

She wanted to educate her children

By Nadeem Saeed Malick

DERA GHAZI KHAN, March 14: An atmosphere of fear and hatred has always surrounded the Khosa headquarters of Bahadurgarh due to lack of confidence and continuous strained relations among inmates of the 'havelis' there.

What happens there remains inside the four walls. However, internal differences between Sardars sometimes make an issue public. One such incident happened on March 4 when a Sardar gunned down his wife and their only son over a family dispute.

Despite having not-so-cordial relations, the race-conscious tribe of the Khosas, the Bales, have to find spouses of their children within the family, specially in case of daughters, in a bid to keep property within the family. That is why Shagufta Bibi was married to his cousin, Ghulam Haider, an epileptic, some 17 years ago at the age of 20. She gave birth to a boy and four girls.

Being fed up with the suffocated environment of Bahadurgarh, Shagufta thought of bringing up her children in better conditions. With the consent of her spouse, she selected Murree. The couple sold their inherited properties back home and started living on the Murree hills. School-going children were admitted to reputed institutions.

To make the both ends meet, Ghulam Haider set up a filling station there besides taking some orchards on lease. Though the husband and wife were not enjoying ideal relationship due to former's male chauvinism coupled with mental disabilities, they lived together for sake of their children.

Mental stress started mounting on Ghulam Haider with increasing cost of living and his unsuccessful business ventures. To bridge the gap, he decided to sell his remaining belongings in his hometown. His brothers opposed the idea and created hurdles to refrain him from doing so.

Estranged Haider moved applications against his brother, MPA Mohsin Ata Khosa, to the deputy commissioner and the superintendent

of police, Dera Ghazi Khan, last year to seek their help in getting his rights. He even appeared in the open kutchery of Khwaja Riaz Mehmood at the prime minister's residence in Lahore. However, his struggle did not bear the desired results.

In the meantime, the family came to Bahadurgarh to spend long winter holidays. Here a struggle started between the husband and the wife. Haider, under influence of his parent family, started advocating in favour of settling at Bahadurgarh due to financial constraints, while Shagufta Bibi was pleading for the completion of their children's education in Murree.

Her in-laws who had already opposed their living in Murree supported Haider.

As the holidays were about to over, the husband-wife tension mounted. Ghulam Haider refused to go back and instead asked for the sale of their Murree residence which Shagufta reportedly bought after selling her inherited 125 acres of farmland.

On March 4, she reportedly mortgaged her jewellery to arrange finances necessary to proceed for Murree where examinations of her A-Level student daughter were about to start.

On her return from the market, she and Haider exchanged hot words over the issue which infuriated the latter who pulled out a gun and fired at her.

Son Adeel and daughter Nida Bibi rushed to save their mother, but also caught in the firing. Shagufta and teenaged Adeel died on the spot, while Nida was rushed to the Nishtar Hospital, Multan, in critical condition where she is still braving for life.

Here starts the most tragic part of the incident which once again demonstrates that in a feudal set-up, prestige is more important than relationship and human beings.

Instead of taking care of the bodies, MPA Mohsin Khosa and his brothers started discussing ways to hush up the murder to save the honour of the Baloch tribe.

Their cover-up bid, however,

could not succeed when slain Shagufta's brothers demanded registration of an FIR and the holding of funeral rites in daylight. An alleged cooked version of the gory incident was told in the FIR in which the killer was quoted as saying: "The incident took place when my gun went off accidentally." Now efforts are being made to get declared the tragedy an accidental one.

Except Irfanullah Khosa, no member of the Haider family expressed solidarity openly with the bereaved family. Irfan also reportedly tried to convince his brothers to resolve the issue according to the Baloch traditions after surrendering Ghulam Haider. Both the families arranged separate qul ceremonies and received condolences separately.

The accused who is still at large has taken shelter in the tribal area of Dera Ghazi Khan manned by the border military police.

In such a crisis, traditionally, the chief of the tribe intervenes and resolves the issue amicably according to the tribal norms. But, apparently, indifferent attitude of Sardar Zulfiqar Khosa has surprised his tribesman. He visited Bahadurgarh on March 5, met the 'bereaved' MPA and returned to the provincial capital.

It was a coincidence that on the international women's day on March 8, the brothers of slain Shagufta appealed to the chief minister through the Press to do justice for a woman whose only sin was that she wanted to make her children responsible citizens of Pakistan. Now the question the common people ask here is what will be the future of the four daughters of Shagufta? According to the Baloch tradition, they have to live with their paternal uncles and the grandmother.

The girls are well-educated and have spent most part of their life away from Bahadurgarh. However, now they have no option, but to abandon their Murree schools, confine themselves to the four walls of the 'haveli' and prepare themselves to become spouses of their cousins in future.