

# Breaking the Silence: Gender, Socio-Economic Status, and Violence in Partition Narratives

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the intersection of gender hierarchy and socioeconomic status in shaping the male violence that women experienced during the Partition in Punjab. Utilising a discourse analysis methodology, the findings reveal women from all socio-economic statuses faced violence because of their subordinate position in the gender hierarchy. They received little to no support from their families after surviving male violence, and men of middle and lower socio-economic status perpetrated much of this violence; influenced by economic disparity, demoralisation and military power. This paper highlights the inescapable nature of the gender hierarchy in communal and domestic spaces, and underscores the limitations of women's agency. This paper offers new insights into the scale of patriarchal control within the gender hierarchy and how socioeconomic intersections are less significant at explaining male violence women experienced during the Partition as opposed to the gender hierarchy.

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## 1. Introduction

"It was man-made, and women suffered".<sup>1</sup> War and Conflict, orchestrated by men and subjecting women to torture, rape and violence. India and Pakistan often make headlines for the plethora of male violence women endure daily, the past events of Partition are no different as women were violated in savage attacks by men. Why did this male violence occur? I believe critical feminism can provide an explanation for this phenomenon. There is a plethora of critical feminist thought on Partition violence against women in the form of sexual violence and honour killings, however I want to analyse the relationship between gender and socio-economic status with female experiences of male violence during the Partition. Authors such as Chaudhary, Reena et al. and Srivastava extensively studies honour based male violence during the Partition and included a discourse analysis methodology to reveal women's "othered" and marginalised identity.<sup>2</sup> They emphasised spatially constructed identities in regards to nation building and the use of women's bodies as sites of violence in religious conflict. However, they overlooked the role socio-economic status played in shaping these identities of these women and the violence perpetuated by men. Chaudhary et al. briefly mentioned the importance of class, gender, and ethnicity but didn't explore further, while Srivastava only touched on socio-economic class in relation to spatial construction. Socio-economic class is based upon income, education, occupation,

wealth and social prestige, such factors influence one's identity, thus my research will explore this intersection in combination with the experience of communal violence and honour killings. Furthermore, these authors highlighted women's subjugation, dependency on men and vulnerability to violence, yet ignored the gender hierarchy. In particular regards to power, my research will explore the violence women experienced during the Partition in relation to power dynamics, thus the gender hierarchy.

I argue that the interplay of the gender hierarchy and socio-economic status reveals that a women's position in the gender hierarchy overpowers the identity of socio-economic status when constructing a subordinate female identity. I also argue that women of all socio-economic statuses experienced violence because of their subordinate gendered status. Women received no support after surviving male violence from their communities, regardless of socio-economic status due to their subordinate gendered status and men of middle/lower socio-economic statuses perpetuated the most violence due to demoralisation by conflict, economic imbalance and military authority. I will use Lene Hansen's post-structuralist discourse analysis model to analyse my data.<sup>3</sup> My first empirical section looks at the interaction between the gender hierarchy and identity. My first endeavour discusses how the low status of women in the gender hierarchy resulted in a subordinate "othered" identity that used women as sites for nationalistic violence. My second endeavour discusses how survivors of male violence had no agency except in the circumstance where they could change their religion and marry their abusers. My second empirical section "the interaction between socio-economic status and violence" discusses how

<sup>1</sup>Amrita Pritam, *India: A people partitioned*, interview by Andrew Whitehead, BBC World Service Radio Series, 1992.

<sup>2</sup>Ankita Chaudhary et al., "Partition Wounded Women Physically and Mentally: A Feminist Perspective," *Social Science Journal* 13, no. 2 (January 2023): 2540-50; Sumit Srivastava, "Revisiting Partition, 1947: Gender, Community and Violence," April 2014.

<sup>3</sup>Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (Routledge, 2013).

men with a middle and lower socio-economic status were easily mobilised to commit violence in the communal sphere and honour killings in the domestic. I then proceed to explain how women from all socio-economic statuses experienced violence and received no support after surviving violence. I evidence these findings with examples of upper-class women and middle/lower class who survived abduction and rape, and how none of these women were given any familial or state support after surviving such ordeals.

My discussion is a cross sectional analysis between all my research questions. I begin with a synthesis of my findings from the previous sections, before using them to answer my research questions. I argue that only the gendered status of women during the Partition in Punjab impacted the likelihood of them experiencing violence because their gender identity “othered” them as symbols of honour and the nation. I disprove that socio-economic status impacted the likelihood as upper, middle and lower status women were vulnerable to communal violence because of their gender identity. I then again argue that only the gendered status of the community impacted the community response to female victims of male violence because all communities across Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus were patriarchal that subordinated women. This is evidenced by the abandonment of survivors, silence of survivors and marriage to abusers. This is seen in women from high, middle and low socio-economic statuses. I used critical feminist theorists: Peterson, Ward and Phillip to explain my conclusions about gender.<sup>4</sup> My third question argues both gender and socio-economic disparities within communities created power dynamics that were exploited by the perpetuation of violence against women, as honour killings show men abusing power at the top of the gender hierarchy. Furthermore, males with middle/low socio-economic statuses were more easily mobilised to commit violence. I used Cockburn’s “Gender Relations as Causal in Militarization and War” to explain this.<sup>5</sup>

I will then explain how the double oppression women faced in the domestic and communal sphere suggesting the gender hierarchy was inescapable, contributes new material to the existing literature. Additionally, I will mention how many of my findings agree and solidify existing literature surrounding honour, national violence and “othering”. Furthermore, I will also state how my research has answered the element of socio-economic intersection, by revealing gender identity and gender hierarchy is better at explaining the occurrence of Partition gendered violence. Finally, I will summarise my findings in the conclusion and explain the limitations of my research and its contribution to the Partition literature.

## 2. Literature Review

After reviewing the literature on gendered violence during the Partition, particularly its causes and consequences, I discovered that numerous authors have contributed to understanding the occurrence of communal violence and how women suffered in

relation to their spatial and national identities during Partition.

Violence against women during Partition was discussed most notably through Menon in “Rehearsing the Partition: Gendered Violence in ‘Aur Kitne Tukde’”, Virdee in “Remembering Partition: Women, Oral Histories and the Partition of 1947” and Butalia in “From the Other Side of Silence”.<sup>6</sup> These foundational texts highlighted bias as stories such as “Buta Singh’s” did not focus on the women’s point of view despite them being abducted.<sup>7</sup> Butalia brings light to the lack of female agency in storytelling. Furthermore, Virdee emphasised women’s social identity during Partition as limited to their relationships with men, noting that “their presence in male storytelling is largely limited to references to their relationships as daughters, wives and mothers.”<sup>8</sup>

These literatures have been the building blocks for other authors to analyse and interpret empirical evidence and apply critical feminist theory. Mann takes inspiration from Butalia’s and Menon’s writings when analysing “the gendered rape and silence of the national body”.<sup>9</sup> Mann wrote about the nationalistic symbolism women’s bodies had in Partition as rape served as an instrument of national humiliation.<sup>10</sup> These findings were corroborated by Mukherjee in “Reading Women’s Journey Through the Debris of Indian Partition in the ‘Charnel Ground of History’”, who explored how women’s bodies became “carriers of national honour” during Partition.<sup>11</sup> There is a lack of intersectionality in the authors’ arguments as class and religion are not discussed in relation to the violence experienced as this article focuses mostly on the legacy of Partition in India/Pakistan.

This element of religion is however explored in Deepa Narasimhan-Madhavan’s “Gender, Sexuality and Violence: Permissible Violence against Women during the Partition of India and Pakistan”.<sup>12</sup> This author analysed how religious nationalism enabled sexual violence as women’s identities were reduced to instruments of political and religious messaging.<sup>13</sup>

The concept of honour is explored in many articles surrounding violence against women during Partition. Robert Hayden explains the concept in “Rape and Rape Avoidance in Ethno-national Conflicts: Sexual Violence in Liminalized States”.<sup>14</sup> Women’s bodies are sexed beyond objectification as the honour of the man, family and nation lie in the preservation of her honour.<sup>15</sup>

I have found this concept of honour and violence against women in Punjab during the Partition an integral concept in explaining the occurrence of such violence within the familial sphere and during communal violence. However, I want to further explore this concept of honour with respect to socio-economic status as it intersects with the concept of power and identity construction. Munawar et al. in “Female Sexuality as Carrier

<sup>4</sup>V. Spike Peterson, “Gendered Identities, Ideologies and Practices in the Context of War and Militarism,” in *Gender, War, and Militarism: Feminist Perspectives* (California: ABC-CLIO, 2010), 17–29; Shannon Philip, “Making Men and Masculinities Visible: A Macro Level Enquiry into Conceptualizations of Gender and Violence in Indian Policies,” *NORMA* 10, no. 3-4 (November 30, 2015): 326–38; Jeanne Ward, “It’s Not about the Gender Binary, It’s about the Gender Hierarchy: A Reply to ‘Letting Go of the Gender Binary,’” *International Review of the Red Cross* 98, no. 901 (April 2016): 275–98.

<sup>5</sup>Cynthia Cockburn, “Gender Relations as Causal in Militarization and War,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 12, no. 2 (June 2010).

<sup>6</sup>Jisha Menon, “Rehearsing the Partition: Gendered Violence in ‘Aur Kitne Tukde,’” *Feminist Review*, no. 84 (2006): 29–47; Pippa Virdee, “Remembering Partition: Women, Oral Histories and the Partition of 1947,” *Oral History* 41, no. 2 (2013): 49–62; Urvasi Butalia, “From ‘the Other Side of Silence,’” *Manoa* 19, no. 1 (2007): 41–53.

<sup>7</sup>Butalia, “From ‘the Other Side of Silence,’” 47.

<sup>8</sup>Virdee, “Remembering Partition,” 51.

<sup>9</sup>Harveen Mann, “South Asian Partition Literature and the Gendered Rape and Silence of the National Body,” *South Asian Review* 22, no. 1 (December 2001): 3–22, at 4.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>11</sup>Anupama Mukherjee, “Reading Women’s Journey through the Debris of Indian Partition in the ‘Charnel Ground of History,’” *Rocky Mountain Review* 66 (2012): 93–94.

<sup>12</sup>Deepa Narasimhan-Madhavan, “Gender, Sexuality and Violence: Permissible Violence against Women during the Partition of India and Pakistan,” *Hawwa* 4, no. 2 (November 1, 2006): 396–416.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*, 414–415.

<sup>14</sup>Robert M. Hayden, “Rape and Rape Avoidance in Ethno-National Conflicts: Sexual Violence in Liminalized States,” *American Anthropologist* 102, no. 1 (2000): 31.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 31–32.

of Masculinity” further support this concept by arguing that women’s sexuality was used to construct and reinforce masculine identity during Partition.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, Dey in “The Female Body as the Site of Male Violence during the Partition of India” explores how women’s bodies became territories of contestation between communities.<sup>17</sup>

The only Partition violence literature I found that mentions violence women experienced during Partition and how it may intersect with socio-economic status is Srivastava’s “Revisiting Partition, Gender, Community and Violence.” Srivastava mentions class briefly, noting that “the relationship between violence and class cannot be overlooked”<sup>18</sup> and that “classes interact with violence in complex ways.”<sup>19</sup> However, this was not explored further in the analysis.<sup>20</sup> Chaudhary et al. also briefly acknowledged that “class, gender, and ethnicity are important intersections” but did not provide a detailed exploration.<sup>21</sup>

Upon reading various literature mentioned, I found a common intersection of gender and socio-economic status to be a reoccurring gap. I found that in the literature reviewed there was the element of spatial identity based on nationalism and honour, but no sufficient exploration of the social and economic dynamics between women’s experience of violence and those that perpetuated it.

### 3. Methodology

My research question and sub-research questions:

“What does the interplay of gender hierarchy and socio-economic status reveal about the male violence women experienced during the Partition in Punjab?”

- Did the status of women during the Partition in Punjab impact the likelihood of them experiencing violence?
- Did the status of the community impact the community response to female victims of male violence?
- Did disparities within communities create power dynamics that were exploited, leading to the perpetuation of violence against women?

I have decided to use discourse analysis to analyse and interpret data. Many authors in this area of research have used discourse analysis. Discourse analysis looks at how language can construct meaning within socio-cultural contexts.<sup>22</sup>

The spectacle of violence by Dasgupta uses discourse analysis successfully to analyse Partition fiction that focus on the sexual violence committed against Hindu and Sikh women from Muslim men.<sup>23</sup> She analysed the text and found repetitive signs that constructed women as sexualised victims, Hindu and Sikh women as pure chaste victims and Muslim men as barbaric predators.<sup>24</sup>

The data that will be collected will be oral testimonies, written testimonies and memoirs, as they are unrefined and convey

intricate detail in comparison to accounts and fictional short stories. Using content analysis I intend to discover repetitive patterns and binaries in order to systematically reach a conclusion. I have chosen to analyse written testimonies and oral histories from Partition because they provide primary accounts of the violence that occurred. Partition is often regarded as “forgotten” as it happened approximately 80 years ago, thus data is limited.<sup>25</sup> Data sources include Kavita Puri’s *Partition Voices* BBC Radio 4 series,<sup>26</sup> Devika Chawla’s *Home, Uprooted*,<sup>27</sup> Andrew Whitehead’s BBC World Service Radio Series *India: A People Partitioned*,<sup>28</sup> and Ian Talbot and Darshan Singh Tatla’s *Amritsar*.<sup>29</sup>

As Talja outlines, qualitative discourse analysis examines how language within texts constructs and negotiates meaning within socio-cultural contexts.<sup>30</sup> My analysis will not include quantitative data regarding religion, income or literacy rates as this information was not recorded in 1947. Therefore, to determine socio-economic class of witnesses I will classify them based on their living arrangements, occupation, and education levels as described in the testimonies.

Furthermore, thematic analysis could be argued instead, however I do not intend to simply identify and report patterns within my analysis of qualitative data.<sup>31</sup> In order to discern the interaction between the gender hierarchy, socio-economic status and violence, I need to go beyond the identification of themes and codes within the cultural context of Punjab and analyse how language used in the data set constructs these oppositional male and female identities.

Srivastava also used discourse analysis to uncover why violence against women occurred during the Partition. The author found a women’s religious and gendered identity to be the main reasoning behind the violence they suffered.<sup>32</sup> Although Srivastava’s research was limited because it focused on religion and specifically stated she did not want to intersect socio-political causes into her analysis.<sup>33</sup> This weakened her argument, as communities can be influenced by socio-economic situations. Furthermore, honour and violence against women during Partition was influenced by socio-economic imbalances and the mobilisation of middle and lower class men in conjunction with religious influence, as I will discuss.

The literature previously mentioned applies discourse analysis, which found women were reduced to bodies they had no ownership over during the Partition, and that those bodies were mobilised to represent and serve the nation. My analysis intends to explain why this occurred; was it only the construction of gendered identity that facilitated violence or did socio-economic status play a role.

This explains why poststructuralist discourse analysis is the best option as it can explain how identities are constructed based on social contexts of the case study. For my research, the identities constructed are gendered ones: male and female. Hansen’s model focuses on how security discourse constructs identity through

<sup>16</sup>Riffat Munawar, Asma Yunus, and Shahzad Mushtaq, “Female Sexuality as Carrier of Masculinity: A Feminist Critique of History of Subcontinent Partition (1947),” *European Academic Research* 1, no. 8 (November 2013): 2167–75.

<sup>17</sup>Arunima Dey, “The Female Body as the Site of Male Violence during the Partition of India in Bapsi Sidhwa’s ‘Ice-Candy-Man,’” *Complutense Journal of English Studies* 26 (November 13, 2018): 27.

<sup>18</sup>Srivastava, “Revisiting Partition,” 123.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 124.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 126–127.

<sup>21</sup>Chaudhary et al., “Partition Wounded Women,” 2548.

<sup>22</sup>Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 41.

<sup>23</sup>Shumona Dasgupta, “The Spectacle of Violence in Partition Fiction: Women, Voyeurs and Witnesses,” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47, no. 1 (February 2011): 30–41.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 32.

<sup>25</sup>Virdee, “Remembering Partition,” 51.

<sup>26</sup>Kavita Puri, “BBC Radio 4 – Partition Voices, Series 1, Aftermath,” BBC Radio Four, August 7, 2017.

<sup>27</sup>Devika Chawla, *Home, Uprooted* (Fordham University Press, 2014).

<sup>28</sup>India: *A People Partitioned*, interview by Andrew Whitehead, BBC World Service Radio Series, 1992–2008.

<sup>29</sup>Ian Talbot and Darshan Singh Tatla, *Amritsar* (Seagull Books, 2007).

<sup>30</sup>Sanna Talja, “Analysing Qualitative Interview Data,” *Library & Information Science Research* 21, no. 4 (November 1999): 471.

<sup>31</sup>Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, “Thematic Analysis,” *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 12, no. 3 (December 9, 2016): 297.

<sup>32</sup>Srivastava, “Revisiting Partition,” 124.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., 124.

a system of binary oppositions.<sup>34</sup> Hansen's model looks for the "linking" and "differentiation" between self and other in texts. Gender and socio-economic status are part of these self/other representations. However, as I previously mentioned, this is only one element of the identity construction as religion and socio-economic status also have an impact. Discourse analysis does have drawbacks; it can struggle to account for structural factors such as the role of institutions, policies, or economic systems that may influence social constructions. Therefore it is important to keep in mind that discourse analysis alone cannot fully capture the structural forces such as colonial legacies, that also shaped violence during the Partition.<sup>35</sup>

This research will be methodologically post-positivist because my theory is critical feminist theory. As my research question looks at the gender hierarchy, a critical feminist lens is the most appropriate as it analyses the power imbalance between males and females in society. As explained by Ward, the gender hierarchy places masculinity as superior to femininity in a social system where gendered power is unequal.<sup>36</sup> This theory explains why men engaged in violence against women during the Partition, as they were at the top of the hierarchy, and women were at the bottom. Peterson complements this, and also extends it by explaining how socio-economic status was utilised as a vector for "othering" women.<sup>37</sup> She argues that women are objectified as "markers of group boundaries" and "bearers of group honour."<sup>38</sup> This theory explains how women's identity was categorised as subordinate in the gender hierarchy that made them vulnerable to violence. I also believe this theory explains why men engaged in violence to protect their honour as well as their women. If the women in a man's family were attacked by the "other" religion, their identity as patriarchal protectors was threatened and this showed they could not protect their women, thus lowering their position in the gender hierarchy. This explains why men felt the need to engage in violent vengeance of the "others" women, as it would rectify this and save their masculine identity. This is evident in the concept of honour killings, which will be further explored in my analysis.

Furthermore, I believe this theory regarding the gender hierarchy can intersect with Cynthia Cockburn's theory that economic, ethnic/national and gender power all intersect to construct the identity of those who are violent during war/conflict.<sup>39</sup> I believe this is exemplified in the violence men committed during the Partition. As men of all socio-economic statuses, religions and ethnicities committed violence to protect their honour, I argue these three intersections can explain the violence men committed; specifically, demoralisation by conflict, being feminised by lowered socio-economic status, and the threat to their position atop the gender hierarchy angered them and pushed them to regain it by committing violence. I will use these theories to explain my findings.

Philip proposes that in patriarchal Indian society masculinity is defined in opposition to femininity, and that men's social standing depends on their capacity to control women's behaviour and sexuality.<sup>40</sup> Cockburn also notes how men were "demoralized and angry" during conflict, which supports how the feminisation

of their identity due to their women being abused pushed them into the notions of vengeance to recover their emasculated gender identity.<sup>41</sup>

#### 4. Empirical Sections

The data I have collected and analysed will be presented as my main findings in the proceeding two sections titled "Gender Hierarchy and Identity" and "Socio-Economic Status and Violence". These sections will look at the interaction between the two variables.

##### 4.1. Gender Hierarchy and Identity

Having analysed my data, I have found that women during the Partition in Punjab occupied a subordinate identity to men and a low status in the gender hierarchy, which was further lowered by being a survivor. My data revealed, men recalled the violence against women in their stories. For example, in *Amritsar* by Talbot and Tatla, many men recount events of violence against women such as "I saw a young girl being raped," "Women were stripped and paraded naked."<sup>42</sup> This language indicates that women were seen as an extension of the men representing purity and honour. This suggests protection of women was vital, as a failure of such would result in a failure of self protection.

I also found this subordinate identity was symbolised; as the violence these women experienced or witnessed illustrated how women were not centred, and that their identities were spatially constructed. Poonan Josh was 17 years old when she migrated from Pakistan to Amritsar, India. She recalls how a group of Muslim men attacked her convoy and killed her family. The male violence she witnessed was targeted and deliberate, and she described the attackers as "huge, wild-looking men."<sup>43</sup>

My second revelation regarding gender hierarchy and identity was that women who survived male violence sometimes chose to marry and stay with their kidnappers or rapists. This seemed to be a choice because they viewed their kidnappers as saviours, perhaps in comparison to the violence they had witnessed in their own community. In *Amritsar*, Kaur recounts how some women "refused to go back" and "wanted to stay with their new husbands."<sup>44</sup> This presented an element of agency — albeit limited and constrained — that women exercised within the rigid gender hierarchy.<sup>45</sup>

Another element to this revelation includes a unique perspective that these women preferred life with their kidnapper as opposed to their own family. Kaur tells of one girl: "I get milk twice a day. My mother-in-law does not order me to get out of bed and sweep."<sup>46</sup> "Does not order me" suggests that in her previous home she was ordered around, perhaps forced to do household chores. This goes beyond simply doing chores as it exemplifies this notion that women's identity within the familial sphere was that of a subordinate — a servant. The gender hierarchy was thus inescapable, both in the communal and domestic sphere.<sup>47</sup> This also shows how women could exercise the little agency they had by marrying their kidnapper. Most likely by doing this, girls could avoid permanent marginalisation from the family and community by taking on a new religious identity in a new community.

<sup>34</sup>Hansen, *Security as Practice*, 43.

<sup>35</sup>Senem Aydin-Düzgüt and Bahar Rumelili, "Discourse Analysis: Strengths and Shortcomings," *All Azimuth: A Journal of Foreign Policy and Peace*, 2018, 4–5.

<sup>36</sup>Ward, "It's Not about the Gender Binary," 275.

<sup>37</sup>Peterson, "Gendered Identities, Ideologies and Practices," 27.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Cockburn, "Gender Relations as Causal in Militarization and War," 150.

<sup>40</sup>Shannon Philip, "Making Men and Masculinities Visible," 327.

<sup>41</sup>Cockburn, "Gender Relations as Causal in Militarization and War," 152.

<sup>42</sup>Talbot and Tatla, *Amritsar*, 150.

<sup>43</sup>Kavita Puri, "BBC Radio 4 – Partition Voices, Series 1, Aftermath," BBC Radio Four, August 7, 2017.

<sup>44</sup>Talbot and Tatla, *Amritsar*, 20.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 30.

## 4.2. Socio-Economic Status and Violence

The first theme that frequented my data was men with a middle to lower socio-economic status committed the most violence as they were more easily mobilised. Discourse analysis revealed that themes of honour, binary opposition between Hindus/Sikhs and Muslims, and demoralisation were ever-present in the testimonies of those who witnessed and experienced violence.

Swaran Singh Riat, a 15 year old Sikh was involved in an attack in 1947, he recalls how he was told “one man from each house was required to attack a Muslim village. To avenge the recent slaughter of Sikhs.”<sup>48</sup> He recalls feeling compelled to participate despite being young, demonstrating how middle and lower status males were mobilised into violence through community pressure and notions of collective honour.

Anant Kaur, an upper class Hindu deputy officer witnessed violence against women during the Partition. Her job was to reunite kidnapped girls, and she recalls girls from low class families and “well to do families” who were kidnapped.<sup>49</sup> She recalls how the kidnappings transcended class boundaries, emphasising that all women were vulnerable regardless of socio-economic status.<sup>50</sup>

Furthermore, upon analysing Angela Araha’s interview from *India: A People Partitioned*, she evidences this further. Angela was born into a Christian upper-class family in Pakistan. She recalls groups of men shooting nuns and killing her father at a church. Despite being from an upper-class family, her experiences of violence were devastating.<sup>51</sup>

Furthermore, a final example of this mobilisation of lower/middle status men to commit violence is illustrated in Kartar Kaur’s and Bisham Sahni’s Partition story. Kartar Kaur migrated from Pakistan to Ferozpur Punjab and can be classified as middle class based on her descriptions of her household and community. She experienced violence firsthand and her testimony reveals how men from similar backgrounds were the primary perpetrators.<sup>52</sup> Men in her community questioned the masculinity of those who did not participate, asking “why not kill all your young women and girls.”<sup>53</sup> “Why not” shows their questioning of the men’s decisions, thus their ability to lead and most importantly their ability to protect their honour. As theorised, the identity of these men was threatened by conflict and the feminisation of their inability to protect women, driving them to violence.

Another theme that emerged from my findings was that all women who experienced violence regardless of socio-economic status, were not granted sufficient familial or state support. Re-occurring patterns of stigma, dishonour, shame and marginalisation were present in all testimonies.<sup>54</sup>

In *Home, Uprooted* by Devika Chawla, she tells the story of a well-educated upper-class woman.<sup>55</sup> It can be seen she was upper-class as she was educated, lived in a lavish house and her sister was a doctor.<sup>56</sup> Despite coming from a higher socio-economic status, she survived brutal violence as she was struck on the head

multiple times with an axe by Muslim men. After her rescue, she found that despite her class status, the community response was the same as for women of lower status: shame, silence, and lack of support.<sup>57</sup> The family tried to suppress her story as it brought dishonour.<sup>58</sup>

Anant Kaur’s stories can be exemplified again. As previously mentioned Anant Kaur was an upper-class officer that reunited girls with their families for the abandonment act. Although she did not experience any violence herself being upper class she suffered emotionally from witnessing the abandoned girls. She tells of a girl who was “rejected by her own family” after being recovered.<sup>59</sup> Regardless of socio-economic status, she was rejected by her own family, marginalised and physically sent away. This illustrates the subordination these women endured within the communal and familial sphere, as being a survivor resulted in facing consequences.

This lack of support after surviving such ordeals is further evidenced in Kaur’s retellings of “the girls were adamant not to go back.”<sup>60</sup> She also mentions how as an officer “we took her out, but she cried, she would not go back to Pakistan” and how other officers stated “bring her.” These examples illustrate the lack of female agency after surviving violence as they were forced against their will to return. “Bring her” encapsulates the attitude society had towards these women, as the brash tone indicates women were not respected. The abandonment act made it clear that women were subordinated and their wishes and wellbeing came second to honour, the nation and the patriarchal demands of the state.<sup>61</sup>

## 4.3. Cross-Sectional Analysis

This section contains a cross analysis between my findings, as I answer my research questions and address my thesis. I will then use critical feminist theories to explain these findings before situating them within the literature.

I have found that the status of women during the Partition in Punjab did impact the likelihood of them experiencing violence. I found only the gendered status of women impacted the likelihood, as socio-economic status did not. My findings show that women were the primary targets of communal violence because of their identity as “carriers” of familial and national honour, as discussed in my analysis. Chaudhary et al. found that “women’s bodies became battlegrounds for communal violence” during Partition.<sup>62</sup> Men’s patriarchal identity was constructed in opposition to these feminised subjects; men wanted to prevent dishonour and being “othered,” “feminised” and emasculated.<sup>63</sup> The subordinate position of women in the gender hierarchy unfortunately made it extremely likely they would experience violence during the Partition as their identity was spatially constructed to represent the honour of the group.

These findings and conclusions reinforce revelations made by Dasgupta, Chavda, Mann and others in Partition literature as they discuss these nationalistic and honour focused representations extensively. Dasgupta discusses how women’s bodies represented the honour of the community and became “spectacles of violence.”<sup>64</sup> Mann argues that the “national body” was gendered,

<sup>48</sup>Puri, “BBC Radio 4 – Partition Voices, Series 1, Division,” BBC Radio Four, July 31, 2017.

<sup>49</sup>Talbot and Tatla, *Amritsar*, 126.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 154.

<sup>51</sup>Angela Araha, *India: A people partitioned*, interview by Charles Haiviland, BBC World Service Radio Series, February 8, 2003, 4–7.

<sup>52</sup>Talbot and Tatla, *Amritsar*, 124.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 127.

<sup>54</sup>Bhisham Sahni, *India: A people partitioned*, interview by Andrew Whitehead, BBC World Service Radio Series, September 9, 1996.

<sup>55</sup>Chawla, *Home, Uprooted*, 45.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 48.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 127.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>61</sup>Talbot and Tatla, *Amritsar*, 36.

<sup>62</sup>Chaudhary et al., “Partition Wounded Women,” 2543.

<sup>63</sup>Peterson, “Gendered Identities, Ideologies and Practices,” 27.

<sup>64</sup>Dasgupta, “The Spectacle of Violence in Partition Fiction,” 35.

and that the rape of women during Partition served as a symbolic attack on the nation itself.<sup>65</sup> Chavda explores how women's sexual identity was forcibly stripped as a mechanism of communal violence.<sup>66</sup>

In regards to my second research question, my findings revealed that the gendered status of communities did impact the community response to female victims of male violence. I found that the gendered status did impact the community response to survivors because all communities were patriarchal. I found that socio-economic status did not impact the community response because my observations reveal that communities of all socio-economic statuses failed to adequately support survivors of male violence. My findings unveil that survivors were often abandoned, silenced or faced further violence upon return. This subordination was cross-cutting across all religious and socio-economic lines.

My findings also show women often feared returning to their families after surviving male violence as they were either sent away or killed. This shows that women were further subordinated in the gender hierarchy because they could no longer reproduce the purity and honour of the family, having been "violated." Philip proposes that in patriarchal Indian society, marriage is the only institution that gives women legitimate protection.<sup>67</sup> This in combination with the discovery that they faced violence in their families and communities contributes to the understanding that the gender hierarchy was inescapable in both the domestic and communal spheres.

The occurrence of women and girls who didn't want to leave their kidnappers or "husbands" after Partition can be explained by their mobilisation to depend on male protection. My conclusions regarding the abandonment act reinforce findings by Chaudhary, as she extensively covers the patriarchal state's control and oppression of abducted women.<sup>68</sup> My observations revealing that socio-economic status doesn't impact the community response to survivors fills this gap in my literature as no author specifically explores how the community response to survivors intersects with socio-economic status. It reveals that gender identity is a better determinant than socio-economic status of community attitudes towards survivors of male violence. This also contributes new material to the literature surrounding the agency women possess when it comes down to gender identity. Furthermore, my findings regarding the small amount of agency women exercised by marrying their abductor, also contributes new information to the wider debate as it exposes how truly subordinated these young girls were, and one of the few circumstances they could exercise agency.

Furthermore, my observations found that gendered disparities and socio-economic disparities within communities did create power dynamics that were exploited, leading to the perpetuation of violence against women. My observations detail how men with a middle and lower socio-economic status were more easily mobilised to commit violence than men of upper class status. This is because they were demoralised by conflict, economically disadvantaged and were given authority by the military.

I believe that my conclusions surrounding middle/lower status men perpetuating the most violence can be explained by Cynthia Cockburn's "Gender Relations as Causal in Militarization and War". She proposes that relative power (economic power, gender

power and ethnic/national power) intersects to create the identity of those who become violent during conflict.<sup>69</sup> Cockburn notes how men were "demoralized and angry," supporting how the feminisation of their identity due to their women being abused pushed them into the notions of vengeance to recover their emasculated gender identity.<sup>70</sup>

I also believe this theory can explain why army men were found to be raping and abusing women. I believe they were exploiting their power because their authoritative position was constructed by a superior position in the gender hierarchy, an increase in economic/class power from conflict and a national/ethnic power. This discovery fills the socio-economic gap in my literature as it shows how socio-economic and gender disparities created a power gap that was exploited by male violence.

## 5. Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has found that the interplay of the gender hierarchy and socio-economic status reveals that women of all socio-economic statuses experienced violence because of their subordinate gendered status. Women received no support after surviving male violence from their communities, regardless of socio-economic status due to their subordinate gendered status and men of middle/lower socio-economic statuses perpetuated the most violence due to demoralisation by conflict, economic imbalance and military authority. This paper addressed three sub-research questions:

- Did the status of women during the Partition in Punjab impact the likelihood of them experiencing violence?
- Did the status of the community impact the community response to female victims of male violence?
- Did disparities within communities create power dynamics that were exploited, leading to the perpetuation of violence against women?

I found the status of women during the Partition in Punjab influenced their vulnerability to violence irrespective of socio-economic status. Kidnapping, rape, mutilation, and honour killings were common, impacting women of all socio-economic backgrounds. The gender hierarchy played a more significant role than socio-economic status in determining women's vulnerability.

The gendered status of communities significantly influenced responses to female victims of male violence, irrespective of religious affiliation. All communities failed to effectively support survivors, regardless of socioeconomic-status. Survivors suffered oppression and subordination, often finding agency in marriage to their abductors, yet were rejected and stigmatised regardless of status. Fear of returning to their families further illustrates the inescapable gendered dynamics of post-violence experiences.

Gender and socio-economic disparities within communities fuelled power imbalances, perpetuating violence against women during Partition. Middle/lower-status individuals, including army officers, villagers, and tribal members, were the main culprits. Cockburn's theory of gender relations and conflict explains how alterations in power dynamics shape aggressive masculine identities, as seen during Partition. Lower-status males, demoralised by conflict and economic imbalance, were easily mobilised to commit violence. Army members exploited their authoritative position, highlighting how intersections of gender, economic, and national power perpetuated violence.

<sup>65</sup>Mann, "South Asian Partition Literature," 5.

<sup>66</sup>Yogini Chavda, "Unveiling Identity and Sexuality: Analyzing Sexual Violence, Trauma, and Alienation in Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar* as a Lens on the Partition of India," *Vidhyayana - An International Multidisciplinary Peer-Reviewed E-Journal*.

<sup>67</sup>Philip, "Making Men and Masculinities Visible," 329.

<sup>68</sup>Chaudhary et al., "Partition Wounded Women," 2545.

<sup>69</sup>Cockburn, "Gender Relations as Causal in Militarization and War," 152.

<sup>70</sup>*Ibid.*, 150.

I believe my research was limited by the small sample of my data. This was due to a data breach at the British Library thus an inability to obtain more information. Additionally, narratives on Partition violence are rare to find due to the taboo nature of the subject. Further research would benefit from a broader collection of testimonies and a wider geographical scope beyond Punjab. This would also ensure less bias and misinformation as it would not rely on interviews recalling the past.

I believe my study sheds light onto the extent of which patriarchal control was responsible for violence against women during the Partition. I also believe it provides an insight into the role gender identity plays in South Asian society and how heavily it influences community behaviour and responses to violence. This paper's analysis of socio-economic intersections with gender hierarchy contributes new material to the Partition literature and underscores the need for further research into the structural forces that enabled, perpetuated, and normalised gendered violence across all levels of society.

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