



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

Chester Crown Court

3 August 2012

Sentencing Remarks of Mr. Justice Roderick Evans

R
-v-
Iftikhar Ahmed
and
Farzana Ahmed

NOTE: there is an s.39 Order restricting reporting details relating to the youngest child, identified in these remarks as X.

The jury has found you both guilty of the murder of your daughter Shafilea. She was 17 years of age when you killed her. What was it that brought you two – her parents, the people who had given her life – to the point of killing her?

You, Iftikhar Ahmed, came to the United Kingdom when you were 10 years of age and you are fully familiar with western culture. Indeed, you married a Danish woman and had a son by her and lived, for some time, in Denmark. Then, in 1985, you returned to Pakistan and, while you were there, you married Farzana Ahmed, your first cousin. She lived in your home village in rural Pakistan. She had no experience of western culture but in 1986 you both came to England and settled here. You have lived here for the last 25 years. When you arrived here you, Farzana Ahmed, were pregnant with Shafilea. In due course, you had four other children, three daughters, Alesha, Mevish and X and a son, Junyad.

You chose to bring up your family in Warrington but, although you lived in Warrington, your social and cultural attitudes were those of rural Pakistan and it was those which you imposed upon your children.

Shafilea was a determined, able and ambitious girl who wanted to live a life which was normal in the country and in the town in which you had chosen to live and bring up your children. However, you could not tolerate the life that Shafilea wanted to live. You wanted your family to live in Pakistan in Warrington. Although she went to local schools, you objected to her socialising with girls from what has been referred to as “the white community”. You objected to her wearing western clothes and you objected to her having contact with boys.

She was being squeezed between two cultures, the culture and way of life that she saw around her and wanted to embrace and the culture and way of life you wanted to impose upon her. A desire that she understood and appreciated the cultural heritage from which she came is perfectly understandable but an expectation that she live in a sealed cultural environment separate from the culture of the country in which she lived was unrealistic, destructive and cruel. The conflict between you and her increased in the last year of her life and you tried to impose your cultural values and attitudes on her by intimidation, bullying and the use of physical violence. She tried to escape and she was determined to do so because she knew what lay in store for her at your hands – being taken to Pakistan to be “sorted out” i.e. having her westernised ideas removed – and to be married off.

She ran away in February 2003 but you recaptured her, dragged her off the street and forced her into your car and, a week later, she was drugged and taken to Pakistan. I have no doubt that your intention was that she should remain in Pakistan and be married there. There came a time in Pakistan when she realised what her immediate future was going to be; she self-harmed by drinking bleach in order to frustrate your plans. She seriously injured herself and her condition deteriorated to such an extent after she had been left in Pakistan that she was no longer wanted as a bride. She was brought back to the United Kingdom where she received prolonged hospital treatment. On her discharge from hospital, even in her weakened condition, she continued to want freedom and to live the life she wanted for herself.

On the evening of 11th September 2003, you berated her for her behaviour and, in temper and frustration, you two suffocated her. It was you, Farzana Ahmed, who said to your husband “finish it here”. While I accept that there was no pre-existing plan to kill Shafilea that night, that remark together with the evidence relating to whether or not Shafilea survived the drinking of bleach drives me to the conclusion that you two had previously discussed the way that you might ultimately resolve the problem which Shafilea presented for you.

Your problem was that, in what you referred to as your “community”, Shafilea’s conduct was bringing shame upon you and your concern about being shamed in your community was greater than your love of you child. In order to rid yourselves of that problem, you killed Shafilea by suffocating her in the presence of your other four children.

I express no concluded view on whether Junyad played any part in the killing of his sister but I have no doubt that, as the result of the distorted upbringing and values to which you subjected him, he told his surviving sisters, within minutes of them seeing Shafilea murdered by you, that Shafilea deserved it. Thereafter, you got rid of her body by dumping it or having it dumped in undergrowth on a riverbank in Cumbria and you told your children what to tell anybody who asked about the disappearance of Shafilea.

You killed one daughter, but you have blighted the lives of your remaining children. Alesha escaped but she is unlikely to be able to avoid the legacy of her upbringing. Mevish, after a period of trying to live independently, was recaptured and brought home and has since become compliant with your wishes. She came to court and was placed in the sad position of having to deny her own words in order to try to help the parents whom she, and no doubt all your surviving children, still care for. X was seven when she saw Shafilea killed and it is difficult to say what effect that has had upon her or will have upon her in the future. However, there is no difficulty in seeing the life which would have lain ahead of her, had she returned to live with you. That future

is graphically set out in the Social Services notes of contact sessions between you and her in which you are recorded making clear your views of X's attitudes and what you expected in the future.

As to Junyad, he remains supportive, especially of you Iftikhar Ahmed. Whether that is simply out of filial affection or the result of the warped values you instilled in him, is impossible to tell.

There is only one sentence that I can impose upon you and that is a sentence of imprisonment for life.

However, I have to set the minimum period that you must spend in custody before you can be considered for parole. That has to be done in accordance with the sentencing regime which applied at the time you murdered Shafilea, that is, that which applied after 31st May 2002 and before 18th December 2003.

My first task is to identify the starting point for setting the minimum term. In my judgment, your culpability can, because of the circumstances of the murder, properly be described as exceptionally high and, therefore, I take the higher starting point.

I then have to consider the aggravating and mitigating features of the case to adjust that starting point appropriately ensuring, as I do, that the features which led me to adopt the higher starting point, are not considered again as aggravating features, in a way which would unfairly inflate the minimum term I set.

The first point to note is, of course, that your intention was to kill Shafilea. That is not an aggravating feature but it means that there can be no mitigation which a lesser intent would attract.

Mitigating Features

I accept, subject to what I have said, that there was no pre-existing plan to kill Shafilea that night.

The only other mitigating feature I can identify is the absence of previous convictions and that, while not wholly irrelevant, can in the circumstances of this case, have but little influence on the term I have to set.

Aggravating Features

I identify the following aggravating features in this case:

1. You were the people to whom Shafilea should have been able to look for protection and kindness. Your treatment of her and your killing her was as fundamental a breach of trust as can be imagined.
2. You acted together as a team to kill her.
3. In the year before you killed Shafilea, you subjected her to repeated violence; you abducted her from the street on 10th February, you drugged her to take her to Pakistan and you tried to arrange a marriage for her which was against her will.

4. Shafilea was in a vulnerable condition when you killed her. She was still weak from the effects of the ingestion of bleach which she had taken to try to avoid what you had planned for her in Pakistan.
5. A truly horrifying feature of this case is that you killed Shafilea in the presence of your other four children.
6. The killing was motivated by the cultural issues to which I have already referred.
7. After the killing, you concealed her body.
8. After the killing, not only did you lie and mislead people to cover up what you did, including lying on oath before the Coroner, but you also made your surviving children put forward an account which was intended to hide what you had done.

I have considered the impact of Paragraph 10 of Schedule 22 to the Criminal Justice Act 2003.

There is no basis upon which I should differentiate between you. The minimum term which in my judgment adequately reflects the seriousness of this case in respect of each of you, is 25 years.

You will not be eligible to be considered for parole until you have served those 25 years in prison. When you have done so, you will not be released automatically. You will be released only when the Parole Board is satisfied that you no longer present a danger.

The sentence, therefore, in respect of each of you is life imprisonment with a minimum term of 25 years from which will be deducted the number of days which you have served in custody during this case. In the case of each of you, I am told that you have been in custody for 66 days. If that figure proves inaccurate, it will be amended administratively.