

Honour Killing as Engendered Violence against Women in Amit Majmudar's *Partitions* (2011)

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ABSTRACT

*The 1947 Partition of British India, otherwise simply known as Partition, marked not only the births of India and Pakistan, but also one of modern history's largest human mass migrations, in which an estimated million died and thousands of women were subjected to horrifying acts of engendered violence. Scholars, such as Menon and Bhasin (1998) as well as Butalia (2000), have conceptualised engendered violence during Partition as a violation of women's bodies, sexualities and psyches by men in general, manifested in various forms ranging from abduction and rape to honour killing and bodily mutilations. However, this study is limited to examining how honour killing is depicted as a form of such violence in the novel *Partitions* (2011) by Amit Majmudar. More importantly, it examines how depictions of the honour killing of women during Partition in the selected text can also be read as manifestations of the negative underside of the concept of biopower conceptualised by Foucault, in which mass death and destruction are necessary to ensure the survival of future generations. This study reveals, based on textual evidence surrounding the botched honour killing of the character Simran Kaur, that the honour killing of women during Partition is due to the perception of the time, place and society that women, as well as their sexuality, are symbolic constructions of male honour. This subsequently leads to women being viewed by their own men-folk as threats against the honour of their respective religions and communities in times of communal strife.*

Keywords: honour killing; 1947 Partition; engendered violence against women; Partition fiction in English; biopower

INTRODUCTION

The Partition of British India in August 1947, otherwise simply known as Partition, marked not only the independence of India and Pakistan from colonial rule. In fact, it also holds the record for being the biggest human mass migration in world history, whereby an estimated 14 million people were uprooted from their homes as they crossed borders into newly-carved nations that befitted their respective religious affiliations (Basu 2014). Subsequently, an estimated million people lost their lives in the inevitable violence and atrocities that ensued (Hill et al. 2008), in which thousands of women, who found themselves at the wrong place and at the wrong time, were subjected to horrifying forms of engendered violence by men of communities in mutual enmity with theirs and also by their own men-folk (Menon and Bhasin 1998, Butalia 2000).

As early as the 1990s, scholars, such as Menon and Bhasin (1998) as well as Butalia (2000), have intellectualised engendered violence against women during Partition as part of their attempt to conduct a feminist reading of Partition and subsequently fill the gaps left by

traditional Partition narratives, which Menon and Bhasin (1998) have considered to be overwhelmingly masculine and patriarchal, a view also shared by more recent scholars such as Dasgupta and Roy (2013) in their exploration of Partition fiction in Urdu. In contrast, fiction has depicted what Butalia describes as the ‘hidden histories’ of Partition ever since the late 1940s, before the horrific aftermath of Partition itself had died down. In 1948, Pakistani author Saadat Hasan Manto published *Siyah Hashye (Black Marginalia)*, a collection of short stories in Urdu that explore the impact of Partition on families and individuals, a theme that he would revisit in later works, such as *Thanda Gosht (Cold Flesh)* (1950) and *Toba Tek Singh* (1953). While there have been noteworthy studies on, for example, Indian literary writings on Untouchability (Ramachandran & Hashim 2014) and diasporic South Asian literature (Rasagam & Pillai 2015), Partition fiction in English, however, came into existence only a decade or so after the historical turning point; beginning with the novel *Train to Pakistan* (1956) by Indian author, lawyer and satirist Khushwant Singh. Although only a handful of Partition fiction depicts engendered violence against women in graphic detail, it has been generally credited by such scholars as Bhalla (1999) and Roy (2010) for not only providing alternative, unconventional and varied perspectives of Partition itself but also for highlighting issues overlooked in traditional Partition narratives.

This study shall therefore examine depictions of honour killing as a form of engendered violence against women found in a recent work of Partition fiction, namely the novel *Partitions* (2011). Menon and Bhasin have postulated that the honour killing of women during Partition reflects the mentality prevalent in societies affected by Partition itself, whereby the traditional perceptions of women as commodities, gendered inferiors and constructions of male honour, in particular, are identified as the main factors behind the engendering of the violence that constitutes honour killing. Menon and Bhasin have also argued that engendered violence against women during Partition is manifested in various forms or methods that are mostly inflicted by men from religious communities in mutual enmity with the victims’, with the sole exception of honour killing. Through Majmudar’s depiction of Simran Kaur, the novel’s protagonist, as a survivor of an ‘honourable’ death planned for her by her father, it is revealed that engendered violence against women during Partition is also depicted in fiction as violence inflicted on women as symbolic constructions of male honour by men from within the community. That being said, this, in our view, is in turn a manifestation of Foucault’s concept of biopower, in which he posits that acts of inflicting mass death and destruction, including wars, are declared with the objective of ensuring survival, a point that we will elaborate in greater detail later on.

To date, however, there is very limited academic scholarship on Majmudar’s *Partitions*, barring two notable studies. The first, by Heidegger (2012), describes the novel as an example of a recent work of Partition fiction that offers a thorough portrayal of the plight of the marginalised, ranging from untouchables to women and children. In the second, by Saint (2015), the novel is merely identified as an example of recent Partition fiction written by an author who has no recollection or experience whatsoever of the event. Our justification for choosing *Partitions* therefore rests heavily on the hypothesis that many key issues have yet to be discovered through an analysis of this novel, especially by examining Majmudar’s portrayal of the character Simran Kaur, survivor of a premeditated honour killing and therefore a victim of engendered violence against women during Partition.

HONOUR KILLING OF WOMEN DURING PARTITION

Before proceeding to how the honour killing of women during Partition also constitutes engendered violence against women during Partition, we believe that it is imperative to first provide a general understanding of honour killing in order to make our argument clearer. A contemporary definition by Ballard (2011, p. 5), in his study on the increasing prevalence of

honour killings among immigrant communities in the United Kingdom, states that ‘wives and daughters are murdered by their husbands or fathers, simply because their victim have had the temerity to step out of line, and consequently been bludgeoned to death for the sin of challenging patriarchal authority’. Closer to our context is an earlier study by Patel and Gadit; in their examination of ‘*Karo-Kari*’ (Sindhi for ‘black male-black female’), a tradition of honour killing unique to the Sindhi community of Pakistan, where they define honour killing in general as ‘the cultural sanctioning of premeditated killings of women perceived to have brought dishonour to their families, often by engaging in illicit relations with men’ (Patel and Gadit 2008, p. 684). In our view, what sets Patel and Gadit’s definition of honour killing apart from Ballard’s is that they also highlight the engendered nature of honour killing, in which they state that ‘this violence exhibits strong gender bias in that, in such settings, men who engage in similar behaviour are typically subject to less severe punishments’ (Patel and Gadit 2008, p. 684).

Within the Partition frame, however, honour killing, specifically the honour killing of women, poses slight variations from the definitions presented above. Gyanendra Pandey in his study *Community and Violence: Recalling Partition* aptly states that ‘the ‘truth of the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 lay, at least for its victims, in the violence done to them’ (Pandey 1997, p. 2037). He adds that the role of violence in such a magnanimously turbulent event as Partition signifies the borders within which the idea of community is situated, to the point that the idea of violence is represented by a sense of community, and vice-versa. Owing to this, he also notes that acts of violence committed before, during and after Partition are often multi-layered by nature.

That being said, Pandey reveals that for the victim, acts of ‘martyrdom’ are narrated beyond the parameters of justifiable cruelty. In contrast, the victim’s view converts ‘martyrdom’ into acts laced with allure, given that these acts are perceived as being committed to uphold the sanctity of God, religion and community. Although Pandey’s study does not examine how honour killing came to be engendered during Partition, he nevertheless points out the overlapping significances of such violence.

In contrast, the second chapter of Menon and Bhasin’s *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India’s Partition* (1998), namely ‘Honourably Dead’, is alarmingly subtitled as ‘Permissible Violence against Women’. In this chapter, Menon and Bhasin recount stories of female martyrdom among minority Sikh communities in places that are now part of present-day Pakistan, notably in the village of Thoa Khalsa, in which 90 women drowned themselves in the communal well when their men had been devastatingly outnumbered by Muslim mobs and there was no other alternative to ‘save their honour’ (Menon and Bhasin 1998, p. 41); the doctor from Sheikhpura who opened fire on his womenfolk, killing 50 to 60 of them (Menon and Bhasin 1998, p. 49-50) and that of the patriarch from Quetta who beheaded 13 female family members including his six daughters (Menon and Bhasin 1998, pp. 47-48). Such ‘permissible violence’, according to Menon and Bhasin, are highly debatable because there is a sense of duality behind the motives of those killings. In the eyes of the women (or just perhaps most of them), it was for defending their honour simply as women. However, in the eyes of the men and the community at large, it was for defending the honour of their religion and community. That being said, one of the ‘martyrs’ surviving relatives (a man) whom Menon and Bhasin interviewed regarding the last of the three examples above later concluded that it was necessary for such violence to be carried out because the times were simply rife with desperation (48). Similarly, another eyewitness, also a man, interviewed by Butalia, described his ‘honourably’ dead womenfolk as ‘martyred’ instead of ‘killed’ (154).

In recounting these instances of women being killed ‘honourably’, or coerced to commit suicide by their men-folk for the sake of avoiding an ostensibly worse fate in the hands of the enemy, Menon and Bhasin thus contextualise honour killing as engendered violence against women during Partition by highlighting the differences in how such violence

is retold and by whom. In their view, the ‘gendered telling’ of honour killing contextualises it as engendered violence against women during Partition because “notions of shame and honour are so ingrained and have been internalised so successfully by men and women, both, that a death which has been forced onto a woman may quite easily be considered a ‘willing sacrifice’ even by women themselves” (Menon and Bhasin 1998, p.46). This is a view reinforced by Munawar et al. (2013) in their study *Female Sexuality as Carrier of Masculinity, A Feminist Critique of History of Sub Continent Partition*, whereby they suggest how “women often internalised the patriarchal notion of their role in the society, and committed suicide in order to preserve the ‘sanctity’ and ‘purity’ of their religion” (Munawar et al. 2013, p. 2170). Here, it can be postulated that suicide among women during Partition, the instances of which, as recalled, have been recorded by Menon and Bhasin, can also be viewed as honour killing of women in the hands of men. This is not only because of the domineering role played by men in coercing women to do so, as evidenced in the mass drowning at Thoa Khalsa, but also because of the patriarchal overtones surrounding it. As Menon and Bhasin have succinctly pointed out, “very large numbers of women were forced into death to avoid sexual violence against them, to preserve chastity and protect individual, family and community ‘honour’” (Menon and Bhasin 1998, p.42).

The prevalence of the honour killing of women in the Sikh community during Partition has been identified by Bhalla (2006) in his study *Moral Action in Times of Duragraha: The Representation of Sikhs in Partition Fiction*, as “constructed out of a series of heroic self-projections and enshrined in a long tradition of martyrology which was sustained by the incremental repetition of *sahadat*-stories (stories of self-sacrifice as testimonies against injustice) of defiant, though doomed, acts of bravery by Sikh warriors against treacherous and barbaric oppressors” (Bhalla 2006, p.105). To support his view, he further postulates that it “becomes a spectacle of heroic *qurbani* (sacrifice)...choreographed to produce all the ‘salvation effects’ which can stir the soul to think of its meaningful relation to the divine’, as well as ‘a terrible example of profane existentiality...transformed into a sacred rite where the women crash through the threshold of the merely earthly so as to achieve a place in the mysterious realm of the sacred” (Bhalla 2006, p.126).

In contrast, Butalia, as well as Menon and Bhasin, have supported each other’s claims that the engendering of the honour killing of women during Partition had subsequently shaped the socio-cultural attitudes of communities affected by Partition towards women who had refused to be killed ‘honourably’, be it through suicide or death in the hands of their men-folk. In an interview conducted by Menon and Bhasin with a Partition survivor, a Hindu man originally from the predominantly Muslim region of Kashmir whose aunt was compelled to commit suicide by consuming poison distributed to all the women in the family but had staunchly refused to comply, it is revealed that such women, as the aunt, were later subjected to shame and labelled as cowards having shown no courage in the face of death (1998, p. 54). Butalia also recalls a similar encounter in interviewing the surviving relative (also a man) of two sisters who went missing during Partition while en route across the border to India from Rawalpindi, a city now in present-day Pakistan. In this instance, Butalia recounts how the tale of the two girls was not brought up in a straightforward manner, as he and his brother reminisced ‘in heroic mode’ how scores of their extended family had been slaughtered during Partition and, when Butalia was asked to refer to their neighbour who also happened to survive the violence in Rawalpindi regarding the fate of the two missing sisters, the latter responded vaguely as well, to the point that Butalia felt ‘it sounded as if this was something to be ashamed of’ (Butalia 2000, p. 106).

Quoting Sri Lankan anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere’s concept of “*lajja-bhaya*” (Sanskrit for ‘shame-fear’) (Menon and Bhasin 1998, p. 59), Menon and Bhasin postulate that the prevalence of what they call ‘shame-fear-dishonour syndrome’ in the culture of the Indian subcontinent, in which there is an inherent fear of loss of status/honour because it is

equivalent to ultimate shame, is highly responsible for the ‘honourable’ deaths of so many women in the hands of their men-folk during Partition. In our view, the understanding of what Menon and Bhasin have termed as ‘shame-fear-dishonour syndrome’ is important in delineating honour killing as a form of engendered violence against women during Partition. This is because it helps to highlight the patriarchal overtones reflected in how men justify their actions in killing their womenfolk, or coercing them to die, ‘honourably’.

Butalia postulates that the preconceived notion among men in the Sikh community during Partition, where women are seen as generally weak, defenceless and vulnerable in the face of danger posed by the enemy, justifies the need for the former to kill or coerce into suicide the latter in order to preserve the purity of their faith and community. Although this deconstructs the perception that acts of engendered violence against women during Partition are inflicted by men of communities in mutual enmity with their victims’, the engendering of the honour killing of women during Partition nevertheless resembles abduction and rape, in that women’s sexuality plays a big part. However, the only difference that sets it apart from the other two is that it is designed to protect women’s sexuality, rather than violate it.

FOUCAULDIAN EXPLORATION OF BIOPOWER

Foucault’s concept of biopower, also interchangeably called ‘biopolitics’, first came about in the first volume of his seminal book *The History of Sexuality* (1976), entitled *The Will to Knowledge*. He defines biopower as a wide range of methods carried out to enforce the command over whole populations as well as the suppression of bodies (Foucault 1976, p. 140). Although he has highlighted several differences between biopower and its predecessor, namely sovereign power, notably in the context of “make live and let die” (biopower) (1976, p. 137) versus “let live and make die” (sovereign power) (1976, p. 135), he also states that “one of the characteristic privileges of sovereign power was the right to decide life and death” (1976, p. 35). However, part of it is also evident in biopower, especially in “the controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomena of population to economic processes” (1976, p. 141).

Foucauldian scholars have posited similar views regarding the concept of biopower, whereby it has been described as ‘an essentially modern form of power and its purpose is to exert a positive influence on life, to optimise and multiply life, by subjecting it to precise controls and comprehensive regulations’ (Ojakangas 2005) and, more importantly, as the use of power by nations or states in controlling a large population of people (Policante 2010). It has also been suggested that, by applying the concept of biopower to the discourse of modern politics, one can find a similarity between the objectives of a body of administration in attempting to exert its command over whole populations, and social scientists’ examinations of the population growth and common behavioural patterns among societies (Mills 2003). Apart from that, biopower, as opposed to disciplinary power that fashions and runs individuals through indoctrination of the body and behaviour, places more emphasis on ‘the life, death and health of entire populations’ (O’ Farrell 2005), in which biopower ‘conceptualises the governmental target as a new collective focus...representing a ‘political object’ insofar the population is that on which and towards which the acts of government are directed, but also a ‘political subject’ insofar as it is the population that is called upon to conduct itself in a particular way” (Gudmand-Høyer and Lopdrup Hjorth 2009).

Based on the views discussed above, a similar pattern can be observed in the perception of female sexuality in communities affected by Partition. Menon and Bhasin (1998) postulate that the honour killing of women during Partition is a reflection of how, due to the prevalence of patriarchy in these communities, female sexuality is often associated with and/or viewed as a symbol of manhood or male honour. In this context, the idea of female sexuality as a symbol of manhood, which leads to the perception of women as constructions

of male honour, is a reflection of Gudmand-Høyer and Lopdrup Hjorth's (2009) view that a population, having become a "governmental target" and a "political subject", is ordered to perform its part/s in a designated fashion (p. 106). Within the frame of engendered violence against women during Partition, society or community is the government, and women a population expected to be adept at certain specific duties, such as the birthing and nurturing of future generations (Menon and Bhasin 1998, p. 44), leading to restrictions of their movements in areas such as public life which, in our view, can be compared with Foucault's postulation of the 'seeming repression of sexual discussion and sexuality' in 18th-century Europe (Mills 2003).

While existing academic scholarship on the application of Foucault's concept of biopower in the plight of women victimised during Partition, such as *Female Sexuality as Carrier of Masculinity: A Feminist Critique of History of Sub Continent Partition (1947)* by Riffat Munawar et al. (2013), focuses primarily on the role of the state in the recovery and rehabilitation of abducted and/or raped women during Partition, we would like to posit the view that engendered violence against women during Partition is part of a greater manifestation of what Foucault has described as the authority to impose death upon an entire generation or, in other words, "the underside of the power to guarantee an individual's continued existence" (Foucault 1979, p.137). Here, in referring to the Holocaust of World War Two, Foucault postulates that battles, which were once declared to enforce the security of rulers, are now declared to protect the survival of peoples, in which "the technology of wars has caused them to tend increasingly toward all-out destruction, the decision that initiates them and the ones that terminate them are in fact increasingly informed by the naked question of survival" (p. 137).

Ironically enough, the role of biopower in causing extensive death to ensure survival can also be applied to the honour killing of women during Partition, which is inflicted by men from within the community rather than men of the enemy community. We suggest this through the view posited by Gudmand-Høyer and Lopdrup Hjorth in their 2009 study *Liberal Politics Reborn: Michel Foucault, The Birth of Biopolitics*, in which they argue how Foucault (1978) "conceptualises the governmental target as a new collective focus...representing a 'political object' insofar the population is that on which and towards which the acts of government are directed, but also a 'political subject' insofar as it is the population that is called upon to conduct itself in a particular way" (p. 106). Similarly, as the 'governmental target' and 'political subject' of the patriarchal communities they belong to, women subjected to honour killing during Partition are, through the exercise of biopower, understood here as patriarchal power in the Partition frame, thus forced into death, which is viewed as 'martyrdom' in the eyes of their own men-folk (Butalia 2000, p. 154). Such violence inflicted by men on their own womenfolk are designed to protect the honour of community and religion from violation by the 'Other', keeping in mind that women are treated as constructions of male honour subsequently magnified as honour of religion and community, and their sexuality a symbol of manhood (Menon and Bhasin 1998).

In this context, Foucault's concept of biopower is not only internalised within a particular community but it also reveals what Biddy Martin (1982) in her study *Feminism, Criticism and Foucault* calls the "ideological construction of the sexed subject as a crucial place to situate the question of sexual difference and the struggle against women's oppression" (Martin 1982, p.3). By linking Martin's view to the honour killing of women during Partition, it can be postulated that, through the position of women as the 'sexed subject', the oppression of women by their own men-folk in communities affected by Partition is evident in what Menon and Bhasin (1998, p. 42) term as their being "forced into death" to preserve the purity of religion and community. This in turn validates the view posited by Nancy Hartsock (1987) in her study *Foucault on Power: A Theory for Women?*, whereby the seemingly obvious answer to the broad issue regarding the link between gender

and power is that “power is associated firmly with the male and masculinity” (p. 157). Martin also states that ‘subjectivity and sexuality are conceived as secondary effects of an essentially negative, repressive exercise of power’, whereby “liberation, then, is articulated in terms of the demand for transgression of or end to external prohibitions” (Martin 1982, p.5).

At this point, we would like to recall Foucault’s view on how biopower can be utilised to cause death amidst the struggle for survival. Foucault states that ‘the principle underlying the tactics of battle – that one has to be capable of killing in order to go on living – has become the principle that defines the strategy of states’, adding that “the existence in question...is the biological existence of a population” (Foucault 1976, p.137). In his view, “if genocide is indeed the dream of modern powers, this is not because of a recent return of the ancient right to kill”; rather, “it is because power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population” (Foucault 1976, p.137). If this is applied to the honour killing of women during Partition, it can be argued that, due to their being viewed as constructions of the honour of their men-folk subsequently magnified as the honour of religion and community, women are therefore perceived as threats to the preservation or, to put it more aptly in Foucault’s diction, the survival of the aforementioned dimensions of honour. The validity of this postulation is, in our opinion, evident in a view posited by Butalia, which we have cited earlier regarding the prevalence of the honour killing of women during Partition in the Sikh community whereby, because of their perceived vulnerability and lack of strength to protect themselves against the enemy, it is supposed that the double pollution of religion and community and self, was highly possible through them (Butalia 2000). As such, by killing their womenfolk ‘honourably’ and/or coercing them into suicide, men in communities affected by Partition, the Sikh community in particular, are thus not only exhibiting what Foucault describes as willing to take lives to ensure the continuity of survival, but also exercising and situating power “at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population” (Foucault 1976, p.137).

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Ballard (2011) in his study on honour killing in Western countries identifies the said practice as the murder of women by male elders of their families, prevalent in South Asian, Middle-Eastern and North African immigrant communities, for committing offences traditionally perceived by these communities as audacious acts of standing up to patriarchal norms and male superiority. Closer to context, Patel and Gadit (2008) describe honour killing in general as the culturally-legalised and deliberate killing of women who have allegedly sullied the honour of their families, adding that the practice is indeed a form of highly-engendered violence against women because men tend to get away comparatively lightly in similar situations.

However, honour killing within the Partition context poses slight variations in comparison with the present-day definitions as discussed above. According to Pandey (1997) violence for the Partition victim is initially expected only from the enemy and never from one’s own kin. Nevertheless, he states that once the threat of violence from the enemy becomes imminent, those within the community end up resorting to violence towards lesser members of their kinsfolk on the pretext of religious or communal martyrdom (Pandey 1997). This echoes the evidence collected by Menon and Bhasin, who reveal through interviews with survivors as well as social workers, the latter having rehabilitated victims of engendered violence during Partition, that scores of women have been killed or forced into suicide by male elders of their own families or communities as a means of safeguarding from the enemy the honour of the latter. This inevitably translates into the honour of their respective families, communities and religious beliefs at large, to the extent that Menon and

Bhasin have labelled such violence as “permissible violence against women” (Menon and Bhasin 1998, p. 42).

Similarly, in Majmudar’s *Partitions*, the ‘honourable’ death planned for Simran Kaur, along with her mother and siblings in the hands of her father, reflects the violent means that men often resort to out of desperation, to protect the honour of their families, communities and religious beliefs, given that their womenfolk and, to an extent, their children, have always been viewed as constructions of their own honour. This is, in turn, magnified as the honour of the family, community and religion at large, as exemplified below.

But the women and the boy risked something worse. To live in their shack: his girls their wives, daily servitude, nightly violence, in a few years not even remembering their true nature. Coming to smell as they smell, eat as they eat. Bearing Muslim sons who would grow up never knowing their grandfather was a Sikh steely as his kangan and proud. Conversion. To bow to their holy city, kiss their book, recite their prayers. Die now and they would die Sikhs, intact, pure in the eyes of the ten Gurus. Dying a Sikh, for being a Sikh: this must be the women’s glory...*Better annihilation than long life giving some slum Mussulmaan pleasure and service and sons.*

(Majmudar, 2011, p. 39, our emphasis)

While the mention of ‘the boy’, Simran’s little brother and her parents’ only son Jasbir, indicates that Majmudar is simultaneously covering the plight of children as a marginalised group of mainstream Partition narratives in his novel, Simran’s father, for his part, is portrayed as a patriarchal figure whose concerns veer more towards the fate of his wife and daughters, should they fall into the hands of the community that he considers as an enemy of his kinsfolk. In the above extract, Jasbir, simply referred to as ‘the boy’, is mentioned only once, but there is no dearth of the possibilities in store for his daughters that he dreads, should they be abducted and forcibly converted by the Muslims.

Taking Foucault’s view on the negative side of biopower, it is important to note that, although Simran’s father genuinely loves his wife and children, we can see how the honour of family, community and religion remains a dominant priority in every aspect of his life. As such, when his family and community are under threat, it is little wonder that, instead of finding a way to get his wife and daughters to safety by whatever means, Majmudar portrays him viewing them as threats to the honour of his religion and community because of their vulnerability to violation from the enemy. That being said, as a man and therefore the traditional figure of authority within a patriarchal society, Simran’s father has the additional option to get rid of them under the pretext of martyrdom, as evidenced in the extract above. This, then, goes in tandem with the aforementioned negative side of biopower, in which Foucault states that extensive death and destruction has become necessary for the survival of future generations. After all, in a society like his, woman is seen as a bargaining chip that represents the honour of man, religion and community. Inevitably, what is to happen of her in troubled times when those brands of honour are at stake lies in the hands of man. As members of the inferior gender in their community, it is unthinkable for Simran, her mother and her sisters to have their own say on whether they want to live or die, albeit ‘honourably’. It is therefore unsurprising that, in their case, merely asking for such a privilege is considered a deeply sacrilegious act of rebellion, defiance and dissent.

In our opinion, Majmudar’s portrayal of Simran’s father echoes the findings of Biddy Martin (1982) who posits the view that self-emancipation is too often interpreted as a “demand for transgression of or end to external prohibitions” in her postulation that the oppression of women in a patriarchal society is a result of them being subjugated and controlled as ‘sexed subjects’ (Martin 1982, p.5). As such, the seemingly only available option that Simran’s father can think of, that of killing them ‘honourably’, subtly demonstrates the extent of woman’s inferiority in a patriarchal society as she is simultaneously denied the basic right to speak on her own behalf, let alone make her own decisions. With reference to the works of Menon and Bhasin as well as Butalia regarding

real-life accounts of ‘permissible violence against women’ committed during Partition, this cruel practice was particularly prevalent within the Sikh community back then, which in turn reflects Bhalla’s view on the construction of the Sikh identity, whereby a repertoire of stories of martyrdom as acts against religious oppression had created a sense of heroic resistance within the community (Bhalla 2006) although the methods tended to vary. In some cases, the victims were systematically beheaded; some were shot as in the literary portrayal of Simran’s mother and sisters by Majmudar, while others were coerced to commit mass suicide such means as drowning in wells, self-immolation or consuming opium.

Menon, Bhasin and Butalia have, in their respective studies, proposed that, even as the overwhelming majority of women who had lost their lives to ‘permissible violence’ committed against them by their own men-folk have been described often to the point of glorification by eyewitnesses (specifically male) as obedient, loyal and at the very least sheepish in accepting death, many may have been reluctant to die as can be seen through the odd survivor or two (Butalia 2000), brought to the foreground in fiction through authors such as Majmudar whose portrayal of Simran echoes the plight of those very few women in real life who had openly and defiantly demanded for their lives to be spared.

Coming back to *Partitions*, although nobody in the novel, not even Dr. Roshan Jaitly’s wandering spirit, has hinted on Simran’s perceived betrayal towards her religion and community for daring to defy the authority exerted by the men of her family, it is, however, made clear when she contemplates suicide almost immediately after her escape from her ‘honourable’ death as can be seen below.

She wishes, and wishes hard, that she could get rid of the body she has just saved. The way her father thought of her body – living deadweight slowing escape, a liability and an ostentation, inviting attack – is how she thinks of her body now, too. Maybe this is just one more way Simran is a good daughter, willing herself to do her father’s will. Her dominant concern, stashed in this tree, is how she might kill herself when she needs to...How difficult, she thinks, how impossible it is to kill yourself in time, before the bad things happen to you! Besides a blade or a pistol, nothing works quickly enough...But would she be able to do it, if she had to?...*Well, then, I won’t be weak*, she decides. *I will do what Harpreet didn’t, if I have to*...Every method she thinks of is imperfect, dangerous without being lethal...She will stay close to cliffs, she thinks. Any ledge she can bolt for and throw herself off. Rivers might work, too, if fast enough. It’s an inversion of the logic that keeps cautious sailors in sight of shore. Once she has a blade of some kind, she reasons, she will have an escape even if she can’t run.

(Majmudar, 2011, p. 70-72)

As shown in the extract above, within the parameters of the socio-cultural attitudes unique to communities affected by Partition, suicide, whether forced or voluntary, is considered a means of upholding the greater honour of the family, religion and community in times of dire crisis, an act of self-denial that echoes the warped logic behind ‘the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few’. In our view, this, in turn, is a magnification of Foucault’s biopower, whereby there arises a need to kill and destroy so that the survival of future generations is ensured (Foucault 1976). Soundly aware that she has dishonoured her family, religion and community by evading the ‘honourable’ death planned for her, it is little wonder that Simran, despite the guts and bravery she had displayed earlier, will at some point resort to take her own life, an act that those who are unfamiliar with her community and culture will probably interpret as one committed out of cowardice.

On the surface level, we can argue that Simran’s suicidal tendencies are best interpreted as a result of her guilt over refusing to die the ‘honourable’ way in the first place. However, we can also argue that those very same suicidal tendencies serve as a grim reminder that she has now become dishonourable for two reasons. One, by refusing to acknowledge her position as a symbolic commodity in her own community, she has not only defied marching to the tune set by the age-old patriarchal norms within her society, but also betrayed the trust of her family and community that she would give up her life for her faith.

Two, by evading an ‘honourable’ death, she has exposed her community and religion to contamination by the enemy, even more so when her personal safety has never been a matter of high importance among her own men-folk as, at the end of the day, it all boils down to the preservation of filial, communal and religious honour. A woman, evidently, has no place of her own in a society as patriarchal as Simran’s. Undeniably, this compels Simran to treat her current predicament as suicide itself, evident in the extract from the novel as presented below.

Now that she is alone and in darkness, she sees, undistracted by earth and sky, what it is she has done. To have set off like this – where? To have detached herself. It’s a kind of suicide...Crowded city or empty desert were the same to a woman who had no family. That should be the end, back there in the hot closed room, sleepy with morphine and scarcely registering the gunshot. Hadn’t her father been merciful to drug them?...Only Simran had suspected, resisted, fled...Better to have ended there, her body useless to the crowd that kicked in the door. Slipping away as she has done, staying wide-eyed between dusk and dawn instead of sleeping between Jasbir and Priya, Simran fears she has outlived her own death. (Majmudar 2011, pp.79-80)

The way we see it, Simran’s act of escaping the ‘honourable’ death that her father has planned for her can be viewed varyingly as an act of ritual suicide, communal excommunication and practical survival. The fact that Majmudar portrays her as describing her father ‘merciful’ further affirms her state of guilt in escaping to save her own skin, which from the perspective of the patriarchal society she comes from, is not only cowardly but also gravely offensive. We are also of the view that Majmudar’s use of the adjective ‘merciful’ in describing Simran’s father through her lenses is a subtle reference to the exercise of biopower in communities affected by Partition. Earlier on, we have argued how the honour killing of women during Partition is a manifestation of Foucault’s view that the dark underside of biopower involves the massive scale of death and destruction carried out for the survival of generations to come. By using the adjective ‘merciful’ on Simran’s father, we posit the view that this is a subtle implication on Majmudar’s part in depicting his (Simran’s father) act of killing his more vulnerable family members, notably his wife and daughters, as an attempt to safeguard the honour of his religion and community, thereby ensuring that future generations of Sikhs are not erased through violation by the enemy.

Coming back to Simran, the scene in which she sleeps beside the dead bodies of her female family members in her abandoned home should be analysed as well, as detailed in the passage below.

Simran straightens the sheet. She lays her own body next to her mother’s. She will fit. The sheet, pulled past her forehead, cools her all over. The cloth on her back, after a second’s delay, soaks through with blood, but it doesn’t bother her. The floor itself is claiming her, absorbing her, fixing her in place. She sleeps the night as still and soundless as the others. (Majmudar 2011, p. 81)

Although Majmudar depicts this scene essentially as an attempt to keep out of the cold as well as a means of camouflage, we argue that it also subtly symbolises the treatment of woman as a construction of male honour. In this context, as Simran shrouds herself alongside her dead mother, she is striving to emulate her ‘honourably dead’ family members and thus restore her sense of belonging within her family, religion and community, even if it means returning to the role of an extension of her men-folk’s identities, a construction of their honour and a mere lifeless commodity relegated to the shadowy background of society’s panorama, as ‘the floor...claiming her, absorbing her, fixing her in place’ suggests.

Similarly, her encounter with the busload of passengers while en route to Amritsar affirms how, as a survivor of an ‘honourable’ death, her alleged betrayal towards her family, men-folk, community and religion has become synonymous with her being subjected to engendered violence in the hands of the enemy, as exemplified below.

They stare at her through the receding window. *The sight of her doesn't provoke a glance or murmur. They, too, are searching for signs of the violence done to her. Are her clothes torn? Is her face cut? The blood makes them curious.*

Feeling the inquisition of their looks, *she decides she mustn't show herself this way.*

(Majmudar 2011, p. 100, our emphasis)

In the above extract, the bus passengers' observations of Simran, notably their immediate act of wordlessly branding her as dishonourable, clearly indicates that, while engendered violence against women during Partition in general was no doubt very commonplace, the socio-cultural attitudes of the communities affected by Partition deem it unspeakable and taboo, which is represented by the silent and supposedly indifferent observations of the bus passengers. Similarly, Simran's decision that she mustn't show herself this way, can be interpreted as an allusion to the actual decisions made by many Partition women victims of engendered violence to remain silent about the violations on their bodies and psyches, partly to spare their respective communities the shame they have caused through no fault of their own, and partly to suppress the trauma of their experiences as well as the pain of communal and ritual excommunication (Menon and Bhasin 1998).

Undeniably, Majmudar's portrayal of Simran as a girl (or woman), who dares to defy the will of patriarchy by avoiding her 'honourable' death in the hands of her men-folk during the height of Partition violence, offers readers a rare insight into two marginalised groups of Partition victims. First, it details the plight of countless women and girls who were, for the most part, far from voluntary in giving up their lives for the honour of their men-folk, community and religion (Butalia 2000). Second, it gives a glimpse into the social stigmatisation faced by those brave enough to refuse death, albeit an 'honourable' one as well as the guilt that they have to bear for their alleged cowardice and disloyalty to family, community and religion as justly highlighted by Menon and Bhasin (1998). More importantly, however, it also elucidates the exercise of biopower in communities affected by Partition. In this context, we view Majmudar's portrayal of Simran, as well as the details of the 'honourable' death planned for her, as subtle depictions of what Foucault had described in *The History of Sexuality* (1976) as the capability of rulers, represented by Simran's father in the narrative, to perpetrate death and destruction as the means to ensure the survival of future generations or, more specifically, to ensure that the purity of communal, religious and, to an extent, filial honour, remains untainted in the face of threats from the enemy.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how honour killing, as a form of engendered violence during Partition, is revealed to be committed against women not by men of the enemy community but by those of their own faith and community and, in many cases, killed by their own male family members. Menon and Bhasin have identified this particular brand of engendered violence against women during Partition as 'permissible' violence carried out by men on their own womenfolk as a means of safeguarding the honour of family, community and religion. This, in our view, can be evidenced through Majmudar's portrayal of Simran in *Partitions*, whose 'honourable' death, along with those for her mother and siblings, are planned in advance by her father and other male family members when attacks from a Muslim mob are imminent.

Our analysis has also revealed that 'honourable' deaths are most commonly found in the Sikh community, even more so when the community is discovered to have a long history of martyrdom in the face of religious persecution, based on a view posited by Bhalla in his study on how Sikhs are depicted in Partition fiction. Apart from that, interviews with Partition survivors, by Menon and Bhasin as well as Butalia, have revealed that there were cases in which the victims resisted being killed against their will inasmuch the same way as

Simran Kaur is portrayed to have done in Majmudar's *Partitions*, and while those who were killed were glorified by future generations for their 'heroism', those who evaded and survived were subsequently shunned for their perceived cowardice. This is reflected in the suicidal tendencies and feelings of guilt and remorse felt by Simran after escaping the 'honourable' death planned for her.

In order to discover the socio-cultural attitudes of the time towards women who were subjected to honour killing during Partition, our study has revealed that Majmudar has depicted society as mostly callous towards women who dared to evade an 'honourable' death. In the novel, Simran's family members, particularly her father and the other male elders, are portrayed as unwilling to allow their female family members to live for fear of them being violated by the enemy. From their standpoint, this in turn translates to violation of family, community and religion. As recalled, Majmudar's portrayal of Simran's guilt as a result of escaping the 'honourable' death planned for her also highlights the extent to which she has ritually excommunicated herself from her family, faith and community by avoiding what others perceive as an act of heroism and martyrdom.

However, with regards to the impact of honour killing as engendered violence against women during Partition on its victims, our findings have revealed that Majmudar's portrayal of Simran tells a slightly different story. In the narrative, Simran is portrayed as a survivor of a premeditated honour killing who is then abducted and nearly sold into prostitution. In our analysis, we have discovered that Majmudar does not portray the impact of the acts of engendered violence inflicted on Simran as wholly damaging. Rather, Simran is portrayed as being consistently perseverant in her will to survive despite being subjected to several acts of engendered violence, both by men from her own family and community as well as by men from a religious community in mutual enmity with her own later on in the narrative.

More importantly, however, the honour killing of women during Partition, as evidenced in Majmudar's depiction of Simran's plight, can also be viewed as manifestations of the exercise of biopower in the fight for survival. It can be seen in the attitudes of communities affected by Partition that treat the killing of women in the hands of their own men-folk when threats from the enemy are imminent as a means to safeguard the honour of religion and community. This, we have argued, is due to the perceptions that women are constructions of male honour magnified into the honour of community and religion, and that women's sexuality is a symbol of manhood. That being said, men of communities affected by Partition tend to wield the same brand of biopower on their own womenfolk in times of communal violence to ensure the preservation of their honour, magnified as the honour of their religion and community. Here, by killing their own womenfolk "honourably", men exhibit what Foucault describes as the capability to inflict death as a means to preserve life itself.

Examining the literary depictions of engendered violence against women during Partition in general has provided researchers and scholars with a microscopic view into Partition itself. In this context, while mainstream historical narratives of Partition tend to focus on macroscopic elements, such as geopolitics and religious differences, such academic scholarship as this study offers an invaluable insight into individuals and/or communities marginalised and silenced by mainstream narratives due to the sensitivity and perceived insignificance of their plight. It also provides the opportunity to examine what Butalia terms as the 'human dimensions' and 'hidden' histories of Partition.

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