Qandeel Baloch, a Pakistani Internet Celebrity, Is Killed in ‘Honor Killing’

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<http://www.wsj.com/articles/pakistani-internet-celebrity-qandeel-baloch-killed-in-honor-killing-1468675455>

An internet celebrity who pushed the boundaries of what is considered acceptable behavior for women in Pakistan was killed by her brother in a suspected “honor killing,” the police said Saturday.

Officials said Qandeel Baloch, a 26-year-old who was described as the country’s Kim Kardashian, died at her parents’ house in the central city of Multan. They said they would know after an autopsy if Ms. Baloch died Friday night or early Saturday.

“According to a preliminary [investigation] and statements from her parents, her brother strangled her,” said Azhar Akram, Multan’s police chief. He said authorities were searching for her brother.

The police said the initial investigation pointed to an honor killing, although all possible angles would be investigated.

Ms. Baloch, whose real name was Fauzia Azeem, became one of the country’s best-known media figures for posting videos and selfies on her social-media accounts, which have hundreds of thousands of followers.

Many of her videos, including one where she offered to striptease if Pakistan beat India in a cricket match, enraged conservative Pakistanis. While there was no nudity in her social-media posts, critics said her commentary, poses and clothes were inappropriate, overly sexual and violated Pakistani and Islamic norms.

Her killing is likely to reignite debate about honor killings in Pakistan. Over 1,000 women were killed in such incidents last year in the country, according to data compiled by the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan, an independent body. Many women are murdered by male relatives who feel their behavior or decisions have “dishonored” the family.

Most recently, Ms. Baloch drew nationwide attention for a video with Abdul Qavi, a prominent Islamic cleric, in which she wore his cap and took selfies while sitting on the arm of his chair. Mr. Qavi’s appearance in the video was quickly criticized by religious circles, and he was suspended from a religious panel.

On Saturday, Mr. Qavi lashed out at Ms. Baloch in comments that seemed to warn others of a similar end. “I have a message for women, for people, that they should keep this lady’s fate in mind and shouldn’t say things that insult religious scholars,” Mr. Qavi said on Pakistani TV channel Dunya News on Saturday, but also condemned the murder.

Although she received opprobrium from some circles, Ms. Baloch was praised by many Pakistanis for refusing to adhere to the society’s restrictions on women and for standing up to conservatives.

“I believe I am a modern day feminist. I believe in equality. I need not to choose what type of women should be,” Ms. Baloch [posted on her](https://www.facebook.com/OfficialQandeelBaloch/photos/a.381098535368238.1073741830.339947236150035/882646491880104/?type=3&theater) [Facebook **FB** **-0.37 %**](http://quotes.wsj.com/FB) page on Friday. “I don’t think there is any need to label ourselves just for sake of society.”

Last month, Ms. Baloch said at a news conference that her life was in danger and asked the government to provide security. She also said she was considering leaving Pakistan with her parents because of security threats, which she didn’t specify.

Neither Ms. Baloch’s family nor her representatives could be reached to comment.

Rights groups have demanded swift investigations and punishments in the wake of several high-profile honor killings this year, as well as stronger legislation against such crimes.

“#QandeelBaloch killed in an #honorkilling—how many women have to die before we pass the Anti Honor Killing Bill,” tweeted Pakistani filmmaker Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy, who won an Academy Award this year for her documentary on honor killings.

[Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, after watching the documentary, promised to tighten laws](http://www.wsj.com/articles/pakistani-film-sparks-effort-to-end-an-evilhonor-killings-1454396961) to help stop honor killings.

Provisions in Pakistani law allow the family of an honor-killing victim to forgive the killer, which critics say allows perpetrators, who are often family members, to escape punishment.

Zahid Hamid, the law minister, told The Wall Street Journal in an interview earlier this month that the government would soon introduce amendments to the law in Parliament to close this loophole.