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Gender, Sexuality and Representation in Pakistani Literature: Qandeel Baloch as a Victim of Honor Killing

By Nukhbah Taj Langah¹ and Sumera Umrani²

Abstract
The article discusses women’s bodies as victims of violence by regarding gender as a stereotype as compared to a social construct within the context of Pakistan. The primary sources for this analysis are a sample of investigative journalism based on the life of a Pakistani social media figure Qandeel Baloch as depicted in The Sensational Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch (2018) by Sanam Maher. We contend that the conventional expectations of women in Pakistan have resulted in crimes like honor killing. Through textual analysis of Maher’s account, we debate the concept of honor killing within the Pakistani context, with the hope of broadening the scope of feminist theories.

Keywords: Pakistan, Gender, Resistance, Partition, Postcolonial, Honor killing.

Introduction
This study presents a textual analysis of Sanam Maher’s The Sensation Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch (2018). The research explores Qandeel’s case as a representative account of the real-life experiences of many Pakistani women whose voices are buried and their bodies tortured on the account of ruining the honor of their families. Baloch’s life never gave her a chance to fully narrate her struggle to climb the social and economic ladder despite her active presence on social media. Maher’s narrative debates a key question: “But whose honor was at stake when Qandeel was murdered?” (Maher, 2018, p. 212). Qandeel’s case is studied by looking at the effects of and solutions for social problems like gender inequality, unrealistic expectations of how a woman’s body should look, and the way gender and class interact with each other.

Our focus in this discussion is primarily on Qandeel’s life, based on the intersectional feminist approach to investigate the ways that gender and class are stigmatized and interrelated.

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We also critique honor killing as a negative social practice in Pakistan, which has continued despite recent efforts to implement legal policies to restrict this practice (Kugleman, 2016). Maher (2018) reflects on the life and honor killing of the first sensational media star of Pakistan, Qandeel Baloch. She entered the media world through “Pakistan Idol” in 2013 while facing rejection and humiliation. However, pursuing her dream of becoming a social media sensation, she started posting her clips on social media, including videos mocking politicians, 

*Mullahs* (clerics), and important public figures. Her most scandalous action was posting her pictures with a religious cleric named Mufti Abul Naqvi, who became a controversial figure after her murder in 2016. While enjoying a short span of glamorous pursuits through talent shows, social media, and television, she ended up being drugged and strangled by her own brother in her parents’ house while visiting them. He bravely confessed his crime without any regret or shame.

Maher’s (2018) journalistic account presents Qandeel’s life as a rural girl’s journey, rejecting the social norms and taboos at multiple levels; she defies domestic restrictions, class hierarchy, and most of all, patriarchal structures. This is the journey of a sensitive girl who sheds all the shackles to transform from a naive village girl to a socialite and a media sensation. The media forums which have empowered many other girls like her as models, stars, and actors, in fact contributed towards her victimisation, raising pertinent questions about her struggle to climb the unbalanced class ladder. Being semi-educated and blindly ambitious may be several factors contributing to her short-lived fame and eventual murder by the very patriarchal system that gave birth to her unachievable dreams. Her resistance to social and cultural barriers made her pay the heavy price of losing her life. Maher’s account of her struggle indicates that despite fleeing from her village and making some space for her professional pursuits as a model and actor, she was never able to cut the umbilical cord to family and is obligated to support her parents and educate her siblings. The irony is that despite her parents’ fury about her bold social media engagements and socially unacceptable means of income, they selfishly depended on her earnings. Hence, the idea of her settling with someone made them insecure about their financial needs.

This article is divided into three major sections. Firstly, we present a brief discussion on the notion of honor killing with a brief review of the literature. Secondly, we discuss the concept of honor killings as prominently identified in the context of Sindh but also across the world. Finally, through Qandeel’s example, we discuss the resistance strategies (such as feminist social media practices and challenging the patriarchal structures) that she adopted. We conclude by commenting on honor killing as a problematic practice within and beyond Pakistani society.

**Understanding the Origin and Development of Honor Killing**

The genesis of honor killing can be associated with historically patriarchal human societies. It is not limited to a particular region, culture, society, or religion. Many centuries ago, Mediterranean, Latin American, and some Muslim societies also seem to have experienced the dreadful practices of honor killing. South Asian countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India report the highest numbers of honor killing cases (Jafri, 2008). However, the subject has been inadequately studied, with few publications in international studies/journals concerning honor killing.

In Pakistan, women have usually been subject to patriarchal traditional norms and arbitrary social and communal practices. Honor killing is one of them; its origin can be traced back to pre-Islamic and tribal cultures. The United Nations Population Fund reports that 5,000 women are killed each year in the name of honor (cited in Kulczycki and Windle, 2011). Unfortunately, Pakistan appears to have recorded the highest number of honor crimes (Niaz, 2003). Wistro (2000) argues that the honor killing in northern (upper) Sindh and southern
Punjab provinces was transported from Balochistan through tribal mass-migration, which, he believes, is now well-rooted and increasingly growing. The practice of honor killing is known by different names in different regions of the country; kala-kali (Punjab), tor-tora (NWFP), siyahkari (Balochistan), and karo-kari (Sindh). However, the said practice is unique in each region in terms of its characteristics, causes, and consequences. For instance, Karo-kari is a Sindhi language compound word which means “black-male” and “black-female,” and these connotations conflate skin colour with negativity, dishonor and disgrace caused by illicit premarital or extra-marital sexual relationships (Patel & Gadit, 2008).

Singh and Dailey (2016) define honor killing as the murder of a woman or girl by a male family member suspected of having transgressed the limits of sexual behavior as imposed by tribal-family laws and cultural traditions (Siddiqui, 2005). Male family members seek to compensate and restore their lost honor by murdering women (Yadav and Tripathi, 2004). The murder is justified on the pretext that the victim has brought dishonor, disgrace, and humiliation to the family and tribe. Such killing is carried out by male family members who suspect that their sister, daughter, wife, or, in some cases, mother as well, has breached the boundaries of womanhood defined by tribal pundits. Moreover, Cees and Saharso (2001) state that the killing in the name of honor is provoked by the perpetrator’s loss of honor and respect at the hands of the victim. They define honor killings as a “ritualized form of violence” against suspected men and women.

Shoro (2017) explains that in patriarchal and tribal societies, women’s day-to-day affairs and other activities are monitored by their male counterparts. Similarly, it is males’ responsibility to keep check on women’s sexual purity and virginity. The victims of honor killing are assumed to be involved in allegedly sexually immoral activities (having sex outside of marriage or adultery) which tarnish the ‘ghairat’ (loosely translated as honor or adherence to tradition) of their family. Oftentimes, such allegations are based on weak assumptions, without having concrete evidence except a mere suspicion of a woman’s infidelity to her family (Lari, 2011). At times, just conversing with “na-mahram” (a man from outside the immediate family) may cost a woman her life. Additionally, women are also murdered for various other reasons, such as refusing an arranged marriage, asking for separation or divorce, or simply just arguing with their husbands about their choices. Conversely, Amnesty International (1999) reports some examples of “fake honor killings” wherein murders are committed to settle rivalries and personal disputes, such as the much-talked-about case of Mukhtaran Mai from Southern Punjab in Pakistan.

Baker et al (1991) term honor killing a type of “traditional” and “tribal justice,” which is nothing but a controversial form of punishment inflicted on someone as a vengeance for their alleged wrongdoing. It is invariably unwarranted and illegitimate. Shoro (2017) believes that the phenomenon of honor killing is quite complex to define in simple terms. Studying the phenomenon of honor killing in Pakistan, especially in the Sindhi context, she contends that the existence of manly “honor” is fragile and validated through females’ chastity, self-denial, and docility. She claims that women’s liberty, education, employment, and right to marry the men of their choice have jeopardized men’s prestige and honor. Several studies have been conducted to understand the socio-cultural and legal aspects of honor killing. However, there is not much research done on psychopathological conditions leading the perpetrators to commit honor crimes. Patel and Gadit (2008) looked at cases that show that violent criminals have psychopathic traits that make them disrespect and hate women, not care about following the law, and have an obsessive need for revenge.

We identify several critical gaps in discussions about honor killing in Pakistan based on our focus on Qandeel. One approach is the way Morris et al (2016) have explored the representation of women in the media, primarily through photography as a medium. Like many other feminist critics, they regard gender as a means of addressing equality and empowerment.
issues. While observing photography as a medium of alternative practice, they have discussed the portrayal of LBGT and single sex images, defining gender pronouns, including trans people as models, and defying class structure. In this discussion about the female image, the writers have passingly mentioned the incident of Qandeel Baloch’s murder. Morris et al draw comparisons between the eastern and western perception of women as exemplified by Beyoncé’s commercial hit and Qandeel Baloch’s murder due to her bold self-expression on Instagram (2016, p. 23). The entire discussion lacks an understanding of the South Asian cultural context, as well as cases like Qandeel that remain unnoticed in critical academic discourses, shedding light on the image of a woman intimidated by the male gaze.

While Kugleman (2016) has commented on Pakistan’s unbalanced relations with neighboring countries such as India and internal issues that connect honor killings to the larger political crisis (e.g., shaky political regimes, terrorism, counterterrorism, economic downfall, and challenges to law and order). Several incidents in 2016, including the murder of a cleric (Mumtaz Qadri), led to the passing of the Punjab provincial assembly bill focused on the “Protection of Women against Violence.” Despite being critical of the law against honor killings being passed after Qandeel’s murder, Kugelman has not directly addressed the repercussions of this murder as a threat to the image of liberal Pakistani women.

Bokhari (2020) has discussed the discrimination and VAW (Violence Against Women) of minority women based on religion and being deprived of their basic rights in Pakistan. Bukhari has discussed numerous state and constitutional provisions for protecting and empowering women (p. 324). Nevertheless, her major focus is on the risk to minority women due to growing religious fervour, blasphemy laws, institutional discrimination, and, in general, the infringement of women’s rights as citizens of Pakistan. She has vaguely addressed Qandeel’s case due to her major focus on religious minorities, instead of regarding women as being more broadly minoritised within the Pakistani patriarchal society, as we do. Bukhari (2020) rightly highlights that despite the implementation of several laws focused on violence against women and female empowerment, they are “sidestepped by those responsible for implementing them due to structural issues that impede the delivery of justice” (p. 325); Qandeel’s case is one such example based on an important social/cultural issue that remains insufficiently addressed through academic debate.

Qandeel and the Question of Honor

While attracting fame, Qandeel was labelled as the Kim Kardashian of Pakistan (Maher 2019), “Pakistan’s hot new internet sensation,” “Pakistan’s own version of Poonam Pandey” (an Indian actress who proposed to strip for the Indian team in ICC 2011) (Maher, 2019, p. 91). She struggled to represent a liberal Pakistani woman who did not care about social or cultural restrictions or even about her image as a social media star. She did what pleased her and had to pay a huge price for it. Originally belonging to a remote village (Shah Sadar Din) in the Siraiki-speaking district of Dera Ghazi Khan, she rebelled against a family of nine siblings. Paradoxically, the center of her attention throughout her short journey as a star was also focused on financially supporting the same family that ironically became the reason behind her rebellion. The mystery surrounding her death is rooted in the indecisive conclusion based on blaming the patriarchal structure of her family vs. the social expectations that she challenged through her temporary association with a religious cleric (Maulvi Abul Qavi). Even if this was a “Heat of Passion crime” (Goldstein, 2002), the treatment of the female body, image, gender

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3 These includes Acid Control and Acid Crime Prevention Act, 2011; Prevention of Anti-Women Practices Act, 2011; Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offense of Rape) Act, 2016; Criminal Law (Amendment) (Offences in the name or pretext of Honor Act, 2016); Prevention of the Electronic Crimes Act, 2016; Hindu Marriage Act, 2017; and Pakistan being a signatory of the “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” and coining a National Plan of Action and a National Policy on Development and Empowerment of Women.
bias, and sexuality in the context of Pakistan remains a problematic issue while discussing her life and death.

**Feminist Media Practice**

The two channels that Qandeel used for breaking these barriers were by interacting and networking with men belonging to the privileged class and through her interaction with the public through social media. Qandeel created her image as an “insta-celeb” (Maher, 2018, p. 81) by resisting the domestic sphere as a means of challenging the “hegemonic masculinity” (Watkins & Emerson, 2000, p. 162) that she had bitterly experienced in her actual life. Part of this effort was using “online feminism” projected by “#Femfuture: Online Revolution” (Ott, 2018, p. 97) that transformed her image from a conventional rural woman to a self-educated, westernised woman who dared to challenge the fake elitism in Pakistan. To project this image, she proactively relied both on mainstream traditional (television shows, advertisements) and modern media (Facebook and Instagram). Her interviews reflect the engagement of modern media as an effort to create a “participatory culture” (Biały, 2017, p. 69; Ott, 2018, p. 93) with her followers, reaching 500,000 at one stage. According to Ott, “The participatory nature of social media means that users are both watching others and are aware they are being watched. Social surveillance rests on a notion of power flow across relationships, peer-to-peer (not institution-to-peer) structures, and reciprocal watching’ creating a ‘false sense’ of ‘utopic equality’ among users” (2018, p. 96). It is her inequality within the unbalanced social structure, “inattention to women and women’s issues” (Rhode, 1995, p. 687), and the mainstream media that forced her to create this sense of equality through social media.

Drawing from Tomas Elkjer Nissen’s (2015) approach (normally applied to defense strategies), Biały’s (2017) argument can be used to identify several strategies that Qandeel used by turning social media into a powerful tool. Firstly, she used social media as a means of “Command and Control”— “depending on their objectives, different actors can use more or less open networks to synchronise their operations” (Biały, 2017, p. 77). Secondly, social media was for her a means of “psychological warfare” using – “influence” and using social media as the channel for disseminating messages whose objective is to influence (change) target audiences’ opinions, beliefs, perceptions, and behaviours’ (Biały, 2017, p. 78). For this purpose, she used “official social media accounts and channels” (Biały, 2017: 79), such as Facebook and Instagram. To achieve her objectives, at times, she also distorted information “[...] twisting facts, misinterpreting and putting them out of context, or last but not least, producing a partly or totally false version of reality” (Biały, 2017, p. 80). For example, she shared information about who she liked or flirted with (which she often emphasized by talking about Imran Khan, a cricketer who became a politician in Pakistan) and how she changed her name from Fozia Azeem to Qandeel Baloch.

On the one hand, such a “coordinated use of multiple channels—open and closed” (Biały, 2017, p. 83) became a threat to her image as she was trolled by various TV channels. On the other hand, her efforts became a means of increasing her popularity. It is significant to observe that despite her financial constraints and semi-educated background, even more than television (which discouraged her involvement as a model and a talent hunt competitor), she managed to successfully use social media as a means of resisting the patriarchal structures, societal expectations, taboos, and cultural barriers. Her constant presence on social media evidently gave her popularity in a short span of time, advanced her “narrative advocacy” (Biały, 2017, p. 86), and “immunised” her audience (Biały, 2017, p. 87) against the marginality of women in Pakistan. She successfully created a “political intervention” or “counter narratives and counter representations that contest male regimes of cultural production and empower women to use media for their own interests and pleasure” (Watkins & Emerson, 2000, p. 152) and became part of the public sphere as projected by liberal feminism (Yang, 2007, p. 368).
However, her efforts can also be critiqued as a means of following “sex-oriented media” (Maher, 2018, p. 163) through her over-glamourized image in a society with dual standards of both fetishizing and rejecting this image. She was simultaneously followed and despised by a public, because, in their view, she was disgracing the Balochs, Muslim values, and Pakistani women as cultural ambassadors (2018, p. 94). As Maher suggests,

Qandeel Baloch gave the selfie generation a catch phrase when she uttered those three words,’ declared in an article ranking the ‘How I’m looking?’ video as one of the 10 notable quotes that defined Pakistan’s entertainment scene in 2015. The innocuous phrase was also quite revealing. (It) encapsulates our generation’s need for validation online […]. (Maher, 2018, p. 94)

Maher also argues that part of her strategy was the “Imran Khan angle” (Maher, 2018, p. 91), as she bluntly expressed her feelings and proposed to the famous cricketer turned politician Imran Khan—a short video that attracted 83,000 likes (Maher, 2018, p. 90). Despite despising politicians in general, she even left a personal message for Imran Khan on Valentine’s Day (Maher, 2018, p. 91). Meanwhile, she also kept a close eye on trending social media discussions on “Cricket, Politics, Football” to decide the focus of her videos and proudly declared that “I act from the heart, and I think from the heart. I’m not desperate for fame. Fame is chasing me; I’m not chasing it.” (Maher, 2018, p. 89).

Hence, social media turned into a weapon for “The exchange of memories, experiences, opinions, views and agendas became easy and—over time—very cheap” (Bailey, 2017, p. 72). For Qandeel, social media transformed into a forum for shedding the restrictions that Pakistani society had thrust upon her; she created her new image of a modern woman through the “unprecedented speed of information” (Biały, 2017, p. 75) that “combined with unlimited range, cost-efficiency and availability 24/7” (Biały, 2017, p. 82). Qandeel utilised this efficient means as a source of conveying her emotions and messages to the public on her own terms, with the objective of gaining empowerment that she had no access to in her small village and within the boundaries of her family circle.

**Offering Body to the Consumer Culture**

Despite her impulsive honesty and resistance against vending her body, Qandeel was forced to be abused by men who had no respect for her but could not fulfill her urgent financial needs. Nevertheless, as a resilient woman, when she decided to eventually interact with them, she took a dominant stance of abusing them by using their money mainly to support herself and her deprived family. Her body had agency. Yang (2007) has discussed liberal feminism and the image of good and bad women (in women’s magazines in Taiwan). In his view, “bad-woman feminism” applies to women who adopt the traits that are traditionally assigned to men. This includes being “active, expressive, ambitious, competitive, individualistic, rational, goal-oriented, and calculative” (Yang, 2007, p. 368). This is the kind of role that Qandeel adopted through her feminist media practice, mainly to project her belief in human rights and gender equality (Yang, 2007, p. 369). She used her body as a feminist practice. Her body can be understood as a “cultural text” which is “interpreted, inscribed with meaning” and “made within social relations of power” (Thompson, 1997, p. 282). Part of this effort was using symbols like a tattoo on her body as a sign of text or taking “stories on the skin approach.” It is conventionally regarded as a western practice (though there may still be a stigma and negative stereotyping attached to this practice even in the west) (Leader, 2015: 181) and as a forbidden practice in Islam that prohibits modification and modernizing of the body (Ben-Ari, 2013, 151; 153). She has used her tattoos to express her power over her repeatedly abused body, which now belongs to someone who adamantly rebels against her society’s religious
traditions and cultural practices. Mifflin’s extensive study on tattoo art on women’s bodies is useful in concluding that Qandeel’s rebellious yet empowering gesture challenged the dominant patriarchal structures:

>[the tattoos] celebrate ethnic pride and family unity; coming out, coming of age, marriage, divorce, pregnancy, and menopause. They trumpet angry independence and fierce commitment. They herald erotic power and purge sexual shame. They’re stabs at permanence in an age of transience and marks of individualism in a culture of mass production. (Mifflin, 2013, p. 178)

Through such strategies, Qandeel has created an image of herself that she aimed to present to her followers as “never just pictures” but “fantasized solutions” for the “anxieties and insecurities” of the public, and this is what makes her body and image as a woman powerful. As Bordo suggests in her interview with Goutam Karmakar,

Images are not imprinting devices, and those who respond to them are not passive ‘dupes’. Rather, the culturally successful image – the one that advertisers and designers reproduce endlessly–carries values and qualities that ‘hit a nerve’ that is already exposed. As such, they are not just about the attractiveness of a certain body size and shape, but about how to become what the dominant culture admires – and/or how to escape the pain caused by that culture [...]. (Karmakar, 2021, p. 861)

Based on Bordo’s theorization, Qandeel had successfully molded her body and image according to the social expectations of the consumer culture in Pakistan. Bordo identifies this consumer culture as “amoral” because it teaches us what is normal, desirable, admirable (or repulsive, unworthy, needing correction) about our bodies. Qandeel has mastered this art in her selfish ambition of gaining popularity via social media. However, she barely envisioned that this consumer culture is “less interested in being ethical or politically correct’ than it is in “developing as wide and diverse a consumer group as possible’ (Karmakar, 2021, p. 862). Qandeel is a victim of this consumer culture and the consumer group that she has created is one that harms her life.

Nevertheless, there is a negative perception associated with Qandeel’s body projected through social media. This is due to her image of a woman as a body (rather than a human being). According to Bordo, this turns the body into a negative term and spreads negativity in the form of distraction, diversion from spirituality, sexual desire, aggression, failing will and death (Karmakar, 2021). Her pertinent question is, can the body be treated as a pure and subversive text? Or is the body treated as a material object (or plastic) that lacks emotions (Karmakar, 2021, p. 860). This idea may become clearer in the discussion below, where the patriarchal structures have crushed her image/body as lacking emotions and morals.

Defying the Dominating Position of Privileged Men

In chapter five of her book, entitled, ‘How is Everyone in the World Looking at my Picture?’, Maher reverts from her account of Qandeel’s life to discuss, among others (Taher Shah, Asif Rana, Mudasir, Shafqat Rajput), the image of a male model who became viral due to his good looks. Arshad Chaiwala got “over the night fame” (Maher, 2018, p. 76) days after a photographer projected his image on social media. Like Qandeel, he did not belong to a privileged class and was semi-educated. Despite his fan following and efforts to have a media presence to pursue his prospects of modelling or acting, his conservative family rejected his public image just like Qandeel’s family. However, he did not fight to compete and, after a short span of publicity, vanished from the scene. His brief career ended after he was identified as an
illegal Afghan refugee in Pakistan. Maher’s discussion focused on how Arshad parallels Qandeel’s story to highlight the fact that the social media viewers do not feel attracted to his male image as much as they respond to the feminist resilience and boldness of Qandeel’s character. The reason defined by Maher is: “The viral stars like Qandeel know how to make these viewers hit pause. Qandeel’s videos may have been scorned or dismissed as attention seeking, but she knew how to create content that sparked conversation” (Maher, 2018, p. 78). Her viewers (largely men) may have abhorred her for her bluntness, but she knew that “to become popular, you have to do a lot. It’s necessary to do some bad things. You have to show yourself, take off your clothes” (2018, p. 94).

As indicated earlier, a controversial male character highlighted in Maher’s account of Qandeel’s life is that of Maulvi (cleric) Abul Qavi from Multan. At this point, Qandeel’s activities on social media had turned her image into that of an immoral woman who would do anything for cheap publicity—and anchors largely being males, regarding her as a disgrace to society. Her first interaction on the TV show, Ajeeb Sa not only introduced Qandeel and Qavi but also initiated a dialogue about how Qandeel’s social media engagements were religiously questionable. While the anchor (Matloob), on the one hand, probes clerics to directly comment on Qandeel’s character, on the other hand, he also scolds and imposes a guilt trip upon her. The cleric remains diplomatically focused on how Islam defines modesty, why religion is important, and why Qandeel needs spiritual and moral direction to save her image from being fully tarnished. While Qavi remains neutral and offers to mentor Qandeel, the anchor suggests they meet in Karachi. Later, this meeting did materialise, as evident through Qandeel’s short video and pictures of wearing the cleric’s Karakul cap that were uploaded on her page with a caption “Having memorable time with # Mufti Abul Qavi” (Maher, 2018, p. 48). The newspaper headlines were: “Qandeel Baloch claims Mufti Qavi hopelessly in love with her!” and “When Qandeel Baloch met Mufti Qavi: a guideline on how NOT to learn Islam” (Maher, 2018, p. 148). The episode ends with Qavi promising to arrange a meeting with her idol, Imran Khan. The significant part of this interaction, according to Maher’s account, is that the cleric “[…] wants to marry her. They can keep it a secret, and he is willing to give her anything in exchange, he promises. Imran is too old for you, he insists. Forget him” (Maher, 2018, p. 148).

This brief interaction shed a negative light on the cleric’s character as soon as Qandeel was murdered. Despite her brother being a key suspect identified by female police investigator Attiya Jaffery, there were rumours about the cleric’s involvement and rumours about his insecurity. Qandeel’s video and photographs had ruined his respectable image in society (Maher, 2018, p. 152). Despite his positive reputation for defending the rights of his female followers who sought advice related to family issues, his strong religious image was challenged by Qandeel. Before his interaction with her in the media, he had also interacted with another controversial Pakistani actress, Veena Malik, who had the reputation of defaming Pakistan on the Indian reality show Bigg Boss through her liberal clothing, westernised behaviour, and a scandalous affair with one of the Indian actors on the show. Unlike Qandeel, Veena was articulate enough to talk back to the cleric on the show and question why her image would be harmful to her son if the politicians and clerics were already ruining the image of Pakistan (Maher, 2018, pp. 158-159). Despite Qavi’s image as an “affable, fun-loving cleric” (Maher, 2018, p. 162) and his frank interactions and his “professional relationship” with the media community, the fear of losing his reputation made him declare that “he was only trying to help Qandeel” (Maher, 2018, p. 165), who was like a daughter to him (Maher, 2018, p. 165). After her death, the police found records of his calls on Qandeel’s phone, but he insisted that he was only calling her to arrange her meeting with Imran Khan. Imran Khan’s representative denied the cleric’s important role in Imran Khan’s party other than holding a membership. Qandeel had realised how she had ruined his reputation and was also apologetic, but he had lost his
Conclusion

As discussed above, Qandeel’s life reflects the struggle of a woman who constantly challenged the image of an ideal eastern/Pakistani woman that society imposes upon many women like her. She defies the conventional social and cultural expectations of a daughter, mother, wife, and sister and categorically refuses to be domesticated. Despite being semi-educated, she made all the effort to be accepted by the educated, rich, and established elites who abused her. While the tradition of honor killing may generally be associated with a woman’s pre-marital or illicit affairs against her family’s wishes, breaking the tribal taboos, an outcome of forced marriage, domestic violence, or patriarchal dominance, Qandeel’s case remains an epitome of multiple pressures that she defied. Despite her poverty-stricken family, she had an average life, and she also married a man she loved and had a child with, but she was doomed to die because of her resistance against patriarchy. Her life is well depicted in a drama series named “Baghi” (dir. Farooq Rind) meaning “rebel,” by Paragon Production (2018), which endorsed Maher’s biographical depiction of Qandeel’s short life, ending in a brutal murder by her brother. Saba Qamar’s leading role of Fauzia Batool is based on Qandeel’s life and best depicts her free spirit, passion for art, efforts to create an impactful media image, freedom of expression, and most of all, resistance against the patriarchal and class structures that she was unable to successfully counter. She sadly became a victim of a society that produced her. Her lack of trust in the dominant male presence in her life through many relationships, including father, brother, lover, husband, friend, boss, client, and colleague, only reflected her frustration and anger against the ways in which patriarchy is deeply embedded and normalised within Pakistani society and culture. In this play, Fauzia Batool, like Qandeel herself, broadly represents women who are victimised by the patriarchal structure of Pakistan. Ironically, they do not belong to one class or region but are scattered across the classes, geographical spaces existing within Pakistani society through the diverse roles of wives, mothers, daughters, lovers, those in social service centers (dar-ul-aman), actors, models, or professionals. Men abuse, threaten, and ridicule them in each social role that they strive to adopt.

For critics or feminists, the deprivations and traditions of the conventional setting of Shah Sadar Din (Dera Ghazi Khan) may be an easy way out to stigmatize a conservative social structure. But Maher argues that Qandeel’s village is well populated by the feudal elite and local community travelling to the UAE in pursuit of financial security. The biggest problem remains regarding women as possessions to be protected and blaming them for destroying the honor of their families. Qandeel’s short-lived fame and death ironically exemplify a woman challenging the contradictory nature of Pakistani society at large since it disapproves of a woman’s liberal image that is paradoxically fetishized by the male gaze to criticize her expressive behavior, western attire, or liberal approach to life.

On the contrary, the same society is in favour of western education (e.g., English medium schools, foreign degrees), a privileged and western way of life for the upper-class elite, and the images of western women projected through international media (e.g., Hollywood and/or Bollywood films, public figures marrying western women). Qandeel’s life and death is a slap in the face of the futile image of modernity that Pakistani society aims to portray. It does not represent the conventionality of a certain village or country but universal patriarchal...
structures, as, for example, also represented by the twelve cases of honor killings reported in Britain in 2003. These cases resulted in the judge’s assertion that honor killings are an outcome of a similar clash between eastern and western values (Anjana 88). Heydari et. al (77) have rightly argued that honor killing cannot be adequately described in terms of sexism and its socio-cultural background. Calling it the “dark side of modernity,” they discuss it as an organised and systematic form of marginalisation and stigmatisation of minorities, created by certain social groups, which also prompts them to blindly follow honor codes. By imposing honor codes, they implement the mechanism of social control, which in turn aggravates honor crimes. It is significant to look at the practice of honor killing through the lenses of communal cohesion, solidarity, and control (Heydari et al, 92).

We would conclude by reverting to a sharp query probed by Maher (2018, p. 212) through The Sensational Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch: whose honor did Qandeel damage: Mufti Qavi, her family, her brothers, her village, or the Pakistani society? (Maher, 2018, p. 212). Through an in-depth analysis of Qandeel’s coping strategies, our discussion raises another pertinent question: Does a woman who struggles to carve her place in a society not deserve a right to live honorably?

References


