

Honour Killing in the Second Decade of the 21st Century

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By

Shahnaz Shoro

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this project is to investigate the phenomenon of honour-related violence, the most extreme form of which is honour killing. The research was conducted in Sindh (one of the four provinces of Pakistan). The main research question is, 'Are these killings for honour?' This study was inspired by a need to investigate whether the practice of honour killing in Sindh is still guided by the norm of honour or whether other elements have come to the fore. It is comprised of the experiences of those involved in honour killings through informal, semi-structured, open-ended, in-depth interviews, conducted under the framework of the qualitative method. The aim of my thesis is to apply a feminist perspective in interpreting the data to explore the tradition of honour killing and to let the versions of the affected people be heard. In my research, the women who are accused as *karis*, having very little redress, are uncertain about their lives; they speak and reveal the motives behind the allegations and killings in the name of honour. The male killers, whom I met inside and outside the jails, justify their act of killing in the name of honour, culture, tradition and religion. Drawing upon interviews with thirteen women and thirteen men, I explore and interpret the data to reveal their childhood, educational, financial and social conditions and the impacts of these on their lives, thoughts and actions. By viewing the rise in honour killings in Sindh over the last three decades as a suspicious change, I argue that there are some notable features such as the Pakistani law, gender discrimination in every walk of life, the social and economic situation and cultural and religious interpretations of notions about honour killing in the light of the interviewees' accounts. Although this is a small-scale study, its findings help make recommendations for future research in the field.

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INTRODUCTION

It was a cold dreary evening in December 1979 when I first came across the word *kari*¹ being used by my mother with great contempt. My primary school teacher had brutally killed his wife with a kitchen knife; the act had terrorised hundreds of children like me. I used to visit my teacher's house quite often, which was close to our home. 'But why did he kill her? She was so beautiful and adorable' I asked my mother. The only reply I received was a long 'Sssshhhh', a deep sound came out of her mouth and she put her right index finger to her lips. After a little pause, the only sentence she uttered in a stern voice was 'She had to be killed because she was a *kari*. Understood?' Being terribly frightened, I looked into her eyes; she was unbelievably serious. That was my first encounter with the word *kari*. The stigma attached to this word became imprinted on my mind with the horrifying message that one should hate and eliminate a woman once she is declared a *kari*. For years after that incident, I was unable to talk of or even hear any conversation about that murder. I still do not know what happened to the man involved in this case because soon afterwards my parents moved to another city.

As I grew up, the number of such incidents also grew. The newspapers kept publishing cases in which men had chopped off women's noses and ears as a punishment for arguing or some other domestic issue, such as for visiting their natal families, working carelessly at home, finding a hair in the food or seeing them talking to someone not liked by the husband or his family. The recurrent, bloody photos of beheaded women and often of men frequently published in the local newspapers and magazines caught my attention. The murdered couples or individuals were called *kari* and *karo*² out of hatred and the killings were considered as honour killings. I cannot remember the murders being condemned by anyone on any occasion but, rather, that the honour killings were seen as a matter of cultural pride.

¹ A fallen, adulteress woman.

² A fallen, adulterer man.

Soon I learnt that the world in which I was surviving was divided into two major compartments: one for men and the other for women. However, the roles of the two genders were very different as men were authorized to check and restrict the conduct of women and women had to be obedient to the male-defined rules and regulations. Although I was part of a society in which norms and traditions revolved around the supremacy of men over women, it was not easy for me to comprehend the extreme violence known as honour killing. All I could understand was that honour killing was the homicide of a family member (usually a woman) by other family members (mostly men) and that it generally took place when a man claimed that a kinswoman had brought dishonour to him or to his family. And that the 'dishonour' brought to the family was the claim that the woman was of loose moral character (within the paradigm of the religio-cultural tradition) or guilty of having had an extra or premarital relationship. The rationale was that the woman and the man she was involved with were supposed to be killed in order to restore the lost honour of the family and the tribe. I could only figure out that men believed that they were inherently honourable and that women enhanced their honour. Therefore, when the men felt their honour violated, they felt justified in killing those women, who in their opinion were the cause of damaging or tarnishing their honour.

In this highly patriarchal culture, honour was one of the most common words to be spoken not only by men but also by women. However, defining, describing and understanding the complex phenomenon of honour was beyond my capacity because in that particular society, honour had no limits. Men's honour was the most fragile and scary phenomenon I had encountered; it was offended when a girl asked for the marriage of her choice, when a woman asked for a divorce from her abusive husband, when a woman laughed loudly or her head was uncovered or if she were dressed up; and endangered by girls' education. Honour has certainly been the power in the hands of men to control women, both directly and indirectly.

From the mid-nineteenth century, international media have been reporting and considering honour killing a serious threat to the existence of women in the Islamic world (Hussain, 2007; Iqbal 2006; Kalanauri, 2014). Yet it was only in the last decade of the twentieth century that some Pakistani journalists and researchers began criticising the abstract values attached to the word 'honour' in the context of Pakistani society. Shahid (1999) states that honour is a tribal and feudal trend and argues that 'since our society [Pakistan] is one of the most traditional and conservative societies with

strong religious fundamentalism so the countrymen tend to develop an unhealthy sense of honour'. Siddiquie (2005: 264) explains more explicitly: 'honour is used as a motivation, justification or mitigation for violence against women as seen from the perspective of the perpetrator, often with the collusion or active involvement of the community'. Hence, as these commentators argue, it is essentially a tool to control a woman's behaviour with the collaboration of various sections of society. However, the meaning attached to the word honour, which affects both the social and personal standing of an individual or a community, is unique in the context of the northern part of Sindh³ (the area of my research). In her article *Honour Killings: Code of Dishonour*, Shah (1998) interviewed one of the *waderas*⁴, Sardar⁵ Sultan Mugheri, from upper⁶ Sindh who stated his views about honour in the following words, '*ghariat* and *izzat*⁷ come with money and property. And if *Izzat* (dignity) is violated, then it is justified to kill and die for honour'. Hence, Shah (1998) elaborates, '*ghariat* and *izzat* reside in the face, the nose, and the head, not to forget the beard in the male. The beard is what the Baloch⁸ swear by and use as oath'.⁹ The abstract nature of honour is signified in these words of *Sardar* Sultan Mugheri who represents the general philosophy of the tribal and feudal honour of Sindh, when he says that a woman is valued as a man's property and to preserve the honour of that property, killing is justified.

What actually inspired me to embark on a PhD project about the issue of honour killing was a shocking incident, which I saw on the road before dawn one morning. In 2004, my husband was posted to a small city of interior Sindh while both my children and I lived in Karachi. During the summer vacation, my children and I visited my husband. For the journey

³ One of the four provinces of Pakistan.

⁴ *Wadera* is a word in the *Sindhi* language used for a tribal/feudal landlord of a village or of many villages. In the local language there are many terms for the feudal *wadera*, such as *sardar*, *raees* and *bhotar*.

⁵ A *wadera* who is regarded as a chief of a whole tribe and *waderas* of that tribe. Although *sardar* means a tribal leader and *wadera* is an area landlord, the local people use the terms interchangeably.

⁶ Upper Sindh is another name for the northern area of Sindh.

⁷ *Ghairat* is a word used in most of the Pakistani and Indian languages for honour. *Izzat* means dignity in almost all the languages of the sub-continent.

⁸ Baloch is one of the main nations of Pakistan that mostly live in Baluchistan (the largest province of Pakistan) and northern Sindh (the area of Sindh adjacent to the boundary of Baluchistan).

⁹ This is when a man takes an *oath* on his beard; he *swears by his* honesty or honour, saying, 'I promise to fulfil or accomplish the specific mission.'

back to Karachi, I preferred to set out by 4am in order to avoid heavy traffic on the roads. The driver taking us to Karachi stopped in Hyderabad to refuel. As soon as he started up the car again, loud noises and firing were heard. The driver, in his confusion tried to accelerate, but he had to stop at once as two men were seen running into the middle of the road chasing after a woman who was screaming ‘Help. Help. I’m not a *kari*, not a *kari*, don’t kill me, for God’s sake help me, help’. In the middle of the commotion, I heard the ear-piercing shots and then a dreadful scream. Within a few minutes there was a deadly silence as if nothing had happened, which made my children, the driver and myself numb for some time. The next thing I remember was the driver saying, ‘Let’s get away from here, the police will be here anytime.’ A little further on, I saw a small pool of blood, oozing from the body of the woman. I can still recall the long, black hair freely spread out on the road.

That was the situation in Sindh, where I grew up. The overt use of the word ‘honour’ invoked to enslave women and the frequent cases of honour killing turned my fear and sense of helplessness into anger and bitterness. Many questions arose for me: Why is gender discrimination allowed to that level? Why were women being killed mercilessly in the name of honour with the support of the community with no-one, including the law enforcing agencies, intervening to rescue them? Is honour superior to human life? If so, then who has decided that it should be so? Why can only men exercise the power of honour and kill whoever they want, whenever they decide? Do women have no honour?

As there was no history in upper Sindh of a woman ever having killed her father, brother, son or husband on the pretext of honour, I used to think about what a woman could do to save or restore her honour should she find her husband in a compromising position with another woman. I dared not to ask my questions to anyone because the majority of people, including women, believed that honour was attributed to men only. Men’s infidelity was taken as a natural occurrence. Men, in the presence of their first wife, could marry for a second or third time. They could proudly discuss their extra-marital relations even at home to tease their wives. Men’s infidelity is supported by religious doctrines and therefore was embraced by the majority of people. Maxims, folk tales and ancient sayings such as ‘Man is man; betrayal is a sign of manhood’ have played a motivating role in extending liberty to men whereas women’s sense of honour was not supposed to be harmed by anything a man could do.

I met a number of Pakistani intellectuals, writers, and political and social activists during and after my university education and discussed the tradition of honour killing with them. Most of them agreed with Hyder (2004: 5) that '*karo-kari*¹⁰ is a practical demonstration of an imbalanced society' but they emphasized the point that honour killing was not rooted in Sindh. To my surprise, most of them agreed that they had not even heard the term honour killing, until the military dictator General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq¹¹ overthrew the democratic government in 1977 and declared martial law.

General Zia came to power through an overnight military coup and promptly imprisoned the very first democratically-elected Prime Minister¹² of Pakistan. Being furious about the unjust imposition of martial law, journalists, members of the civil society and political workers staged demonstrations. The countrywide protests were dealt with inhumanely and for the first time in the history of Pakistan public flogging of political prisoners and journalists was carried out. To divert the international media's attention from the riots caused by overthrowing the legal democratic government of the Pakistan People's Party,¹³ General Zia charged the overthrown government with being corrupt and un-Islamic. To justify his rule and the undemocratic actions, he created the slogan 'Zia commits himself to enforcing his interpretation of *Nizam-e-Mustafa*¹⁴ and

¹⁰ *Karo-kari* is an act of murder in which a person is killed for his or her actual or perceived immoral behaviour.

¹¹ General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq was the sixth President of Pakistan from 1977 until his death in 1988, having declared martial law for the third time in the country's history in 1977. He was Pakistan's longest-serving head of state, ruling for eleven years. He is most noted for his efforts to bring religion into mainstream society within Pakistan and in foreign policy, for his close relationship with the United States and support for the so-called Afghan Mujahedeen resistance against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

¹² Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a social, secular political leader of Pakistan, served as President of Pakistan from 1971 to 1973 and as Prime Minister from 1973 to 1977. In 1977, he was ousted in a military coup by General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq and was arrested. He was hanged on 4 April 1979 for allegedly ordering the murder of a political opponent in 1974.

¹³ Commonly referred to as PPP, it is a social democratic political party in Pakistan created by its founder Zulfikar Ali Bhutto in 1967.

¹⁴ Establishing an Islamic state based on *Sharia* law would mean a return to the early days of Islam when the Islamic prophet Muhammad (PBUH) ruled the Muslim state.

establishing an Islamic state and *Sharia*¹⁵ law' (Kepel, 2002: 101). With this slogan, he soon won overwhelming support from the country's conservative and theological forces. In 1978, General Zia established 'Shariat Appellate Benches, grafted on to Pakistan's four High Courts' (Hussain, 2005: 400). The benches were tasked to determine cases based on the teachings of the Qur'an and the *Sunnah*.¹⁶ A *Sharia* council was appointed to bring the state's legal statutes into alignment with Islamic doctrine (Hussain, 2007). The purpose of creating a *Shariat* Appellate Bench of the Supreme Court was to give it status as the final authority in *Sharia* cases.

Apart from *deeni madrassahs*,¹⁷ expansions of the reform of cultural policies (which decried the influence of Western culture and music in the country), the creation of sectarian divisions between *Shia*,¹⁸ *Sunni*¹⁹ and other religious groups and sects, and the infamous Blasphemy Law,²⁰ a number of constitutional amendments were made in order to bring the country's constitution into accordance with the Islamic *Sharia* Law. General Zia, with the overwhelming support of rigid religio-political parties successfully implanted such ordinances into the constitution of Pakistan, which eventually went against human rights and increased the miseries of women.

¹⁵ Islamic religion-based law is called *Sharia*. These laws are derived from the Qur'an, *Sunnah* (the practices of the Prophet) and *Hadith* (saying of the Prophet). The modern forms of *Sharia* law have been derived from various schools of legal interpretations created by four religious scholars in different periods of early Muslim history and in the context of different socio-economic and political systems, Hanafi (AD 699-767), Maliki (AD 713-795), Shafi (AD 767-820) and Hanbali (AD 780-813). In Pakistan, the state derives dominantly from the Hanafi school of thought, which is Sunni ideology, (The dominant group of Muslims in Pakistan) (Khan, 2006: 229).

¹⁶ *Sunnah*, (plural *Sunan*) is the verbally transmitted record of the teachings, deeds and sayings of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) defined as a path, a way and manner of life.

¹⁷ Religious schools.

¹⁸ One of the two main branches of Islam that rejects the first three *Sunni* caliphs and regards Ali (the fourth caliph), as Muhammad's first true successor.

¹⁹ One of the two main branches of Islam, differing from *Shia* in its understanding of the *Sunnah* and in its acceptance of the first three caliphs.

²⁰ The Pakistan Penal Code (PPC) and the Criminal Procedure Code were amended, through ordinances in 1980, 1982 and 1986 to declare anything implying disrespect to the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), *Ahl-e-Bait* (family of the prophet), *Sahaba* (companions of the prophet) and *Sha'ar-i-Islam* (Islamic symbols), was a cognizable offence, punishable with imprisonment or a fine, or with both.

The most controversial of the ordinances were the *Hudood*²¹ Ordinance (1979) and the *Qanun-e-Shahadat*²² Order (1984). These ordinances added new criminal offences of adultery and fornication to Pakistani law and new punishments of whipping, amputation and stoning to death (Lau, 2007). The provisions relating to *zina*²³ were replaced by the ordinance with punishments of a flogging of 100 lashes for unmarried offenders (women and men found guilty of having extra-marital relations) and stoning to death for married offenders (Heng & Liew, 2010).

However, these corporal punishments were not the only way of penalising women. As Heng and Liew explain: 'More worrisome for human rights and women's rights advocates, some lawyers and politicians, was the incarceration of thousands of rape victims on charges of *zina*' (Heng & Liew, 2010: 360). As for all these *Hudood* punishments, they were dependent on Islamic *Hudd*²⁴ proof. This proof requires four Muslim men of good repute testifying as witnesses to the crime in question. In practice, uncorroborated testimony by women was inadmissible in *Hudood* crimes (Hussain, 2005). So in cases of rape, victims were sometimes charged with fornication and jailed while their rapists were freed because the women could not comply with the *Hudd* requirement of having four reputable Muslim men testifying to the rape. According to Shah (1998: 56), 'statutory law under the *Zina* Ordinance does not strictly differentiate between rape and fornication either; in fact, if a raped woman cannot prove that she did not consent to intercourse, she is considered to have committed *zina*, fornication, which attracts severe punishments. It does not dishonour the rapist'. Both of these laws have had a devastating effect on

²¹ *Hudood* means limits or restrictions, as in limits of acceptable behaviour in Islamic law.

²² Blasphemy is the act of insulting or showing contempt for God, religious or holy persons or toward something considered sacred, with penalties ranging from a fine to death. From 1987 to 2014 over 1300 people have been accused of blasphemy, mostly from non-Muslim religious minorities. The vast majority of the accusations were lodged for desecration of the Qur'an. *BBC News*, 6 November 2014.

²³ The Arabic word *zina* means all extra-marital sexual intercourse between a man and a woman who are not married to one another through a *nikah* (marriage contract). It includes extra-marital and pre-marital sex. 'According to Islam '*zina*' constituted social suicide – an entire society commits suicide over time if it allows fornication and adultery to go unpunished in the Islamic style' (Mirza, 2008). *Hudood* Ordinances are laws in Pakistan that were enacted in 1979. They replaced parts of the secular, British-era Pakistan Penal Code. Before the implementations of the *Hudood* Ordinances, state had nothing to do with *zina*.

²⁴ The limit.

the rights of women. ‘Girls as young as twelve were also sometimes jailed and prosecuted for having extra-marital intercourse because the ordinance abolished Pakistan’s statutory rape law (*Human Rights Watch*, 1999: 18). In 1979, before the ordinances went into effect, there were 70 women held in Pakistani prisons but by 1988, there were 6,000 (Ashfaq, 2006). As a consequence of the *Hudood* Ordinance, no woman could dare to bring anything to the notice of the legal authority, whether it was rape or inhuman violence because of the highly gender-discriminatory legal laws (Khan, 2006). According to the legal scholar Martin Lau:

While it was easy to file a case against a woman accusing her of adultery, the *Zina* Ordinance made it very difficult for a woman to obtain bail pending trial. Worse, in actual practice, the vast majority of accused women were found guilty by the trial court only to be acquitted on appeal to the Federal *Shariat* Court. By then they had spent many years in jail, were ostracized by their families, and had become social outcasts. (Lau, 2007: 1296)

Women with broken bones, burns, and other serious physical injuries, if brought to the hospital at all, were given treatment but the perpetrators were barely subject to any kind of investigation. Even suicides, rape and murders of women (of any age) by their kinsmen could not receive any justice from the Pakistani authorities. In respect of this, Kalanauri (2014: 11) argues that ‘promulgated in the name of Islam, the *Zina* Ordinance became a tool of oppression at the hands of vengeful husbands’ and parents’ intent on punishing their wives or daughters for disobedience’. Pakistani human and women’s rights groups protested against the law and complained that the law was used by the hard liners who wished to curb and control women’s rights by any means in order to make them subservient.

General Zia’s interpretation of Islam significantly contributed to the rise of fundamentalism. I was still a schoolgirl but was very much affected by the political upheaval, as there was a huge visible change in society. I remember, before the *Zia* era, that it was hard to find a woman wrapped in a *burqa*²⁵ in my city but all of a sudden women in *burqas* were seen everywhere. Girls of my age were ordered by the school administration to cover their heads. I had a feudal background but considered my family fairly non-religious and liberal, my father was an active political worker,

²⁵ The *burqa* is a long, loose stitched garment/clad covering the whole body from head to feet, worn in public by women, specific to Pakistan and Afghanistan and adjacent areas.

yet I, and my both sisters were forced to wear a *burqa*. Upon my strong resistance and refusal to do so, I was stopped from going to the school. My further education was conditional on wearing the *burqa*. Once, when I was taken to visit a close relative, being extremely angry, I threw the *burqa* from the window of the train. I remember that the fear of being scolded or beaten was far less than the overwhelming feeling of being free from the black cage.

Although a group of social and political activists were protesting against such discriminatory laws, as a whole Pakistani society, including the majority of women, believed that since the ordinances were in accordance with the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah*, they should therefore be part of the Islamic state's legal and social system. As Hearn (1996: 104) argues, 'a first and most basic way to continue violence is to deny it at all. This may be in total or in part'. The denial of violence was widely seen in the society in which nearly every form of abuse was denied or taken a routine matter not only for the abusers but also for the victims. In fact, on a larger scale, Pakistani society had no clear idea of domestic violence. Hitting, pushing and teasing was a common way of living and so the majority of the people, who already accepted family and domestic abuse, welcomed the ordinances. The incorporation of the *Sharia* laws into the legal and judicial system of Pakistan actually authorized men to control the actions of their kinswomen with the backing of the state. Men's actions that caused injury and physical or mental harm to women were generally part of life and were not considered violent or treated as a serious issue.

Since the death of General Zia in 1988, inconsistency and instability has prevailed in Pakistani laws. In fact, his death was not the end of his era. The greatest example of this is the promulgation of *Qisas*²⁶ and *Diyat*²⁷

²⁶ *Qisas* is an Islamic term, meaning retaliation/retribution in kind or revenge, eye for an eye, nemesis or retributive justice. It is a category of crimes in Islamic jurisprudence in which *Sharia* allows equal retaliation as the punishment. The *Qisas* principle is available against the accused, to the victim or victim's heirs, when a Muslim is murdered, suffers bodily injury or suffers property damage. In the case of murder, *Qisas* means the right of a murder victim's nearest relative or *wali* (legal guardian) to, if the court approves, take the life of the killer (Encyclopedia Britannica).

²⁷ In Islamic *Sharia* law, *Diyat* is the financial compensation paid to the victim or heirs of a victim in the cases of murder, bodily harm or property damage. It is an alternative punishment to *Qisas* (equal retaliation). In Arabic, the word means both blood money and ransom, and it is spelled sometimes as *Diya*, *Diyah* or *Diyeh* (Spevack, 2015: 81). *Diyat* compensation rates, under *Sharia*, have historically

Ordinances in September 1990 by his successor President Ghulam Ishaq Khan. Talbot (1998: 281) states that ‘under the law, the victim (or heirs of the victim) of a crime had the right to inflict injuries on the offender identical to the ones sustained by the victim (although the ordinance set the ‘blood money’ compensation for a woman victim at half of that for a man)’. The law, by including the term ‘blood money’,²⁸ in reality allowed the offender to absolve himself from the crime or killing by paying compensation to the victims or their heirs (who are usually relatives) if the heirs agree to this. This is called the ‘settlement’ and in these cases of honour killing the settlement was more often seen.

It is also worth considering the impact of Western interest in the issues involved. As Khan (2006: 148) explains, ‘in Pakistan, honour related violence and killings started receiving attention when human rights organizations were motivated by western donor agencies’. By 1995, the Western media had started highlighting and presenting some videos about honour killing cases in Middle Eastern countries and South Asia. From 1996 onwards, various NGOs prepared monthly and annual statistics on the subject of honour killing. The report *Human Development in South Asia* (2000: 92) reveals that in Pakistan, 176 cases of honour killing were heard in only six months of 1997, in which 70% of the victims were women. In the South Asian region, Pakistan is infamous for violence against women and honour murders have become increasingly common practice. A survey conducted by the *Thomson Reuters Foundation Trust* (2011) placed Pakistan at number three on the list of the world's most dangerous countries for women. The Pakistani government seemed finally to take the issue seriously and established a commission of enquiry on the status of women in 1997. In the context of Sindh, the commission reported that:

During a three-month period in 1996, 66 cases of *karo-kari* in the Sindh province were recorded in the Sindhi language papers. A rural women’s organization from Sindh reported in 1996 that 148 women were subjected to *karo-kari* during the previous 15 months. Another 1996 report recorded more than 300 cases of *karo-kari*. (*Report of the Commission of Inquiry for Women, Pakistan*, 1997: 87)

varied based on the gender and religion of the victim. Muslim women victims have typically been compensated at half the rate as Muslim male victims, whilst non-Muslims’ compensation rates have varied between 1/16th to half of a Muslim, for an equivalent case (Terrill, 2012: 559).

²⁸ Blood money, a term derived from the Qur’an, suffices the punishment; the money is considered compensation under Islamic law.

Some startling statistics produced in the report of *The Human Rights' Commission of Pakistan* (2000: 18) show that 'Karo-kari killings in Sindh were estimated at 1,410, showing a continuously rising trend over the years: 432 in 1993; 776 in 1994; 864 in 1995; 864 in 1996; 750 in 1997; 800 in 1998; and 886 in 1999'. In 2000, *karo-kari* killings claimed 393 lives in Sindh (Sabir, 2001). More recent data indicate that in 2004 Sindh had the highest occurrences of honour killings compared with other Pakistani Provinces, with 632 cases (Iqbal, 2006: 18). The 2012 RDHR²⁹ report states that 605 women and 115 men were murdered in the name of honour during 2011 in Sindh (the year I started my PhD research). However, the more worrisome fact is that 'often these figures are not more than best estimates – for violence against women goes all too often unreported' (Vlachovd & Biason, 2005: 2).

The increase in honour killing motivated me to look into the issue more carefully. I carried out some research and wrote a few articles and features in leading Pakistani Urdu newspapers based on my findings. The articles received a mixed response; it was difficult for people to think that honour killing could have motives other than honour. I was told by my superiors not to dig too deeply into the subject as it might put me in dangerous situation. However, I decided to carry on with my research into honour killings in Sindh as planned. Unfortunately my preliminary literature search was disappointing, since I could find very little relevant research on the subject. The existing literature on honour killing in Pakistan was predominantly about killings that were associated with honour-related issues and its connection with female sexuality. Most of the literature showed that honour killings were based on a suspicion of immorality on the part of the victim. This situation presented me with problems when writing my background introduction chapters, because, on the basis of my own observations and through discussions with journalists researching and reporting on the issue over a couple of years, honour killings in Sindh were not solely based on honour-related issues, even though the killings were always given the name of honour killings. I aim to discover the underlying religious, social, communal and moral assumptions that require men to kill in the name of honour. It is worth considering why killing women over some blame and accusation is not considered as an extreme form of gender discrimination and dealt with as murder? Why does the Pakistani judicial system have a supportive role in honour killing? And above all, are honour killings in fact to do with honour or are there some other factors involved?

²⁹ *Research and Development for Human Resources.*

In the first chapter, I shall begin with a discussion of the abstract notion of honour that has justified killing. I shall discuss honour killings in Pakistan, the laws related to murder and honour killing, the prosecution system and the role of various political parties, civil society and media in honour killing, as well as women's status in Pakistan and, in particular, Sindh. In Chapter Two, I shall present an historical perspective on Sindh, discussing its economic and educational situation and marriage system. In this chapter, I shall also look at previous research conducted on honour killing in Sindh, the *jirga*³⁰ system and the situation of state-run shelters. This will be followed by a methodology chapter in which I reflect on the process of conducting my field work in northern Sindh, my experience of finding interview participants in the community, in the jails, and the shelters, conducting interviews, methodological concerns and ethical issues involved in conducting feminist research, as well as some reflection on data collection and analysis.

In the subsequent three chapters, I shall present an analysis of my data regarding the violence-related experiences of my participants from their childhood to the present day and how the tribal and cultural values related to the tradition of honour affect their lives. First, in Chapter Four I shall examine how violence and poverty are embedded in everyday life in the upper region of Sindh and the influence of these conditions on both genders. In Chapter Five, I shall explore my male participants' concept of honour killing and its justification, and how society treats them after they have committed honour killing. In Chapter Six, I shall investigate how the female participants who were threatened with death managed to escape. I shall also offer a discussion of the difficulties these women faced as life became very uncertain for them. Finally, in my conclusion I shall summarise my main findings and the contribution that I have made to the study of honour killing in Sindh, Pakistan.

³⁰ The *jirga* is a local customary tribal court. It is an illegal local law-enforcing and decision-making assembly or tribal council. An informal law system which runs parallel to the state's formal law is tribal law (village courts). Its judgments come through *jirga* and implement through tribal/fudal leaders' and their henchmen.

CHAPTER ONE

HONOUR KILLINGS, THE LAWS AND WOMEN

Introduction

In order to discuss honour killing in Pakistan, along with the laws that deal with such cases and their impact on women in a wider context, this chapter discusses the different ways in which killing on the pretext of honour has been supported by the law. Before focusing on the situation of Pakistan, in order to elucidate what honour is, I shall discuss the meaning of honour, its diversity, and the different boundaries and significance for men and women. I shall further explore how the concept of honour has been associated with violence in various cultures and how honour-related violence, even to the extent of killing, has long been adopted in diverse societies with the collusion of the law (see for example Brundage, 1987; Cantarella, 1991; Goldstein, 2000; Warraich, 2005). This chapter examines the means by which ancient and modern honour-related conceptions clearly differentiate between men and women. As a result, honour crime in today's world has been associated mainly with violence against women, especially in South Asia and the Middle East where the plea of honour is used as a defence for crimes ranging from domestic violence to killing (Fisk, 2010; Bhatti & Jamali *et al.*, 2011; Hussaini, 2009; Saadawi, 1989; Khouri, 2003).

To aid comprehension of the extreme form of violence known as honour killing, this chapter will explore the different perceptions of honour by which violent acts on the pretext of honour are considered not offences but honourable deeds in Pakistan¹ (Ali, 2001; Hina, 2000; Irfan, 2008; Shah, 1999). In order to provide a background to the increasing incidence of honour killing in Pakistan, this chapter will use existing data to discuss the

¹ Pakistan is a federal republic, which was previously part of India under British colonialism. At the time of its independence on 14 August 1947, Pakistan consisted of five, mainly Muslim-dominated, provinces. After the separation of Bengal in 1971, this was reduced to four provinces with a population of approximately 176 million.

different ordinances and amendments embedded in the Pakistan Penal Code by the military dictator General Zia and his successors to bring Pakistani law into accordance with *Sharia* law (An-Naim, 1990; Lewis, 2001). I shall also explain the application and implementation of these ordinances in order to illustrate their impacts during the prosecution process in cases of honour killing.

I shall also discuss the role played by Pakistani civil society and the media in pressurizing government authorities to look deeply into the consequences and effects of these ordinances and amendments on the lives of women (Goldenberg, 1999; Warraich, 2005). This chapter will further investigate the steps taken by consecutive democratic parliaments for the betterment of women by bringing some changes into the discriminatory laws about honour killing, which had mainly ruled against women. Later in this chapter, I shall explain women's status in Pakistan in general and Sindh in particular.

The Relationship between Honour and Violence

The word 'honour' in English refers to nobility of soul, reputation, moral behaviour or suggests respect for an honoured individual, for example in such terms as 'the guest of honour', 'code of honour' or 'buried with honour'. The concept of honour is also of fundamental importance in the whole sub-continent where the word 'honour' in general is used as a distinction, a high reward and a high standard of moral behaviour. Hence, in Pakistan, quite a few idioms also contain the word honour, such as: 'honour bound to do', 'word of honour' and 'pass an exam with honour'. Thus the concept of honour has a long history as a chivalric norm to define honourable deeds in the context of duty, responsibility, morality and ethics of an individual or a nation at large all over the world.

Interestingly, apart from the general meaning of honour, the definition of the word in both English and Pakistani languages splits into two obviously different groupings in describing 'honour' for men and women. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (1842: 553) explains that, 'honour is more particularly applied to two kinds of virtues, bravery in man and chastity in woman'. The definition assigns praiseworthy duties to men whereas it is confined only to the bodies of women. This could be defined as man being responsible for everything's honour whereas woman is responsible for her bodily honour only. Honour is therefore 'a male value derived and viewed against the index of a woman's body', as Shah puts it (*Dawn*, 19 November 1998). The highly gender-differentiated meaning of honour and

the dual standards of moral and sexual conduct for men and women determine the status of women as subservient to men in a patriarchal society.

Thus the double standard of sexual morality and the 'concept of honour is deeply embedded male authority over female in patriarchal society' (Baker *et al.*, 1999: 164) and assigns men and women not only two unequal responsibilities but also authorises men to control women's actions. Mernissi (1975: 61), in the context of North Africa, argues that 'honour and purity, two particularly sensitive emotional concepts, link the men's prestige in an almost fatal way to the sexual behaviour of the women under his charge, be they wives, sisters or unmarried female relatives'. It thus appears that either women have no respect or honour or by nature women are incapable of understanding what honour is and, therefore, men should use their power to enforce it in order to keep both the woman's and the family's honour safe. This definition of honour assists men in imposing their conception of honour onto women, thus becoming the caretakers of women's sensual, social and behavioural conduct. Saadawi (1989: 31) explains that 'a man's honour is safe as long as the female members of his family keep their hymens intact'. In other words, women's sexual character determines men's honour and the respect they receive. Since men's honour is in the hands of their female relatives, if it is violated, the men take revenge through violence and thus attempt to restore their honour.

Ruggi (2006) argues that this control of men over women is due to the fertility or reproductive power of a woman that needs to be controlled by the men of the family, clan, or tribe so as to use her as a factory for making men. Consequently, in the name of honour, men became the guardians of women's reproductive bodily organs and assumed the right to kill women whom they suspect of being adulteresses or young girls whom they believe to have lost their virginity. Thus the custody of women passes on from father, uncles, and brothers to the husbands and sons and so on. Khan (2006) argues that girls are sometimes killed on mere suspicion of loss of virginity and 95% of girls killed in Jordan have had no sexual relations at all. Consequently, the inferior status of women, which confines them to the function of reproduction, eventually puts them not only in a state of subordination but also in a vulnerable position as their focus is to safeguard their virginity as the property of a man. Hussaini (2009) argues:

As men created and dominated the religious, cultural and judicial elements of society, women became subordinate, as they were legally, culturally and religiously bound by their husbands and male relatives to keep the

family honour maintained. This meant that women had to be restricted so there would be less chance that the precious community would be lost (Hussaini, 2009: 101).

Thus, the standards of honour in patriarchal societies do not have the same parameters for women as they have for men. The subjugated position of women at the hands of men, through man-made laws, has for centuries allowed men to impose unjust cruelty upon women. The connection with honour-based violence is elaborated by Baker *et al.* (1999: 164), who argue that it reflects three basic elements: '1) control, or desire to exert control, over a woman's behaviour, 2) a male's feeling of shame over his loss of control, or perceived loss of control, over her behaviour, and 3) community or familial involvement in augmenting and addressing this shame'. Henceforward, along with the men of the family, the community and other social actors also determine whether women are acting according to acceptable standards or not. The patriarchal social structure is reinforced if women live in a state in which honour crimes are facilitated by the law. According to anti-patriarchal critiques: 'men's violence is a general means of maintaining and reinforcing power that is available to men' (Hearn, 1996: 30). Welchman and Hossain (2005) state that:

Whether we are looking at the 'fit of fury', in Middle Eastern states, 'violent emotion', 'in the heat of passion' in Latin America, or 'extreme emotional distress' in the USA, it is clear that societies across the world – through their laws and their courts – continue to countenance legal defences that overwhelmingly benefit males committing violence against females. (Welchman & Hossain, 2005: 13).

Due to the support of various laws to protect men's honour crimes, 'Subjugation, exploitation and commodification of women are ancient and widespread' (Jafri, 2008: 27). It is not long since violence against women was first recognized as a significant issue of human rights throughout the world (Dobash & Dobash, 1998; Mogford, 2011). This recognition has brought noteworthy changes in worldwide policies and practices; however, it was restricted to the English-speaking world (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). Thus, considering the history of honour crimes may be useful for gaining an understanding of how a murder on the pretext of honour is considered to be not a criminal act but a respectable deed.

Honour Killing

Khoury (2003: 28) suggests that the history of honour killing goes back as far as 1200 BC and was practised under the rule of Hammurabi and other

Assyrian tribes. Goldstein (2002: 12) finds its roots in ancient Rome where, for the first time in history, women's sexual conduct became subject to legislation during the reign of Augustus (22 BC to 17 AD), when the husband and father of an adulteress were given the right to kill her. This law, with the purpose of tracking the sexual purity of a woman as a way to keep her kinsmen's level of honour high, remained in effect for about two thousand years (Cantarella, 1991: 230). However, laws that associated insult, shame and honour with the actions of women were not limited to the Roman Empire; in medieval Europe early Jewish law mandated death by stoning for an adulterous wife and her partner (Cantarella, 1991). Under Ottoman rule, a killer would 'sprinkle his victim's blood on his clothes and parade through the streets displaying the bloody murder weapon ... to increase his honour' (Kressel, 1981: 143). In Arab societies, if a woman caused shame to the family, a man or men must react accordingly otherwise they will be the cause of adding disgrace (Giant, 1979, cited in Baker *et al.*, 1999). The fact that 'Hammurabi, Aristotle, Augustus, Aquinas and others, were occupied by notions of sexual conduct, honour and shedding of blood demonstrate that killing for honour transcends space, religion and time' (Jafri, 2008: 32).

This historical overview confirms that the concept and the ritual act of honour killing with legislative backing is very old and is not limited to any specific part of the world (Khan 2006; Welchman & Hossain, 2005). Brown, an advocacy director for Human Rights Watch (cited in *National Geographic News*, 28 October 2010), maintains that at present the practice of honour killing 'goes across cultures and across religions'. A relatively current research about 'Domestic Violence, Forced Marriage and 'Honour'-Based Violence' (2007-08: 13) by the Home Affairs Committee of the UK House of Commons maintains that 'honour based violence is not connected with a particular religion or religious practice, and has been recorded across Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh communities.' These statements indicate that honour killings have been reported not only in Islamic countries such as Egypt, Iran, Jordan, the Palestinian National Authority, Lebanon, Morocco, Pakistan, Syria, Turkey, Yemen, and other Mediterranean and Persian Gulf countries, but also in some non-Islamic countries, for example, the USA, Canada, China, Greece, Italy, Spain, Argentina, Ecuador, Brazil, Egypt, Guatemala, Israel, Peru, Venezuela and some European countries such as France, Germany and the United Kingdom (see Jafri, 2008; Howe, 2008; Khan, 2006; Unicef, 2000). It is estimated that at least 5000 women and girls worldwide are murdered each year in the name of so-called honour (*United Nations Population Fund*, 2000). Although honour killing is being reported worldwide, some regions

are particularly in the news, such as South Asia and the Middle East (Mayell, 2002; *United Nations Population Fund*, 2000).

Khan (2006: 11) suggests that with the release of a shocking documentary by CNN on 7 December 1995, honour killing became a subject of debate all over the world. The documentary was about honour-related crimes/killings in the Muslim Arab communities residing in Israeli and Palestinian territories, with the title *Honour Killing: A Brutal Tribal Custom*, and created an impression that honour killing is peculiar to Muslim countries. A number of researchers have argued that honour-related crimes and killings also occur beyond the Arab domain and 'it is by no means endemic to the religion of Islam or tied to any particular group' (Lang, 2000: 55). However, Fisk (*The Independent*, 7 September 2010) describes such killings as: 'the crime wave throughout the Middle East and South Asia that shames the world'. Denying such a claim is not easy as 'More than 90 per cent of cases of honour related violence against women are reported from Muslim countries or among Muslim communities living in non-Muslim states' (Khan (2006: 9). Indeed, in countries such as the USA, the UK and Canada and European countries, many cases of honour killing have been reported. Dyer (2015: 22–25) argues that the three cities in the UK – London, Bradford and Birmingham – with the highest number of residents of Pakistani origin also ranked as the three UK cities with the highest number of honour killings or attempted honour killings. She further elaborates: 'Of the 22 out of 29 reported cases of honour killings and attempted killings from 2010 where the ethnicity of the victims is known or alleged, 15 were of Pakistani origin, three of Indian, one of Bangladeshi, one of white British'. Interestingly, the term 'honour killing' entered the British legal system in 2003, when Abdullah Yones (a Muslim Iraqi who had fled Saddam Hussein's Iraq in 1999 with his family) pleaded guilty to killing his sixteen-year-old daughter Heshu (Rose, 2009: 5). In the context of North America, Tripp (2012) reports that the honour killing toll reached at least fifteen in Canada over the past two decades and that most honour killings also happen in migrant Muslim families. Similarly, the articles, case studies and research papers written about honour killing in the United States present evidence that cases of honour killing happen amongst migrants, of whom the majority were Muslim (see Avalon, 2008; Smith, 2013; Tripp, 2012).

Despite the statistics showing that honour killings are being reported from all over the world, a number of rather shocking news reports of honour killing in Muslim countries are often heard, such as the video of the killing

of seventeen-year-old Du'a Khalil Aswad from the Kurdish area of Northern Iraq, available on YouTube. The blurry video shows several men kicking her and throwing rocks at her as she tries to hide her blood-covered face and body. At one point, she struggles to sit up, but a man's kick forces her to fall again and then a large concrete block hitting her on the head thrown by another man ends her life. According to Zebari (*Agence France Presse*, 5 May 2007): 'several uniformed police officers, standing on the edge of the crowd were watching while the mob were filming the violent assault on their phones and cheering and shouting with pleasure'. This brutal public murder was indeed an act of honour killing by her uncles and a brother who believed that she deserved such a fate because she had fallen in love with a man belonging to a different religious sect. Likewise, *the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan*² in its annual report (2012) declared that in 2011, a Belgian court had sentenced four members of a Pakistani family to prison for the murder of their daughter, who defied them by living with a Belgian man and refusing an arranged marriage. In a more recent case of honour killing in Lahore (Pakistan) in May 2013, a woman called Farzana was beaten to death with bricks by her natal family for marrying the man she loved. Her husband, Muhammed Iqbal, begged nearby police for help but the police did not intervene. This happened on a busy street outside the provincial High Court where Farzana had gone to seek protection. The explicit video of the murder can be seen on YouTube. While I am writing these lines, *The Independent* (29 September 2015) has published a report that a Pakistani man strangled his daughter, nineteen-year-old Lareeb, to death as a matter of honour in Berlin (Germany) after learning of her affair with a young Muslim man in the German town of Darmstadt. The mother of the girl assisted her husband in hiding her dead body. The couple is facing trial at a district court in Germany for the joint murder of their daughter. Regrettably, there has been a long series of brutal murders called honour killing perpetrated by Muslim families, living either in Islamic or non-Islamic countries. '91 per cent of honor killings are committed by Muslims worldwide' (Sweeney, 2011) and '95 per cent of honor killings in the West are perpetrated by Muslim fathers and brothers or their proxies' (Kay, 2011).

The United Nations' landmark Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, along with the International Bill of Rights for Women, known as CEDAW³ (18 December 1979), calls on states to establish the

² *HRCP*.

³ *The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*.

mechanisms necessary to combat the abuse of women's human rights to prevent and eliminate honour killings and to punish perpetrators. In this context, on 4 March 2010, REAL⁴ released a report stating that 'some 5,000 women are murdered in honour killings by their families every year'. Honour violence against women is now a globally recognised gendered social problem and there is a huge literature focusing on it. Feminist research and activism have played a major part in changing perceptions of the problem since the 1970s. Because many countries do not see this issue from a feminist perspective, in response to such violence their laws are still ineffective at curbing the danger.

Pakistan is allegedly among those countries notorious for an epidemic of honour killings: 'Women are murdered every day in Pakistan for perceived slights against conservative social traditions. The crime is so common it rarely rates more than a paragraph in newspapers' (Hourd, 2014). In fact, nearly all published studies mention that the numbers of recorded cases of honour killing are far fewer than those of unreported or unrecorded cases. The Indian sub-continent has a long history of various forms of gendered violence, with traditions such as *sati*⁵ and *jauhar*⁶ and contemporary forms of lethal violence against women. In Pakistan such violence is not limited to honour killing; other forms of violence such as dowry deaths and rape are also frequently reported.

Honour Killing in Pakistan

Although killing women or motivating women to kill themselves to save the honour of the family or the tribe is rooted in the sub-continent, the thought-provoking fact is that, until the end of British rule in India and the emergence of Pakistan on 14 August 1947 up until 1990, the term honour killing was uncommon to the extent that 'the people at large were not even acquainted with the term of honour killing' (Hyder, 2000: 38). Whilst cases of gender and domestic violence and sexual harassment were often reported and discussed, because of the social norm that telling about family misbehaviour was/is a taboo, victimized women were either

⁴ *Responsible for Equality and Liberty Organisation.*

⁵ *Sati*, a Hindi word, literally meaning a chaste woman but was applied in Hindu communities to a woman who self-immolated on her husband's funeral pyre either voluntarily or by use of force or coercion.

⁶ *Jauhar* literally means 'ability' in the Urdu and Hindi languages but 'doing *jauhar*' is an idiom in Urdu language which means committing suicide by immolation along with the family to save family from dishonour.