

THE DYNAMICS OF GENDER & IDEOGRAPHY IN PARTITION NARRATIVES

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ABSTRACT

*One of the most horrific events of the subcontinent history was the Partition that uprooted, displaced and traumatized millions of people, especially women. This horror, trauma, and displacement has been fictionalized in multiple forms by the literary writers on both sides of the border. This paper focuses upon the way these sufferings were and have always been glorified thus silencing the voice of the true victims. The ideographs of honour, heroism and martyrdom became institutionalized in the dominant narratives of Partition and regulated women's experiences. Drawing upon a close reading of selected Partition texts—Bhisham Sahni's *Tamas*, Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*, Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* and Ritu Menon & Kamla Bhasin's *Borders & Boundaries*—this paper aims to counter the 'haloed narratives', which present women as heroes and cover the underlying realities of fear, vulnerability, and trauma. Women who were portrayed as symbols of sacrifice and honour actually found themselves to be the first victims in a society where patriarchy ruled; limiting their freedom of choice and autonomy. This study is an attempt to critically examine the romantically celebrated narratives related to women's sufferings and chalk more inclusive and realistic experiences of women during the Partition.*

Keywords: Partition of the subcontinent, gendered ideographs, women's experiences, victims, suffering, patriarchy, trauma.

INTRODUCTION

The Partition of India in 1947 was a violent event that altered the political and social landscape of the Indian subcontinent. The division of the subcontinent in August 1947 is considered by many as a significant event because it “defies comparative historical and conceptual analysis” (Talbot & Singh, 2009, p. 1). Partition literature talks about the countless stories of displacement, suffering, and loss that emerged amidst the chaos and violence causing “one of the great human convulsions of history” (Butalia, 1998, p. 3). Though the narratives mostly dwell on the general historical context and the political conspiracies of the time, a significant

number of authors have also focused on the personal experiences of individuals, particularly women, “who were especially victimised because they symbolised community ‘honour’” (Talbot & Singh, 2009, p. 3). This research aims to examine the ways in which gendered ideographs, such as honour, heroism, and martyrdom, have been employed to shape and control the narratives of women's experiences during the Partition. These ideographs have been a part of the social constitution and the literary landscape for a long time in the Indo-Pak society.

The disturbance and destruction that resulted due to the Partition of the Indian subcontinent, had a profound impact on the lives of women. Many were forced to flee their homes, witnessed the deaths of their loved ones, and faced the threat of “widespread sexual savagery” (Butalia, 1998, p. 3). Yet, in the subsequent narratives that emerged on both sides of the border, women's experiences were often framed at the discursive framework of ideographs such as honour and sacrifice. This paper argues that these ideographs, while seemingly empowering, actually serve to obscure the underlying realities of fear, shame, and vulnerability that women faced during partition. These women were made to believe in the strength of these ideals in terms of social existence, and despite the horrific treatment they faced, they were expected to “fashion new strategies of survival in a completely alien land” (Bhardwaj, 2004). This had a devastating effect on the lives of women because instead of fighting their suffering, they were forced to embrace it.

In order to explore these dynamics, this study will analyze selected Partition texts, *Tamas* by Bhisham Sahni, *What the Body Remembers* by Shauna Singh Baldwin, *The Other Side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia, and *Borders & Boundaries* by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin. These texts not only express multiple experiences of Partition and exemplify “that women were the main victims” (Talbot & Singh, 2009, p. 17), but also give an idea of how gendered narratives were constructed and diffused into the society, thereby allowing social institutions to regulate the rules and norms of society. The most basic thematic issue that arises out of these narratives is of the widespread fear-shame-dishonour syndrome that expected “silence from traumatized women” (Kabir, 2005). This syndrome was deeply ingrained in the cultural and social norms and exerted a powerful influence on the choices and behaviors of the women of that time. The idea of a life filled with shame was so beyond them that living in shame was considered equivalent to dying, and thus, women committed suicide as a means of saving their honour. However, the narratives that the society has built to remember these deaths often overlook the repressed fear and desperation that motivated these women to choose death over life. They present women as heroic figures who willingly sacrificed their lives for the sake of their community and nation. This idealized portrayal of the experiences of women served to

“further the patriarchal ideas of honor, which shackled women to victimization” (Poole & Ronnenberg, 2024). This paper therefore seeks to devalue the seemingly glorified stories of women’s heroism in order to reveal the underlying realities of dread, fragility, and distress by closely examining these narratives. By uncovering the realities of the ideographs of Partition, the dominant and traditional narrative structures will be challenged, and the true suffering of women will be realized.

Literature Review

The Partition of India in 1947 is among the greatest tragedies of South Asia, uprooting, displacing and greatly traumatizing millions of people, particularly women who were primarily the main victims of this violence. In their analysis of Partition narratives, scholars have exponentially examined women, particularly their representation in society, by specifically focusing on the ideologies driving these representations. In this chapter, literature on ideography and gender dynamics in Partition narratives is reviewed to extract essential themes, discourses and debates in textual discourse on women's agency and experiences during this tumultuous period.

Grosu-Rădulescu (2016) highlights how Shauna Singh Baldwin in her novel *What the Body Remembers* shows the “extreme commodification of women, whose bodies become sites for men’s competition for respect and territory” (p. 86). Essentially, this exploration demonstrates the convergence of violence, patriarchy, and colonialization, with women's bodies as a site of contention for male supremacy. It illustrates the extent to which literary narratives contain the large and macro forces of society and historical processes that oppress women. Fatima & Tyagi (2023) adds to it by analyzing Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence*. The constant violence towards women is detailed, telling us how “they were prey to the men's harassment and abuse” (p. 277). Her analysis portrays the physical, psychological and mental violence wrought on women and how Partition stigmatized so many of them as contaminated and segregated them within their societies. In stark contrast with the actual treatment of women by objectification and dehumanization, this work depicts the fallacy of how in the eyes of religion and social beliefs, women are revered as goddesses.

Monica (2024) in her research on Bhisham Sahni's novel *Tamas* explores the psychological trauma of women during the Partition where she talks about "the terror, anxiety, and sadness that women experience when their homes are destroyed, and their families are ripped apart" (p. 71). Focusing on women's strength and their redefined identities, the paper brings out the story of the fight and resilience of women in the face of rapidly changing gender roles during conflict and unreliability. In the same manner, Ramachandran & Duresh, (2019) also highlight how Sahni has portrayed women as 'Tamas' by exhibiting "the mental and physical trauma and also their struggle to exist in their native soil" (p. 4634). In this way, the representation of psychological trauma captures the potentially enduring effects of partition-related violence on the psyches of women, illuminating the long-term and far-reaching violence of such historical atrocities.

Poole and Ronnenberg (2024) suggest that the efforts of recovery and restoration following the partition continue to produce the same patriarchal notions that made women vulnerable to victimization in the first place. In this study, their analysis reveals the cyclical nature of these forms of gendered oppression and how it was reinforced under the banner of recovery as women's roles in the family and society made them prime targets for "brutality, kidnapping, and forced conversion" (p. 1). According to Thakur (2024), who argues on Butalia in the *The Other Side of Silence*, memories of survivors encapsulate that "people had to suffer acutely owing to cataclysmic division" (p.40). Thakur (2024), who wrote about women's suffering during the Partition, penetrates the scars that partition has left on the personal and societal psyche through Butalia's narrative collection, highlighting that how individual suffering superseded the politics of the time.

Singh et al. (2023) propose that "a woman's life in the Indian subcontinent is inextricably linked to her submission or else, at times, resistance" (p. 779). The paper generates a theoretical framework of references to understand gender identities and relations, within a patriarchal system that leads to violent acts against women, as occurred during the Partition. Misri (2011), who elaborates on "the role of gendered bodies in and as the archive of communal memories of violence" (p. 1), comments on the patriarchal cutting up and reassembling of a woman's body, which is actually an imposition of a

pre-defined narrative of women where they become victims, taking responsibility away from men.

A common theme is apparent in these perspectives — of the ideal narratives established by the patriarchy and the darkness faced by women during the Partition. However, there is no research regarding the role of ideographs like honour, heroism and martyrdom in the creation of these glorified narratives of women's suffering. Certainly, these ideographs frequently conceal women's real feelings and experiences, and they require a closer examination in the Partition discourse in order to highlight the realities of "helplessness, fear and terror" hidden beneath the exulted acts of bravery.

Materials and Methods

The research seeks to unearth the streaks and strains of the ideographs embedded in the traditional narrative structures of the Partition of the Indian subcontinent. The qualitative method is used for conducting the research in order to meet the explorative requirement of the study. The Ideograph theory of Michael Calvin McGee (1980) that proposes that words shape system of beliefs and contain a persuasive power that can mobilize individuals and groups toward collective action would help to disintegrate the idealized versions of women's heroism, particularly the fear-shame-dishonour syndrome. In his essay, "The 'Ideograph: A Link Between Rhetoric and Ideology'", Michael Calvin McGee (1980) puts forth that ideographs "are the basic structural elements, the building blocks, of ideology" (p. 7). Through the analysis of selected Partition texts, including *Tamas* by Bhisham Sahni, *What the Body Remembers* by Shauna Singh Baldwin, *The Other Side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia, and *Borders & Boundaries* by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, the study examines the influence of Partition ideographs in promoting the patriarchal notions of honour, shame, and fear. In the context of Partition narratives, ideographs such as "honour," "heroism," and "martyrdom" were imbued with specific cultural meanings that reinforced traditional gender roles and patriarchal values.

The present research particularly explores how these ideographs were instrumental in the killing of women who became victims "both of 'other' male predators and of their own menfolk who killed them in order to save family and community 'honour'" (Talbot & Singh, 2009, p. 17). An example of this

would be the ideograph of honour, which was inextricably tied to female virginity and purity. The stories often painted women as martyrs and heroines who were sacrificing themselves for a greater purpose. This research, however, challenges the idealized interpretations that mask women's terror, helplessness, and agony. The paper supports its standpoint through various tools: reviews, research papers, newsletters, internet journals. Furthermore, primary and secondary sources have been employed in order to make it more argumentative and concrete.

Discussion and Analysis

The 1947 Partition of India and Pakistan was more than simply a division of land: it was a mass movement of people, of disorder, and general violence the likes of which the nation had ever experienced. This watershed event greatly affected women, and in the narratives of loss and survival they emerge as iconic symbols of communal honour, sacrifice, and martyrdom. Through the study of four selected texts: *Tamas* by Bhisham Sahni, *What the Body Remembers* by Shauna Singh Baldwin, *The Other Side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia, and *Borders & Boundaries* by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, this paper aims to delineate the role of ideography in Partition narratives. By closely reading these texts, the analysis attempts to reveal the underlying threads of fear, honour, helplessness and gendered identities within the context of communal catastrophes.

a. Honour and Shame in *Tamas*

In *Tamas*, Bhisham Sahni (2016) explores the psychological and emotional impact of Partition on people, especially women. The story unravels communal violence, showing how abstract constructs of honour and shame infiltrate private spaces. The most striking feature of *Tamas* is the depiction of women as objects of honour whose experiences are largely filtered through the communal identity. The idea of honour is deeply ingrained in the women who jump into the well. In the context of the Partition, women were often seen as bearers of their community's honour. This is signified by their combined shout: "I too shall go where my lion-brother has gone!" (Sahni, 2016, p. 225). It suggests that these women's desperate acts are not just a means of escape but are also imbued with a sense of duty, to follow their male relatives

even in death, protecting the community's honour by denying the enemy any form of victory. This cultural construct forces them to choose death over the perceived dishonour of being violated or captured by the opposing community.

The depiction of women resorting to the most extreme measures is cloaked in a heroic narrative, as though sacrificing oneself to avoid capture is noble and brave rather than a tragic consequence of cultural expectations. When Jasbir Kaur decided to lead the women in jumping into the well, "she was standing right under the light in the middle of the hall, and her face glowed as though with celestial light" (p. 225). The association of her resolution to die with the heavenly light suggests that the decision was taken not just by this woman but by some divine power. This connection of heroism with spiritual authority gives further rise to the patriarchal ideographs and ideology which idealize women suffering because "ideology in practice is a political language, preserved in rhetorical documents, with the capacity to dictate decision and control public belief and behavior" (McGee, 1980, p.5). It is implied here that these women got the strength to end their lives from a divine source. The whole tragedy of these women ending their lives had a fairy tale like aura in the novel.

Martyrdom is another strong ideograph found in the text. The tragic deaths of women are styled as noble sacrifices for the greater good of their religion and family, making them acts of faith and community. The narrative that follows portrays Jasbir Kaur as both martyr and saint as "she only uttered *Wahe Guru* and took the jump" (p. 226); her act becomes a sacrifice to her faith, propelling it to the status of spiritual martyrdom. It provides an outlet; a veil over the crushing and pointless despair of the condition of women in society, a facade of worship as they turn their suffering into divine martyrdom. The text illuminates these ideographs by going deeper into how they erase the individual identity of these women. What looks like voluntary sacrifice by women actually reveals lack of agency and the right to choose. Phrases like "frenzied voices" (p. 225) and "heart-rending cries" (p. 226) give witness to the psychological trauma and panic of the women, lost under thick veils of hurt, honour and patriotism. "Some of them had their children with them. Two or three women had little babies in their arms, while some, holding their children by their hands, were

pulling them along” (p. 225). It simply emphasizes the despair that they had no future and signifies a much deeper hopelessness and desperation than martyrdom. Tamas stands testament to the refusal of the ideographs of honour, heroism and martyrdom of the partition to give way to the tangible inner and outer experiences of women. Although these constructs give a story of women being noble martyrs, they do not deal with the extreme oppression, fear and lack of autonomy that characterize their real experiences.

b. Trauma and Identity in What the Body Remembers

What the Body Remembers by Shauna Singh Baldwin (2015) provides a scathing rebuttal of the familiar honour, heroism, and martyrdom ideographs of Partition, especially by portraying the realities that women face in a society which is dominated by patriarchal narratives. As Baldwin (2015) reveals through Kusum and others; the overt fears, traumas, and vulnerabilities often hidden beneath those dominant narratives are real, yet rarely made apparent. It mentions a gruesome portrayal of Kusum's corpse which is dismembered in a bloody dissection style, and the message is straightforward; this is an assault on the womb, an assault on the self and the womb acts as a carnal compass on which public morality is built, it is also an attack on her identity, and this impacts the whole community. The scattered limbs and missing uterus send a powerful threat of obliteration: “We will stamp your kind, your very species from existence” (Baldwin, 2015, p. 501). These acts are described as a war strategy, to literally break the individual and family line, and instrumentalize women's bodies to violently hold sway over communal identity.

Patriarchal ideologies, in particular the idea of izzat or honour, enable this atrocity of female infanticide. Izzat is an integral part of the value system of the culture and the practice of Indian subcontinent, and in different Partition texts the authors illustrate the ways in which rules of izzat override safety and individual identity. In What the Body Remembers, the bodies of women become tools for maintaining family and community honour. Portrayed as a death in the name of izzat of her quom, Kusum becomes a noble martyr - a choice (as if smeared in her blood) between ‘honour’ and ‘shame’. Baldwin affirms Kusum's choice, or rather, the absence of choice, to

die not as a free individual, but as someone who is bound by the narratives of society: “those words drowned before they took shape or sound, in the blood she bore within. Blood of the quom” (p. 512). The story also reveals the heavy load of ‘responsibility’ that both men and women carry, which is derived from a patriarchal obligation to safeguard and protect honour at all costs. For men, it becomes a duty—to protect women’s bodies from being violated and ‘polluted’ by other religious identities, an indication of fear rather than bravery. Despite Kusum’s brave struggle, her father-in-law believes he is justified in extinguishing her life because of the potential risk “that some Muslim might put his hands upon her” (p. 510), again reinforcing the idea that ‘male protectiveness’ is really just a guise for the urge to control women.

In contrast, women’s burden is that they endure in silence and agree to do what is required of them, sometimes paying with their very lives. By highlighting this narrative, Baldwin challenges the mythologizing tendency that women do something morally beautiful when they sacrifice their lives for their nation. This association of death with aesthetics is ironic. She argues that there are desperate and immanent psychological processes which promote martyrdom into the psyche of women so that women associate death with their duty, a status of being “heroes.” The notion that how the ideals of sacrifice are ingrained in women is illustrated by the fact that the “old women were giving opium to the younger women, first burying their gold jewellery beneath the Guru, preparing them for martyrdom” (p. 508). As if through a spectral whisper, Baldwin illuminates, “sometimes we choose to die because it is the only way to be both heard and seen” (p. 516), suggesting that for many women, dying is the ultimate freedom they can exercise against society’s attempt to deafen them into silence. Choosing death here highlights the earth-shattering alienation and traumatization of women, where death is an assertion of identity over honour codes, an act of protest and demand for recognition of one’s being over ideals.

Overall, What the Body Remembers deconstructs the notions of what a hero or martyr is, especially the notion that the oppressive moments of the Partition were heroic moments for female figures. In contrast to what the traditional narrative of the Partition tends to describe, these soldier-mothers experienced trauma in the same manner that all women had during

that period. In this respect, Baldwin (2015) encourages readers to move past the idealized narratives of sacrifice and honour and documents the systemic oppression and suffering those women experienced and continue to experience under patriarchal regimes. By revealing these truths, the novel asks the readers to reconsider history and identity, and to reflect on the ways in which people narrate the stories of women and their historical roles.

c. Voices of the Silenced in The Other Side of Silence

The *Other Side of Silence* by Urvashi Butalia reorients the perception of Partition through not focusing on the events surrounding this historical phenomenon but on its human aspect, particularly its females through the stories of women whose voices are often absent or too simplified in mainstream narratives. The current study attempts a deconstruction of the heroic narratives that women have been told to embrace in order to depreciate their own fear and trauma. Through a careful analysis of the discourses focused on the ideographs of ‘honour,’ ‘heroism’ and ‘martyrdom,’ the attempt is made to subvert the hegemonic paradigms and foreground the suffering of women in the narratives of Partition.

The ideograph of ‘honour’ has been co-opted over the centuries to promote patriarchal values at the cost of women and their autonomy. Women in Partition historiography were often depicted as vessels of family and community honour. But this text counters this conventional norm by drawing attention to the destructive domestic violence that made these women—like those in Damyanti Sahgal’s account—into victims whose lives were no longer respected as they were upended and silenced by a sexualized violence and trauma. In Sahgal’s account we see how “she even rode on horses” (Butalia, 2000, p. 120) and cried out: “Who has come to take me?” (p. 122). Furthermore, the women’s unwillingness to go back to their lives, emphasized in the text, adds complexity to the traditional rescue narrative. They knew that if they were rescued and went back to their towns, they would not be accepted by society. As one woman movingly put it, “What is left in me now of religion or chastity?” (p. 117). The surprise at this lack of moral obligation expresses disillusionment with the very idea of ‘honour’, that it restores and

heals and instead highlights the trauma and helplessness these women experienced.

Women like Damyanti Sahgal were seemingly oblivious to the main burdens of these glorified narratives; their ideal stories of courage and success provided artificial beauty to the plight they experienced, sidelining the frightening mundaneness of their lives. While Sahgal’s dangerous and brave encounters garner a kind of heroism, they scrub away the constant anxiety and societal pressure she faced. She risked her life in some very heroic ways, but her struggle with fear is also apparent in the text, with mentions of “dangerous and unsafe terrain” (p. 121) and “I was upset—I had risked my own life” (p. 121). Likewise, the story of Zainab and Buta Singh does not lend itself to this simple categorization of heroism. Buta Singh’s chaste love and subsequent suicide is considered a sentimentally acceptable tragedy, an ideal sacrifice. However, Zainab was also a victim of circumstance when she rejected to go back with Buta Singh as she was forced to say: “I am a married woman. Now I have nothing to do with this man” (p. 103). The traditional narrative only considers Buta Singh as a hero but ignores Zainab’s suffering as she was also a victim, where her voice was hushed by the masculine voices of her family, and she was expected to reject Buta Singh as an act of ‘honour’. This honour, however, wrought a great tragedy and brought emotional distress and pain to both Buta Singh and Zainab.

Whereas Partition’s violence is often cloaked in martyr’s colors that eulogize the martyr, this kind of glorification can obscure humanistic ideals, and the individual suffering of the people involved. Women like Kaushalya, Satya and others show how the martyrdom of men is a choice, but women, on the other hand, do not have that freedom and they are expected to follow societal norms and customs which have their roots in patriarchal values. Damyanti Sahgal’s immediate reaction about Satya highlights this point: “I learnt about Satya, that she was with dacoits and thieves and that she had become one better than them” (p. 120). Sahgal especially felt this because she witnessed that in the context of both war and peace, the societal expectation forced women into the binaries of protector or protected, objects of sacrifice or national duty, rather than simply people with personal and remarkable pains and desires. The text brings to light these underlying tensions, a glimpse into a world where women, ordered to

perform certain duties, had to deal with the ghosts of deferred love, disrupted houses, and abandoned lives.

The *Other Side of Silence* tactfully gives expression to the suppressed voices and layered experiences of women during the Partition. Through her exploration of the ideographs of ‘honour’, ‘heroism’, and ‘martyrdom’, Butalia subverts conventional historical narratives and counterbalances the misplaced focus on honour by accentuating its underlying emotions, and offering voice to the hidden stories of fear, shame, helplessness, and exploitation written on and in women's bodies. It goes beyond the external experience of women and into their internal torments, by mentioning the “powerful fire raging in their hearts” (p. 122) and emphasizing their silent struggle. It argues that instead of focusing on a wider understanding of the past, the individual suffering of women should be more comprehensively embraced so that the voices of silenced women are heard. Beyond the mythologized narrative of the Partition, which is fueled by patriarchal ideographs, real human suffering, particularly of women, is lived and experienced.

d. Reassessing the Glorified Narratives of Women's Suffering in Borders & Boundaries

In *Borders & Boundaries*, Menon and Bhasin deconstruct the fragmented histories centered on the 1947 Partition of India, providing an unflinching counter-narrative to the male-centered ideographs of ‘honour,’ ‘heroism,’ and ‘martyrdom’ that have historically obscured the realities of women's trauma. It is through the close analysis of these counter-narratives that the silenced realities of shock, panic, and susceptibility of women will be revealed.

The portrayal of women’s so-called sacrifices and the idea to get these sacrifices valorized is maintained by a society which is dominated by patriarchy, and it appears to be an endless cycle. The idea of voluntary sacrifice, Menon and Bhasin contend, is a distortion of reality; women had little alternative to acquiescing to death in order to maintain patriarchal and communal honour. As Menon and Bhasin write, “there was one village, Makhtampura, where all night they plundered and raped” (Menon & Bhasin, 1998, p. 32). Women have suffered brutalities of every kind. However, this popular narrative often overlooks the fact these so-called heroic acts were

born out of coercion and ignore the profound terror and lack of agency women experienced. Also, the exploration of the role that men play in deciding the fate of women elucidates the story of heroism. The text explains how families chose death for their women instead of abduction, which was considered a big disgrace. “One had been raped by ten or more men—her father burnt her, refused to take her back” (p. 32) because social honour was more important than the lives of women, where every male was compelled to defend the honour of his community in general and family in particular. Menon and Bhasin (1998) try to break the myth of glorifying these actions as “errors arise when one conceives "myth" and "ideology" to be contraries” (McGee, 1980, p.3), and instead highlight the harrowing realities of coercion and force.

By doing so, the authors draw attention to the gendered nature of Partition violence and how the ideological constructs of ‘honour’ and ‘martyrdom’ function to sustain a violent and hegemonic patriarchal ideology. Women were represented not solely as victims but also as icons of religious and communal identity. It values the pride of communities above the lives of women—saving pride is placed over saving lives as “in the villages of Head Junu, Hindus threw their young daughters into wells, dug trenches and buried them alive” (p. 32) saving the pride of the community. Menon and Bhasin (1998) also explore the lasting psychological scars on women who lived through these types of situations. The comment of Taran highlights this reality as she says: “I loved life, was in love with it. And I saw death staring me in the face” (p. 47). It provides an unfiltered view into the trauma that entrenched this woman's psyche. Menon and Bhasin (1998) decenter romanticized narratives of female sacrifice, positioning these voices in such a way that they highlight the weakness of the dominant patriarchal narrative that primarily hides the truth of female oppression. These voices that challenge the ideographs of patriarchy often expose the death-and-sacrifice images that patriarchal history so dearly loves.

Menon and Bhasin (1998) also critically examine the glorification of the ideograph of martyrdom and focus on the lived experiences of women during Partition. They write, “the violence was, by most reckonings, organized and systematic” (p. 35), alluding to the patriarchal control that expands

beyond the borders and boundaries of women's bodies and stories. In doing so, they offer a vital feminist perspective on contemporary resistance by women who are still being influenced by political concepts and narratives that value privileged masculine orientation over women's true experiences. However, a study of patriarchal ideographs encourages scholars to revisit the long-held conceptions of women's honour, heroism, and martyrdom through a frame of skepticism and trauma. *Borders & Boundaries* stands as a politically forceful invitation to rethink patriarchal ideographs underpinning historical accounts—ideographs that have often hidden the realities of women who suffered during the Partition. Peeling off the layers of honour and martyrdom, Menon and Bhasin (1998) offer an incisive and timely critique of the need for honouring those who struggle for freedom — an honour that is based on hearing the truth about women's suffering in order to arrive at an unclouded and correct version of history.

Conclusion

The narratives of *Tamas*, *The Other Side of Silence*, *Borders & Boundaries*, and *What the Body Remembers*, describe experiences of real suffering of women during the Partition of Indian subcontinent. Through these texts, it is critically analyzed how the ideographs of honour, heroism and martyrdom motivated women in making sacrifices for family and community. They were made to believe that their suffering which comes as a result of fighting for honour and defeating shame is noble regardless of how these women actually felt. An analysis of these stories reveals that the traditional narratives that valorize the toil of women and glorify their suffering and sacrifice, fail to realize the fact that women often had little to no agency over the events of the time for it was trauma that drove their actions rather than liberty and freedom.

This research makes it evident that ideographs such as honour and heroism did not empower women's voices, but instead added to their oppression and silenced their voices. In *Tamas*, for instance, the romanticized images of martyrdom often hide the exceptionally oppressive and violent environment women lived through. The so-called 'choices' of the women in *What the Body Remembers*, were the product of a patriarchal society which actually gave these women little to no choice. The discourse on

heroism, highlighted in *The Other Side of Silence* and *Borders & Boundaries*, communicates to the readers that the patriarchal ideographs represent heroism in such a way that it masks the everyday pain of women who live and perform roles written for them by a male-dominated society. An analysis of these ideographs and exposing their role in constructing the glorified narratives of women's suffering is the first step to understanding the tragic stories of women during the Partition. The exposition of these narratives and ideographs pays tribute to the women of Partition and leads to a more just and inclusive history.

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