



# The Sensational Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch

*Sanam Maher*

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Bold', 'Shameless', 'Siren' were just some of the (kinder) words used to describe Qandeel Baloch. She embraced these labels and played the coquette, yet dished out biting critiques of some of Pakistan's most holy cows. Pakistanis snickered at her fake American accent, but marvelled at her gumption. She was the stuff of a hundred memes and Pakistan's first celebrity-by-social media.

Qandeel first captured the nation's attention on Pakistan Idol with a failed audition and tearful outburst. But it was in February 2016, when she uploaded a Facebook video mocking a presidential 'warning' not to celebrate Valentine's Day, that she went 'viral'. In the video, which racked up nearly a million views, she lies in bed, in a low-cut red dress, and says in broken English, 'They can stop to people go out...but they can't stop to people love.' The video shows us everything that Pakistanis loved—and loved to hate—about Qandeel, 'Pakistan's Kim Kardashian'. Five months later, she would be dead. In July 2016, Qandeel's brother would strangle her in their family home, in what was described as an 'honour killing'—a punishment for the 'shame' her online behaviour had brought to the family.

Scores of young women and men are killed in the name of honour every year in Pakistan. Many cases are never reported, and of the ones that are, murderers are often 'forgiven' by the surviving family members and do not face charges. However, just six days after Qandeel's death, the Anti-Honour Killings Laws Bill was fast-tracked in parliament, and in October 2016, the loophole allowing families to pardon perpetrators of 'honour killings' was closed. What spurred the change? Was it the murder of Qandeel Baloch? And how did she come to represent the clash between rigid conservatism and a secular, liberal vision for Pakistan? Through dozens of interviews—with aspiring models, managers, university students, activists, lawyers, police officers and journalists, among them—Sanam Maher gives us a portrait of a woman and a nation.

## **The Sensational Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch Details**

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# **From Reader Review The Sensational Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch for online ebook**

## **Arathi Unni says**

Qandeel Baloch was a model-singer-actress in Pakistan and became a raging Internet sensation to be one of the most googled people in the country. Her story of rags-to-fame (not riches) is the kind of stuff that blockbusters are made of. However sadly, hers was not a fictional blockbuster, but the story of a living dreaming fighter that ended abruptly like a broken record. Sanam Maher brings into life the story of Qandeel and everything that led to her death.

The first I heard of honour killing was about two decades ago, and back then, I couldn't fathom the fact that a family could place their hatred & pride ahead of the life of their child. Cut to 2016, things hadn't changed much in the South Asian Subcontinent. Qandeel Baloch was one such victim, whose brother killed her because he couldn't accept the person she was. Sanam's book on her is not only Qandeel's story, but also of every social pillar of the country that influences a person's fate - family, judiciary, religious & educational institutions, media, human activists, politics, artists and the common man.

The book deals with serious social & political scenarios that, while reported in Pakistan, is prevalent in many more parts of the world. I love how Sanam brings in her journalistic style and constructs the plot without sensationalising it. Her writing gives a very good account of all the facts with a personalised local flavour.

Highly recommended!

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## **Padmaja says**

This book starts with the news of Qandeel's murder making headlines on national television and the tug of war between news channels about capturing the footage of her body and their tussle in interviewing her family. This book answered all my questions about Qandeel and why was she suddenly in the news. Very wonderfully written, this book highlighted all the people who knew Qandeel from her beginning, people who were sad that she was killed, people who were praising her brother for killing her.

I appreciate Maher for unflinchingly describing the details of her life. Maher not only highlighted Qandeel's life but also the important aspects of Social media. The rise of cyber bullying, the upside and downside of social media, in this case, perfect example being Arshad Khan, the famous "Chai wala" who garnered attention because of his eyes and his brooding gaze. How people like Nighat Dad, who runs DRF(Digital rights foundation) and a helpline for women who are victims of cyber bullying.

People made fun of her videos and her video with Mufti Abdul Qavi, the cleric from Multan who was always in the news. It wrecked havoc on his life as well.

Qandeel led a hard and a rough life. People blaming her for bringing down the Baloch name, accusing her of not being a Baloch and threatening to sue her. Her life was not easy. Still, she supported her family by doing all what she could. Disowned after leaving her husband and son, she decided to live life on her own terms, unabashedly and confidently.

I love the writing, the natural way of telling the story and most of all the painstaking research that was done to make this book!

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## **Maria Kane says**

For several years now, I've been aware of a female social media sensation based in Pakistan called Qandeel Baloch.

If you don't live in Pakistan or India, you might never have heard of her. She rose to fame in her home country because she shared selfies and short videos through Facebook and Instagram that were often very unfiltered - so much so that she was often called "the Kim Kardashian of Pakistan." Pakistan is a Muslim majority country where conservative values are pervasive. Existing against this backdrop as a social media star known for saying and doing provocative things was not the safest or more comfortable career path but Qandeel never backed down or hid away. She received death threats and was often mocked. Her social media status rose to such a point that she was often invited onto talk shows and other events because she was good clickbait - but on those shows, she was treated with little respect.

Sadly, Qandeel's whirlwind life came to an untimely and tragic end in July 2016. She was murdered by her brother whilst visiting her parent's home. She was aged just 26 years old. In death, Qandeel became more famous than she ever was in life. Her death put a spotlight on Pakistan's entertainment industry, the treatment of women, the tribal mentalities of small villages in Pakistan and on honour killings (which is what her murder was labelled as). The murder of an outspoken, larger-than-life woman at the hands of her religious, conservative brother bought in international press attention, with many Western media outlets vying for that "she stood up to the patriarchy and died" angle. I remember reading this coverage and wanting to know so much more about this woman who had become an enigma over night. Like many people, I really wanted to know more about her life behind-the-scenes and behind the lens because as a brown woman, Qandeel represented so much more than just another victim. So, understandably, when I found out about Sanam Maher's book about the life and times of Qandeel, purchasing it was a reflex.

### **Who is the author?**

Sanam Maher is a Pakistani reporter based in the city of Karachi who writes for Al Jazeera, The New Yorks, Buzzfeed and more. As a journalist, Maher had followed Qandeel's viral exploits for years but never actually met or interviewed Qandeel herself. To write this book, Maher has done a superb job of researching and interviewing practically every key person that was at every key event of Qandeel's life - from her overwhelmed parents to her agent. Maher recently mentioned that she was inspired to write this book because Qandeel's death left her in a state of shock. Specifically, Maher was shocked by the image that Qandeel had crafted of herself: of a carefree, confident and liberated woman - when the reality was that Qandeel actually came from a very conservative, very poor family that was not supportive of her life choices at all.

### **What's it about?**

In the book, Maher traces Qandeel's life story to the small village she was born and raised in and then meanders onto the different paths Qandeel took in her quest for fame and fortune: from working as a bus hostess, to a model, to enjoying viral fame. As Maher retraces Qandeel's path, she interviews her family, her coworkers, her confidantes and even her enemies. Through Maher's travels and interviews, we get a cross-sectional look at Pakistani society and Pakistani culture and we get to see just how varied and different it is. Some notable examples include the strong and charismatic Nighat Dad of the Digital Rights Foundation who

tries to help and empower Pakistani women caught up in any kind of cyber abuse and the story of Arshad Khan, a chaiwalla who inadvertently became "Insta-famous" and had no idea what to do with said fame given that he'd never even used the Internet. Through all this, we get a feel for the context in which someone like Qandeel existed and a real feel of the diversity that makes up the fabric of Pakistani society.

### **Best bits?**

Every. single. word. of. it. I know it seems like I'm not sparing the hyperbole here but I really do mean this. I didn't hesitate a moment to pick up this book because like most people, I was so curious about Qandeel and what drove her and Maher does an outstanding job of trying to demystify Qandeel for us. However, the true beauty of Maher's book is in the insights we get into Pakistani culture. Being of South Asian heritage myself, I often struggle with how Pakistan, India and other South Asian countries are appraised through the lens and perspectives of Western writers. It was so refreshing to read about a famous South Asian woman's story from another South Asian woman - someone who gets the nuances and the context. You really get that the story of Qandeel is the story of isolated villages, of class divides and of the 'Me Too' generation.

### **Any not-so-great bits?**

I'll come in again with the hyperbole here: not. a. single. word. of. this. book. wasn't. great!

### **Verdict?**

10/10. Buy this book now. Read this book now. If you enjoy social media or are curious about it in anyway, you will enjoy this book. If you've heard of Qandeel, you will enjoy this book. If you like to read about scandal, you will enjoy this book. If you are curious about modern day Pakistan, you will enjoy this book. If you've never heard of Qandeel and you don't even have a Facebook account, you will enjoy this book and I promise, you will turn the final page of this book feeling richer in mind and in soul.

*Check out book reviews and more at my blog: [www.thesouthernblogs.co.uk](http://www.thesouthernblogs.co.uk)*

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## **Tariq Mahmood says**

If love marriages don't succeed in movies, then how can they succeed in real life? A judge giving his judgment.....

There is a huge issue of honour in the Pakistan culture, and in order to really understand its complex and intricate nature, this book is a must-read. Sanam has really worked hard to piece together a story from another planet, the paindo culture of Pakistan. What real options have working girls have coming from poor backgrounds without any real skills in the very patriarchal Pakistani culture? Qandeel was learning from her new contacts, improvising as she went on a very dangerous journey, alone and unchaperoned. The real risk was not accepting the security of any patron on her journey which made her very bold and courageous but unfortunately very very naive. I don't think she truly realised the implications of Social Media fully. I don't think anyone of us do. The girl was innocently trying to claim the spotlight for as long as possible so she could make some money. And she did pretty well for a while till she came head to head with the maulvi, and no one fucks with the maulvis of Pakistan, and gets away with it.

The maulvis supply and propagate the best anecdotes, anecdotes around which Pakistanis have created their life philosophies. These anecdotes have to be challenged and new ones put in place for any new change to be effective.

Beghairat ko ghairat kissi waqt bhi asakti hei, a shame this anecdote only seems to apply to the men of Pakistan, and not to the women.....

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## **Rumsha A {Stories.and.plot.twists} says**

I never buy books that are worth more than 250 Pkr, my logic is; when you can buy 4 for 1000 Pkr, why get your hands on only one ? But the moment i heard that a book was launched on Pakistan's first social media star who was killed for honor, i knew i had to get it. I bought 'The Sensational Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch' for 1135 Pkr from a local bookstore, and dove into the book headfirst.

My initial thoughts were; Why is there even a need to waste so many words on a woman who couldn't respect what her religion taught her, a woman who couldn't respect the boundaries set by her country, who couldn't praise the efforts by her ancestors who sacrificed their lives in the name of establishing an 'Islamic' state. Why not write a book on people like Junaid Jamshed, Aarfa Kareem or Tariq Jameel sahab , people who actually tore away from the boundaries and bought fame and prosperity to the people of their country.

I read on, and one thing i discovered was, this writer right here is a darn good one. She's intelligent, she's not commenting on Qandeel neither is she expressing her views if she did wrong or right. Maher's smart.

Through this book i got to know more about Qandeel Baloch, information i didn't knew i needed about her until i read it. Maher talks about not only Qandeel but other rising issues such as cyber crime, suicides and identity protection.

This book provides an insight to the people of Pakistan, about the sensational life and death of Qandeel Baloch, who rose as a bold social media star and achieved fame due to partially nude videos and her fake accent. It let's reader be the judge of her life, wheather what she did was wrong or right.

I finished this book and my conclusion was; you don't need to go nude and hurt the sentiment of people, the ideology of your religion, to prove yourself a 'feminist' or a woman with power, or to be popular. Benazir Bhutto, Arfa Kareem, Fatima Jinnah, Nasira Iqbal, Naseem Hameed, these are just a few women of the many who tore away from the chains of what society deemed acceptable, but still managed not to hurt the sentiments of people around them. They were famous, they didn't sit at home and rot away, they did something big, but in the confines of their religion and with dignity.

This book tells people, especially women, to break the chains and do something good, become popular if you want. But don't play with religion, or the emotions of people. Respect what you were born with, born in. Kudos to Sanam Maher for the fine, fine prose, i rate it 5 stars.

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## **Komal says**

what a tremendous book. This isn't a conventional biography, rather it attempts to understand the world Qandeel lived in as much as Qandeel herself. Maher notes in the beginning that Qandeel was a persona created by Fauzia Azeem and avoids from rhapsodizing or trying to slot Qandeel/Fauzia into a neat category. In doing so, perhaps she showed more respect to the deceased than most of us did in her lifetime.

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## **Chitra Ahanthem says**

Karachi based journalist Sanam Maher's 'The Sensational Life & Death of Qandeel Baloch' is more than just a biography of an Internet sensation who was killed by her own brother, for though the book brings to us the bits and pieces about the many facets of Qandeel Baloch, it is also about the larger story of the socio cultural moorings in Pakistan and how 'going viral' spins off a complex world. In her author's note, Sanam Maher says, "It has not been easy to write a story that everyone thinks they already know. If, by the end of the book, you still have questions, and feel doubtful about anyone trying to sell you the real story of Qandeel Baloch, then this work has served its purpose." By the time I finished reading the book, these words from the author resonated with me.

What worked for me with this book was how Sanam Maher takes us through the lives of other people in Pakistan: the many women some of whom want to be the next Qandeel Baloch and some who are trying to just stay alive and safe. Maher's profile of internationally acclaimed lawyer and digital rights activist Nighat Dad and her work for women who face cyber bullying and other forms of blackmail added more context to the lives and times of young women in Pakistan today even as Nighat's own life story reveals she survived an abusive husband and an overbearing brother.

I would strongly recommend this book to readers looking at books on social norms and practices in the sub continent and social media narratives.

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## **Ariba Naushad says**

\*3.5/5

Qandeel Baloch. I didn't even know who she was until my friend mentioned her name in front of me. I didn't know much about her until her death on July 15th. That's when I started to research more about her. Honestly, I admired her cause even after all the hate she got from her videos she still kept doing them. And that to me is a sign of a brave women.

The book touches base on a lot themes that exist within the Pakistani society like body issues, racial issues etc. Talk about how women coming from conservative backgrounds are treated, cyber-bullying etc. There were some chapters that I found really interesting while the other's not so much.

There are some random mentions of people like Nighat Dad. She, by the way, has been featured on TED and reading about her for the first time and gonna be honest here she is a women I admire now. For the work she has done. For the way she stood up for what she believed in, even if that meant going against the society's norms.

Overall, I found the book interesting but something I would not read again. I expected a bit more from the

book so it didn't really reach my expectations.

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## **Nashwa says**

I'm going to think about this one for a while and then write a full review. But this book is extremely well written, well researched and talks less what she did as a person and more about the society she lived in.

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## **Sohinee Reads & Reviews (Bookarlo) says**

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### **REVIEWED BY SOHINEE DEY**

In the book 'The Sensational Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch', Sanam Maher describes the life of Qandeel and captures the after effects of her death.

Qandeel Baloch, an internet sensation had captured the attention of many people worldwide with her "bold" videos. Who knew she would be found dead just after six months to her rise to fame. Journalist Sanam Maher has done an extensive amount of research to find out the reason behind the death of Qandeel and why would someone opt for Honour Killing which was relevant back in 2016 until the constitutional bill was passed. The book breezes through the life of Qandeel and what happens after her death and the way people try to justify "Jo Hua Acche Ke Liye Hua" (whatever have conspired, it was for the good).

Sanam Maher had adeptly traced Qandeel's life and given all the details about her life. From people around her and what were their thoughts on the incidence to getting inside Qandeel's head and expressing her views, this book is so much more than just a biography.

I was completely hooked to the book and for a person who doesn't enjoy non-fiction much, I loved this book so much! It was such an eye opening read for me. I loved the narration, loved the writing style of the author and even though the plotline was switching from before and after the incidence, nowhere did it feel abrupt or incomplete.

I would definitely recommend this book to Non-fiction lovers, people who like reading books on social issues and autobiographies.

**POESY IN CHRYSALIS RATING : ??? / ????**

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## beautywithbooks says

No one tells me, 'Qandeel, you have gone to war against a society, against a kind of place where men think women are as lowly as their shoe. The kind of place where it's so common for a man to hit a woman, that if some man doesn't hit his wife, people call him beghairat (dishonourable). Why don't people see that?

Famous as 'Pakistan's Kim Kardashian', Qandeel Baloch was a social media figure. She was first seen on Pakistan Idol. Though she failed in the audition her five minutes presence on screen captured the nation's attention. She rose to fame by posting videos of her songs, dances, and lisp on facebook. Thousands avidly followed her social media page. She uploaded a video mocking a presidential 'warning' not to celebrate Valentine's Day that went viral. Then she posted an outrageous video promising that she will strip for Shahid Afridi if his team managed to defeat Indian cricket team. At this time she was named as Pakistan's Poonam Pandey. Later she came into controversial limelight again when she posted her videos and pictures with Mufti Abdul Qavi, a cleric from Multan, in a hotel room. Her videos had millions of views showing Pakistani's loved - or loved to hate - her. They despised her fake American accent. They hated her because according to them she was 'shamelessness' and 'bold'. She received many death threats and was mocked for defaming the surname Baloch. Six months later, after she rose to fame, she was dead. On July 2016, her brother strangled her in their family home, in what was described as 'honour killing'. It was the punishment for the 'Shame' and 'dishonor' she brought to the family and nation.

The book starts with the breaking news of Qandeel's murder at her family home, surrounded by the crowd of new reporters struggling to capture the footage of her body. Baloch's death has drawn mixed reactions from different sections of society in Pakistan. Maher has tried to capture every detail of her life by trying to interview and involve all the people associated with her. It's worthless to talk about the life of Qandeel here, as we all know she had a very rough and hard life. And her videos of her life and death are already in news and media platforms.

Through this book, the author has tried to highlight one social evil that still persists in the 21st century in Pakistan: Honour Killing. In a year there were as many as 500+ cases of Honour killing. Many of such cases are never reported. In many cases, the honour killing is done for illicit relations or 'marriage choice' outside of the tribe. This also shows the hypocrites who love to follow and watch her videos on Facebook, but it becomes a question of pride for their village Shah Sadar Din, Dera Ghazi Khan when her true origin and her real name Fouzia Azeem is revealed on social media. It also shows the loophole in the law where the murderer can be 'forgiven' by the surviving family members and roam freely without any charges.

The book is well written except for some places where the focus is moved from Qandeel to other people and goes deep into describing their lives that you will forget about Qandeel. For instance, Arshad Khan, who became famous just in five days just by an accidental share of his pictures on social media site Instagram. Other people like Attiya Jaffrey, Mufti Qavi, Nighat Dad, that were involved with her either when she lived or after her death for the investigations are also described elaborately. This might be to understand about their stand on Qandeel's murder but I felt it was longer than required.

It is about the short-lived life of a woman who fought with the society to live her life on her terms.

Love me or hate me, both are in my favour. If you love me, I will always be in your heart. If you hate me, I'll always be in your mind.

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## **Asmara says**

Like many Pakistanis, I'd grown up with an image of the Multan in my head: dusty, desert-oasis with the mountain-sized blue-tiled tomb of Shah Rukun-e-Alam looming like a herald of the apocalypse. Larger than life. Too dramatic to be seriously true. It's only when you're standing at the entrance of Shah Rukun-e-Alam that your childhood fantasy and adult perception come colliding-- your mind can only think of one thing: 'That's it?'

The tomb is in the middle of the bustling Old Multan, markets teeming with people. The building itself is smaller than you thought. Instead of mysterious sufis gliding through its corridors, drug-addled men lie slumped on the floor. There's tourists taking selfies. It's as far from that apocalyptic scene in your head as you can possibly imagine.

Being an adult sucks.

Particularly when it means the loss of all your young fantasies about life. You can no longer escape into them as eagerly or as readily as you once could when life got too overwhelming.

“The Sensational Life & Death of Qandeel Baloch” by Sanam Maher presents this same dilemma at the heart of Pakistan's warped national psyche with far more tragic consequences. Here was Qandeel, larger than life, twice as alive and as in your face as it is possible for a woman to be. Here was Pakistan, forever stranded at a crossroad between faith and the future, both infatuated and irritated with her antics, obsessing over her next video while mocking her accent, her clothes, her make-up-- her defiance of what we incorrectly defined as our norm.

Sanam Maher's compassionate narrative of Qandeel's brief, fiery life never loses sight of the fact that the murdered 'internet sensation' can never come back to life yet with each page, each new person interviewed you feel as though she doesn't need to-- the players in the drama of her life condemn themselves with each word out of their mouth. Yes, her brother may have been the one to choke the life out of her, but who paved the way for that eventuality-- her parents? Her abusive husband? Her 'manager'? Herself?

No one, argues Sanam Meher, and everyone.

Qandeel's story is, as reiterated by many men in the book, not unique-- yet the violence of her death coupled with the vitality she had embodied in her life make for a sobering forensic investigation on their own-- indeed, the story would have been trite fodder in the hands of a lesser writer but Sanam Maher's voice lends a dignity and quiet power to the book that Qandeel herself was denied as a woman. There are entire chapters in the book that left me shaken to the core-- not just for the denial of Qandeel's humanity but for the events she had to endure to merely exist on her own terms.

To me, the most important aspect of the book is that it gives Qandeel's life context, particularly in terms of Pakistan's torturous social media terrain. It's easy to remain dismissive about Qandeel's murder until you

realize the deeply out-dated state of the nation's police and justice system. It's easy to scoff at Qandeel's impact on social media until you realize the fate of Arshad Khan, the unassuming #chaiwalla who's single, searing photo sent the world into a frenzy. Context powers each event in Qandeel's life until the final fateful chapters when you realize that Qandeel wasn't just a reflection of the deeply conflicted nature of Pakistan, she was a product of it. Her death wasn't a failure of our system, it was the final bloody conclusion of a system complicit in silence.

We may never see justice delivered to Qandeel or to the thousands murdered in the name of 'honour' in South Asia, we may never even witness a conclusion to Qandeel's own case let alone the thousands of cases rotting in court-rooms around the country.

Sanam Meher's balanced reportage gives Qandeel the very right she was denied in life-- to speak on her own behalf. The dead may not speak but when they do they speak with tongues of fire.

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### **Saba Imtiaz says**

An exceptional, incredibly engaging book that goes beyond narrating the life and death of Qandeel Baloch and explores local culture, social media-fuelled fame and how it's changing society and politics and popular culture, and the toxic masculinity that dogs the lives of women in Pakistan. Highly, highly recommended.

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### **Anum Shaharyar says**

*More than a year after she made her last video or uploaded her last photograph, we are not done talking about what Qandeel did.*

I'm so, so glad Sanam Maher wrote this book, because someone needed to. Pakistan is, let's face it, a country bursting with issues that we don't talk enough about. We've got more problems than we can count, and on top of that, we've got those who will choose to ignore our problems in favour of pointing at other countries and screaming 'but they're so oppressive/racist/RAPE CAPITAL!' because apparently if we're bad, all that matters is that we not be the **worst**.

But I digress. I'm glad someone wrote this book because the only places where we discuss the horrors of being a woman in Pakistan are the bland, overused stock phrases of newspaper articles. I'm glad because a smart, insightful look at the Pakistani social media scene in the form of a full length book is a very rare thing. I'm happy because the writing was controlled and the narrative structure well-formed. It was organized and not boring at all and it talked about all the right things without veering off into melodrama or too many facts one after the other. And mostly, I'm ecstatic that there were whole chapters dedicated to people like Arshad Khan (the Chaiwalla, for those who never bothered to learn his real name) or Nighat Dad, cool woman personified.

I thought the whole book would be about Qandeel herself. That's what everyone who has seen the TV show about her life says, as an excuse to not read this text. But it isn't, not really. Maher's focus is not just on the linear life path that Qandeel followed but also all those who are affected by her, who interacted with her, orbited in her circuit. It's about people who looked up to Qandeel as a role model or those who lost their credibility by affiliating with her. The focus of the story constantly circles wider, talking about people who,

like her, shot to fame on social media, or like her, knew what cyberharrassment felt like. The woman who was in charge of the investigation after Qandeel's death, the man who trained Qandeel in self defense, the parents who registered an FIR against their son, the woman who worked as a model and wanted to follow in Qandeel's footsteps, the man who introduced Qandeel to the modelling business. They all feature in detail, talking about their own selves and most of all of how stark a presense Qandeel was in their lives.

Overall, though, it feels sort of pointless to talk about the content of the book itself, because doesn't everyone already know about Qandeel? We've, after all, seen most or at least some of her interviews or YouTube videos. We all remember Mufti Abdul Qavi and the offer to Shahid Afridi and the appeal to Imran Khan. Most of us also remember when Qandeel's real name was revealed across all the channels and the absolute madness that erupted every time her name was mentioned after that. But the way Sanam Maher has tackled her source material is extraordinary. I don't claim to have read a lot of nonfiction, and memoirs or biographies have never managed to retain my interest, but Maher isn't interested in just Qandeel's life. We talk not only about Qandeel but about the society in which she lived and how it in turn was obsessed with and horrified by her. And by horrified I mean enough to have been happy when she was murdered. And enough to threaten Saba Qamar, the actress who willingly chose to portray Qandeel in a TV serial based on QB's life.

*Qamar reportedly received death threats for taking on the project and when the Express Tribune ran a trailer for the new series on its Facebook page, the post was flooded with hateful comments. 'Like Qandel's murder, Saba Qamar should also be murdered in the same way,' one male commentator wrote while another called Qandeel and Qamar 'strippers and prostitutes'.*

Maher's work is also unflinching in its depiction of the media that some argue are what contributed to her death. If not the actual murderers, than accomplices for certain. It wasn't, seemingly, the shame of what Qandeel had done, but how widespread that fame became, that led to her brother killing her. Our media isn't exactly a responsible and conscientious medium on its best days. The slightest hint of a controversy is enough to send them into a mad frenzy. Once Qandeel's real name was revealed, pictures of her passport appeared on almost every channel.

*If Daily Pakistan is responsible for what happened to Qandeel, then so is every other newspaper and TV channel that ran a story on Qandeel's real name and where she was from.*

Other equally horrible stuff crops up elsewhere as well. The honour killing laws and their treatment, and the fact that they haven't actually managed to make any substantial changes in the number of deaths. Cybercrimes and how Nighat Dad is spending her days dealing with the utter craziness that is Pakistan's web. Social Media, and how fame from these sources can be dangerous and toxic. The modelling industry, and how it crosses over into blatant prostitution. The villages where women are killed for any number of ridiculous reasons. Patriarchy and how it dictates the life of the majority of Pakistan's population.

*"We have a tradition here that every second or fourth day some girl is killed and thrown in the river. You media guys are creating hype for nothing."*

I think the only thing that makes me sad about the existence of this book is that the people who should be reading it are probably not going to. I know loads of people who picked the book up and looked horrified at the (very cool) illustration of Qandeel's face. And these are the very people at whom I wanted to shove the book to force them to read it. I feel like there's a very tiny crowd, the ones who defended Qandeel in the first place, who'll read this book and actually learn from it. The rest of Pakistan, misogynistic and patriarchal, will continue living in ignorance. And that is the saddest thing about this whole endeavour.

Today, two years after her death, the conversations still continue in the same veins, with the same groups saying the same thing. To us, she's either a fighter, taking on patriarchy and misogyny front and centre, a woman who escaped the clutches of a horrible marriage and made a life for herself and for her parents, or she is a wanton woman, an insult to our culture and a threat to our religion. Even with all the adoration and the vitriol poured on her in tandem, she still fascinated, with scores of Pakistani audiences unable to look away from the sort of drama the name Qandeel Baloch could stir. These two teams represent not just those whether we were with or against Qandeel but are also extensions of the Pakistani mind set, in conflict with itself over everything. Here's hoping that this book changes the landscape in terms of making everyone a little less ignorant about the realities of the world we live in. **Definitely recommended.**

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I review Pakistani Fiction and would love to talk to people who like to talk about fiction (Pakistani and otherwise). To read more reviews or just talk about books, check out my Blog or find me on Twitter!

*Disclaimer: I got a copy of this book from the publisher in exchange for an honest review.*

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*ORIGINAL UPDATE:*

*Really, really good stuff. Highly recommended, especially to all Pakistanis, but also for those who are blind to the realities of being a woman. This book was necessary. Review to come.*

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*My first international ARC, and from INDIA! Can't wait to review this.*

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## **Madhulika Liddle says**

Dubbed 'Pakistan's Kim Kardashian', Qandeel Baloch was a social media maverick, the very personification of scandal. Thousands avidly followed her on social media, watching videos of her as she danced, sang, and lisped outrageous promises—to strip for Shahid Afridi if his team managed to defeat the Indian cricket team, for instance—in broken English with a fake American accent. Many thousands (millions?) more hated Qandeel. They hated her 'shamelessness', as they called it. They thought she besmirched the name of Pakistan, of Islam, of ethics and culture.

There were perhaps not quite so many who could read between the lines, who could see Qandeel Baloch for neither the slut she was labelled, nor the star she perhaps wanted to be, but someone in between. A human being, who did not deserve to be murdered, and that too by her own brother, just for the sake of 'honour'.

In the beginning of her biography of Qandeel Baloch, Sanam Maher writes about the conflicting accounts surrounding Qandeel's life. Accounts that have become more convoluted and contradictory as time passes: accounts which by their very nature make it difficult to pinpoint who Qandeel was. Yes, we know she was born Fouzia Azeem and grew up in a Punjab village called Shah Sadar Din, and that having gone through an abusive marriage, eventually wound up as model, singer—and social media celebrity. Beyond that, however, it's hard to conjecture about Qandeel's motivations, or even the details of her life.

So Maher takes an interesting route to show us not just the journey of Qandeel Baloch, but of present-day Pakistan: she takes us down related roads. The life of a bus hostess, for instance (Qandeel probably worked as one). What it is like to be a model. How a similar rags-to-riches, overnight-fame story—that of the blue-eyed *chaiwallah*, Arshad—bears a resemblance to Qandeel's, but could well be a contrast, highlighting Qandeel's ability to remain in the spotlight.

Maher goes into the world of the journalists who unearthed parts of Qandeel's life, and who broke the news of her murder. She introduces us to the police officer who spearheaded the investigation, and a woman who runs a helpline offering support for women who have been made the victims of cybercrime. She even interviews Mufti Qavi, who appeared with Qandeel on a talk show and later visited her at a hotel, sparking off a scandal.

What Maher manages to achieve through this is a brilliantly insightful, thought-provoking look at Pakistan. How its media, its religious leaders, its politicians and administrators help create, build up, and break down people like Qandeel. The role of society and its ideas of what is moral and what is not. The complex and nuanced character of Qandeel herself, of whom so little is known, even though—almost two years after her death—she is still all over the net.

If you're looking for salacious gossip on Qandeel Baloch, go online. If you're looking for an intelligent, informative and extremely entertaining look at Pakistan today, read *The Sensational Life and Death of Qandeel Baloch* instead.

(From my review for The New Indian Express, August 19, 2018: <http://www.newindianexpress.com/lives...>)

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