

Violence Against Women in Pakistan: A Forensic Discourse Analysis of Honour Killings in the Dawn

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Abstract

The brutal custom of honour killings is practised in various societies of the world, including Pakistan; thereupon, the underline objectives of such killings are explored in a famous Pakistani Newspaper, 'The Dawn'. Two (2) editorials from 'The Dawn' newspaper were analysed using a text analysis technique comprising vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and text structure called Forensic Discourse Analysis (FDA). The basic descriptive mixed-method revealed that The Dawn's left-wing ideology influences people, and the patterns of honour killings are usually socially and economically constructed with the strong support of flawed frames of culture and religion, favouring the culprits with the sympathetic escape.

Keywords: Honour Killings, *The Dawn*, Forensic Discourse Analysis (FDA), Pakistan, Textual Analysis.

1. Introduction

Honour killing or shame killing is a willful massacre of the victim (mostly kin) under the belief that the individual is disgraceful for disobeying religious, societal or cultural values (Jafri, 2008). It is a traditional procedure throughout the globe, and Pakistan's case is no different (Shah, 2016). Chafai (2014) stated that honour killings are correlated in the East with religious and sociocultural misinterpretation, whereas, Vatandoost (2012) believed that the immigrants exercise brutal acts of honour killings in the West because of a clash of civilisations or multiculturalism. Although honour killing in the world is "now illegal almost everywhere" (Annan, 2000), however, the acts of honour killing are still an everyday activity exercised in different societies of the world (Churchill, 2018).

This study is based on Forensic Discourse Analysis (FDA), where the textual analysis of the editorials from *The Dawn* newspaper was focused. The key objectives of the current study were to analyse the discourse of honour killings in the editorials of *The Dawn* newspaper, to explore the objectives and results of the social dilemma of honour killings and to explore the patterns of portraying honour killings that affect the mindset of people. The research questions of this research are as follows: How is honour killing portrayed in the editorials of *The Dawn* newspapers? Second, how is the media affecting people's mindset regarding honour killings?

Honour killing is a social dilemma traced back to prehistoric times (Ahmed, Shafi, & Masood, 2021). Honour killing is evident all over the globe, and the situation of Pakistan is no

different as Pakistan is ranked 153rd of 156 countries in the Global Gender Gap Index, 2021 (World Economic Forum, 2021). The representation of the issues of shame killings through Mass Media also affects the mindset of people regarding such killings. For this reason, micro-level analysis of honour killings in the printing press is essential. The topic of this research is delimited explicitly to textual analysis of two (2) editorials from *The Dawn* newspaper from July 15, 2016, to July 25, 2016. The study is significant in finding the portrayal of honour killings in Pakistan, exploring the objectives of honour killings and investigating the role of media while portraying such cases of honour or shame killings.

2. Literature Review

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

2.1 Conceptual Literature

The act of honour killing or shame killing is a voluntary massacre of the kin under the belief that the individual is disgraceful for disobeying religious, societal or cultural values (Jafri, 2008). The Latin word “Discursus” is the root of the word “Discourse”, meaning “language in use” (Adjei, 2013; Oxford Languages, 2020). FDA combines Discourse Analysis, Multimodality and Forensic Analysis on literary or media texts. It is a complicated word because it refers to a method of research that emphasises the use of vocabulary and language in social structures. It concerns how authority is wielded and how social relationships, awareness, and culture are maintained. This technique is focused on critical linguistics and post-structuralist philosophy. FDA is concerned with both spoken and written language and verbal and nonverbal facets of life (Cukier et al., 2009).

The integration of linguistic competence, methodologies, and observations into the forensic understanding of crime, communication, criminal investigation, prosecution, and judicial procedure is known as forensic linguistics or legal linguistics. It is a sub-discipline of applied linguistics. Comprehending textual legislation, interpreting linguistic use in criminal and legal procedures, and providing linguistic testimony are the three main research areas for linguists functioning in forensic situations. Forensic linguistics is not monolithic; it includes a diverse range of scientists and investigators from several fields (Munt, 2003).

Language is a reference with random and standardised meaning combinations as its building blocks. Grammar encounters endorse the perspective that all concentrations of grammatical description form syntactical, lexical, and phrasal constructions to conceptual syntactical structures and larger discursive structures, which are hereinafter known as Multimodal Grammatical Constructions, based on their substantial scientific evidence (Hoffman, 2017). Also, in order to communicate concepts and ideas, discourse is required. Language stretches are used by people all over the world to convey their ideas. Any conversation must acquire cohesiveness to be understood (Sholeh, 2014).

2.2 Research Literature

In Iraq, the history of honour killing dates back to 1780 BCE. King Hammurabi established a commandment that every female belonged to her spouse until death. If she is found in betrayal, she and her lover would be thrown into the sea until the assassination. In 17 BCE, Augustus, the Roman Imperial Dictator, declared that females should be murdered by the

dominant male of their household if captured in a sexual encounter, according to Julian Law. Attempts at honour killings have long been associated with “chivalry” and “nobility”. These ideas are still popular today, and the same connotations are still associated with them. In Pakistan, the Talpur tribe of Sindh pioneered the tradition of honour killings that later spread to other areas of the region (Herald, 2016).

In the press, honour killing is depicted as a case of using “language as a medium of control.” It is not considered an offence. The truth of honour killings is very different, and the media portrays it quite differently (Masood & Shafi, 2020). Many incidents of honour killings, for example, go underreported in Pakistan, and no judicial charges are brought. Since the scheme is inadequate and convicted individuals are not prosecuted, honour killings are increasing daily (Ullah, 2010). Due to Pakistan’s harsh feudal environment, many violent criminals are free to move about and believe it to be the correct thing to do (Hussain, Arif, & Saleem, 2021). *The Dawn* has liberal and open-minded nature and presents left-wing ideology by giving importance to local bodies and organisations for societal concerns (Bilal et al., 2012).

A discourse, illustration, or verbal or written language description by literature, media or audio is referred to as text (Arif, Shafi, & Ullah, 2022). The text refers to everything that has significance. Textual analysis is a form of analysis that involves examining a text for its lexicon, syntax, and grammar. Roland Barthes coined the word “textual analysis.” FDA uses text styles to illuminate particular meanings and correlates them with occurrences, defining the relation between language text, its context, and culture. Editorials report on domestic and world affairs, political figures, policymakers, and influential lawmakers’ decisions. The textual analysis is critical for exposing a discourse’s underlying philosophy (Ayoub et al., 2016).

Honour killing is known by different names in four (4) provinces of Pakistan: ‘Kala Kali’ (Punjab province), ‘Tor Tora’ (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province), ‘Karo Kari’ (Sindh province), and ‘Siyah Kari’ (Balochistan province). Although honour killing has multiple names in Pakistan’s ethnic languages, the context is the same: the perpetrators of honour killings are punished by sacrificing their life to save the family’s prestige again for violation of having a pre-marital relation (Iqbal, 2006). Honour killing and several domestic and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have been the focus of much coverage. However, their studies were not mostly based on the portrayal of the issue in newspapers, so this study highlighted the portrayal of honour killings in Pakistani English newspapers, namely *The Dawn*.

The research gap in the previous studies was that they were limited to the incidents of honour killings and not their portrayal in the Mass Media. The former studies have not discussed the reasons and objectives of honour killings in detail. This research also covers the gap in Pakistan because people consider this issue taboo. These gaps are essential in giving way to research studies; filling these gaps in the research is necessary. This research gap has provided the methodological background for the research. In order to fill the research gap, an operational research model is followed to investigate the text and objectives of honour killings.

3. Research Methodology

Newspapers reflect and represent the norms and customs of society (Chafai, 2010). The canvas to society is the language; in particular, the language used in newspaper editorials reflects the control, culture, norms, ideologies and power (Fowler & Trew, 2020; Hodge & Kress, 1993). FDA of editorials can reveal the hidden ideologies that are propagated through them (Hassan, Shafi, & Masood, 2021). It is observed that even the accidental syntactic mistakes have innate ideologies hidden within their pragmatic discourse (Zulqarnain, Shafi, & Masood, 2022), and these words express emotions (Ullah, Ali, & Shafi, 2022). This research is a basic-descriptive mixed-method approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research approaches (Durant,

2004). This portion gives an insight into the research procedures, methods, design and sampling (Sultana, Javed, & Masood, 2022).

3.1 Theoretical Framework

Textual analysis was completed under four (4) theoretical frameworks: First, vocabulary under the 3-Dimensional Model (Fairclough, 1993, 2007, 2013), grammar under Multimodality (Kress, 2001), cohesion under Discourse Analysis (Sholeh, 2014), and text structure under Forensic Analysis (Munt, 2003). FDA utilising the aforementioned theoretical frameworks was applied to *The Dawn's* editorials to analyse the text deeply. The Text Analysis comprises the following four (4) techniques:

3.1.1 Vocabulary: According to Norman Fairclough, vocabulary is the most critical aspect of the written debate. It is concerned with the manifestation of domineering groups' dominance and the tactics used by these groups to influence popular opinion. Within vocabulary, literary techniques such as collocations, continuity, and synonymy are examined (Fairclough, 1993, 2007, 2013).

3.1.2 Grammar: This grammar analysis examines whether the action's initiator is obscured by passive development or revealed by the active development of sentences. The media's bias is revealed, and the social faction preferred in their coverage is illustrated, owing to the use of grammar examination (Kress, 2001).

3.1.3 Cohesion: Literary devices that connect the text are referred to as cohesion. Demonstratives, pronouns, and conjunctions link sentence sentences in a paragraph. The text examines these connections in cohesion (Sholeh, 2014).

3.1.4 Text Structure: The text structure determines the descriptions of the production of instances found in a document. The comments that promote odium, commitment, or identification with a specific concept are investigated in text structure analysis (Munt, 2003).

3.2 Population/Sample

The sample is whittled down only to excerpts from one of the major English newspapers of Pakistan, *The Dawn*. This convenient sampling was obtained from Two (2) newspaper articles from *The Dawn* newspaper from July 15, 2016, to July 25, 2016. The convenient sampling of the research is synchronic to the time when a significant and famous incident of the honour killing of a famous Pakistani model Qandeel Baloch happened, and it was a significant concern in Mass Media.

3.3 Research Design

This research comes under the discipline of applied linguistics (Arif, Siddique, & Ahmed, 2022). This study is based on Forensic Discourse Analysis (FDA), where the text analysis of the editorials from *The Dawn* newspaper was focused. The current study has utilised mixed-method analysis, where text analysis deals with the quantitative findings and the discussion deals with the qualitative findings.

4. Findings

Two (2) editorials were extracted from *The Dawn* newspaper from July 15, 2016, to July 25, 2016. The analysis of data gathered from the sources is completed under the theoretical perspective of the FDA. The investigation of editorials is descriptive. The primary concern was the description of editorials in the light of the text. It is basic-descriptive applied research where a societal phenomenon is investigated through the description and is also applicable to society.

4.1 Qandeel's Murder (July 17, 2016)

"The shocking 'honour' killing ... false notions of 'honour'" (Editorial, 2016a) (for the complete story, see Appendix A).

4.1.1 Vocabulary

The collocations of Honour are repetitive in the editorial, particularly **“false notions of honour”, “anti-honour killing bill”, and “honour killing”**. These iterations emphasise the severity of the situation and encourage readers to concentrate on the issue of honour killings. In the editorial, the writer poses two questions. First, **“Why is lethargy?”** And second, **“When will parliament be jolted out of its stupor to pass the anti honour killing bill?”** The aim of asking these questions was to elicit memories of past events related to the document. The term **“disobedient”** describes how an honour killing victim is mistreated by her superior masculine assailant, her **“brother”**.

The proper noun **“Nawaz Shareef”** is listed in the document only once (1) and **“Qandeel Baloch”** Two (2) times. The writer used these proper nouns to accuse Nawaz Shareef of failing to protect Qandeel Baloch, a famous Pakistani media star. It also kept Nawaz Shareef responsible for not amending the criminal law act to remove pro-honour killing provisions, which led to the assassination of Qandeel Baloch. Words like **“private offence”, “punishment waives”, “crime”, “perpetrator”, “murderers”, “regressive patriarchies”, “murder”, and “death”** set the tone for the event and leave a lasting impression on readers.

4.1.2 Grammar

Most of the sentences in this text were active arrangement sentences, with fewer passive arrangement sentences. Within the total of Seventeen (17) sentences, there were Ten (10) active sentences and Seven (7) passive sentences. There was an excess of denominators: Definite article **“the”** was traced Twenty (20), and indefinite articles **“a”** and **“an”** were tracked Eight (8) and Three (3) times, respectively. Infinitives with **“to”** were found Ten (10) times. Present participle **“ing”** was noticed Seven (7) times and past participle **“ed”** for Eighteen (18) times. Present form **“be”** is incorporated Seven (7), and **“been”** is scripted for One (1) time only. The verbs **“am”, “is”, “our”, “was”, and “were”** were used for Zero (0), Four (4), Two (2), Three (3) and One (1) time respectively.

4.1.3 Cohesion

There was a surplus of cohesion instances, such as conjunctions in the majority, pronouns in the second majority, and demonstratives in a minor ratio. These were incorporated to reinforce connectivity into the text. Seven (7) conjunctions were traced Twenty-Two (22) times in the text. These conjunctions were **“and”, “that”, “as”, “both”, “if”, “for” and “because”**. Five (5) instances of Three (3) demonstratives were found in this editorial. These were **“that”, “this”, and “there”**. Twelve (12) pronouns were used Thirty (30) times in the editorial. These pronouns were **“her”, “she”, “whom”, “itself”, “it”, “which”, “themselves”, “they”, “its”, “he”, “his” and “who”**.

4.1.4 Text Structure

The editorial has Two Thousand Four Hundred and Thirty-Five (2435) characters, Four Hundred (400) words, Seventeen (17) sentences and Thirteen (13) paragraphs. The average word length is 4.9 letters, and the average sentence length is 23.53. The writer disclosed the naked face of Pakistani politicians, especially Nawaz Shareef, who forgot his vow regarding amending the law of honour killing after the screening of Shameen Obaid Chinoy’s famous Oscar award ceremony. The death of model Qandeel Baloch was a bare witness of the ruling party in government for their non-serious attitude towards this grave national issue: honour killing. The newspaper text structure of editorials informed the ideology of the newspaper.

4.2 Pro-women Legislation (July 22, 2016)

“Yesterday’s developments offer ... with the crime” (Editorial, 2016b) (for the complete story, see Appendix B)

4.2.1 Vocabulary

The quantitative evidence used in any document ensures that the incident depicted in the piece of literature is accurate. Therefore, the author has incorporated Four (4) statistical pieces of evidence in the document, including “**five hundred women**”, “**in 2014,**” “**in 2015,**” and “**19-year-old Maria Sadaqat**”. Statistical instances demonstrate the author’s accuracy in supplying accurate details in the article. This factual evidence often prompts the users to accept what is published in the script on a psychological level. The collocations relevant to the term honour are often used in the editorial text, for instance, “**honour killings**”, “**transgression of ‘honour’**”, “**honour killing**”, “**anti-honour killing laws**”, and “**Anti-honour killing**”. Both the editorials contain the terms “**death**” and “**murder**” twice.

Three (3) proper nouns were used in the editorial: “**Maryam Nawaz**” for One (1) time, “**Maria Sadaqat**” for One (1) time and “**Qandeel Baloch**” for Two (2) times. The writer used these proper nouns to praise Nawaz Shareef for her interview with Qandeel Baloch, a famous Pakistani media star. It was contrary to the previous article. It kept Maryam Nawaz responsible for not amending the criminal law act to remove pro-honour killing provisions. It was because the first editorial condemned it because of the pre-murder situation of law and the latter editorial praised it because of the post-murder amendment in the law.

4.2.2 Grammar

Like the former editorials, this text comprises the majority of active construction sentences and a minority of passive construction sentences. Within the total of Fourteen (14) sentences, there are Ten (10) active sentences and Four (4) passive sentences. There was an excess of denominators: Definite article “**the**” was traced Thirty-Three (33), and indefinite articles “**a**” and “**an**” were tracked Eight (8) and Two (2) times, respectively. Infinitives with “**to**” were found Ten (10) times. Present participle “**ing**” was noticed Twenty-One (21) times and past participle “**ed**” for Thirteen (13) times. Present form “**be**” is incorporated Four (4), and “**been**” is scripted for One (1) time only. The verbs “**am**”, “**is**”, “**are**”, “**was**”, and “**were**” were used for Zero (0), Five (5), Two (2), One (1) and Two (2) time respectively.

4.2.3 Cohesion

There was an excess occurrence of cohesion to establish connectivity in the sentences. Conjunctions were traced Twenty-Six (26) times, demonstratives were observed Two (2) times, and pronouns were incorporated Eight (8) times. Eight (8) conjunctions were traced in the text Twenty-Six (26) times. The examples of conjunctions were “**where**”, “**that**”, “**for**”, “**than**”, “**both**”, “**and**”, “**then**” and “**but**”. Two (2) demonstratives were observed One (1) time each. These were “**this**” and “**those**”. Five (5) pronouns were incorporated in this editorial Eight (8) times. These are “**it**”, “**who**”, “**one**”, “**they**” and “**their**”.

4.2.4 Text Structure

The editorial has Two-Thousand Five-Hundred and Thirty-One (2531) characters, Four Hundred and Three (403) words, Fourteen (14) sentences and Thirteen (13) paragraphs. The average word length is 5.1 letters, and the average sentence length is 28.8 words. The author depicted the role of parliament and significant lawmakers in amending and enacting anti-honour killing legislation and criticised their delay in the law-making process. Legislators such as Nawaz Shareef and Mariam Nawaz inaction demonstrate their disinterest in the question of honour killings. The assassination of Qandeel Baloch demonstrates the impossibility of enforcing honour killing laws in the real world. Every couple of weeks, there are several cases of honour-related offences, and the government’s failure to respond demonstrates the government’s lack of seriousness. These leaders are merely paying lip service to the Pakistani people.

5. Discussion

Violence against women, particularly in honour killings, remains a grave concern in Pakistan, posing significant challenges to the country's social fabric and human rights agenda. This study employs a forensic discourse analysis approach to investigate honour killings, as reported in *The Dawn*, a prominent Pakistani newspaper. By critically examining the language and underlying power dynamics within news articles, this research aims to shed light on the prevailing societal attitudes and structural factors perpetuating violence against women.

The study begins by providing a comprehensive overview of the cultural and historical context surrounding honour killings in Pakistan. It highlights the patriarchal norms, notions of family honour, and the interplay of religion, tradition, and socio-economic factors that contribute to the persistence of this form of violence. The forensic discourse analysis focuses on two (2) news articles published in *The Dawn*, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the representations, language choices, and discursive strategies employed to frame honour killings. The findings of this research underscored the complex nature of honour killings, revealing the intricate web of gender inequality, power dynamics, and societal pressures that perpetuate violence against women (Jones, 2018). The forensic analysis highlighted patterns such as victim-blaming, justifications rooted in cultural relativism, and the role of media in shaping public perception and discourse (Shafi, 2022). Furthermore, the study explored the implications of such discursive practices on policy-making, legal frameworks, and societal attitudes towards violence against women in Pakistan.

The Dawn newspaper seems to align with the left-wing ideology. *The Dawn* newspaper discusses world laws and institutions concerning the unresolved aboriginal problem of honour killings. Using vocabulary associated with honour and people, the newspaper expresses its strong opposition to honour killing. The grammar used in *The Dawn* newspaper's editorials indicates that active structures are used more often than passive structures to make the meaning of the sentence as direct and obvious as possible. Cohesion covers a maximum number of conjunctions and pronouns and a minimum number of demonstratives to connect the text. The text structure in the article has favoured women by vigorously condemning the misogynistic practices of honour killings.

The study has found that the *The Dawn* follows the left-wing ideology. It means that the newspaper advocates social, religious, economic and cultural equality and favours socially liberal ideas. The research called for promoting gender equality, comprehensive legal reforms, and the need for the media to adopt responsible and sensitive reporting practices. Additionally, the study emphasized the significance of engaging multiple stakeholders, including religious and community leaders, to challenge patriarchal norms and advocate for women's rights. By employing a forensic discourse analysis, this study contributed to a nuanced understanding of violence against women in Pakistan, particularly honour killings. It provided valuable insights into the underlying discourses that perpetuate this form of violence, enabling policymakers, activists, and researchers to develop targeted interventions to eradicate such practices and foster a more equitable society.

6. Conclusion

Forensic Discourse Analysis (FDA) is an innovative, effective, operational and triangular model that seems to revolutionise the research domain in social science discourse. The combination of textual and forensic analysis is best suited for newspaper discourse for investigating the patterns and objectives of honour killings. The aforementioned model is very influential in searching for the roots, objectives and patterns of honour killing. The current study showed the hidden ideologies of honour killings promoted through editorials keeping Pakistani culture in mind. It also revealed how the writers of editorials portray the honour killings. Honour killings are

practised in Pakistan as a social norm. The patterns depicting honour killings in Mass Media affect people's mindsets, developing or changing social customs and cultural practices.

Honour killings should be abolished; such studies will significantly increase women's consciousness of their status. This patriarchal mentality of honour killings will be changed if women begin to struggle for their rights and men cease their patriarchal mischief. Women's interests should be promoted through the media. Universities should host international conferences to educate men about their spiritual responsibilities. The authors on the topic of honour killing should be taught in gender studies classes all over the globe. Honour killing, blasphemy, and other taboo subjects should be welcomed among students. The research can be extended to different newspapers, news channels and media reports of different years. This study would further help the students of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Forensic Linguistics, Mass Media, Multimodality, Women Literature and Gender Studies in their research by providing a new angle to observe editorials.

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Appendixes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Why the lethargy?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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