

Honour And Ownership Of Women: Shauna Singh Baldwin's What The Body Remembers

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Abstract-

A woman's life in the Indian subcontinent is inextricably linked to her submission, or else, at times, resistance to the idea of her being of lower status in society. Contained within the body yet having no authority over herself or her body, she leads a marginalized, exploited, and silenced life, often becoming a victim of sexual violence even within the home. While women's oppression may be a continuous reality across generations, the consequences of ideas of ownership and honour located in the female body were experienced beyond imagination during the 1947 partition of India. Baldwin's novel *What the Body Remembers* (1999) offers a context to explore and comprehend how women's selves are conditioned to accept and even perpetuate the culture of discrimination and marginalization of women. The paper explores how the patriarchal structures governing gendered identities and relations affected, contributed to, and led to unspeakable acts of violence during the partition. The paper also examines how Baldwin recreates the social and cultural milieu of the times to reveal expectations from women to conform to existing roles and selves within society.

Keywords: Gender relations, Identity, Partition, Patriarchy, Women's bodies.

Introduction

The mere mentioning of 1947 partition of India brings to mind a saga of unspeakable suffering endured by common people caught in the forcible movement across borders. As Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims unwillingly began fleeing to their respective sides of the border, they were subjected to and became the perpetrators of worst kind of communal violence against one another. Women became the primary victims of this madness both at the hands of men of their community and of the other. Since as per the cultural practice, women's bodies have been the primary sites of patriarchal discourse, carrier of family honour, triumph as well as defeat. The accounts of terrible acts of violence against Hindu, Sikh and Muslim women have remained suppressed for many years. People have hardly talked about, discussed, or narrated the horrible incidents. More importantly, there is hardly any discussion around the prevailing cultural conditions governing the communities which allowed the violence against, and oppression of women to happen while the country was passing through a politically and religiously charged moment in history. Hence while renowned writers such as Sadat Hassan Manto, Amrita Pritam, Bhisham Sahni, Khushwant Singh, and scores of others, lamented the total breakdown of social and cultural values, their literary narratives did not look within the cultural practices to explore the reasons of such deplorable incidents. Kavita Daiya in *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender, and National Culture in Postcolonial India* (2008), aptly points out that the oppression of women, accompanied by brutal violence, has not received adequate attention since, "in a political discourse in which women are symbols of community, the violence against women within communities never became a politicized issue." (Daiya, 2008, p. 80) It was only much later, in 1998, with the publication of oral histories; Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence*, and Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's *Borders and Boundaries*, the silence around the gendered violence before and during the 1947 riots began to be broken resulting in a blurring of the boundaries between the literary and the real-world discourses, hence bringing the matter into wider attention and scrutiny. Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* (1999) examines the social and cultural practices particularly of patriarchal dominance.

Methodology

According to Abeda Sultana, patriarchy refers to “the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general.” (Sultana, 2012, p. 3) In a patriarchal culture and society like India, women's oppression stems from their association with their physical bodies. The rights to emotional, mental, psychological, and physical spaces are frequently denied to women as Kanchan Mathur aptly observes, “Women live in constant threat of violence; are discriminated against and exploited, are denied the right to spatial mobility, right to make informed choices over their bodies and sexuality.” (Mathur, 2008, p. 54) The fact that female body is constantly under pressure to conform and mould into prescribed social and cultural roles brings into question the spaces that need to be protected as well as the rights that must be asserted in order to maintain women's body integrity. Also, to dispel the myth that men are superior and women inferior and to put a stop to the exploitation of women, feminism attempts to promote societal acceptability and legitimate protection to them. It aims to promote women's equality and overall development. It seeks gender equality in all aspects of life.

The present paper is an attempt to examine Shauna Singh Baldwin's novel *What the Body Remembers* from the viewpoint of patriarchal dominance. This study aims to illustrate the status and position of women in British India. It also highlights society's sociocultural mindset and exposes patriarchal domination, struggles, and spaces that Indian women have negotiated in their quest for empowerment.

Literature Review

Several research studies are available on the novel *What the Body Remembers* which has been taken up for the present study in order to examine the viability of the present article. The survey shows that there have been essays and articles written in various journals. Deepti Misri's *The Violence of Memory: Renarrating Partition Violence in Shauna Singh Baldwin's What the Body Remembers* (2011) explores how the novel builds on partition feminist historiography in order to exhume and retell the story of family violence against women during India's partition, intended to “save their honor” from rioting mobs. Similarly, Manobi Bose Tagore and Shibani Banerjee's *Postmodern Feminism: The Emerging Role of New Woman with Special Reference to Shauna Singh Baldwin's What the Body Remembers* (2011), also presents an insight into the understanding of rebellion by emphasizing both on the public image of woman as an individual and as a member of society. *Objectification of Women and Violence in What the Body Remembers* (2016) by L M Grosu-Rădulescu examines the extreme commodification of women, whose bodies become sites for men's competition for respect and territory.

Likewise, Olivier Harenda in “*Git-mit, Git-mit Talk*”: *A Woman's Perspective on the Partition of India in Shauna Singh Baldwin's What the Body Remembers* (2017) focuses on the representation of the partition event while analyzing the partition from a woman's perspective. *Women, violence, and martyrdom in Shauna Singh Baldwin's Partition Fiction* (2018) by D Mookerjee-Leonard addresses how many women suffer loss of home during partition and independence turned out to be tale of terror for them. Inter-communal riots led to their loss of control over their bodies, and, eventually, their loss of faith due to betrayal by their relatives. Shuby Abidi's *Rewriting Partition: Gender, Memory and Trauma in Shauna Singh Baldwin's What the Body Remembers* (2023) also examines the partition of India through Vazira Zamindar's term ‘Long Partition’ to explain the lasting impression of this devastating event on generations and that will keep on influencing the posterity. The overall analysis of the research studies illustrate how Baldwin expresses her views on women and political issues during the partition of British India in 1947 through the language and narrative of her book *What the Body Remembers*. As the novel has been studied from various perspectives, the current study aims to highlight that aspect which has not been studied yet. It dramatizes the situation of Indian women who are under patriarchal domination and marginalized due to their bodies giving a realistic representation of the status of women. Through various female characters in the novel, the present paper represents the losses, compromises, and inherent consequences that women face strangled between cultures, religions, and ideologies.

Baldwin's *What The Body Remembers*

Baldwin is deserving and sympathetic author who presents the viewpoint of a struggling woman. Talking about her life span, she is an internationally renowned Indian diaspora novelist who was born in Montreal in 1962. Baldwin's works include novels, stories, and non-fiction writings. She has written *A Foreign Visitor's Survival Guide to America* (1992), *English Lessons and Other Stories* (1996), *What the Body Remembers* (2001), *The Tiger Claw* (2004), *We Are Not in Pakistan* (2007), *The Selector of Souls* (2012) and *Reluctant Rebellions* (2016).

Baldwin in her novel *What the Body Remembers* focuses on the women's condition in Indian society during the colonial and partition period. The narrative is set in a small village in the 1937 Punjab region of northwestern India, a region that got divided into India and Pakistan during the 1947 partition. It is the story of Oxford-educated Sardarji and his two wives

during the final days of British colonization prior to the partition of the subcontinent. Through their portrayal Baldwin points out the consequences of patriarchal structures governing a society whereby a woman exists mainly as a belonging of her father or husband. Her ownership as body indicates a self-implied 'power' of the male head of the family. As such her fragile frame is expected to carry the heavy burden of family, and even community's honour and pride is on her shoulder. Baldwin narrates Roop's story of being in a polygamous marriage with a Sikh Engineer, Sardarji to portray the deeply embedded patriarchal norms in society.

Baldwin situates the tale during a time when the political unrest was growing stronger, so much so that it had intruded in the lives of ordinary people, making them more and more anxious to guard the conservative cultural boundaries. The brunt of the political happenings outside was especially borne by the women living within the homes. The impulse to guard their women's bodies could not be compromised since the women were also the carrier of family's and community's honour. As Baldwin portrays in the novel, women are there to serve their men in every possible way along with being the provider of children, thus furthering family's lineage. This becomes clear with the entry into Sardarji's household of his second wife, Roop, with a body ready to procreate. That further becomes the cause of the downfall of his first wife Satya who is 'barren,' unable to bear a child. Women's bodies thus, as Baldwin portrays, are highly objectified and become the instrument for men to use either for their own or for the community's interest. In the novel, the decision of marrying a second time, to a woman (Roop) much younger than himself, amply demonstrates the subjugated status of women. Sardarji does not even inform his first wife (Satya), about his marrying again. Thus, Baldwin superbly brings to life women who were already enduring the patriarchal oppression before facing the communal violence during the 1947 riots.

Textual Analysis and Discussion

What the Body Remembers is a powerful representation of the patriarchal society governed by its dual-system. From the very beginning, the primary focus of the novel is on women's suffering at the behest of patriarchy which rules, governs and defines them. Abeda Sultana (2012) quotes Kamla Bhasin's explanation of patriarchy that "refer to male domination, to the power relationships by which men dominate women, and to characterize a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways" (Sultana, 2012, p. 2). Thus, women are subdued in every way in their life. Most of these ways are embedded in ordinary language and daily-lives, and control self and society in multiple multi-layered, but largely in unconscious ways. Through the female characters, such as Roop's mother, Gujri (the family servant), Roop, Lajo Bhua, Satya, and Kusum, the writer depicts the lives of women who are at the mercy of men within and outside the family. Kanchan Mathur in "Body as Space, Body as Site: Bodily Integrity and Women's Empowerment in India," aptly points out that a girl child right from childhood is made to learn or follow certain social norms that are deeply ingrained in the patriarchal society. (Mathur, 2008, p. 55) Roop in the novel learns the lesson at an early age when in the opening scene she discovers that foods such as "egg-bhurji" (scrambled eggs) and "chicken" are for her older brother Jeevan but not for herself or for Madani, her older sister. Both have to be satisfied with modest "daal" (lentils) and "savayan" (sweet milk-boiled noodles). Even the family servant, Gujri admonishes her for wanting to eat those. Gujri exclaims, "Ay, Roop -bi! No eggs for you- the egg-bhurji is for Jeevan." (Baldwin, 2001, p. 20) At this moment, Roop does not react or resist because she accepts her lot. Now she "is old enough, she understands-she doesn't need the egg-bhurji; he does. He is going to join the army." (p. 20) Hence, women's labour is not worthy enough to entitle care or nutrition.

Throughout the novel, female characters act within the patriarchal constraints that monitor, shape, and describe them. The societal norms that only men could accompany the deceased at the burial site become a course of life for Roop. Roop's mother dies during childbirth trying to deliver another child. Roop is unable to recover herself from the traumatic loss of her mother. She wishes to say her final farewell to her mother and joins other men at the crematorium to participate in the final rites. At this, Bachan Singh refuses to let her accompany the mourners because he does not believe that the place is appropriate for women to go to. So, he directs Roop to "Go back. Go home." "This is men's work-not for you." (Baldwin, 2001, p. 35) Roop continues to be haunted by memories of her mother because she was unable to say her last goodbye. Similarly, women who become the primary target of constant patriarchal domination in the family later become the active agents of patriarchal controls. Gujri incorporates the patriarchal values considered 'proper' for a woman when she guides Roop to stay calm or else, be ready to face the horrible consequences. Roop has to face the disastrous result when she returns to Bachan Singh after throwing away her chunni in the campfire. Bachan Singh rebukes Roop and blames Revati Bhua for not teaching her the significance of chunni. Bachan Singh says, "it is Revati Bhua's fault, she did not look after Roop "like a mother," teach her the great importance of her chunni, her modesty, . . . and the importance of obedience 'for her own good'." (p. 75) Lajo Bhua also embodies patriarchy within Roop by teaching her the lesson to say only "hanji" not "nahinji" to please the elders. She says, ". . . You want to make a good marriage; you must be more graceful, more pleasing to your elders. I want to hear only 'achchaji,' 'hanji', and 'yes-ji' from you. Never 'nahinji' or 'no-ji'." (p. 76) Thus, from the very beginning girls are taught to endure suppression.

As Baldwin portrays, the power of patriarchy exists everywhere in the novel and women don't have the right to oppose it. Bachan Singh, a middle-class man with a traditional religious attitude, controls Roop's life. Roop was unable to read

anything other than a Punjabi writing or Sikh history because Bachan Singh places Sikh history at high value; more than anything else. She can only be admitted to the Bhai Takht Singh's school "with walls twelve feet high" (Baldwin, 2001, p. 79) so that she remains protected from the outside world and its impending communal outrage. She must not go outside the boundaries of Pari Darwaza. She gets to learn "achaji" and be obedient to earn herself the love of her in-laws. She is not supposed to talk to any man other than a relative. Roop at a point in the novel observes that:

Hai! To be married and freed of Papaji's endless restrictions and policing! It seems Kusum has been brought as Jeevan's wife just to be Roop's kotwal, or if not her gaoler, then at least her chaperone. Revati Bua is no better - if Roop climbs to the terrace, Revati Bua puffs her way up the narrow staircase behind her. Roop longs to ride Nirvair as she has each summer, the mare's still-willing old hooves throwing sand in the eyes of the sun, but Papaji has decreed Roop can no longer ride, even chaperoned by Jeevan, for fear she will have no blood on the sheets when she marries. (Baldwin, 2001, p. 104)

Therefore, a girl, whether married or unmarried is made to follow certain restrictions and norms of behaviour.

The novel also depicts the power of patriarchy through Sardarji's character when he decides, and orders Roop to give away her first child to Satya. The fear of being sent back to Bachan Singh for disobedience, and causing hurt to her father's 'izzat,' makes Roop silently follow Sardarji's order and hand over her child to Satya. It is a trial by fire for Roop, just as it was for Sita. "She does not join them at the table for the midday meal. She goes inside to lie in her darkened room and wait for Sardarji's further will. There is no need for decision or uncertainty; she has been good as Sita for her lord." (Baldwin, 2001, p. 83) Further, the writer sheds light on the life Roop leads, "When she stands in the smallest, a room so small . . . and watch the world beyond its threshold, she is Sita in her man-inscribed circle. . . . She stands there for hours, silent, diffused into the cold dense air like a coin palmed by a magician's nimble fingers . . ." (p. 191). Here Baldwin makes a comparison between Roop and a coin that is in the complete control of a magician to show how men have complete control over women. By remembering the lesson of "give no trouble" by her father, Roop reluctantly accepts the new ways of life in her husband's house where she is now ruled by Sardarji who has complete control over her. "Now Sardarji's every moment has consequence, every shift in glance, every twitch of a muscle has meaning beyond meaning. . . . He is cause and she effect. . . . She is a mass of taut strings, awaiting the sweep of his bow." (p. 190) Thus, a man becomes a symbol of power whereas a woman merely has to obey him.

The societal codes include bodily or behavioural codes that exist in the culture, and in turn, affect the body. It is a systemic violence embedded in the patriarchy that a girl suffers right from childhood even though it cannot be seen yet it is acutely felt. Pinky Sharma in her critical essay "Metaphorising the Body in Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers*," quotes Susan Bordo that "body is the metaphor of culture". (Sharma, 2016, p. 108) It indicates that the body becomes a concrete medium through which culture inscribes and reinforces its norms. As such, the rules of femininity come to be transmitted through the visual images and behavioural presentations which Bordo calls "bodily discourse". (p. 108) Hence it is always already prescribed how women should dress, move, express, talk, and behave. In the novel, these unconventional patriarchal elements also shape Roop's identity through the dressing and table lessons that are taught to her in the house of Sardarji. The transition phase in Roop's dressing manner shows her discard to her simple salwar kameez and adopt a sari instead. Though from a middle-class family but now married to the landowner Sardarji, she has to adopt the modern lifestyle and transform her identity accordingly. As Sardarji declares that Roop, ". . . will be at his side and should wear a sari like the wives of other civil servants." (Baldwin, 2001, p. 301) Roop thus comes to experience fashion personally as well as publicly. She stops wearing a bindi on her forehead or the Mangla-sutra pendant as these are Hindu customs. Mani Mai teaches Roop to tuck the sari around her waist and leave aside her preferred salwar kameez. She must adorn herself with matching jewelry bought by Sardarji so that she can belong in the social gatherings of upper-class men and women. Roop further learns table manners from Atma Singh, the cook in Sardarji's house because having food at the dining table was not a part of Roop's cultural life at her paternal house. But now being Sardarji's wife it is required for her to follow Atma Singh's commanding words:

Careful not to touch her, Atma Singh also called her Choti-Sardarni as he demonstrated the angle of incline by which her head should indicate to a bearer that he must remove her plate. He moved hollow-chested at her elbow, with the silver tray held to her left to serve, removed from her right. Then he held a silver fork and demonstrated how it must stab the roundness of peas, accurately, elegantly. "Fork in left, knife in right." . . . Close your mouth, Choti-Sardarniji. Sit straight. Cover your head. (Baldwin, 2001, p. 154)

Roop thus undergoes a complete transformation at the instructions of her husband. Refusing or resisting options are simply not available to her, nor does it occur to her to try.

Though imposing traditional and communal codes of behaviour on the women, men do have a yearning to be like the governing masters of the land. While on the one hand, a woman is not supposed to have an opinion let alone dare to express it, she is supposed to master a foreign language so that her man may maintain his prestige in the high society. Language discourse thus becomes another discursive element within the patriarchal system that contributes to women's subjugation. Sardarji feels the need that Roop and the children should learn the language of the masters. For this, he

appoints Mrs. Barlow as the English teacher to assist Roop and the children. However, it is difficult for Roop to learn the new language as Baldwin represents in the novel:

Though she sits with her good ear turned towards him always, it is so difficult to remember the things he wants her to remember. New names of things—there are so many more things around her now, each with its own special purpose. New names of people—all the English names of men in his department. New names of places—how far she is from Papaji's home. (Baldwin, 2001, p. 189)

The English lessons imposed on Roop are hard for her to comprehend. Steeped in her Punjabi mother tongue, she is only able to learn and mutter phrases such as "How do you do?" and "Delighted to meet you," (p. 373) or "All very well" (p. 343), and words such as "yes" or "no" (p. 264). This much however is sufficient for Sardarji to have her accompany him to parties or gatherings.

Motherhood, often considered the only purpose of a woman's existence, is portrayed as another tool of oppression in the novel. Always regarded as "the biological destiny, and the greatest ambition of a woman . . . Indian woman's identity and her well-being depends on her producing a child, especially a male child." (Roy, 2007, p. 159) In the novel, women are reminded that having children (meaning sons) is "what women are for" (Baldwin, 2001, p. 33). The writer further compares woman with the earth through Bebeji's proclamation: "A woman is merely cracked open for seeding like the earth before the force of the plough. If she is fertile, good for the farmer, if not, bad for her" (p. 8). According to Gayatri Spivak, women are "metonymized as nothing but the birth canal." (Spivak, 2009, p. 80) The death of Roop's mother is the result of these rigorous patriarchal norms, as she attempts to deliver another child. Lajo Bua (Roop's paternal aunt) also becomes a target of her husband's wish for a son. When she fails to deliver a son, her husband scolds her saying, "Useless woman, I have paid two dowries for marrying you, no sons you brought me." (Baldwin, 2001, p. 77) Satya (Sardarji's wife) too suffers domestic violence and becomes a victim of polygamy as she could not deliver a child that further forces her to commit suicide.

Baldwin's novel further raises the issue of gender discrimination through the exercise of patriarchy at the birth of a girl and a boy child named Pavan and Timcu, respectively. For Roop's daughter Pavan's naming ceremony, it remains a quiet affair and no function is planned for the occasion. Sardar Kushal Singh has given the name reciting from the Holy Guru Granth Sahib. When Roop's son Timcu is to be named, a grand event is organized with a lot many guests, and the celebrations go on for a month. There is picnicking and feasts going on at the canal colony, with people singing qawwalis and reciting poetry. (Baldwin, 2001, p. 226) The birth of a boy is an occasion for great celebration since he signifies ancestry. Even as Sardarji's long term desire for a baby boy is fulfilled, and guests are entertained at the naming ceremony, the mother, Roop is not permitted to join the guests. At Sardarji's orders, she gives away her son to Satya, suppressing her own feelings. In fact, Roop is more worried about "[I]f something is wrong with Timcu, Sardarji will be very angry indeed. And then he will shout at her. She hears his roar in her ear right now, . . . a roar so loud everyone will hear her shame." (p. 229) Roop realizes how alone and abandoned she is with no body, not even her father there to watch over her; after all she is his daughter and not his son:

And Roop understands now, like simmer coming to boil: Papaji will not protect her. His duty to Roop ended the day of her marriage, but his duty to Jeevan lasts to the day his body follows Mama's to cremation and beyond. Jeevan's inheritance is far, far more important to Papaji than Roop's life or children. And for that he stands within a circle inscribed by Sardarji. (Baldwin, 2001, p. 262)

Hence, a woman's individuality receives no support from any side, neither from her parents nor her husband.

Apart from Roop, other women in the novel too are affected by the male-dominated society. Gujri, a child widow lives as a household helper in Bachan Singh's house. Though she belongs to a lower caste, she plays a big role in Roop's life. She cooks with the same taste as Roop's mother. She had come into Bachan Singh's family along with Roop's mother at the time of marriage as a gift. Widowed at the age of seven, she was declared unlucky by all the people as Baldwin illustrates in the novel when she states that, "Widowed at Roop's age, just seven, Gujri says her whole village thought her unlucky after her husband died . . . elders advised she should not marry again lest she kill another husband." (Baldwin, 2001, p. 21) So, Gujri like the other women in the novel whose fates are decided by men becomes a victim of patriarchy. Likewise, Lajo Bhua spends her life at the mercy of her husband. She has learned throughout her life that a woman does not have the right to be angry. Even when her husband screams at her failure and his misfortune, she still advocates to the girls Roop and Madani with wet eyes, "Never feel angry, never, never. No matter what happens, or what your husband says, never feel angry. You might be hurt, but never ever feel angry." (p. 77) This supports the idea how women become agents of patriarchy even though they themselves suffer from its consequences considerably.

The patriarchal violence inflicted on women during the 1947 partition is also re-membered in the last section of the novel. The story of Roop's sister-in-law Kusum in the novel is an instance to understand the magnitude of violence committed against the female bodies. Bachan Singh, a refugee in Delhi after the riots, recalls how he saved the family's honour by killing his own daughter-in-law Kusum. He tells Roop the whole incident when partition violence started in Pari Darwaza, Muslim majority mob threatens to overrun Bachan Singh's home. In fear of family, community, and religion's honour, he beheads Kusum himself and mutilates her body. He recounts:

I raised my kirpan high above her head. Vaheguru did not stop it; it came down. Her lips still moved, as mine did, murmuring, 'Vaheguru, Vaheguru,' as her head rolled from my stroke." . . . "I felt the warm splatter of her wet blood here, through my kurta." . . . "I didn't know one woman could have so much blood inside her. Blood arced, spouted, gushed everywhere. I opened the wedding trunks and pulled out clothes as fast as I could, my tears mingling with it. (Baldwin, 2001, p. 456)

This episode of an 'honour' killing whereby Kusum preferred death to being dishonored through rape and forcible conversion, was obviously not a stand-alone incident. Again, like many others in real life, she became a martyr in the eyes of society; being one who chose to sacrifice herself for her community's and family's honour. Kanchan Mathur aptly observes that "Virginity and chastity are virtues, which are entrenched part of the socialisation pattern of girls. The expectation of bravery or "macho" behaviour in men gets interpreted and accepted as the right to inflict violence on their part as opposed to acceptance of violence on the part of women who are expected to be not only chaste, but also obedient and "good". The typical image of a "good woman" is still one who upholds the honour of the family, maintains the "culture of silence" prevailing in the private domain and is obedient and sacrificing. (Malhotra, 2008, p. 55) This was how so many Hindu and Sikh women became the target of violence at the hands of men of their own community and family during the 1947 partition. Baldwin thus portrays an incident which has echoes in Urvashi Butalia's seminal work, *The Other Side of Silence* (1998), an archive of oral testimonies. Butalia records the testimonies of partition survivors where Sikh men took pride in killing women of their community or quom for the sake of honour. In one testimony, the survivor expresses his fear while sacrificing his family's seventeen women and children. As he puts it:

The real fear was one of dishonour. If they had been caught by the Muslims, our honour, their honour would have been sacrificed, lost. It's a question of one's honour . . . if you have pride you do not fear. (Butalia, 1998, p. 195)

The tales of such sacrificial deaths are rooted in the South Asian history where a woman had to burn alive on the pyre of her husband (as per the sati practice) or carry out self-immolation (as Rajput women performed Jauhar) in medieval India to save their honour from the abductors. Ironically, it is the patriarchal violence that acted on female bodies to preserve the chastity of the body and the honour of the community. Baldwin in the same vein illustrates various kinds of violence perpetrated on women of Pari Darwaza according to their reproductive potential. Kusum's mutilated body is not just a symbol of suffering that she must have gone through during partition, but also of the insult the community suffered and which her violated body represents. Kusum's husband, Jeevan, an Indian Army officer, discovers her body dismembered and interprets it as a message left by the religious or ethnic enemy: "We take the womb so there can be no Sikhs from it, we take the womb, leave you its shell." (Baldwin, 2001, p. 447) This heinous act of violence perpetrated over the bodies by men of the other community thus was not just a disgrace to the community or quom but also a symbol of triumph over the other during the 1947 riots.

Conclusion

To sum up, the novel establishes the interconnections between ideas pertaining to women's honour and the male ownership of their bodies. Baldwin indicates how these two are connected and lie deep rooted in the cultural consciousness as social practices. A woman is not a human, rather merely a possession to be guarded against the other. Further, her ownership is not simply to possess her but also to flaunt her existence as a sign of honour. It is no wonder then, why amidst the extremely volatile and communal conflict, the female body becomes the preferred target and means of inflicting insult on, or else, taking revenge from the religious, ethnic, or communal other. Baldwin thus superbly recreates the cultural and social milieu of the times to suggest a possible cause of the terrible happenings among communities existing cordially together for generations. Without taking sides, Baldwin portrays how the women belonging to both sides faced the brunt of the acts of aggression. The violence was indeed acted out on their bodies and to make it worse, their own community added to the trauma when they rejected, abandoned, disowned them for becoming 'impure.' Those who were earlier symbols of family's honour, now stood rejected as stigma, a sign of family's shame and dishonor. The novel thus may be treated as an attempt at re-membering the memories which have remained mostly silenced, and suppressed for long. Alongside, it brings into the discourse the presence of inherently violent and discriminatory practices hidden within the homes. Women live at the mercy of men surrounded by patriarchal practices and beliefs. As Baldwin portrays, they are victimized, yet often themselves turn into agents of patriarchy aiding in perpetuating its power and reign. In a searing criticism of the social system, Baldwin shows how women are treated as objects or voiceless territory to be possessed, used, and discarded by the patriarchy. However, for tracing the link between the idea of honour and how it affects women, this research paper limits itself to a single text. Keeping in mind its limitations, an attempt could be made to widen the scope of the novel by including more texts for analysis.

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