

# Blaming Rape Victims For Jackboots Guilt

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“In an imperfect society, a healthy man seems sick and a sick one healthy”. Naguib Mahfouz

General Pervez Musharraf's non-stop vitriolic on innocent, unfortunate rape victims is not merely unbecoming but absurd too. More absurd, in fact, than unbecoming. Blaming Dr Shazia for damaging Pakistan's image instead of arresting her abuser or blaming NGOs instead of eliminating Panchiats is like killing mosquitoes to eliminate malaria.

On September 7, addressing an image-building 'Regional Conference on Violence Against Women', he lambasted NGOs and complained that 'the people from Canada or France turn a blind eye to the situation in their own country and come to Pakistan to lecture it on violence against women.' He warned Dr Shazia: 'Do it in Pakistan and I am with you. Don't do it abroad'. Yet another absurdity. First Dr Shazia is subjected to a horrendous crime allegedly by a military officer. Then the military intelligence hounds Shazia out. Now the military chief tells a US newspaper: 'A lot of people say if you want to go abroad and get a visa for Canada or citizenship and be a millionaire, get yourself raped'. By bad-mouthing Shazia, the military chief sounds like a person seeking mercy as an orphan after having killed his both parents. But his defense as well as prosecution is flawed.

His defense is particularly awry nay absurd when he asserts why Pakistan "should be singled out when the curse is everywhere in the world" and then launches misguided reference to rapes being committed in "the United States, Canada, France and Britain".

This logic reminds one of a Punjabi joke. A peasant was ploughing his fields when a passing by village mate tells him: 'You my friend are not ploughing the fields properly'. An angry ploughing peasant shots back: 'Well, I know you. It was your sister who eloped last year'. 'Gentleman! What my sister's elopement got to do with it', asks the passer by. Comes the reply: gallaan choon gall nikaldee aay

(One thing leads to another).

One wonders why Pakistan's military boss wants his country to emulate USA; Britain, France and Canada only in rapes. Will it not be appropriate for Pakistan to emulate these countries in democracy too? After all, one thing leads to another!

True, the curse is everywhere. But tit-for-tat rapes administered by Panchiats do not occur in these countries. Neither gang rapes are administered by police officers. Nor these countries hound the rape victims out of the country.

Instead of resorting to this intellectually bankrupt and mediocre argument, General Musharraf would have done himself a favour had he looked Eastwards instead of Westwards. He should have referred to India. But not to seek a justification for rape crimes. Instead for a guidance.

Not merely the case of Bandit Queen but the recent case of Imrana bears similarity to Mukhtar Mai's case. The West not merely singled out India for Bandit Queen but India itself behaved normal. Pholan Devi was not hounded out. Her passport was not confiscated. Instead, on her release, she contested election and was elected as member of India's parliament. Nobody accused Shekar Kapoor for filming 'Bandit Queen'. The film in fact helped establish good reputation for Bollywood.

Similarly, Imrana raped by her father-in-law was forced by village Panchiat to divorce. The Panchiat was acting in line with a decree issued by Darul Uloom mullah. The mullah thought Imrana marriage, according to Sharia, was annulled since she was like a mother to her husband after having physical relation with her father-in-law

Imrana as well her husband refused, initially at least, to comply by the Panchiat's verdict. It was NGOs taking up the case. Neither Manmohan Singh maligned the NGOs for distorting India's image nor Imrana was put on Exit Control List even if India was 'singled out' by West.

Maybe Imrana was not barred from travelling abroad because she was not invited to USA. But then Mukhtar Mai or Dr Shazia were not invited to USA because they are rape victims. But because they refuse to stay silent. These brave girls, of late joined by Sonia Naz, have dared stand up shame and authorities. It is their courage to challenge authorities that General Musharraf finds subversive. Dictators detest dissent. It is not the rape victims General Musharraf is mad at. It is the resistance symbols he is after. Any challenge to their authority is dealt with iron hand. Hence, travel ban on Mukhtar Mai, unleashing of bad press on Sonia Naz, vitriolic on Dr Shazia and NGOs' scapegoating. In fact, by showing rare courage Mukhtar Mai, Dr Shazia, Sonia Naz as well as NGOs, political groups, activists and section of press, standing by their side, have built Pakistan's image. It is the jackboots distorting Pakistan's image.