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Navigating the Mosaic of Female Body Spaces in the Selected South Asian Fiction via Partition Lens

Aleena Shahzad

National University of Modern Languages
Islamabad

Abstract

Female body spaces construct history in the arena of Partition that reflects the fractured, gruesome realities of the females who become the product of sexual exploitation either at the hands of military soldiers or by the patriarchy. Traditionally, different literary canvases illuminate the predicament of female sexual atrocity in different harrowing ways to register the overwhelming carnage of war. This paper analyses the checkered female body spaces, troubled choices of survival in the aftermath of war, and the subverted concept of honour in the three short stories: *Blindfold* by Shoba Rao, *Parbati* by Farkhanda Lodhi, and *The Holocaust* by Shamim Hamid. Although these concepts are ubiquitous because of their critical and sensitive appeal, the researcher has analyzed these stories not only through the concept of body as space but also through how fragmented bodily spaces can serve as a strength for females. The study also discusses their suffering through the lens of Elizabeth Grosz's Body as Space, which is the main critical debate in the research fabric of the paper. It also analyses how economically fragile poor females have to make difficult decisions for their survival by manipulating young girls from the lower class.

Keywords: Female Body Spaces, Honour, Partition 1947 & 1971, Marxism, Geographical Region.

Introduction

History holds paramount significance for any geographical region because it shows a spectrum of various events that elucidate the dark and gruesome realities of the people who were affected blatantly by the carnage of war. In this debate, partition is not only just a political divide or merely a division of properties and assets, but it is mainly a 'division of the hearts' (Butalia, 2000, p. 8). In this checkered fragmentation, people from different regions like India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh got separated, and a sense of up rootedness, trauma, displacement, a sense of rupture, and sexual bestiality became profoundly embedded in the mental outlook of the people. Due to this division, people developed bitter animosity for one another and indulged in obnoxious activities that tarnished the social and mental fabric of society and individuals, respectively. At this critical vantage point, females suffered terribly at the hands of the state and especially patriarchy. The profound carnage of war cultivated a vacuum, and they struggled so hard to cope with the nefarious realities of the aftermath of the war. One of the profound repercussions of war

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and partition is that the survival of women became difficult, and they had to sustain themselves economically and financially by adopting bad survival strategies. Women in different geographical regions, especially India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, share the same painful stories, which are graphically pronounced in various degrees of intensity (Chauhan, 2022).

At the heart of this debate, Female body spaces are sites of contestation that cannot be overlooked because of their utmost importance, especially in literary academia. Sometimes, those females were given the celebrated status of birangon as (war heroines) by the state, especially in Bangladesh, and sometimes their existence was given utter silence (Mookherjee, 2015, p. x; Mookherjee, 2022). Body and space are in harmony with each other as they reflect untold tales in the most harrowing way. In this body-space matrix, Marleau-Ponty, an eminent body theorist, said:

> Our body is not in space like things; it inhabits or haunts space. It applies itself to space like a hand to an instrument, and when we wish to move about we do not move the body as we move an object. We transport it without instruments…since it is ours and because, through it, we have access to space (Merleau-Ponty, 2002,p. 5).

This paper aims to bring into the spotlight the gruesome spaces of female bodies from three different regions, i.e India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. In this regard, I have selected three short stories: *Blindfold* (2016), written by Shoba Rao from the collection of her short stories titled *An Unrestored Woman*; *Parbati* (2005) by Farkhanda Lodhi from the collection *Kahani: Stories by Pakistani Women* edited by Aamer Hussain; *and Holocaust* (2001) by Shamim Hamid from the collection *1971and After Selected Stories* by Niaz Zaman. I argue that the short stories from these three geographical regions not only reflect the politics of female bodily spaces but also reflect that females have to adopt obnoxious means to sustain themselves financially, i.e., they use to buy young girls and run a bad business to earn money, which is illustrated in the story *Blind fold* written by Shoba Rao. The female body becomes a volatile territory (Mookherjee, 2015, p. 3). It clearly illustrates the impact of war on the poor class, and they are forced to eliminate humanitarian values and get themselves preoccupied with nefarious designs just to earn a livelihood to keep their family unit together. Furthermore, those females who were raped were normally viewed as ‘homo sacer’, a term by Giorgio Agamben which means ‘cursed’ or ‘despised’ (Agamben, 1998, p. 3; Gouws, 2025).

To navigate the rich, painful tapestry that has been interwoven by these short story writers, it is pertinent to mention that female bodily spaces are not only sabotaged by patriarchy from other regions but also that females are ostracized from their own domestic sphere as

well (Morgenroth et al., 2024). Furthermore, in this critical mosaic, transgression of human values can vividly be seen with respect to the female bodies, where a mother is stripped of her dress by the army in front of her daughter in the politically charged climate of war, where people from the poor class were deprived of their homes and were molested ferociously in front of their family members (Mammel, 2025). This concern is echoed in the story from Bangladesh, titled *Holocaust,* written by Shamim Hamid. My concern in this paper is not only to identify cramped spaces of female bodies but also to reflect how certain females muster up their courage from those murky ambiances and elevate themselves as individuals, not objects, as Veena Das said that the task of history is to "break the silence that announces the zones of taboo" (Das, 2006, p. 57).

Theoretical Framework

Mapping Body and Space: Elizabeth Grosz, Michel Foucault, & Martha E. Gimenez

This study uses the overarching critical trajectory of corporeal geographies, in which the idea of body and space by Elizabeth Grosz has been extracted from her book *Volatile Feminism: Towards a Corporeal Feminism.* According to Elizabeth Grosz, "body is a crucial term, a site of contestation, in a series of economic, sexual, political and intellectual struggles (Grosz, 1994, p. 19). This definition quintessentially captures the textual phenomenon of the selected three short stories: *Blindfold* (2016) written by Shoba Rao from the collection of her short stories titled *An Unrestored Women*, *Parbati* (2005) by Farkhanda Lodhi from the collection *Kahani: Storie sby Pakistani Women* edited by Aamer Hussain, *and Holocaust* (2001) by Shamim Hamid from the collection *1971 and After Selected Stories* by Niaz Zaman. The female characters have undergone myriad bleak experiences where they are barred from their bodily choices, agency, and identity, entering them into the vicious process of psychological entrapment. Elizabeth Grosz argues that "bodies become the part of corporeal schema"(Grosz, 1994, p. 87), affecting not only the cognitive landscape but also the surrounding environment. The critical trajectory by Elizabeth Grosz has been selected because the textual phenomenon in different contexts in the selected three texts captures the debate of the female body at different levels of marginalization, thus extending the scope of body literature not in one dimension but in different orientations converging at one single point (Mithun, 2024).

Similarly, another seminal text, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* by Michael Foucault, pronounced the idea of the "docile body (136), which is also ingrained in the textual phenomenon of the selected texts. Foucault argues that the docile body undergoes the process of improvement, transformation, and subjugation (Foucault, 1977, p. 136) but I argue that the female bodies is in the robust process of subjugation and mutilation, not in the process of improvement in terms of physical stature; mentally, they equip their minds with difficult choices of survival this concocting the debate of body and mind in the critical

trajectory of corporeal literature. The female bodies are caught up in the complex network of relationships (Foucault, 1977, p. 146), affecting their mobility and social space.

Lastly, the carnage of partition and war fosters poor economic stability, and it corroborates the critical trajectory of Marxist Feminism by Martha E. Gimenez, who propounds that "society is the history of class struggle and sex struggles" (Gimenez, 1975, p. 61) in *Marxism and Feminism*. This critical idea resonates with the overarching idea of body and space, where not only gender and sexuality are compromised but also economic aspects, making female bodily spaces and choices more pigeonholed. In a nutshell, all three critical apparatuses attempt to configure the idea of female body and space in different geographical regions, maintaining the cosmopolitan appeal of the traumatic aftermath of the carnage of partition (Ali, 2024).

Research Objectives

1. To analyze the body as a main site of contestation, territory within the textual and theoretical scope.
2. To delve into the psychic and material impact of partition on the lives of the female characters in the selected three short stories from different geographical regions, viz., India, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
3. To engage the notion of honour with reference to the female bodies in the context of partition.

Research Questions

1. How do the selected short stories from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh represent the female body as a contested territory through which the political, cultural, and ideological tensions of Partition are negotiated?
2. In what ways does the discourse of honour shape the psychic and material consequences of Partition for the female characters in the selected stories, particularly in relation to gender, violence, displacement, and bodily autonomy?

Significance of the Study

The significance of the present study lies in its focused critical trajectory of the body as a space where females and their choices are fractured in three geographical regions, viz. India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Although the idea of partition in contemporary critical debates sounds obsolete, it is still relevant in different regions of the world in different socio-political contexts where female roles and agency are being tarnished either because of the carnage of war or patriarchy. The study attempts to capture the debates of corporeal geography where mind, body, and female spaces are sabotaged, but at the same time it shows the troubled

choices of survival that those females embark on to sustain themselves in the harrowing episodes of war. This leads to the idea of the atmospheric competence of the partition arena that compelled females to make difficult choices for their survival. The partition socio-political context, along with the overarching critical trajectory of body literature within the nexus of the female body, still resonates in the contemporary arena but in different shapes and forms, keeping alive the past checkered history and the resilience and the endurance of the females who suffered. Thus, fiction gives the historic vivid landscape of the past to preserve the partition context and the resilience of the females in that tumultuous landscape.

Limitations of the Research

The present research is limited only to three geographical regions i.e. India, Pakistan and Bangladesh and In this regard, three short stories have been selected namely: *Blindfold* (2016) written by Shoba Rao from the collection of her short stories titled *An Unrestored Women*, *Parbati* (2005) by Farkhanda Lodhi from the collection *Kahani: Stories by Pakistani Women* edited by Aamer Hussain, *and Holocaust* (2001) by Shamim Hamid from the collection *1971 and After Selected Stories* by Niaz Zaman.

Review of the Literature

At the heart of Partition literature, the issue of representing female ostracized experiences in varying intensities holds paramount significance. There is always a struggle of representation in the canon of partition literature, particularly ruptured female spaces in different literary forms in the past. Their presentation can be seen in myriad forms, including visual, literary, and at the state level (Mookherjee, 2015, p. 6; Bhattacharya, 2022). The substantial literary works of Saadat Hassan Manto have meticulously orchestrated the molestation, abduction, rape, and objectification of female bodies during the riots of partition (Jalal, 2013, p. 85). The story *Open It* by Manto represents the violence inflicted on females (Sarvar, 2006, p. 308). Manto, being an illustrious writer, has presented females as fallen beings, subjugated to patriarchy, especially in his stories *Sharifan* and *Colder Than Ice* (Rumi, 2012, p. 81). Such stories evoke horror and terror in the minds of the readers (Bhalla, 1999, p. 3124). A plethora of literary works reflect the marginalization of females with reference to the female bodies, but the present paper has not only highlighted the politics of the female bodies with reference to their spaces but also subverted the traditional notion of honour, which is associated with virginity, and the females in all of the selected short stories liberate their bodies from utter exploitation in different intensities.

An article titled "*Literary Representation: Partition in Indian and Pakistani novels in English"* by Francis Harrison offers a deep insight into the political landscape of the event of partition, showing that it is not simply a division of territory but also leads to a

holocaust, creating chaos in history and affecting the psychological dilemmas of both the perpetrators and the victims (Harrison, 1991,p.95). Holistically speaking, another article, "*Forms of Memory: Partition as a Literary Paradigm*" by Anna Bernard, gives the three main genres that exist in partition studies, namely: romance, bildungsroman, and fragmented narrative. Fiction in these partition genres results in the mental repercussions for characters belonging to different geographical regions who are affected by the event of partition. For instance, in *Train to Pakistan* by Khushwant Singh, the romance between a Sikh man and a Muslim woman (admittedly a rather violent and misogynistic affair) ends in disaster: Juggat Singh manages to stop the train carrying Nooran to Pakistan from being blown up, but he is killed in the process (Bernard, 2010, p.16). Similarly, in the Bildungsroman genre, the narrator's coming of age aligns with the event of partition, such as in Cracking India and in the non-fictional childhood memoirs by Amos Oz and Ghada Karmi. In all of these texts, characters suffer either from pre-partition or post-partition trauma that results in self-annihilation and disillusionment in the coming-of-age adult contexts. Cracking India invites the tropes of injustice, gender, sexuality, and disability that the main protagonist suffers as a result of partition (Bernard, 2010, p.19). Lastly, the genre of fragmented narrative offers a signature partition writing style of Saadat Hasan Manto's works, especially because of brevity, fragmentation in the plot structure, and the dialogues of the characters who were affected by the experiential sense of partition (Bernard, 2010, p. 23). Therefore, partition offers a collective as well as shared personal memory whose effect is still pronounced in multiple critical contemporary theoretical disciplines like trauma studies, border studies, and narratology, underpinning the material as well as psychic effects (Cour, 2023, p. 74).

In light of the aforementioned discussion, substantial literary works have been published and proliferated around South Asian academia with the voices of different established historians and critics, but still the present research tries to reshape the partition studies with a contemporary critical trajectory of corporeal geographies, where the critical notion of body and space by Elizabeth Grosz, along with other theorists have been discussed with reference to the twenty-first century debates. Hence, the present study seeks to offer a kind of collage of old and new: revisiting the old scars and partition event with contemporary theoretical approaches to maintain the pronounced effect emphatically.

Research Methodology

For qualitative research, the close textual analysis of the three short stories: *Blindfold* (2016) written by Shoba Rao from the collection of her short stories titled *An Unrestored Women*, *Parbati* (2005) by Farkhanda Lodhi from the collection *Kahani: Stories by Pakistani Women* edited by Aamer Hussain, *and Holocaust* (2001)by Shamim Hamid from the collection*1971 and After Selected Stories* by Niaz Zaman have been selected. Since the textual analysis is based on the textual and historical study of partition

literature, a secondary text, *Literature, Gender and the Trauma of Partition: The Paradox of Independence* by Debali Mookerjea-Leonard (2017), has been selected to understand the pathos of women, bodies, and partition along with the geographies of displacement. The book offers insight into understanding the partition text in terms of tone, which is melancholic and brutal, as can be seen in the textual nuances of the selected fiction (Mookerjea-Leonard, 2017, p. 5). The in-depth discussion of the book resonates with the critical trajectory of corporeal literature, with special emphasis on the idea of body and space in the context of partition, and it is elucidated by Debali Mookerjea-Leonard in his book as: "the hurt is not in the body but in the mind, the soul" (Mookerjea-Leonard, 2017, p. 9). Taking scholarly cues from the partition and literary scholars Ritu Menon and Debjani Sengupta, respectively, the methodology for doing analysis is divided into three sections, namely: Volatile Bodies, Troubled Choices of Survival in Post-Partition by Females, and Body and Space: Female Honour Rejuvenated or Tarnished. Under these headings, the textual analysis of the three selected short stories from three geographical regions, viz, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, is analyzed within the guided theoretical frameworks by Elizabeth Grosz, Michael Foucault, and Martha E. Giménez.

Analysis and Discussion

My discussion in this section is guided by the concept of 'body as space' given by Elizabeth Grosz from her book *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Along with this discussion, the concept of "docile bodies" by Michael Foucault has been synchronized with the textual engagement. To highlight the troubled choices about female bodies, the concept of Marxist Feminism by Martha E. Gimenez has been synergized from her article *Marxism and* Feminism. Therefore, this section has been divided into three parts:

I- Volatile Bodies
II- Troubled Choices of Survival in Post-Partition by Females
III- Body as Space: Female Honour Rejuvenated or Tarnished

Before probing into the actual textual and critical discussion with the selected texts, a brief literary sketch or literary snapshot of all three stories, i.e., *Blindfold, The Holocaust, and Parbati,* has been given to understand the holistic intricate dynamics of the female body experiences.

In *Blindfold* by Shoba Rao, the female protagonist Bandra belongs to a poor class because her husband passed away, and she has sold all the furniture of her house to sustain her three children in this precarious situation. To make both ends meet, she used to exploit the poor farmers in the nearby areas and take their young, beautiful daughters forcefully. She opened a brothel and used to add young girls to this malicious place to

earn money. Zainab, an eleven-year-old girl, became the victim of this exploitation, and she was forced to entertain customers in that brothel and make companionship with a cat to pacify her inner pain. There are different coloured doors for specific girls_- red, blue, green, etc. so that the customers can easily identify the girl with a coloured door. The green-coloured door was exclusively given to Zubaida, and she used to entertain different male customers. At the end, she managed to free herself from the cruel clutches of Bandra.

In *The Holocaust* by Shamim Hamid, a thirteen-year-old girl, Hafiza, has seen the horrors of the female body of her own mother, who became the victim of the soldiers, and later on Hafiza was left all alone in her house, and her space was dictated by the neighbourhood patriarchy. In *Parbati* by Farkhanda Lodhi, a girl named Parbati or Parveen has witnessed the gruesome reality of war, and her honour was plundered by the military soldiers. The people, including the patriarchy, have a token of reverence for her despite this bleak, painful experience that she has endured. The society outside the refugee camp has stigmatized her with bad names. In a nutshell, female bodies become the locus of docility, objectification, and exploitation with the binary of interior and exterior spheres of society.

I- Volatile Bodies

According to Elizabeth Grosz, “body is a crucial term, a site of contestation, in a series of economic, sexual, political and intellectual struggles (Grosz, 1994, p. 19). In the story *Blindfold* by Shoba Rao, Zainab suffered terribly because her father was a poor farmer. Shoba Rao has mentioned: "The village of Doran Pur was small, just a sprinkling of low, unadorned huts. Farmers and shepherds... Impoverished”"(Rao, 2016, p. 57). Bandra dragged Zainab from her house brutally, and she tied her hands and feet together with the rope and stuffed a piece of cloth in her mouth. Consequently, different cuts or bruises appeared on Zainab's arms and face (Rao, 2016, p. 61). Zubaida’s body was ill-treated because of her poor class, and it is linked with the idea that the body is a “pliable entity” which can be molded easily into any form (Grosz, 1994, p. 187). She became an object, and her presence as a human being was nullified, which Rao has mentioned in the story by the character of Bandra that “A deal, after all, was a deal" (Rao,2016,p. 61), and thus it resonates with the theory by Elizabeth Grosz that the female body is reduced to a sexually specific object(Grosz, 1994, p.19). She has used the term 'Volatile Bodies,' which reflects that the female spaces are fragile and can be confined easily (Grosz, 1994, p. 45).

When Bandra has taken full control of Zainab's body, she took her to the brothel, where the gruesome journey of Zainab has started. Rao has mentioned: “It was not really a door, just a curtain, but each girl had a different color; Gulshan’s was red, Siddiqah’s was blue,

and Zubaida's would be green. Colors made it easier for the customers"(Rao, 2016, p. 62). Zubaida's dress was embellished with fancy colors to attract customers. I link this idea with respect to space and body, as Grosz has mentioned: "Body is linked to the representation of spatiality and temporality and our body becomes corporeal schema"(Grosz, 1994, p. 87). Therefore, her physical space in the form of her embellished dress was elevated with vibrant colours, as well as the internal space inside her green door, which has been given meticulous attention by Bandra _owner of brothel so that Abdul Karim, a man of forty-eight years old, can take charge of Zubaida's body voluptuously. It is of utmost concern at this point that Zubaida was not able to leave that obnoxious brother's vicinity. She was struggling with the patriarchy, as mentioned in the story that Abdul Kareem has shown a bite mark on his arm to Bandra, which reflects that Zubaida was struggling hard to escape from the shackles of this bad business for two years. I link this idea with the theory of Elizabeth Grosz that "The female body is in struggle with the patriarchy because it restricts that mobility and social space"(Grosz, 1994, p.19). Furthermore, the story not only tells us about the confined body space of Zubaida at the hands of customers at the brothel but also about the female body spaces of other girls who were victimized by Bandra, as he used to give them different herbs if they got ill by engaging in that malicious business.

I argue that not only is patriarchy involved in sabotaging the female body spaces, but also Bandra, the owner of the brothel, is involved in the marginalization of those young girls. It is reflected in the text as: "Gulshan got sick. She was pregnant by one of the men. She gave her herbs, the same ones she'd given the other girls."(Rao, 2016, p. 68-69). I link this idea with the concept of 'Docile Bodies' by Michael Focualt, and he states that: "A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). Consequently, the female bodies of those young girls were subjugated with the help of herbs, colors, embellished dresses, and Bandra's candid attitude toward her customers. Zubaida's identity was crushed in her new bodily space as she was given the name Lyla by Bandra. Shoba Rao reflected this as: "I told you, your name is Lyla. Did you forget?" (Rao, 2016, p. 65). In a similar vein, Zubaida's body, with her new name, was easily accessible to every type of customer, and it made the business of Bandra more lucrative; this idea is linked with Foucault's concept that the body does not have a fixed position but "distributes them and circulates them in a network of relations" Foucault, 1977, p. 146). In this gruesome journey, Zubaida, who was called Layla, manages to free herself from the bestial clutches of that brothel and restores her body with a note of reconciliation, and her docile body has been transformed from subjugation that resonates with the idea of Foucault.

At the heart of this critical debate, it is important to navigate the story from Bangladesh origin titled *The Holocaust* by Shamim Hamid. Hafiza, a thirteen-year-old girl, has witnessed the horror of the mutilated body of her mother, Amena, who was brutally

strangled by the Pakistani soldiers. The soldiers have this notion in their minds that they have the right to rape women in this way; the children who will be born out of this malicious act will create a nation that is truly Islamic, and it will be aligned with our culture. This idea has been manifested by Shamim Hamid in the story as: “We have to put the fear of Allah into them by killing the men and raping their women. Then the children born of our seeds will create a nation that is truly Islamic and in line with our own culture"(Hamid,2001,p. 35).In this way, the female body becomes a territory and a site that has been pronounced by Elizabeth Grosz by calling it a "social, political, cultural construct" (Grosz, 1994, p. 23). Grosz further argues that "the body is not an object. It is the condition and the context through which it has a relation to object”(Grosz, 1994, p. 86). The same idea is synergized in the critical debate of this story, *The Holocaust,* that the carnage of war could, with acrimonious feelings of soldiers for another nation, plant sexual savagery publicly.

Ostracized from the modest role, Amena’s body became the victim of utter bestiality because “her blouse had been ripped open in front...and her breasts were heavily scratched and bleeding” (Hamid, 2001, p.33). With this painful, heart-wrenching experience, she warns her daughter Hafiza that she must run and save herself. This idea links to Merleau-Ponty, who said that "we perceive and receive information from the world through our bodies" (Grosz, 1994, p. 87). In a similar token, the bodily space coupled with the harrowing experience of Amena reminded her of her daughter that she must run and seek refuge in some safe place. Finally, the haunted space of Amena’s body was filled with horror and terror as the story illustrates that “One of her breasts had been lopped off and blood was oozing out in a thin trickle” (Hamid, 2001, p. 37). That horror is further amplified by Shamim Hamid as “ Whirlpool of vultures dotted the sky, and the stench of bodies rotting” (Hamid 39). Those soldiers have power over the female body of Amena, and this is synergized with the theoretical paradigm of Foucault's concept of ‘docile bodies,’ who asserts that: “The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down” (Foucault, 1977, p. 138). In Foucault's terms, “by using macro-Physics of power” (Foucault, 1977, p. 160), those soldiers made their effect pronounced in a horrific and tumultuous way.

On the other hand, the space of the female body of Hafiza, the daughter of Amena, was also brimming with the social, cultural, and religious spheres of the society. Matbar, a fifty-year-old and influential religious person of the community, asserted that Hafiza’s life would become a living death and she would become a social outcast in the absence of her family (Hamid,2001,p. 38). I link this idea with the postulate given by Grosz, who says that "our attitudes and ideas seep into the functioning of the body itself, making up the realm of possibility or impossibility” (Grosz, 1994, p. 190). This theoretical concern is voiced in the story that Hafiza’s marriage was arranged with Matbar, a fifty-year-old man, in the name of providing shelter to an orphan, but inside he was attracted by the

body of Hafiza, saying “she was dark, but she was also full-breasted and exuded a sexuality which was all the more sensual” (Hamid, 2001, p. 44). In the garb of religion and humanitarian grounds, her consent for the marriage was taken for granted, which resonates with Foucault's idea that “in every society, the body was in the grip of very strict powers, which imposed on it constraints, prohibitions or obligations” (Foucault, 1977, p. 136).

I argue that the intervention of military soldiers as well as the society in taking charge of the female bodies is not only confined to the war aspects but both interventions _soldiers and society use religion as a tool to circumscribe the space of the female bodies to a nadir point which Kate Millet has also asserted in her essay *Sexual Politics* that patriarchy believes that “God is on our side in all spheres of life “ (Millet, 1970, p. 3).

From the prism of the Pakistani region, the story *Parbati* by Farkhanda Lodhi, translated by Samina Rehman, equally gains momentum that reflects the sad orchestra of the female body spaces and honour. The turbulent intervention of the soldiers through the recurring word “kill” heightens the gloomy appeal of this short story. The impetuous blow of the war and the atrocious attitude of the soldiers keep the body space of Parveen, called Parbati, more fragile. Farkhanda Lodhi has reflected this concern in the literary matrix of the story by saying, "..she was aware of her chest wounds, stiffened with caked dirt. ‘Where can I go in this condition?’ She was almost naked, covered in blood. Her shirt hung in tatters..” (Lodhi, 2005, p. 106). Her mobility was restricted because the fear of marginalization and stigmatization from society kept on lurking in her mind. Because of that speculation, her body space was confined in that gloomy ambit, which is also manifested by Elizabeth Grosz, who states that "the female body is in struggle with the patriarchy because it restricts their mobility and social space"(Grosz, 1994, p. 19). Moreover, when Parveen was taken to the camp, her inner world was coloured with self-annihilation, terror, injustice, and she was aware of the uncomfortable questions which the people in the camp would ask. This elucidates that she was familiar with the interior phenomenon of her body in the form of the scars as well as the exterior reality o f the social world as well. I link this idea with the concept of body as space by Elizabeth Grosz that “it is necessary to know the relation between interiority and exteriority, the body and the modes of the sensual perception are not merely physical, but it has to do with the consciousness as well; mind for him is always embodied " (Grosz, 1994, p. 86).

I contend that the grotesque experience of her mutilated and violent body, which Parveen has absorbed in the dark recesses of her heart and mind, refashions the worldview of the common masses as well, especially patriarchy, and then the female body enters into visual docility. In this context, it subverts the idea of Foucault, who contends that the body is the locus of subjugation and transformation (Foucault, 1977, p. 136). I use the term “visual docility” in this particular context. In this short story, not only does

Parveen's body suffer from subjugation at the hands of military soldiers, but her physical presence can also become the locale of visual docility by the ordinary masses, especially males.

II- Troubled Choices of Survival in Post-Partition by Females

The aftermath of partition left the poor, downtrodden people from the lower class in profound financial constraints. Most of the women lost their husbands in the carnage of war, which forced them to adopt nefarious means to earn a livelihood for their family. For instance, in the short story *Ten Rupees* written by Saadat Hassan Manto, a mother was forced to send her young daughter into the business of prostitution to earn money. Similarly, in another story, *Road to Mirpur Khas* (2016) by Shoba Rao, a wife was forced to sell her body because she and her husband were starving from abject poverty and hunger. These two profound instances from the literary canvases give us a crystal-clear picture that the female body has undergone immense exploitation, marginalization, annihilation, and transgression in different perturbed scenarios. This aspect can be traced in the story *Blindfold* by Shoba Rao and *The Holocaust* by Shamim Hamid, particularly.

The selected text for this paper is titled *Blindfold* by Shoba Rao. The main character, Bandra, was the owner of a brothel and stepped into this malicious business because of her poor financial conditions. After the death of her husband, her life was on the brink of an alarming zone. Shoba Rao has mentioned this as:

> he'd left her the plot of flat, useless land and had known it could grow nothing _not even a shriveled sprig of cilantro _and so she'd sold jewellery, all the furniture in the house, livestock, and even her hair, and used the money to build the brothel and buy her first three girls (Rao, 2016, p. 3).

I link this idea with the theory of Marxist Feminism by Martha E. Gimenez, which propounds that "society is the history of class struggle and sex struggles"(Gimenez, 1975,p.61).In the story *Blindfold*, Bandra was struggling in her poor class, and her struggle was all alone because of the absence of the family head, who usually takes charge of giving the family financial security. This led her to opt for the brothel business, and she used to exploit the poor farmers of Duran Pur by giving them some money to take hold of their young daughters. In Gimenez's terms, "woman's world"(Gimenez, 1975, p. 62), which constitutes a family unit in the presence of a head, completes the life of any woman, but for Bandra, her world was disrupted because of the carnage of war and she takes part in sustaining her children, which is related to Gimenez's term" Production" (62). In another striking episode, Abdul Karim, a brothel regular customer, wanted to marry Zubaida, and in return he offered handsome money to Bandra, which she

accepted. Shoba Rao has reflected this as “She could buy ten new girls with that money” (Rao, 2016, p. 69). It reflects economic exploitation of poor people not by the capitalists but by the poor people.

I resonate with this idea with the theoretical trajectory by Martha Gimenez, who said that “In Third World countries, all working class women, employed or unemployed, regardless of socio-economic status, are subject to oppression and economic exploitation” (Gimenez, 1975, p. 68). This is manifested in the story *Blindfold,* where Zubaida's father was reluctant to give her daughter as a commodity by saying, "We don't want to sell" (Rao,2016,p. 59). Bandra ransacked the whole area and found the girl and forcibly took her in the cart, which was destined for a brothel. Moreover, in this irksome journey of getting Zubaida late, it reminded Bandra, "A deal, after all, was a deal" (Rao, 2016, p. 61), and she thought of exploiting Zubaida’s father more.

It is pertinent to mention in this critical debate that Bandra found the brothel business quite lucrative and thought it would uplift her economically, which Gimenez has manifested in her Marxist Feminism theory that females can improve their status by their constant struggle to attain “economic self-sufficiency” (Gimenez, 1975, p. 72). This crucial aspect is synergized in the literary matrix of the short story *Blindfold,* where Bandra found this obnoxious business more profitable. Shoba Rao has voiced this aspect as “Two years went by. The number of customers for Lyla increased.” (Rao, 2016, p. 64). Traditionally, the working class is being exploited and marginalized by elite capitalists, which is the benchmark motif of Marxism, but I argue that the poor class is being exploited at the hands of the poor class, not the elite class, for their survival in the story *Blindfold* (Lafferty, 2024).

The Holocaust by Shamim Hamid also weaves a tapestry of utter marginalization of the girl named Hafiza at the hands of Matbar, who was a rich person in the village. By using his mercenary approach, he wanted to assert his dominance over the poor villagers. Shamim Hamid has said in the story that Matbar knows "how to manage the illiterate but canny villagers" (Hamid, 2001, p. 38). He arranged the burial and other religious ceremonies of the “butchered bodies” (Hamid, 2001, p. 41) that were laid in every nook and corner of the village, and he managed all the expenses of the religious rites. Keramat Ali, who was quite influential in arranging marriages, persuaded Matbar to take benefit from the grotesque rubble of war and marry Hafiza. He said: “Remember the adage that a disaster for someone can be a joyous harvest time for another?” (Hamid, 2001, p. 44). This persuaded Matbar to exercise his wealth to take advantage of Hafiza by marrying her because his previous wife was unable to give him a son and was obese after bearing him only daughters (Hamid, 2001, p. 44). I link this idea with the Marxist Feminism theory by Gimenez, who asserted that “capitalist mode of production is more a game” (Gimenez, 1975, p. 76). The story *The Holocaust* has the same literary matrix in this

theoretical paradigm, in which Matbar was playing a double game in front of the villagers; he wanted to get a son by marrying Hafiza, giving this impression to the villagers that he was doing this on humanitarian and religious grounds. Secondly, Hafiza's father had not given him the bamboo grove, so by marrying Hafiza, he could get hold of that too to further his business. This aspect is also imbued in the theoretical debate of Gimenez, where she says that neither human beings nor social environment can exist in isolation; they interact with one another (Gimenez, 1975, p. 62).

III- Body as Space: Female Honour Rejuvenated or Tarnished

The painful yet at the same time rejuvenated tapestry of the female body is clouded with the traditional notions of honour _where a female body is stigmatized with different labels after the horrors committed against the female body in the context of war. Traditionally, women are trapped in the epitome of chastity and purity, and when their bodily space is sabotaged by nefarious means, they have been ostracized from society (Bhasin, Menon & Khan, 1998, p. 11; Marconi, 2024).

The following pictorial image has been extracted from the book *Against All Odds: Essays on Women, Religion and Development from Pakistan and India,* written by Kamla Bhasin, Ritu Menon &Nighat Said Khan, that delineates the traditional notions of the female body- a product of domestic chores, chastity and purity (Bhasin, Menon & Khan, 1998, p. 9).



In the story *Blindfold* (2016) by Shoba Rao, a female owner of a brothel named Bandra contemplated the status of Zubaida, who was victimized and managed to escape from the brothel by saying, " What else could a girl of fifteen, alone, impure, unable to return home, have done? (Rao, 2016, p. 73; Nittali, 2020).This idea resonates with the

traditional terms where the female body is enshrouded with chastity and purity. I contend that the honour of Zubaida has not been violated; rather, it is society that has established a stereotypical notion in its mind, and their dignity and honour are tarnished, as voiced by Dasgupta in her poem *Honour Killing* (2017):

> It's you who lost your virtues before the moon
> It's you who lost your innocence before the sun
> It's you who made the races trip in front of their daughters!
> Do keep your honour elsewhere.
> Do keep your virtues elsewhere (Dasgupta, 2017, p. 77).

Dasgupta says that honour is not only to be traced in the realm of the female body; it also lies somewhere else. It is society that has lost honour and is in a more crippling situation as compared to the victim (Dasgupta, 2017, p. 77). Furthermore, in the story *Blindfold*, Zubaida's body has been transformed from utter marginalization at the hands of brothel customers to an autonomous body which can be synergized by the concept of 'docile bodies' by Michael Foucault, who says that a docile body can be transformed or improved (Foucault, 1977, p. 136).

A similar idea has been jelled in the story *Parbati* by Farkhanda Lodhi, where Parveen was the victim of being made a laughingstock by the villagers after her bodily space was marginalized by the military soldiers, and they believed that she had disgraced everyone. She was stigmatized as an unproductive or infertile woman (Lodhi, 2005, p. 112; Mushtaq & Sarfraz, 2025). However, after encountering the grotesque episode of bodily violence, Parveen stepped out of the traditional taboos related to the concept of honour and empowered herself as an individual. Her body has been transformed, and she elevated herself as Lodhi has reflected in this in the text as "Parbati was reborn" (Lodhi, 2005,p.113).

Conclusions

In light of the aforementioned discussion, I contend in my paper that the notion of honour associated with female bodies, if it gets violated at the hands of military soldiers particularly, the female bodies become a locus of animosity and stigmatization with bad labels. However, the female protagonists Zubaida and Parveen rejuvenated themselves and liberated their bodies from the cruel clutches of patriarchy, which resonates with the idea of Dasgupta, who asserted that patriarchy should revisit its traditional ideas related to honour because honour lies somewhere else and it has nothing to do with the virginity of females if it gets violated (Dasgupta, 2017, p. 77).

Navigating the Mosaic of Female Body Spaces in the Selected South Asian Fiction via Partition Lens is an effort to break the stereotypical ideas about female bodies in resonance

with the notion of honour. Female body spaces construct history in the arena of partition literature that registers the fractured reality of females most critically. Literary voices of writers from India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh give us a spectrum of gruesome tales of female bodies that became the product of utter marginalization and exploitation (Navarro-Tejero, 2019). It also reflects that the repercussions of war put females in limbo, and they were forced to sustain themselves financially by engaging in nefarious means. Female body spaces are violated by different shades: poor females suffered from war, military soldiers, and the patriarchy, which used to take advantage of war and decide the future of the young girls by themselves. More importantly, it's not only the transgression of the female bodies, but it also reflects the transgression of human values as well.

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Aleena Shahzad is a Lecturer (English Literature), National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, & Ph.D. Scholar (English Literature) International Islamic University, Islamabad