

Criminal justice system reforms, execution of law termed imperative to stop karo-kari killings

By Our Staff Reporter

KARACHI: Legislators, senior officials of law enforcement, members of the legal fraternity and civil society activists have agreed that reforms in criminal justice system, implementation of law in true spirit and strong writ of the state are imperative to deal with the menace of 'honour' killing or karo kari in Sindh.

At a consultative meeting titled 'Honour killing — a crime against humanity: reasons and challenges in stopping the menace' organised by Sindh Human Rights Commission on Friday, they spoke at length about the

reasons behind the brutal trend and discussed way out to provide justice to victims and their aggrieved families.

Member National Assembly and head of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) human rights cell Nafisa Shah as the keynote speaker at the meeting said that modernisation and reforms within the state and justice system were required to deal with issue of honour killings.

"The case [of honour killings] does not exist outside the state, the courtroom is implicated, law is implicated and criminal justice system is deeply implicated," she said. "The idea of restorative justice becomes

strong when investigation systems and criminal justice systems are weak. Even though the aspect of culture and customs is present when one talks about honour killings, our criminal justice system is also in dire need [of] reforms and that the so-called garb of Islamisation has had a lot of impact on our criminal justice procedures."

She also shared about her extensive work on honour killings when she was a journalist and later when she was pursuing her PhD. She said that the anthropological aspect of the issue was something she wanted to explore.

Former chief justice of Sindh

High Court retired Justice Shaig Usmani said that karo kari had a cultural aspect. It was about restraining women and not giving them independence, he said and added that there was a need for a different law.

He said that an anti-honour killing law should be made to separately deal with this heinous crime and a dedicated commission or institution must be formed to deal with cases related to honour killings.

Abdul Khaliq Shaikh, the DIG headquarters of Sindh police, while delivering his presentation said that Sindh police recently conducted a research on honour killings in the province.

The numbers, even though alarming, were less than those recorded last year, he added.

"In the first quarter of 2019, the number of cases reported to Sindh police were 65. In 2018, we recorded 113 cases. A total of 50 women were killed in the name of honour this year, while 28 men were also murdered following the result of honour killing," he said.

Former chairperson and present member of the National Commission for Human Rights Anis Haroon said that the issue of honour killings was not new. Every other day society witnessed a new wave of honour killings.

"The entire belt where honour killings are prevalent should be declared no-go areas for women. An emergency should be declared to deal with cases of violence against women in the vulnerable region," she said reflecting on the urgency required to deal with the issue.

SHRC chairperson retired Justice Majida Razvi spoke about the suffering of women and young girls within the province, as well as the way they were treated in the name of honour.

She said that the issue of honour killing was a matter of urgency, which needed to be dealt with in consultation with all stakeholders.

In the name of honour: the state of Karo-Kari in Sindh

May 24, 2010

A survey of showed that 88 per cent of officers saw no different between honour killings and other murders: 'Honour Killings in Sindh and Police by Abdul Khaliq Shaikh.

Abdul Khaliq Shaikh is a barrister and deputy inspector-general (DIG) in the Sindh Police with vast experience in handling investigations of honour killing. He is also the focal person for the Prevention of Karo-Kari Project being executed in the province in collaboration with the Gender Justice Project, UNDP. Mr Shaikh spoke about the critical evaluation he has authored of the polices response to killings in the name of honour.

How did this joint study come about?

The Sindh police started a project on the prevention of karokari in Sindh in collaboration with the Gender Justice Unit of the UNDP. One of the activities of the project was to undertake a study on the state of honour killings in the province — probe into its causes, collect and analyse relevant data, and explore the ways and means in which the police force can play its role in preventing murders in the name of honour.

How is the book being received in police circles?

Generally the book is considered a good effort and it is being taken positively. Although it is critical of police handling of the cases of killings in the name of honour, police officers do appreciate the fact that unlike other books on the subject this study gives the law enforcement perspective.

However, not all police officers are appreciative of the project and some of them are of the view that there are other priority areas such as terrorism, investigation and forensics which require more attention than honour killings.

In what ways do you expect the book to be helpful?

Most studies on honour killings give the typical human rights perspective. This book focuses on the role of the police in prevention and detection of honour killing cases. Instead of mere police-bashing, it gives an insider's view which is missing in other such studies.

Also, it does not merely identify the problem but attempts to explore possible solutions to the problem. For instance, where it identifies flaws in the investigations of murders committed in the name of honour, it also mentions good practice guidelines for correcting such flaws and improving the quality of investigation of cases.

A decision has already been taken by the provincial police chief to include the relevant chapters in the training syllabus of police training courses.

The sections of the book related to defective investigation and standing operating procedures on how to handle such cases have been converted into lectures, translated into Sindhi and included in a training manual to be used in police training institutions in the province.

Would you agree that the lack of education among the majority of our police force will hinder their training in the issue of honour killings?

Most police officers in the senior ranks are adequately educated. However, junior police officers are not highly educated. The problem is that most of the [murder] cases are initially handled by junior police officers. The training programmes also target junior police officers.

Since junior police officers do have basic education it is still possible to train them on issues of human rights, including violence against women.

Furthermore, the training modules have been designed keeping in view the junior officers' educational capabilities.

Most of the master trainers are police officers themselves and as they also rose from junior ranks this facilitates their communication with the trainees.

In your experience, is the situation concerning honour killings becoming worse over time? Or is there any sign of improvement?

There has been no marked decrease in the number of incidents. In our society violence has unfortunately increased rather than decreasing. This trend is also manifested in incidents of honour killings. The area which has shown improvement is the growing awareness among public and stakeholders about the seriousness of the issue.

Now many people condemn killings in the name of honour. Furthermore, it is almost impossible now to hush up the matter after committing murder in the name of honour, which used to be a common practice only a few years back.

'Eliminating discriminatory aspects of laws' is listed as an objective under the heading of Legislative Response. How will it be possible to achieve this basic objective when MNAs and MPAs themselves defend these practices as the traditions of their respective provinces?

I think there is immense pressure on parliamentarians to abolish laws that are discriminatory to women and to introduce laws aimed at protecting women. Despite their traditional mindset and personal biases, they cannot evade this issue anymore. You will appreciate that recently they have passed laws for the protection of women and ending harassment.

Having said that, one must recognise the difficulty in getting overwhelming support among lawmakers on gender-based issues as many proposed laws have been met with resistance and delaying tactics.

Yet, it is not impossible to win their support. This is where civil society and women parliamentarians have to play their role in highlighting issues and pushing legislation aimed at ending discrimination.