

THE SUPREME COURT OF PAKISTAN
(Appellate Jurisdiction)

PRESENT:

MR. JUSTICE MUHAMMAD HASHIM KHAN KAKAR
MR. JUSTICE SALAHUDDIN PANHWAR
MR. JUSTICE ISHTIAQ IBRAHIM

Criminal Petition No.1718/2022

(Against the judgment dated 21.11.2022,
passed by the Lahore High Court, Lahore
Bench in Criminal Appeal No.8321/2020)

Abdul Manan @ Imran

...Petitioner(s)

VERSUS

The State & another

...Respondent(s)

For the Petitioner(s): Mr. Aftab Alam Yasir, ASC

For the State: Mr. Tariq Siddique, APG, Punjab

Assisted By: Ms. Tayyaba Munir, Law Clerk

Date of hearing: 07.05.2026

JUDGMENT

Muhammad Hashim Khan Kakar, J.-

"Now I know what hell feels like." (Moung Sreymom, acid attack survivor Cambodia)

"All the colours have gone from my life. I feel like I'm a living corpse, even worse than a living corpse. I think I have no right to live." (Shama, 24, acid attack survivor in Multan)

"The burns hospital was like hell on Earth. Charred bodies would be rolled in next to her. It was no place for a young girl." (mother of Reshma Qureshi, acid attack survivor in Allahabad)

The harrowing accounts documented above are indicative of a fractional glimpse into the profound devastation wrought by this

offence. They stand as the audible echoes of a much larger, silent multitude of survivors who endure a relentless daily attrition of their physical and psychological well-being, long after the act of violence itself has ceased. Vitriolage is an offense that is significantly more heinous than homicide. Unlike death, which consumes its victim only once, the victim of an acid assault is relegated to a "living death," where they are compelled to endure the agony of their trauma and the degradation of their physical self on a daily basis. The perpetrator's objective is not merely to kill, but to extinguish the victim's soul, leaving the living corpse as a permanent reminder of their depravity.

2. This petition for leave to appeal is directed against the judgment and order of conviction and sentence dated 01.02.2020 passed by the learned Anti-Terrorism Court, Faisalabad in Sessions Case No.138/ATC/FSD/2019. The petitioner Abdul Manan @ Imran was convicted of the offense punishable under section 336-B of the Pakistan Penal Code for causing burn injuries to Mst. Iqra Perveen through acid. The petitioner was sentenced to undergo rigorous imprisonment for life, pay a fine of Rs. 1,000,000/- to the victim towards compensation, and, in the event of default, to undergo SI for 2 years. The conviction and sentences were subsequently upheld by the Lahore High Court in the impugned judgment dated 21.11.2022, which is the basis for the current petition.

3. In outline, the prosecution's case is that the petitioner, with the intention of permanently injuring the victim and disfiguring her, threw acid on her face and body while she was cooking in the kitchen of her home on 04.09.2019 at noon. The acid resulted in extensive burns on the face, chest, back, left leg, and left foot, as well as the complete destruction of the left ear. During her examination before the trial court on January 16, 2020, she was unable to recline, move, or walk. Since the incident, she has been bedridden.

4. The FIR was promptly registered with the relevant Police Station, and the petitioner was apprehended during the investigation. The prosecution collected the acid bottle, medical records, injury certificates, and ocular evidence of the victim and witnesses. A charge sheet was filed after the investigation was completed, and the case was committed to the Anti-Terrorism Court Faisalabad due to its serious nature. The prosecution examined eight witnesses, including the victim (PW-6), eyewitnesses, medical officers, and investigating officer. They also presented documentary evidence, including the injury report, chemical analysis report, and other corroborative materials, which confirmed the substance as sulfuric acid. The petitioner, in his statement under section 342 Cr.P.C, denied the allegations and claimed false implication, but no defense evidence was presented.

5. Learned counsel for the petitioner strenuously argued that at the time of incident, the petitioner was a juvenile aged 17/18 years. He submitted that the petitioner deserves leniency considering his young age, lack of criminal antecedents and possibility of reformation. On the contrary, learned APG while vehemently opposing the petition stated that the offence is gruesome, premeditated and has destroyed the life of a young lady. Despite the passage of long time, she continues to battle for survival. As per his contention, age cannot be a shield for such barbaric acts.

6. In the presence of witnesses, the occurrence in this case occurred in broad daylight within the complainant's residence, as the witnesses were inmates of the house in question. Their presence cannot be disputed in any way. The eyewitnesses and the victim, Mst. Iqra Perveen, provided an ocular account. The petitioner was identified as the sole perpetrator in the FIR, and the evidence of victim is unimpeachable. The medical evidence completely supports the ocular account, which is subsequently confirmed by a positive report from the Punjab Forensic Science

Agency. The injuries are clear in nature and fall within the definition of section 336-A P.P.C. They specifically violate section 336-B, P.P.C, which requires a minimum sentence of 14 years of rigorous imprisonment, which may be extended to life, and a minimum fine of one million rupees. The act was intentional, with the intention of disfiguring the victim, a common motivation in gender-based violence. The seamless synergy between the confidence-inspiring ocular account and the medical evidence specifically the "smoking gun" evidence of acid burns found on the petitioner's own fingers leaves no room for any hypothesis of his innocence. The petitioner's plea of alibi remains a hollow assertion, unsupported by a shred of evidence and is utterly eclipsed by the overwhelming weight of the incriminating facts. False implication is not supported by any evidence. The trial and appellate courts conducted a thorough examination of the evidence on record and reached a unanimous conclusion that the petitioner's guilt had been fully established. Upon our own independent assessment of the evidence, we have been unable to adopt a stance that differs from that of the lower courts.

7. Having looked into the merits of this case, we now turn to a broader historical and legal analysis of vitriolage. The historical instances of acid violence, or "vitriolage," is inextricably linked to the industrial proliferation of sulfuric acid in the 19th century. As the most common type of corrosive used in these attacks is sulfuric acid (oil of vitriol), hence the name vitriolage. Acid violence is mostly used as a tool of patriarchal dominance such as upon "rejection" of marriage proposal or sexual advances, rejection of love proposals, dowry issues and male aggression to inflict a "social death" upon women by destroying their physical identity.

8. The primary deterrent against such depravity lies in the dual strategy of rigorous criminalization followed by a stringent regulation of corrosive substances. In recognition of the social death inflicted upon victims, various jurisdictions have enacted

pioneering legislations that provide a clear empirical nexus between robust legal frameworks and a precipitous decline in offenses. For instance, the Republic of Bangladesh, through the enactment of the Acid Control Act and the Acid Crime Prevention Act in 2002, successfully achieved a remarkable annual reduction rate of approximately 15% to 20% since the enactment. Similarly, the Kingdom of Cambodia, following the introduction of its 2011 Law on the Management of Strong Acid, witnessed a drastic contraction in reported casualties, which plummeted from 36 in 2010 to a mere 6 by 2014. These international benchmarks demonstrate that the first essential step toward eradication is the categorical criminalization of the act itself, coupled with an uncompromising regulatory grip on the sale and distribution of acid.

9. In context of Pakistan, the evolution of the law concerning corrosive substances reflects a heightened state awareness of the peculiar depravity inherent in acid violence. It was with the specific intent to provide a robust penal response that the Legislature enacted the Criminal Law (Second Amendment) Act, 2011 (Act No. XXV). Through introduction of Sections 336-A and 336-B into the PPC, the law moved toward recognition of "hurts caused by corrosive substances" as a distinct class of atrocity. Relevant sections are reproduced below:

"336A. Hurt caused by corrosive substance.- Whoever with the intention or knowingly causes or attempts to cause hurt by means of a corrosive substance or any substance which is deleterious to human body when it is swallowed, inhaled, comes into contact or received into human body or otherwise shall be said to cause hurt by corrosive substance:

336B. Punishment for hurt by corrosive substance.- Whoever causes hurt by corrosive substance shall be punished with imprisonment for life or imprisonment of either description which shall not be less than fourteen years and a minimum fine of one million rupees."

Crucially, the parallel amendment to the Schedule of the Code of Criminal Procedure, declaring offense under Section 336-B non-compoundable, signifies a clear departure from the principle of private settlement. This legislative shift was a deliberate response

to the disturbing trend where perpetrators of acid attacks often coerced victims into settlement to evade justice. By removing the possibility of a legal settlement, the State has effectively recognized that a victim's disfigurement is a permanent assault on the collective dignity of the citizenry. The overarching objective of this amendment is to ensure that those who inflict such permanent, life-ruining trauma do not go unpunished, thereby upholding the sanctity of human dignity and the rule of law.

10. Beyond existence of penalizing statutory provisions, it is important that such cases are dealt with quick trial mechanism. Hence a major legislative development emerged with the enactment of the Anti-Rape (Investigation and Trial) Act, 2021, Schedule-II of which explicitly includes the offense punishable under Section 336-B of PPC, assigning jurisdiction over such cases to the Special Courts established thereunder. As declared in its preamble, the objective of this legislation is to ensure expeditious redressal of sexual abuse crimes in respect of women and children through special investigation teams and special Courts providing for efficacious procedures and speedy trial. By virtue of Section 16 of this Act, these Special Courts are mandated to preferably decide the case within four months of taking cognizance, indicating the legislature's intent to enforce an accelerated trial timeline. The cumulative effect of such provision is to ensure that the agony of the trial does not outlast the physical healing of the victim. The summary nature of the trial in acid-throwing cases serves a dual purpose. Firstly, it achieves the deterrence and to provide swift justice, and secondly it offers restorative justice to those who have been consigned to a life of physical and social ruin. We are therefore of the view that while the statute provides the framework for a speedy trial, its success depends entirely upon the strict implementation of the prescribed statutory timelines.

Furthermore, by virtue of section 9 of this Anti-Rape Act, 2021, Special Sexual Offences Investigation Units (SSOIs) have been established in every district by the provincial governments, and

by the Federal Government within the Islamabad Capital Territory, specifically to investigate the Schedule-II offenses - including acid attacks under Section 336-B of the PPC - under the direct supervision of a police officer not below the rank of BPS-17. Furthermore, it also provides a critical accountability safeguard, whereby if a complainant expresses dissatisfaction based on reasonable grounds regarding the conduct of the investigation, the probe is immediately transferred to the district head of investigation of the police to ensure transparency and a fair trial. It is our firm view that these specialized mechanisms, if implemented with utmost seriousness, will fully realize the purpose of their enactment, which is to conduct foolproof, rigorous investigations in strict accordance with the sensitivity of vitriolage cases.

11. The eradication of acid violence is inextricably linked to the restriction of access to it. While the legislative amendments of 2011 served to criminalize acid violence with the severity it warrants, the persistence of such atrocities reveals that penal sanctions alone are insufficient to address the root of the crisis. We are of the view that as long as corrosive substances remains easily available, the deterrent effect of penal consequences will be perpetually undermined. In this context, The Punjab Acid Control Act 2025 (Act XXVI of 2025) represents a watershed moment in provincial jurisprudence. It is an example of shifting the focus from post-occurrence punishment to pre-emptive regulation where the said Act mandates a rigorous licensing regime and categorically prohibits the sale of acid to individuals under the age of 18 that is the need of the time. It is our sanguine expectation that the rigorous enforcement of such specialized regulatory regimes will effectively dismantle the accessibility of these lethal instruments, thereby serving as a robust bulwark to curb and eventually eradicate this heinous offense from our social fabric.

12. This Court has repeatedly emphasized the gruesome and barbaric nature of the acid attacks. In landmark observations, former Chief Justice of Pakistan Mr. Justice Asif Saeed Khan Khosa described acid attacks as “an offence worse than murder.” While murder ends life, an acid attack destroys the quality of life, leaving the victim in perpetual agony, social ostracism, disfigurement and dependency. The victim suffers not only physical pain but also profound psychological trauma, loss of self-esteem and economic marginalization. Acid violence is one of the worst forms of gender-based violence in our society. As stated above, it is an offence worse than murder because in case of murder, after burial, the victim at least becomes owner of a piece of land in the graveyard, whereas, in case of acid throwing, the victim becomes dependent on others for rest of life and live and die every day. Dr. Rahat Indori has very beautifully captured the said discussion in his famous couplets in the following words-

دو گز سہی مگر یہ میری ملکیت تو ہے
اے موت تو نے مجھ کو زمیندار کر دیا

13. The ordeal of an acid attack survivor does not terminate with the conclusion of the criminal trial; rather, it marks the beginning of a grueling, lifelong odyssey of medical intervention. Survivors are frequently subjected to an exhaustive series of reconstructive surgeries and specialized procedures that are not only physically agonizing but financially prohibitive, rendering essential healthcare inaccessible to the majority of victims. According to the Asian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)¹, the devastating impact of acid violence in Pakistan is exemplified by survivors like Irum Saeed and Memuna Khan, who endured 25 and 21 reconstructive surgeries respectively, following attacks triggered by marital rejection and inter-family disputes. Similar patterns of gendered brutality are seen in the cases of Shameem Akhter, a survivor of gang rape and subsequent vitriolage who underwent 10 procedures, and Munira Asef, who required 7 surgeries after rejecting a proposal. In this context, this Court is

¹ Asian Human Rights Commission, “PAKISTAN: Acid attacks continue to be a serious concern,” Statement No. AHRC-STM-018-2010, 28 January 2010

of the firm conviction that the principles of Restorative Justice and Reparative Liability must be integrated into our judicial framework. Globally, the shift toward victim-centric rehabilitation is well-documented. In the landmark precedent of *Laxmi v. Union of India* [(2014) 4 SCC 427], the Supreme Court of India issued several comprehensive directives including a minimum compensation of Rs. 300,000/- to be made immediately available to each survivor to facilitate medical care. Furthermore, that Court directed both state and private medical facilities to provide gratuitous treatment to acid attack victims, recognizing that the right to health is an extension of the right to life. Similarly, Bangladesh established the National Acid Control Council Fund, specifically dedicated to the rehabilitation and economic aid of survivors. It is high time that a similar robust mechanism is formalized within our jurisdiction. While the primary offender must be held strictly liable for the costs of the victim's treatment, the State cannot absolve itself of its *Parens Patriae* obligation as occurrence of such an atrocity reflects a systemic lapse in the State's duty to prevent crime and regulate lethal substances.

We are also of the view that acid attack survivors who suffer permanent sensory or physical damage are fully qualified to be classified as Persons with Disabilities. The severe, lifelong impairments resulting from vitriolage including but not limited to permanent blindness, loss of function of the limbs, psychosocial trauma etc. directly satisfy the criteria of disability, thereby establishing their right to be issued official Disability Certificates thus ensuring that acid attack survivors are entitled to dedicated disability quotas in employment, educational institutions, and all state-sponsored welfare benefits as a matter of law.

14. Having said this now coming towards the quantum of sentence. *Poena debit commensurari delicto* is a famous maxim meaning that the punishment should correspond to the gravity of the crime. In acid cases, the injury is not a temporary wound as it is a perpetual agony for the victim. In determining the quantum

of sentence, we have given anxious consideration to the petitioner's plea of juvenility. However, the sheer gravity and calculated brutality of this offense preclude any possibility of leniency. We find that the shield of juvenility cannot be invoked to mitigate a punishment for such an inhumane act under following reasons:

- i. The record confirms that the petitioner did not act on a sudden impulse; rather, he arrived at the victim's residence equipped with a "can" of acid, demonstrating a premeditated and cold-blooded plan to cause irreparable harm.
- ii. The physical devastation is harrowing with 3rd-degree burns over 40% of the body, the complete destruction of the victim's left ear, and the total disfigurement of her facial features. Beyond the visible disfigurement, the court must recognize the profound, perpetual emotional trauma and social ostracization the victim is condemned to endure every time she faces her reflection.
- iii. The petitioner, despite his age, demonstrated the capacity to handle a dangerous corrosive substance with lethal precision.
- iv. Petitioner's conduct post-occurrence further aggravates his position; rather than showing remorse, he resorted to the absurd and malicious defense of victim-blaming, alleging that the injuries were self-inflicted. This claim was debunked by the medical testimony of PW-4. To suggest that a young girl would subject herself to such agonizing torture is a premise that defies both logic and human nature.

The reasons stated above depict an exceptional depravity where the victim is consigned to a "living death," due to which we believe that the minimum sentence of 14 years is grossly inadequate. The punishment must be proportionate to the atrocity of the crime

and the permanence of the scars of the innocent. Therefore, a life sentence for the perpetrator is not excessive but is the only penalty that matches the life-long sentence of disfigurement imposed upon the victim. Consequently, we find the petitioner entirely undeserving of the lesser penalty and deserving of the maximum penalty provided by the statute as a matter of absolute justice. We also place on record our profound appreciation for the exceptional assistance rendered by the learned APG Punjab, Mr. Tariq Siddiqui, ASC, whose elaborate submissions, particularly his arguments against extending leniency on the sole ground of juvenility in cases of such unparalleled cruelty were instrumental in this matter.

15. In light of the foregoing discussion and the overwhelming evidence on record, we find no merit in this petition. The prosecution has successfully established the petitioner's guilt beyond a shadow of reasonable doubt, and the circumstances of the case offer no grounds for a reduction in the quantum of sentence. Consequently, leave is refused and this petition is dismissed, thereby maintaining the conviction and the sentence of life imprisonment passed against the petitioner by the Courts below. This Court observes with concern that the learned courts below have inadvertently overlooked the mandatory nature of Section 544-A of the Code of Criminal Procedure (Cr.P.C), which obligates the Court to award compensation to the victim unless reasons for its denial are specifically recorded in writing (reproduced below).

544-A. Compensation of the heirs to the person killed, etc.: (1) Whenever a person is convicted of an offence in the commission whereof the death of, or hurt, injury or mental anguish or psychological damage, to any person is caused, or damage to or loss or destruction of any property is caused, the Court shall, when convicting such person, unless for reasons to be recorded in writing, it otherwise directs, order the person, convicted to pay to the heirs of the person whose death has been caused, or to the person hurt or injured, or to the person to whom mental anguish or psychological damage has been caused, or to the owner of the property damaged, lost or destroyed, as the case may be, such compensation.

Consequently, to rectify this omission and in view of the gravity of the harm inflicted, we hereby exercise our powers under Section 544-A Cr.P.C to direct the Petitioner to pay a sum of Rs. 1,000,000/- (Rupees one million) as compensation to the victim, which shall be recoverable as arrears of land revenue in the event of default.

16. Before parting with this judgement, we want to direct attention of authorities towards some important matters. We are of the firm view that while laws may be present on the statute books, their purpose is entirely defeated if implementation and enforcement remain feeble which is evident through the recurring occurrence of these horrific incidents across the country. A law serves no meaningful purpose when it exists merely as text on paper rather than a living instrument of justice; hence, the ultimate test of any legislative enactment lies in its strict enforcement. To prevent legal frameworks from becoming hollow promises, there is an urgent need to bridge the chasm between statutory intent and practical reality, ensuring that every right, procedural safeguard and timeline is strictly adhered to in its letter and spirit.

17. In light of discussion in paragraph 10, it is strongly recommended to all worthy the High Courts that they shall actively monitor and ensure that in all cases of vitriolage, the statutory timelines provided by relevant laws for the completion of trials are strictly adhered to as the prime intent of the legislature was to provide swift, summary adjudication to prevent secondary victimization. Ensuring strict adherence to these legal timelines is vital to translating legislative intent into a powerful, living deterrent against this offense deeply rooted in gender-based violence, deep-seated misogyny, and patriarchal aggression.

18. In view of discussion in Paragraph 11, we strongly recommend that the Federal and all Provincial Governments ensure that the sale of acid to private individuals be completely banned, wherever such unregulated retail trade still persists. We

further recommend creation and implementation of a centralized digital system governed and monitored by the concerned authorities in real time to process all legal acid sales and purchases. Under this digital system, entities intending to purchase acid must apply through prescribed electronic forms, ensuring collection of the following essential details for every purchase including but not limited to quantity of acid, purpose of purchase, name and details of the purchaser, picture and biometric thumb impression of the purchaser. Such real-time system will completely eradicate manual record-keeping and will be able to manage the trade with absolute transparency. It is the expectation of this Court that, until such specialized legislative and policy frameworks are adopted across all remaining jurisdictions, stringent administrative policies and regulatory rules must immediately be formulated to standardize the sale and distribution of corrosive substances, thereby ensuring that no legal vacuum persists to facilitate such heinous acts.

1. In view of the observations recorded in Paragraph 13, we recommend to the worthy Federal Government and Provincial Governments to take necessary steps for accommodating acid attack victims under disability quotas along with enactment and enforcement of specialized legislation for establishment of a National Acid Survivors' Rehabilitation Fund. Accordingly, it is recommended that this statutory fund shall provide:

- i. Comprehensive medical coverage for financing for exhaustive reconstructive surgeries and specialized physical therapy
- ii. Ensuring psychological and social rehabilitation through mandatory access to professional trauma counseling, psychotherapy, and psychiatric care to combat the "social death," depression, and PTSD that frequently follow such attacks
- iii. Economic security through a mandatory monthly stipend for survivors who, due to the nature of their

injuries or ongoing medical condition, are rendered incapable of financial self-support.

- iv. National Rehabilitation Guidelines as a standardized framework ensuring gratuitous, lifelong medical and mental health treatment across all state-mandated and private medical facilities (funded by the above-mentioned fund).

20. The office is directed that a copy of this judgment shall be forwarded to all the High Courts through Registrar, Federal Secretary for Law & Justice, to the Chairman Parliamentary Committee for Law & Justice, Secretary to the Government of Punjab Ministry of Law & Parliamentary Affairs Department; Secretary to the Government of Sindh Law, Parliamentary Affairs & Criminal prosecution department; Secretary to the Government of KPK Law, Justice, Parliamentary Affairs & Human Rights Department; Secretary to the Government of Balochistan Law & Parliamentary Affairs Department; Office of the Attorney General for Pakistan and the Offices of Advocate General/Prosecutor General of all the Provinces of Pakistan for doing the needful. Any steps taken in this regard shall be intimated to this court through the Registrar.

21. Before concluding, we place on record our appreciation for the diligent assistance extended by Ms. Tayyaba Munir, Law Clerk in the present judgment.

Judge

Judge

Judge

Islamabad the

7th of May 2026

Approved for Reporting

*Tayyaba Munir, Law Clerk, Abdul Samad/**