



**SDPI**  
Sustainable Development Policy Institute

Special Bulletin on:  
**The Road not Taken to Combat  
Violence Against Women**



## CONTENTS

Breaking the Norms of Patriarchal Cultural: "Sawara practice undermined"	3
"Do as it is done unto you"	4
Political Empowerment of Women	5
Every Little Counts: A Woman's Story of Survival	6
The Struggle of a Hindu Girl for Justice	7
Protecting the Rejected: Undermining the Practice of Karokari	8
Tables Turned: "Power to the powerless"	9
A Light at the End of the Tunnel	10
The Pen is Mightier than the Sword; Struggle for Justice	11

“There are two powers in the world; one is the sword and the other is the pen. There is a great competition and rivalry between the two. There is a third power stronger than both, that of the women”

Muhammad Ali Jinnah

### Sustainable Development Policy Institute

P.O Box 2342  
38, Main Embassy Road  
G-6/3, Islamabad, Pakistan

Tel: +(92-51) 2278134  
Fax: +(92-51) 2278135

Web: <http://www.sdpi.org>  
Email: [main@sdpi.org](mailto:main@sdpi.org)

Author: Mome Saleem  
Formatted by: Nasir Khan

These articles are a product of action oriented research on “ Strategies Adopted by Community to Combat Violence against Women” the research has been funded by UNDP and UNOPS.

### Disclaimer

The opinions expressed in Part 1 and Part 2 of these Special Bulletins on Violence Against Women (VAW) published in May 2011 are solely those of the author, and publishing them does not in any way constitute an endorsement of the opinion by SDPI.

## Breaking the Norms of Patriarchal Cultural: “Sawara practice undermined”

In an essentially patriarchal society, where even the educated and liberalized elite of the Capital hesitate in actively participating in a social revolution to empower women, men such as Malik Azeem Ullah Khan, a 72 year old man, with 10 children, with a secondary education, continue to strive for the protection of women.

Malik Azeem Khan, belongs to the village Kaga-wala, has been an active jirga member for over half a decade now, and has been working tirelessly to prevent violence and ill-treatment of women in his area. Malik Azeem's father had 38 children, from four wives. While they were never ill-treated, his father was unable to devote an equal amount of time and attention to each family, especially due to his job as a government employee and social responsibilities as a jirga lord. Malik Azeem observed over time the misery of his father's wives and thus learnt important lessons for his own life.

Historically, Swara is the cultural practice of forcibly marrying girls in order to settle a blood feud between two families. It gained popularity, not only because it was deemed that it would augment peace and aid in settling disputes, but also because it was considered one of the best possible forms of revenge available. Swara victims are wedded off in a completely untraditional manner, with no celebrations. Often, brides commit suicide prior to their marriage or in several incidences after the marriage owing to ill treatment by the in-laws.

Azeem Khan led the way to change by proposing a ban on the practice of swara in the Khalil Mohmand area and by persuading his tribal and jirga elders to impose the ban. He has used his father's, and over time, his own political influence especially in order to end the practice of swara. Due to the collective and united decision of the elders to enforce the veto, it was never contested or challenged.

The punishment for murder in Azeem Khan's jirga is varied, according to the financial standing of the accused. A penalizing Quranic measure is to ensure financial compensation for the deceased's family, especially if he was the main breadwinner. Sawara was also previously used as a conciliatory measure in such cases. However, Azeem Khan has also changed that, as in the case of Zardad Khan, a man from a neighboring village, Masho Khail, who had committed four murders. The families of the victims demanded swara as a punishment. It was a result of Azeem Khan's hard work that Zardad said, “women should

not be punished for the evil deeds of a man, I do not agree to this. I belong to the neighbouring village but for resolution of all sorts of disputes I come to Azeem Khan for I trust his decisions which are in light of Islam.”

Azeem Khan resisted yielding to the pressure exerted by them, and kept Zardad in his custody for eight months, until the decision made was in accordance with Islamic teachings. It was determined that Zardad would pay the affected in cash or land for the murders committed.

Azeem Khan's work and his fight against the abuse of women is essentially the exemplary paradigm that all communities need to eradicate violence against women. Pakistani men, too, can support gender equity and protect women's rights. Men must be motivated to play an active role in this battle. Often, their reluctance is rooted in incorrect beliefs regarding the social and religious importance or the position of women, which stem from distorted interpretations of legal jurisprudence or Islamic texts. Moreover the prevalent illiteracy and lack of skills and opportunities amongst women only serves to make them further susceptible and defenseless against the atrocities committed against them.

In 2002, the National Judicial Policy Making Committee announced that swara was entirely against Islamic Laws because a marriage demands the will of both sides. The committee further announced that Sections 310 and 338(e) of the Pakistan Penal Code are against the bargaining of women to reconcile any dispute. Yet Swara remains prevalent in many villages and tribes, destroying the lives of its victims.

The need for women's empowerment is in no way a call for conflict between men and women; it is a need for an overhaul of the entire social system, for behavioral change; in stronger words, a social revolution. The struggle is not against another gender; it is against uneducated, erroneous perceptions of the role of women, which result in cruel and inhumane crimes against women. Men and the potential and ability they hold to evoke change on an individual level cannot - indeed, must not, be isolated in this worthy task. Towards this goal, it is imperative that educated and enlightened men and women, both, must strive together to stop and rectify these violations of the most basic human rights denied to weak and vulnerable women without recourse.

## “Do as it is done unto you”

Seven year old Sangam lived close to the village of Kingra in district Sialkot, with her father Shaukat and her stepmother. She lived a life of fear from her stepmother's violent behavior towards her and her older sisters. However, it was her own father who married her off at the same age to a much older man.

He had previously been involved in trafficking women but in one case the deal did not work when a woman he had sold to a family, absconded. The family wanted compensation either in the form of money or another woman. Therefore he gave them his own daughter.

Sangam was forced into saying yes at the Nikah, (marriage) without seeing her in-laws or her husband. After the wedding, she entered straight into a life of constant verbal abuse by her husband. While initially, her mother-in-law provided some form of protection, eventually, she too began to treat Sangam badly. She was not allowed to leave the house, even to meet her family.

A few months later, Sangam's father filed a report at the Deputy Police Officer's office, under the charge of abduction. A police raid in the house was conducted and Sangam was recovered. In court, Sangam clearly and bravely stated that she did not want to live with either her in-laws or her own father; she simply wanted to study. The court ordered that she be sent to a shelter home while a suitable place was found for her.

Arsalan Khan was a government contractor and a social worker. His father was employed in the capacity of the District Officer Social Welfare. On a routine visit to his father, he learnt of Sangam's case from the shelter home. She added that a child as young as Sangam could not remain for long at the shelter home, moreover, it would adversely affect her future life. Shaukat had come to take her back several times, but Sangam had always refused, fearing for her safety.

Arsalan attempted to speak with the Deputy Police Officer, but the conversation was fruitless. In order to get his attention, Arsalan used his influence and connections to hold a press conference regarding Sangam. The DPO reacted predictably and Arsalan was able to file a case under Section 365, which provided for the criminal offence of abduction, against all of Sangam's in-laws, her father and all others involved in the crime.

Her husband, Shehzad, the cleric who conducted the Nikah, and the witness were arrested,

but her father fled the area temporarily. Shehzad's story differed from Shaukat's at certain points. He claimed that the two men had merely been acquaintances. A friendship had begun and a month later, Shaukat had taken a loan from Shehzad twice, the second of which he had never paid back. He'd then come with Sangam and his wife to Shehzad's home and asked them to look after the girl until his wife and he returned from the city. The next Shehzad heard from him, he had issued a complaint of abduction against them.

After the hearings, the court took Arsalan's suggestion and issued orders sending Sangam to the SOS Village. Meanwhile, Shehzad and others were bailed from jail, with the help of the district administrator.

Sangam is now living at the SOS Village and is a happy nine year old pursuing her studies. She has refused to resume life with her father because she will not be able to study or eventually make a career for herself there.

A woman's freedom and mobility reflects poorly on the perceived definition of 'manhood'. Her husband is castigated and taunted for being unable to keep her in control. The lack of education and financial dependence of women on men are propagated. Moreover, they are conditioned to feel guilty and incompetent as mothers if they work to improve their financial status. The idea is essentially that a working woman cannot be a good mother or wife. The household and the upbringing of the children are her responsibility entirely.

Similarly in cases of domestic abuse, people refuse to intercede, arguing that it is the man's personal matter. The extent of acceptable community intervention is to attempt to persuade him to avoid violence. Should he persist and proceed with it, there is no further arbitration.

This precisely is the pattern that has forced women to combat patriarchal, illiterate and often cruel norms victimizing women. It is difficult for most women to grasp the idea that breaking the cycle and empowering women requires the dynamics of strong community participation. Formal and informal institutions and mechanisms must work in conjunction, and use their facilitative roles to further a positive paradigm. Simply put, any society or commune must work in harmony, whether men or women, towards ending the tyrannical customs and traditions ruining hundreds of lives, and look at empowering women as a matter of human rights.

## Political Empowerment of Women

Shehnaz Bibi of Kot Ihtiram district, Kasur, was widowed as a young mother of two daughters. She lived with her brother and mother, earning for herself as a seamstress. Her husband had left her land, the ownership of which was disputed. After an 11 year long court battle against a local politician, Rana Naseeruddin, she was declared the legal and rightful owner of the land. With her saved earnings, she built her own house on the land, and moved in. Over time, she began to contest in local elections, and was twice elected as a labor councilor in the Union Council. She formed a political alliance with the then MNA Sardar Talib.

Rana Naseeruddin's party was in opposition to Shehnaz Bibi's. Fueled by his anger at the court's decision, along with insecurity and jealousy at her political success, he attempted to publicly humiliate her on numerous occasions, but party workers stood up for her and while harsh words were exchanged, nothing came of them.

One day, motivated by his greed and malicious need for revenge, Rana Naseeruddin gathered people at his outhouse, including the Nazim of the Union Council, Ilyas. At the congregation, he declared that certain brothels in the neighborhood needed to be shut down and the people involved should be banished. With his lies and manipulations, he directed a crowd of around 70 people to Shehnaz Bibi's house.

The armed crowd vandalized her home, throwing stones, and attempting to set it on fire. She was dragged out into the road, along with some female guests she had been entertaining at the time, and stripped nude. People painted her face black and hung a string of shoes around her neck, to signify her disgrace and humiliation. They were verbally and sexually abused by the crowd; despite the women's pleas for mercy, no heed was paid to them, and the perpetrators of these crimes were too infuriated to stop. Shehnaz's daughter was kidnapped by the mob and raped. Although she was recovered, she was shortly afterwards found to be pregnant. In addition, her house was robbed of everything, even her sewing machine.

People were afraid to come forward and help, because the throng was armed and out of control. This dispensing of mob justice should have been brought to an immediate halt by the police; but the corruption inherent in the system is such that local authorities themselves were involved in this heinous crime. In such cases, it can only be the community

that can stop the perpetrators by getting help, or alerting higher officials immediately. Educated men and women must work in tandem to provide safety and security for innocent women who do not have the patriarchal protection of male family members.

A local teacher, Jameel, heard of this incident half an hour later. His own cousins had also been part of the crowd. He visited Shehnaz Bibi at night to offer her his support, and immediately contacted Sardar Talib to ask for assistance on her behalf. He also invited media attention and support to garner public encouragement and help. In response to this, Rana Naseeruddin brought false theft charges against him and his supporters.

"Women in our society are a victim of an inferiority complex as they have been oppressed openly. A major reason for this is the lack of education amongst women. Families in the villages consider it unethical for their women to step out of the house even if it is for receiving education. There is not even a single high school for girls in the entire village of 80,000 people," said Jameel.

Shehnaz Bibi was not only isolated, but ostracized by her neighbors and other community members. "No one from the society came forward to help us; in fact my neighbors shut their doors at my face," she said. It was only through the efforts of Jameel, and her lawyer, who took on the case free of cost, that courts were provoked into taking action against Rana Naseeruddin. The High Court also specially acknowledged this case.

The voice of women like Shehnaz Bibi should not only be allowed, but be encouraged to raise the battle cry to fight the violence against and abuse of women. The right to the services of the police and courts should be open to them, and not treated as a social taboo. Often women going to courts are rebuked and carry a negative impression in their community. These perceptions must be eradicated by enlightened minds, and awareness must be spread, in order to empower women.

Stronger policy making and implementation at the grassroots level is an absolute must; the misogynistic culture that allows such cruelty and barbarity to fester in otherwise civilized societies should be torn out by the roots. Corruption should be weeded out of the system and institutional gaps must be bridged in order for justice and peace to prevail in society. Such criminals must be brought to justice, for their actions do not merely violate the rights of women, but humanity as a whole.

## Every Little Counts: A Woman's Story of Survival

"Women have no respect in this society. If anyone sees a woman in need of help, they will just exploit her," says Naseem, a survivor of a life of domestic abuse that began when she was not yet in her teens.

Naseem was a fifth grade student when her parents arranged her marriage to a 50 year old man. Naseem was promised 10 tolas (a measurement of gold in Pakistan) of gold and ownership to land in Gujarat as a wedding gift; legal transfer for the property could not take place as she was under age. However, her husband took away the gold she had on the wedding night and handed it to his mother. He raped her, for the first of many times, that night, and she had to be taken to the doctor the next morning. She returned home for the period of her recovery, during which time her mother in law visited her and told her she had been sold to her in laws and would have to accept the consequences of her marriage. The dynamics between women in such patriarchal settings are usually inherent of intense hostility directed towards the daughter-in-law. Often even the girl's own parents refuse to offer her support, decreeing that she is now to follow her husband's rules.

Upon returning to her husband, Naseem was made to take a traditional medicine to induce her menstrual periods, so that she would be able to conceive. She was often tied to the bed and beaten frequently and severely by her husband. When she resisted and refused him more often, her in laws took her back to her parents' house, whereupon their complaints to her mother resulted in her mother refusing to feed Naseem if she was not going to conceive.

When she was returned to her in-laws by her mother personally, they physically assaulted her mother. Within a year, Naseem had given birth to a daughter. Her husband left for Saudi Arabia; in his absence, his family attempted to murder Naseem but it was stopped by the unexpected arrival of her mother. Naseem left with her and stayed with her parents for a while.

Naseem's husband then took her to Saudi Arabia, where she had intended to earn her own living. She took on several jobs, from cleaning houses to teaching the holy Quran, but frequently, he would lock her into the house without any food or money. Once her 9 month old son fell severely ill, but her husband refused to take him to the hospital. She had to ask her neighbors for help, who then took her son to the hospital.

By 1993, Naseem was able to buy her own ticket

back to Pakistan. She sold her jewelry to finance the construction of her home. At this point, her husband was involved in several extra marital affairs, including one with her own sister. He would severely beat Naseem at home, constantly abusing and threatening her in front of the children. Eventually, Naseem moved into her new house with her children, and began teaching.

In 2004, she and her husband separated, but to grief and dismay, her children turned against her as well and recorded testimonies in court that opposed her. During this time, Naseem was selling garments on a door-to-door basis; this was when she met Mehmooda, an educated and kind woman who hired Naseem to work at her shop. Despite threats from Naseem's husband, Mehmooda did not falter in helping Naseem, eventually leasing the shop out to her.

Similarly, she encountered Ms. Shabana of Shirkat Gah at a local hotel. Ms. Shabana encouraged her, calling her a role model for other women suffering similarly, and offered support by instructing her organization's members to make sure Naseem was financially and otherwise provided for.

Naseem received next to no help from her community members. A local NGO worker helped her understand and fight for her property rights. However, her lawyer insisted on being paid a huge sum before arguing her case. There were mainly two reasons for this; primarily, that many people feared an enmity with her husband by assisting her, and secondly that a poverty stricken community will probably lack the resources needed to aid even one of their own. In addition, the prevalent attitude towards domestic issues is that there should be no outside interference. The importance and necessity of community participation is never realized, and hence, never harnessed.

In addition to this, the need of the hour is the reform and implementation of women protection laws. Inefficiency and gaps at an institutional level nullify the effectiveness of such laws and policies. They become nothing more than lip service to the cause of violence against women, failing to truly curb the atrocities suffered by countless women. The community, governmental institutions and private bodies should ideally work as one unit to fight such injustice and provide abused women a strong platform that will make their voices heard, and lead to social welfare.

## The Struggle of a Hindu Girl for Justice

“laws dealing with rape require a proof that is humanly impossible to provide. Anyone who has been subjected to rape cannot cope with the process which would ideally achieve justice through the current system. The laws should be reformed for rape victims and for registering a FIR. People who have been in bonded labor also take upon raping women and so a woman is victimized in all strata of the social structure,” says Veer Koli, a courageous survivor of bonded labour, when speaking of his quest for justice for his cousin Kasturi.

Kasturi is a seventeen year old girl residing with her family in Mokariyo, a small village in Nagarparkar in the province of Sindh. She belongs to the Koli clan and was engaged to a cousin, with the wedding date set for a month later. She often helped her mother with household chores, and it was while collecting fodder for the animals that one day she ventured outside the village.

Two men partially concealed by some bushes startled her by initiating a conversation with her; she responded because she recognized one of them as another Hindu native from her village. The other was a Muslim whom she did not know. When they had ascertained that she was indeed alone, they physically restrained and gagged her at gunpoint. She was then dragged to a deserted plantation close by.

Tradition decrees that a bride should wear jewelry given to her by the groom’s family for a few weeks prior to the wedding, so she was wearing some jewellery. They robbed Kasturi of her jewelry and harassed her. About thirty minutes later, a car arrived, in which Ramzan took her to the city, only a few kilometers away, and then to some rooms in a deserted building in a shady area. There, three brothers belonging to the influential feudal family Khosa joined Ramzan; the Khosas also owned land near Kasturi’s house and she recognized them. Kasturi was then brutally raped by the men.

Meanwhile, at home, almost the entire village was looking for her. By retracing her footprints and following the car’s tire tracks, a mob of people, including settlers from neighboring villages, made its way to the city at about 4 am and found the location of the crime. The rapists were spotted and recognized, but managed to escape nevertheless.

Kasturi later related that she had also been tortured and forced to convert to Islam by the criminals. Upon her return to the house, Veer Koli, who works for the rights of workers in bonded labor in Hyderabad, stepped into the fray. He’d been a victim of bonded labor himself at a brick kiln, and had later completed his education at Mehergarh in Islamabad. He took her to

the police station and attempted to register an FIR against the rapists. When the police refused to register the case, the same day, Veer drove to Hyderabad and filed a petition in the High Court. The High Court sent notices to the DPO and the local police station. The police came to Kasturi to register the FIR. Simultaneously, Khosa clan members arrived at the station to pressurize the local officials to leave the case unregistered. Eventually, after numerous delays, the case was registered. Corruption as well as institutional limitations and the influence of powerful families are some of the major reasons such cases are suppressed and never brought to justice. The influence of locally powerful families manifests itself in protection for such criminals and the suffering and silence of innocent women.

At home, Kasturi’s in-laws called off the marriage, declaring that they would not expose themselves to the ridicule of the community by bringing Kasturi into the family when she had such a social stigma attached to her. They demanded back the jewelry that had been stolen from her.

The culprits were from a highly connected feudal family, with the support of several political figures and lawmakers. A counter FIR launched against Veer resulted in a 100 policemen raiding his house and arresting 13 family members under the false charges of cutting down Gugraal trees, a local species which it is illegal to cut. The Khosas attempted to blackmail Veer by offering the freedom of his family in exchange for him dropping all charges. However, Veer stood strong by his word and vowed that even if those 13 people were executed, he would not subject Kasturi to further injustice. However, he managed to bail out his family members a week later.

Despite the lack of community support, which was largely due to fear of the feudal family, Veer did not falter in his devotion to Kasturi’s cause, and continues staunchly. However, the culture of the feudal landowners has posed a major barrier to the success of the case; moreover, community support remains blatantly lacking. This is mainly due to religious discrimination. Although Nagarparkar is pre-dominantly Hindu, feudal families are largely Muslim and hence bent on usurping the rights of Hindus.

Community and media support are essential in empowering women.

## Protecting the Rejected: Undermining the Practice of Karokari

Dr. Riaz resides in Dera Allahyar, district Naseerabad, in Balochistan. Besides running a clinic, he is politically affiliated with Jameet-e-Islami, and is also the General Secretary of the District Administration. Owing to his work and political alliance, he is a trusted and respected public figure. For the last decade, he has been using this influence to protect survivors of honor killing, i.e. karo kari. This is described as the cultural tradition of meting out punishment to an adulterer or wrongdoer, which is gruesomely popular in the region. There is a particular season when men and women must work together in the fields; this is when the incidences of karo kari are at their highest. Should the woman escape death, the man is then necessarily killed.

Even sanctuary is not to be found for these women. Those who take refuge at a police station find themselves at the mercy of the Sardar, who then uses them for his illicit activities, or even has them given away as gifts to his friends.

In order to put an end to this terrible practice, Dr. Riaz began by requesting the local police stations to bring the women to his house instead of the Sardar. Fifteen women have been sent to him over the course of eight to ten years. Their families follow, to announce that they have disowned the girl and insist on punishing the girl. The local Sardar has often threatened him and demanded custody of the women. However, Dr. Riaz and his wife do not yield to the pressure; they, instead, look after the women until they are willing to get married, at which point, they arrange for their marriage. Their suitors are pre-informed of their kari status, and the women are asked for their opinion prior to proceeding with the marriage. The doctor says not one marriage has been unsuccessful. 'I am also a woman, we have daughters too, we can feel their pain,' says his wife.

Dr. Riaz's personal opinion is that the law regarding the need for four witnesses to prove adultery is ignored, and the evidential conditions left unfulfilled. The cases against these women are, hence, built on hearsay. The only women-related issue that a local jirga, dealing with family feuds and conflicts, handles is karo kari. Women are not allowed to raise their domestic concerns, or to protest against unfair decisions. Moreover, mostly men use the label of kari to get rid of their wives, or enemies to satisfy a rivalry.

Mrs. Riaz believes that primarily, karo kari stems from the ignorance and illiteracy of people who view women as machinery to produce children

and take care of household work. She often fears the huge responsibility and the threats that accompany their work, but simultaneously realizes the importance and the overwhelming need for it.

Dr. and Mrs. Riaz are exemplary in their roles as social workers. Within the dynamics of a narrow-minded, uneducated society, they have actualized the concept and idea of community participation and welfare. Women in the area are not given opportunities relating to education, training or work of any kind. Even the birth of a girl is viewed as a occasion for mourning and consolation, whereas the birth of a boy causes great celebration and joy.

Considering the girl's opinion or wishes when the time comes for her marriage is completely beyond norms and strictly taboo. However, she is an easy receptacle for blame; if she is divorced, she is the one held liable.

Karo Kari is simply another manifestation of the misogyny inherent in a culture ripe with misperceptions of religion and tradition. These customs are taught to each man and woman throughout their formative years through a socialization maintaining and in fact, further propagating a practice of violence against women. A woman is declared kari if she is even seen talking to a stranger, without the need for witnesses or counter argument, and certainly without debate about whether punishing alleged adultery with death is even vaguely ethical. The gross violations of a woman's right to life are quickly and easily dealt out, without even fear of repercussions.

Unfortunately, violence against women is not treated as a problem requiring a solution from communities as a whole. The outcry, and the ensuing battle against it, has been limited to women alone, excluding men from what is considered to be an unconventional and unusual role for them. Often, the fear of being ridiculed holds men back from doing their part. However, where men like Dr. Riaz are struggling to make a difference, why should it not be considered the norm for men also to be a fundamental and active part of a necessary social change?

Community participation is a major and imperative element in the struggle to eradicate violence against women and empower women and bring home to them, at the very least, the basic rights of protection from harm, education, shelter, so on and so forth.

## Tables Turned: “Power to the powerless”

Until the 10<sup>th</sup> of October, 2009, a fateful day that changed her life forever, Asma Khand was a normal 15 year old female student from a poor family. Born and raised in the village of Bhangu Baen, Tehsil Faizganj, District Khairpur, she attended the Bhangu Bain Boys High School with her cousin, Sukkur-ud-Din.

One day, when Asma reached school, her English teacher's niece and her classmate, Nila asked her to accompany her back home from school, as she had forgotten some necessary books. Asma agreed and the girls left the school premises.

At Nila's house, Asma found that Shaukat, the English teacher, and two other teachers of hers, Ghulam Mustafa and Imtiaz, were waiting for the girls. Nila left her alone with them, upon which, Shaukat told Asma that he had devised this plan to trick her into being alone with them, so that they could rape her.

Back at school, when Asma's cousin realized she was missing, he alerted the family, who began looking for her instantly. By inquiring from the gatekeeper, they eventually tracked her down to Nila's house. When they arrived, they witnessed the horrific attack upon Asma. However, the three criminals managed to escape.

When Asma's family attempted to report the crime to the school's headmaster, they were shocked at the silence of the faculty members. The local Nazim, Imdad Lakhuja, was Ghulam Mustafa and Imtiaz's brother and hence, began a fake internal inquiry. He also got his brother's fake attendance for the same date marked in another school.

It was now that a local journalist Mehmood Khan Shur, a 60-year-old Balochi, took up the case and began a serious investigation. He had previously also been active in the community with respect to protecting human rights. During his investigation, he met with the teachers at the school and under a Quranic oath, they confessed that they were aware of the sexual molestation of the children going on at the school, but were pressurized by the President of the Teacher's District Association to remain silent.

Attempts to register an FIR were delayed by another 6 days, again due to the Nazim's interventions, and it was only because the media was involved in highlighting the case that one of the perpetrators was arrested, while the other two absconded to another village. Asma's medical examination, conducted by a midwife, determined the loss of her virginity, but she could not present any evidence of rape.

Due to media pressure by Mehmood Khan and his colleagues, the superintendent of the police took serious action, and the other two offenders were also ar-

rested from the other village. Imdad Lakhuja sought aid from a powerful vedera, i.e. a feudal lord, Ali Sherdin tried to force Asma's family to give up the charges in exchange for five hundred thousand rupees.

When the case went to court, the defense counsel took advantage of the lack of physical evidence and the accused were released on bail within three months, whereas, Asma's life to this day is threatened and marked with the trauma she has endured.

After the travesty of the Hudood Ordinance, even though rape cases increase every month, so does the social stigma associated with reporting them. As many as 7546 women were raped in 2008, which is 314 rapes every month, reveal Interior Ministry documents presented to the National Assembly. Currently, violence against women makes up 95 percent of cases of violence reported in Pakistan. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan approximates that a rape occurs every two hours, and a gang rape every eight hours. Yet, despite these dismal and unacceptable conditions, the conviction rate in sexual assault cases remains only three per cent annually since 2003.

Rape victims are treated with the strongest of social taboos. There is shame associated from reporting a rape case and taking it to the courts, as it becomes even more public; even those who overcome it are not assured of a victory against those who have damaged their lives so irreparably. Without the benefit of restraining orders on the accused released on bail, they are free to further harass and traumatize survivors. Several families change their location and detach themselves from the legal system to avoid social persecution.

It is men such as Mehmood Khan that still give hope to women, enable them to struggle for their rights, and reaffirm the fact that men standing against the violence and abuse of women not only still exist, but are working to change social standards and correct erroneous perceptions. They must be honored for attempting to work within the legal system and create a niche for women within it. It is time for the tables to be turned; the perpetrators of such heinous crimes, who manage to get away with the lightest of punishments, should be made to suffer for their sins. Men of all communities and backgrounds can make a huge difference for the women around them by realizing the plight they are in, and aiding them, broadening their opportunities, education and strengthening their rights. Capable men and women must not segregate, but must form a united front in the struggle for those whose voices have been silenced by tyranny.

## A Light at the End of the Tunnel

Often, the most painful torture that is inflicted upon women, not by their husbands or strangers, but by their own parents and family. One such story is Saira's.

Saira was a twelve year old girl residing in Ghumava, District Haripur with her family. Her father Kala Khan had a dispute with his wife's brother Naseem, and the two families were not on cordial terms. However, Saira still occasionally met her maternal cousins. On the occasion of Naseem's daughter's wedding, Saira attended the wedding without her parents' permission. She stayed at her uncle's house for the duration of the wedding, but did not know they would be the last she ever lived. The day she returned, Kala Khan and his wife were enraged with her. They tied her up, and Kala Khan began beating her with a stick. He hit her so severely that he broke both her arms and both her legs. He then tied a rope around her neck and dragged her on the floor, until she suffocated and died.

Kala Khan's immediate concern was of burying her without being noticed. He went to Malik Ashraf, a local union councilor and asked for permission to bury his daughter, admitting that he had murdered her for dishonoring him. The councilor acted intelligently and assured him of his support, asking him to wait while he made the preparations. Kala Khan agreed and waited at the councilor's residence.

Malik Ashraf was also the secretary of the ACC made by the NGO Sungi, organized to work for community welfare. He hurried to the police station and brought back the police with him. Kala Khan was immediately arrested and Saira's body taken in for a postmortem. The report stated that about 40 bones in her body were found broken due to the beating.

When the villagers were informed of the incident, they called for an emergency session of the VCN. Representatives of Sungi were also in attendance. All the participants vocalized their intolerance of the heinous crime and the community decided to socially boycott the family as well as legally pursuing the case. Religious clerics denounced Kala Khan's act during their Friday sermons. Kala Khan was prosecuted in court by Noor Zaman, a local social activist and president of the local ACC Council. Kala was imprisoned with a life sentence. His wife later pleaded for the release of her husband as she could not support her children alone. The people of the village took into account his remorseful behavior and agreed to release him.

Mr. Zaman stated that such events were heard

of often prior to Kala Khan's punishment. But after he was publicly prosecuted and humiliated by the community for his act, essentially being made an example of, the rate of such crimes saw a considerable decrease. Such Councils at a community level generate a sense of self help and responsibility. He attributes the main cause of such felonies to the lack of education; illiteracy and the resulting lack of awareness have made it difficult to let go of ignorant customs and accept enlightened ways of thinking. Sungi conducted several meetings hereafter for the purpose of generating awareness regarding human rights.

According to Mr. Zaman, religious clerics played a crucial role in condemning Kala Khan and others like him, repeating the Quranic verse stating one murder to be equal to the murder of all of humanity. The correct interpretation and construal of Islam can have a huge impact on small communities and villages; most of their culture, traditions and mindsets are derived from what are believed to be Islamic teachings. As the masses are illiterate, they look to religious scholars for guidance. Often Islam has been perceived as ordaining the domination of men, but this is not so. Domestic violence cases in the area have seen a clear decline since 2008. If a husband abuses his wife, community members congregate and approach the husband. Attempts are made to reconcile the two and settle the dispute, but if they are not successful in doing so, people recommend divorce. This is plainly a change in the general outlook of society towards divorce as taboo; often women stay in unhappy and abusive marriages rather than be known as divorcees. Change can come as a result of community participation and a more enlightened view.

Pakistani social and cultural dynamics have evolved over years and now manifest themselves in discrimination against women. These are decades old patterns and practices that must be broken. For this, policy makers, implementers, governmental and private institutions and capable men and women must form a united front and work towards overall social welfare. The need for education, vocational training and the exposure of women in poverty stricken areas is stronger than ever, so that they may be financially independent and able to support themselves, instead of living at the mercy of people who abuse them. One must take courage from the fact that despite the prevalent patriarchal structure, there are institutions and individuals that are constantly working to end the oppression of innocent women.

## The Pen is Mightier than the Sword: Struggle for Justice

The sister of seven siblings, Sughran is an 18 year old girl, born and raised in Qurban Colony, Usta Mohammad, district Naseerabad, Balochistan. Her marriage was arranged five years ago through the watta satta, i.e. in exchange for her brother's wife. Despite the glaring 15-year age difference between her fiancé Inayat and her, Sughran was rushed into the marriage when she was only in the 8th grade in school, because her brother was getting married then. In a watta satta marriage, she had no choice but to comply.

On the night of her wedding, Inayat told Sughran he was impotent, and threatened to kill her if she ever told anyone. His three brothers, their wives and his mother, who all lived together, were aware of his secret. In the following days, he tortured her regularly by tying her down and burning her with cigarettes. When she next met her family, she told them what Inayat had done to her. The case was taken to the Sardar, who decided that Sughran should return to her marital home one more time, but if anything were to happen again, Inayat would be forced to divorce her and he would be fined five hundred thousand rupees.

When she returned, Inayat and now his brother, Nasir too, resumed torturing her for dishonoring the family by telling the truth. During this time, a Hakeem, i.e. a Muslim physician, was consulted. Upon examining both Inayat and Sughran, he concluded that Inayat's impotence was the only problem. He attempted to treat Inayat, but the treatment failed. To conceal this, her in-laws decided to murder Sughran. They tried to force her to drink petrol by telling her that it was medicine the Hakeem had prescribed. She recognized the smell of the liquid and resisted drinking it for three days. Then one day Nasir raped her. Despite her screams for help, no one came to her help. When it was over, she staggered to her own room and collapsed. The women of the family came to her then but only then left.

A few days later, she was sent to her parents' home to meet them, but before that she was and threatened with the deaths of her brothers and father, if she dared to tell them anything. Yet Sughran courageously told her family the truth and went to the police station with her father and grandmother to register a complaint. The police turned them away, saying the place the incident took place in was not within their jurisdiction. Her elder brother's wife Saima worked with a non-government organization (NGO), and suggested seeking the aid of a local

journalist Manzoor to convince the police to cooperate. Manzoor had also previously been involved in reporting cases of human rights abuse, motivated simply by the need to eradicate this social evil. After his involvement, the police issued a reference number of the complaint. But they created problems in registering the case, and in sending her medical reports to Agha Khan Hospital for verification on time. Initially Sughran's brothers refused to support her and asserted that she and Nasir both should be killed. Although she had been raped, the Baloch society still viewed her as a siahkari, or wrongdoer. However, her father vowed to get her justice. Saima also supported her throughout the ordeal, blaming her family for sending her back the first time.

Sughran and Saima faced strong criticism from the community. They were threatened to the point where the two went to a relative's home in Quetta to ensure their safety. Nevertheless, the people eventually realized who was at fault, and then offered strong moral support and protection to the two women. At the same time, Manzoor mobilized the media including various newspapers, to publicize the case. Local MNA Nasir Khan Jamali read of the case and urged the police to take serious action. While one of Inayat's brothers was arrested, Nasir was protected as he was Faiz Mohammad Jamali's personal bodyguard. (Faiz Jamali was Nasir Jamali's uncle). Sughran's wish remains that Nasir and Inayat both are brought to justice for the agony and torment she suffered at their hands that has caused her permanent psychological damage.

The culture of silence about violence and torture of women by their families must be broken. The gross misinterpretation of Islamic texts and the Quran has made it socially acceptable for a woman to be beaten and disciplined by her husband. On the flip side, psychosomatic anguish and deprivation of basic facilities is not even considered part of violence against women. This discrimination against women has evolved in the shape of illiterate and cruel traditions such as watta satta.

It must be noted that the potential of men's role in the battle for women's empowerment cannot be ignored. While rare, there are Pakistani men that combat these inhumane norms of society. They should be viewed as the role models of affirmative masculinity, as pioneers of a social change that has taken years to come together. Community participation should be harnessed as a strong, life-saving alternative to unfulfilled governmental schemes.

