

CHAPTER-V

WHAT THE BODY REMEMBERS: RECONFIGURING FEMALE IDENTITY

Nations have attempted to control their culture and their national identity by controlling women's bodies and their access to power, knowledge, and public life.

-Marjorie Agosin

This chapter concentrates on the female protagonist, i.e., Roop's metamorphosis from a submissive figure into a woman of strength and agency in Shauna Singh Baldwin's *What the Body Remembers* (WBR). It first traces how the family and home are pivotal to the construction of Roop's gender. It situates her within the specific Sikh cultural context and uncovers her experiences of struggle within dominant patriarchal institutions such as family and marriage. The chapter attempts to study how the Partition experience aids in her transformation. It also seeks to examine the relation between women's honour and Partition and integrate it with the idea of martyrdom within the Sikh religious context.

Shauna Singh Baldwin's first novel *WBR* (1999) spans the period from 1928 to the time of India's Partition of 1947. Baldwin's grandparents had gone through Partition and the character of Roop, the protagonist in the novel, has been inspired by her grandmother. In an interview to Anjana Rajan that appeared online as *Memory's Harvest* in *The Hindu*, Baldwin says that she began the process of retrieving women's experience of Partition based on her grandmother's memoir of "about 60 pages that are now a treasured family document" (Rajan, May 5, 2011). Baldwin was instrumental in goading her into this remembering because till then her grandmother only told "the

story she was authorised to tell” (Rajan, May 5, 2011). Going against the authorised version means to open up the areas of silence. Baldwin does exactly this by taking up the threads of her grandmother’s personal story and weaving it with the memories of those survivors of Partition she met and talked to in 1997 both in India and across the border and the result is a novel, which reads almost like an epic. Baldwin does not belong to what Kamra (2015) calls the “eyewitness generation” (p. 160). She represents “intergenerational memory” (Kamra, p. 159) which, without being direct witnesses to Partition, offer newer ways of engaging with the relationship of the present generation with the event. Hirsch (2012) uses the term “postmemory” (p. 5) to explain the location that the later generations occupy in relation to traumatic catastrophes of the past:

“Postmemory” describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they remember only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. (p. 5)

Baldwin was born in 1962 in Canada and therefore she is a witness to the Partition experience through her grandmother’s memories and through the stories of Partition refugees from Punjab in Delhi, where she grew up. Born in Canada, having lived in Delhi and now living in the USA, Baldwin’s is a literary voice, which identifies deeply with her Sikh race and gender. The novel narrativises the story of a Sikh family of colonial and pre-Partition India and later its encounter with India’s Partition. In the process of telling the Sikh side of the Partition story Baldwin deftly foregrounds the

woman's story, an area which has escaped the notice of privileged narratives. She has woven a complex web of interrelated issues like polygamy, patriarchal conditioning of women, gendered memory, the crafting and re-crafting of female identity and women within Sikh history and culture with the India of the pre-Partition and Partition period as the backdrop. Through this novel, Baldwin has attempted to initiate a transnational dialogue about women's experience as women and also as the keeper of the men's and community's honour during Partition.

The basic story of the novel relates to the second marriage of a prosperous, well to do Sikh to a poor, young girl, i.e., Sardarji's marriage to Roop. The first wife of Sardarji, Satya, is still alive but she has not been able to bear any child. It is this situation that has necessitated the second marriage of Sardarji. Baldwin's taking up the issue of polygamy in the novel would on the face of it make it seem like an outdated issue because this practise was outlawed in 1955 in India. But in the opinion of lawyer-activist Agnes, "the progressive sounding provision of monogamy not only turned out to be a mockery but in fact even more detrimental to women" (2000, p. 131). Polygamous marriages amongst Hindus and Sikhs had legal sanction up to the enactment of 1955 and hence women in such relationships had the right to maintenance and legitimacy. Even after codification polygamous practices did not stop, but continued as men have found ways to circumvent this particular law. The Act turned out to be detrimental to the interests of the second 'unmarried wife'. The result is that since this is an illegal arrangement the woman is now no longer entitled to any financial rights and security. Agnes's work with such cases has revealed to her that polygamous men still exist on a large scale but without having to account for any responsibility to the woman involved. Bigamy or polygamy still persists in its delegitimised version and

the onus remains on the first wife to initiate prosecution failing which the man escapes conviction as well as any responsibility. In many of the North Indian communities polygamous marriages undergo the same kind of transactions to settle the marriage as does the legally arranged first marriage. It was common for the kings in India to be polygamous to effect political alliances as well as to beget heirs. This practise was taken up by the patriarchal minded upper classes and the rich and it involves the idea of commodification. Sardarji's marriage to Roop is a mismatch in many ways but his wealth and social position are what seal the bargain. Girls from poor families like Roop become the sites receptive to men's wealth and social status. The fact that Sardarji is twenty five years older and already married speaks volumes for the fact that his eligibility in terms of marriage has not diminished. Sardarji's being "Just a little more than forty years old" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 142) does not in any way take away from his potential to become Roop's future husband but sixteen year old Roop herself will lose her eligibility as a bride very soon if she does not marry quickly. Therefore, Roop's father's poverty and she moving towards prospective spinsterhood set the stage for a bigamous marriage. The woman who will marry Sardarji and bear him a son has to be carefully selected and here Roop's 'body' plays a crucial part. What go in Roop's favour are her youth, chastity and domesticity. Therefore, Sardarji's zeroing in on Roop as the ideal fertile female who will suit his purposes is a calculated move.

The women involved emerge as the most vulnerable subjects in polygamous marriages while men control wealth and power. Be it Satya, the first wife, or Roop the second, it is the women whose vulnerability is exploited within such patriarchal practices. Satya is virtually discarded as a wife for her lack of reproductive potential – although Sardarji still admires her managerial capabilities – and Roop is chosen for her

procreative potential. Since it is well established in Roop's mind that women are meant for marriage and procreation, for her an ill matched marriage is better than no marriage at all. Although bold and outspoken, Satya too is trained for a lifetime of dependence, constrained in the narrow space of the home. Since the public space is out of reach for women of the household, Satya cannot use it to challenge Sardarji's authority and injustice. Therefore, it is within the private space of the home that Satya exercises power over the person, i.e., Roop, who has usurped the position that once belonged to her. She proceeds to extract her revenge for offloading her from the privileged position of being Sardarji's exclusive wife.

Baldwin's naming of the novel has special significance. *Roop* connotes body, form, shape or beauty. It is the woman's body on which not only patriarchy induced power games are played, but also the violence of Partition is enacted. According to Bowden and Mummery, possessing a woman's body means:

...not possessing the right or capacity to control everything that happens to or is expected of the body. Women's bodies are after all, like their lives, affected on all sides by various forms of explicit and implicit social, political, legal, symbolic and discursive control. (2012, p. 45)

Both childbearing and childlessness come under scrutiny by society. The kind of reception that a woman is handed by the Indian society, especially within the family, rests on her reproductive capacity. The woman's pregnant body receives protection and is valued. This may make the female body appear in more positive terms but is nonetheless, fraught. Pregnant Roop faces Sardarji's censure for being too thin which is not ideally healthy enough to support the son he is so sure she carries. This same body

which was prized before the birth is made to feel guilty for having betrayed what was willed when she gives birth to a daughter. Roop's body also becomes the medium through which Sardarji is able to "scientifically" establish that he can have children. Roop's mother's body bears four sons who do not survive. The last one makes her die a painful death. Bachan Singh's willingness to take her to consult a doctor in Lahore is overridden by Roop's grandmother who strongly objects to "show her body to strange men" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 37). Roop's mother's valued body is placed under cultural prohibition and her own voice in any of the decisions is not heard. Satya's childlessness becomes the reason for her devaluation as a woman. With maternity eluding her, her quarrelsome and argumentative nature presents her in sharp contrast to Roop, Sardarji's "little brown koel" who "will listen to him admiringly, carefully" unlike Satya who "has never lowered her eyes before him and carries herself far too confidently" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 375). All of this adds up to his perception of her as somewhat unbalanced, selfish, deficient, unwomanly and after his second marriage, a threat to the peace of the family.

The female body is used and abused in various ways in order to fulfil notions of cultural tradition. In the words of Mooney:

Women's bodies become sites for the representation, contestation and control of identity, invested as they are with notions of collective loyalty, purity, and nurturance. Yet they typically have little control over or choice in the ways in which they represent and embody collectivities; not only do women mother communities and nations, but in appalling corollary are sexually brutalised when the collectivities they embody come under attack. (2010, pp.159-160)

She further adds, “These forms of embodied identity, cast in moral tones of purity, were horrifically assaulted among Punjabis during Partition” (Mooney, p. 160). The stories of being used and abused are not of one woman or one generation of women, but of women of the entire community over a considerable period. In their everyday life, the women constantly remember that their bodies must perform one paramount function and that is procreation. Baldwin’s narrativisation unifies this concern with the violence that is worked out on Kusum’s body during the Partition riots. It is Kusum’s youth and childbearing potential symbolised by the womb, which is attacked by the Muslim marauders. Just as the female body is a site to be dominated and controlled by the male in day to day life, similarly it is also the location for men to bend it to their will and exercise territorial rights during communal conflicts like Partition. What Baldwin sees is the woman’s body as a commodity that is easily expendable. Satya’s story is the failure of the body to produce an heir. Here, the female body is seen in terms of its reproductive capabilities. Sardarji may not have caused direct violence upon Satya’s body. But he shares the same perspective of the abductors and rapists of women during Partition because in both cases the women’s bodies are perceived in their reproductive roles. The attack was on those particular areas of the women’s bodies, which signified procreation and nurturance – the breasts and the womb. What Roop hardly realises initially when she agrees to marry Sardarji is that she has been reduced to a mere ‘womb’ to produce Sardarji’s male heir. When her first born is a girl her womb is required again because it has not yet fulfilled the task it was acquired for. To bear children, particularly an heir in the form of a son, is the fundamental duty of a woman. A woman who fails in this duty becomes an object of discord. Roop has no say in this matter for by marrying Sardarji her body has been conquered for a specific purpose.

For all his education in England, his job as an engineer guiding India towards modernisation, his power and position as a landlord and his dreams of achieving a united India, Sardarji's expectation of women and marriage is no different from that of the marauders who unleashed unspeakable violence on women's bodies during Partition. Satya looks at her failure to have a child as a kind of sin, "what right had she to share his bed and bring nothing from the coupling?" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 12) She is confined to the condition of a discarded woman. It is woman's fate and as her mother tells her "if she is fertile, good for the farmer, if not, bad for her" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 12). She makes the fertility-femininity association with the female body represented as a fertile/infertile tract of land. The woman's body is either a territory to be conquered or a territory to be controlled and protected.

Associated with the woman's body are also ideas of chastity and deformity both of which can do or undo a girl's prospect of marriage. Under the ruse of tradition and culture, women's purity is valorised. So, what becomes central to patriarchy is to control women's bodies and their behaviour. Motherhood is glorified and chastity and virginity are the sole instruments through which the community's honour can be preserved. The notion of woman's chastity is also drilled into Roop by the women in Pari Darwaza. They preach to her that chastity is a necessary quality for women. One reason why she is prohibited from riding Nirvair any more is to ensure that her chastity remains intact. It is imperative for the young Roop to maintain her virginity and the evidence of it. The imposition of such qualities has made Roop abandon her independence and become an unquestioning slave to the dictates of patriarchy. She must prove her chastity to the bigamous Sardarji.

The novelist has consciously and deliberately related the situation arising out of the second marriage of Sardarji to the long history of the presence of conflict and violence in the relationship between the three most visible communities of India. In order to interweave the history of the three communities into the story of a family, the novelist very early mentions, “Roop is a new Sikh, then, an uncomprehending carrier of the orthodoxy resurging in them all Hindus, Sikhs, Muslim, they are like the three strands of her hair, a strong rope against the British, but separate nevertheless” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 6). Roop thus becomes a symbol of the presence of the three dominant communities coming together to fight against the British colonial rule, but at the same time, retaining their identity which ultimately results in the politico-geographical division of the country.

Roop grows up in undivided Punjab’s village of Pari Darwaza in Khanewal. Her Papaji’s home is not gender neutral. Although there is no obvious separation of the house into male and female domains, yet there is no question as to what exactly the gender roles are in the family. The home and her family – Revati Bhua, Gujri and Papaji – exert a powerful influence on Roop, moulding her young female mind as to what a girl is meant for and what she is not. Gender formulation is at work through Roop’s witnessing of the lived experience of Revati Bhua and Gujri and through their constant harping on notions of women’s purity, humility, loyalty and propriety of which Papaji is also a part. Roop “like Madani is Papaji and Jeevan’s guest for a while, just till her marriage” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 31), a belief that is in concord with the way North Indian society perceives the woman’s socio-cultural position to be. Gender roles are clearly delineated for Roop as those of daughter and sister in her parental home and those of wife and mother in her marital home. Marriage and motherhood are her

destiny, an idea Roop has already imbibed from women like her Nani who laments at the death of Roop's mother, "What is a woman without children?" to which the assembled women in mourning answer, "Nothing" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 47). When her Mama goes into labour, Roop is given a timely reminder of her role in life, "'Ay, learn,' says Nani, cuffing the back of Roop's head so she almost falls into the room, 'learn what we women are for!'" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 42). Gender construction is at work when women are expected to have a host of desirable qualities for marriage. The discovery by Papaji that Roop has one bad ear added to being *Mangalik* is a source of worry for him, "Who will take you now?" and "Marry a rich man? Now? What rich man will marry a girl with one ear?" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 94) Roop is sworn to secrecy about the deformity by her father. Revelation would expose that she was a flawed piece of object no husband would want to own.

Gujri's story, albeit a minor one in the novel, is of the faithful servant owing loyalty to the family that shelters her. Although she is well integrated into the family and there is a mutual dependency, yet Gujri too cannot escape the societal and the patriarchal expectations of her as a woman. Gujri, widowed at seven cannot marry again as in the traditional perception she is now inauspicious and would "kill another husband" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 28). Having been denied fulfilment through marriage, her existence finds meaning in her role as the caregiver to the family she has been adopted into and in her knowledge of the scriptures, both Hindu and Sikh. Her presence is comforting to the children. Thus, Gujri gives back generously to the family, which has sheltered her and becomes a surrogate mother to the three children whose own mother is too weak and sickly and who eventually dies during childbirth.

Another figure whose ultimate calling in life as woman was never met is Revati Bhua, “a woman whose kismet left her unmarried” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 37) who is Papaji’s cousin sister but welcome to stay as a guest for as “an unmarried woman, she has no sons to look after her in her old age” (Baldwin, p. 34) and has also found meaning in her life by transforming herself into an aunt “to every man, woman and child in Pari Darwaza by listening well to all their woes” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 34). It is through her interactions with these two women in the home that Roop learns about her role as a woman and all the things she is expected to do. They exhort her to strive to imitate the models of piety and sacrifice.

Very early in life, Roop is made aware of gender roles. Her family subscribes to strongly polarised and clearly defined roles for boys and girls. According to Kapur and Misra, “Gender constructs are necessarily introduced by social structures in a given cultural setting for the process of differentiation between the categories of man and woman” (2010, p. 187). A girl child is taught a different set of behaviour compared to the male child:

Daughters experience fewer physical and psychological comforts and investments than do sons; increasingly dissociated from their birth families as they grow up, daughters may receive differential treatment in terms of diet, education and discipline in comparison to their brothers. (Mooney, 2010, 162)

In most Indian societies the socio-cultural act of eating food is replete with gendered connotations for it conveys more than just eating. One message that food conveys is about gender, and inequalities can be expressed in culinary forms. Following a gender-segregated eating culture Gujri offers only *daal* and *savayan* to Roop while the more

powerful and strengthening chicken and eggs are reserved for her brother Jeevan. Gujri will not allow her to have egg-bhurji and chicken for as she says, “Eggs and meat for a girl? No, don’t waste them...Roop you have daal” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 27). Roop too feels “she doesn’t *need* the egg bhurji; he does. He’s going to join the army” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 27). This emphasises the stereotype of women who will never join the army and therefore would not need the source of energy. The very next instant when Jeevan invites her to practise her boxing on him and Roop is able to land a good punch at Jeevan which makes him reel back and she can sense his “disapproving” (p. 28) reaction, Roop realises “She should have been less strong, that was it” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 28). Physical strength is not what Roop requires for after all even the role of defending and protecting Roop is traditionally the brother Jeevan’s lot. Commenting on the privileged position of the male child, Walton-Roberts (2010) writes:

Even after marriage the brother is still considered the protector of his sister and her children, especially against her husband, should the need arise. The relationship is symbolised through the ceremony of *rakhri*, which the sister ties to the brother’s wrist to demonstrate her material dependence on him. (pp. 335-336)

A show of strength greater than Jeevan’s therefore would be unexpected and unacceptable because it would be incompatible with the notions of traditional gender roles.

An event from which Roop is excluded from participating in because she is a daughter and not a son is during her mother’s funeral. She is not allowed to either participate in the last rites or accompany her mother on her final journey. She is sternly

reminded by Papaji, “This is men’s work – not for you” (p. 46). Roop feels the pain of this exclusion:

Mama will be burned, and Roop cannot be with her. Only Papaji and Jeevan can be present; they are men. Then when Mama is nothing but ashes, Papaji and Jeevan will take her all the way to Hardwar to float away upon the Ganga – why can Roop not be with Mama to hold her hand and say farewell? (Baldwin, 2011, p. 46)

Deprived of a more personal and emotional final farewell, Roop is unable to experience the psychological comfort that the power of ritual could have brought her. On the day of the funeral she constantly thinks of her mother, “*Will Mama feel the burning? The blazing heat from the flames all around her? Madani and I should be with her now, just to hold her hand*” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 49). In later days, she remains haunted by the images of the funeral which she never witnessed, “*Did the flames catch her long hair? Did she ignite from within? Does she know how much I wanted to be with her?*” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 65) And:

Mama is gone and all sweetness, all fire, gone with her. Papaji didn’t let Roop say goodbye. No one allowed Roop to carry her mama away, help lift her to the funeral pyre, no one let Roop hold her mama’s hand as the flames took her away. (Baldwin, 2011, p. 76)

Somewhat similar issues have been raised by Kaur Singh. Singh recounts the event of her mother’s death and the subsequent funeral rites that were performed by male relatives and friends while she remained a silent spectator throughout. However,

before the immersion of the ashes in the river Kaur Singh (2010) decided to venture into what was an entirely male domain:

We were coming to the finale of funeral rites. This was my last chance to touch the physical part of my mother. I wanted to hold the bag that Uncle, her younger brother, possessed. I asked for it; he refused. I asked again, and this time he reluctantly gave in. As I held my mother's relics close to my body, I felt wonderfully comforted. In this 'impassioned experience' the tumult of the preceding days was soothed. All the agony and frenzy of those days was transformed into peace and harmony. (pp. 208-209)

Kaur Singh pleads for 'feminization of ritual':

My understanding of 'feminization of ritual' derives from the pain of not being able to participate more fully in my mother's funeral simply because I was a daughter and not a son. This personal pain extends to other women (and men) who are excluded and oppressed in our patriarchal society. (2010, p. 209)

She continues to observe on this issue:

Ritual itself is a transformative process. The feminization of ritual entails a double transformation through which we will be active subjects, not passive objects; we will confidently lead, not timidly follow; we will be whole, not fragmented; we will be powerful not weak; we will be liberated, not oppressed. (2010, p. 209)

Roop has the opportunity to lay those haunting memories to rest on the day of the Baisakhi festival in Lahore which Papaji visits with his children. Lost in the crowd for

a short time she witnesses a gathering of people at Lahori Gate assembled “to burn all their foreign clothes” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 97) in protest against the British. She watches the bonfire lit for the purpose and “its flames grow strong and leap as high as Jeevan said Mama’s funeral pyre had flamed” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 97). To Roop, the flames represent her mother’s funeral pyre and the “white chunni” that the woman protester throws into it her mother’s body, “This is what Mama’s body must have looked like, on the pyre” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 97). Roop is compelled by a subconscious decision and she “throws her own white chunni into the flames, Mama’s white chunni, and watches it burn” (Baldwin, p. 98). This is a kind of enactment of participating in the funeral ritual of her mother. Discovered a short while later by Papaji and earning a humiliating slap for her endeavours at making a spectacle of herself, she cannot explain to him that the act signified a final closure for her, “She wants to tell Papaji she placed Mama on the pyre, saw her chance to tell Mama goodbye” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 98).

The power of patriarchy continues to be wielded in other spheres as well. It is Papaji who decides as to what values the family will adhere to. The humiliation of the young Sikh boy at the hands of the Arya Samajis that Papaji witnesses fills him with the determination to set things right inside his home and bring to an end the tolerance that had allowed him to let his “family walk the border between one faith and another” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 57). His orders brook no argument and questioning as he peremptorily says:

None of your brass idols in the house, Revatiji, no Hindu ceremonies, no Aarti, no Sandhya, no offerings to that tulsi tree on the terrace. I don’t want to hear a single bell – understand? Gujri, no more Muslim meat is to enter this house, not

even if Abu Ibrahim sends goat meat he slaughters for our labourers at Sadqa; the Guru forbids killing animals slowly and painfully. (Baldwin, 2011, p. 55)

It is the communal events taking place in the external sphere that bring an awakening and “back to mindfulness” (p. 55) of “we are Singhs” (p. 57). His visit to the site of the massacre at Jallianwalabagh is the moment when it strikes him with double force about how his community has been caught in the crossfire of the Hindu-Muslim hatred and has unjustly borne the backlash of colonial tyranny. His assertion of his ‘Sikhness’ is a response to the Sikhs being reduced to a marginalised status, appropriated by the dominant Hindu nationalist ideology, and gradually expelled from the project of separatism. The two nation theory of India’s Partition did not include the aspirations of the Sikhs. Since in the present all that the Sikhs have met with is betrayal at the hands of the British and the Congress, Papaji takes recourse to nostalgia to reconstruct at least within the private space of his home, the idea of a Sikh community if not a nation. To borrow a term from Shiv Lal (1994), Papaji proceeds to “de-Hinduisse Sikhism” (p. 58). Shiv Lal, while elaborating upon the work of the Singh Sabha says “The Sabha de-Hinduised Sikhism whose doctrines and institutions had been completely Hinduised” (1994, p. 58). Papaji excavates the past history of the Sikhs as a community that exemplified valour and sacrifice. The martyrdom of the Gurus is recalled by Papaji for the benefit of Jeevan and the women of the family lest they forget the ideals that the Sikh religion stands for. Papaji places much of the burden of this remembering on the women who are to imbibe and live out these ideals. Papaji’s response to the injustices heaped on the Sikh community is to set in motion at least within the house, attempts to restore past greatness and redeem the losses that have been caused to the community by leaders on the national level.

Papaji's sudden ordering that no more Hindu rituals will be followed in the house by anyone but only Sikh rituals, turns Revati Bhua's world upside down. When Papaji decides to equate religion with identity, Revati Bhua has no choice but to follow suit and do Papaji's bidding. Roop and Madani are sent away to Firozpur to attend the local Sikh girls' school "because Papaji does not trust Revati Bhua with his daughters anymore" (Baldwin, 2011, 99). Papaji's attempt is to keep his daughters away from Pari Darwaza and from the influence of learning "about Hindu gods and goddesses...or learning Muslim prayers..." (Baldwin, 2011, 99). The school is attached to the gurdwara. Lajo Bhua's role is to dispense the rules the two girls must follow to make a good marriage. The rebellious Roop will not adjust to being deprived of the normal comforts she has been used to and is reprimanded by Lajo Bhua because "who knows what kind of family Roop will have to adjust to" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 100). Madani, however, has learnt all the arts of a woman's proper behaviour and is a contrast to Roop. Papaji's control over the household is absolute and the women in it also speak and train Roop following the same patriarchal rhetoric.

Moving from her home, the next space that Roop occupies with her sister Madani is Bhai Takht Singh's boarding school for Sikh girls "with walls twelve feet high so they'll be insulated from all the anger brewing in Punjab and so Roop can't run away on any more protest marches" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 104). While Jeevan has been sent to Rawalpindi and is being tutored "in English so he can do what Papaji wants him to: go to Murree, high in the Margalla Hills above Rawalpindi, to study at the mission school" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 107), Roop against her will is made to help in the school kitchen "like a servant" (Baldwin, p. 106). She is punished "not because she doesn't want to learn cooking, but for *saying* she doesn't want to learn it" (Baldwin, 2011, p.

107). Bhai Takht Singh's school teaches the girls "the Guru's shabads and embroidery" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 109). Thus Roop's studying at Bhai Takht Singh's school is not an empowering end in itself. Madani has trained herself to behave keeping in mind the idea of family honour. Roop as a child does express her incomprehension at being forced to do things just so she doesn't create problems for Papaji. But by the time she grows up notions of *sharam* and honour have taken such deep roots that she never questions the gendered inequalities she is subjected to. Accepting without question the rules laid down by her family about what constitutes archetypal womanhood; Roop over the next few years would learn to negotiate experiences that will result in a transition and reimagining of her self.

Kusum's marriage to Jeevan makes Roop aware of the need to marry. She feels her mother died without fulfilling this duty of hers, i.e., arranging her marriage while she was a child. Roop is now confronted with the fear that perhaps she would not be able to fulfil social expectations and be married by seventeen. Roop's decision to marry Sardarji out of choice, exhibits both agency and subordination at one and the same time. She has taken the decision to change her destiny as per her will by marrying a landowner like Sardarji, but at the same time she perpetuates her own subordination. She is compelled to ensure marriage at a decent age in deference to societal expectations or else risk the accruing of disgrace to her family. Roop has no option but to accept all the social sanctions. Otherwise she may have to endure Revati Bhua's unmarried status and its accompanying perceived horror of living alone in her old age with no sons to look after her. Roop is thus driven to make her decision to marry Sardarji.

The process of such gender construction also involves “a culture’s proclivity of devaluing female life...placing them a notch below or perhaps several notches below men/boys, a reality poignantly fictionalised by Shauna Singh Baldwin in her novel *What the Body Remembers*” (Malhotra, 2010, p. 84). The novel is replete with examples where Roop’s family exults in women as mothers of sons, rather than as mothers of daughters. The birth of four sons to Roop’s mother and their inability to survive obviously take their toll on her health. Kusum, herself a mother of sons once remarks to Roop, “A woman who has sons will never be alone in her old age” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 133). Roop’s first born is a daughter “an unwanted gift” (Baldwin, p. 234) to Sardarji for he had looked forward to a son. The disappointment in Sardarji’s household is palpable to Roop which makes her think, “I deserve this. I made a girl” (Baldwin, 2011, p.225). In an attempt to make amends Papaji anxiously writes to reassure Sardarji that the astrologer Jyotish Sunder Chand has predicted “not one but two boys” (Baldwin, p. 225) after one daughter for Roop.

Roop as a child has taken the decision that she is not meant to do normal household drudgery and therefore has her eyes set on a rich husband. She is more ‘ambitious’ than her sister Madani in this respect. Patriarchal conditioning from Gujri, Revati Bhua and Kusum has now taught her “shame” (Baldwin, p. 135). Learning to be “silent and obedient” (Baldwin, p. 132) she tries to be “good-good, sweet-sweet and obedient as Sita so everyone will love her...” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 135). Marriage for Roop would also mean to be “free of Papaji’s endless restrictions and policing!” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 136) As Roop waits for her marriage to be arranged and for destiny to take a turn for the better, she gives in to the prohibitions that have been put on her – she does not venture outside the *haveli* and nor can she ride the horse, Nirvair anymore.

Although much of these notions are on the wane, yet “like much of India Punjab is a patriarchal and patrilineal region” (Mooney, 2010, p. 160). The word used in the north of India for “shame” is *sharam* which refers to “modesty, humility and propriety” (Mooney, 2010, pp. 160-161). Roop now has to maintain social distance from any “unrelated man in the village unless he be a small boy or a white-bearded elder for fear of what-people-will-say” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 135). This limits Roop’s freedom. Revati Bhua’s solution to the restlessness brewing inside the young girl is “Do some embroidery” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 137). Like Madani and Kusum have done, Roop is also expected to occupy herself with cooking, sewing and looking after the house as this would ensure a definite passport to marriage. While it cannot be contested that Roop complies with prevailing feminine norms, there is in her the potential for women’s agency. Since childhood she has been predisposed to the idea of marriage as a woman’s destiny. But notwithstanding this limited perspective of her role in life, she desires a change – a different fate from that of her Mama and Madani and Kusum. She wants to be loved like her Mama, “but she doesn’t really want to be like her Mama and never see anything beyond *Pari Darwaza*” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 135). Even as a child while appreciating her dead mother’s qualities of love and generosity and yearning to be like her, Roop, “doesn’t want to die like her, never having seen the street or the bazaar, never going out without *pardah*” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 76). Therefore, she wishes to marry a man who is perhaps a landowner or “Maybe a raja” (Baldwin, p. 77). Roop does not mind Papaji’s praising his daughter-in-law Kusum’s culinary talents and exhortation to Roop to learn from her:

Roop doesn’t have any jealousy of Kusum, and there is nothing Kusum does that Roop wants to do – Kusum just waits for Jeevan’s visits and letters and helps

Gujri in the cookroom, weeping over onions, grinding chillies, or slowly stirring fiery dark brown 'Pindi cholas in the wide mouth of the pan rocking on the clay stove. (Baldwin, 2011, p. 133)

Roop's wishes are answered when Sardarji's proposal of marriage comes her way. Ironically it is her father who has reservations about this liaison, for Sardarji, forty two years old, already has a wife who has remained childless. Roop has no qualms in accepting this proposal as these are issues which she cannot let stand in the way of her future happiness. Her prayers are answered when her astrological charts are found to be compatible with Sardarji's, both being *Mangalik*, i.e., born under the influence of the *Mangal* star. Seventeen years is the deadline set by the patriarchal dictates of her society to get married or else she would be in danger of forever remaining unwed. Sardarji being a *jagirdar*, an owner of many villages, she would have servants and nice clothes. In Sardarji she sees her saviour. Overriding any reservations that Papaji might have had for such a marriage, Roop gives her acceptance.

The real challenges in Roop's life begin after this marriage to Sardarji. Roop has now to negotiate a transition from her father's home to her husband's home. The material benefits – Sardarji's huge ancestral property with its sprawling four storied *haveli* with servants and all the comforts she could have desired – are compensation enough. What, however, Roop had not bargained for was Sardarji's first wife, Satya's presence as an individual and who Sardarji still cared about and listened to. Satya has vehemently protested Sardarji's second marriage and Roop can sense her antagonism. But apart from the discomfort that Satya's presence causes her, Roop initially is not too disturbed. The challenge, however, comes when she is expecting her first child and in order to appease Satya, Sardarji tells her to give it to the childless Satya. No longer

under the protection of her father's family, Roop will alone have to make her choices and face the consequences. While weighing the pros and cons of this unfair demand Roop realises it is a "fire test" (Baldwin, p. 217) comparable to the one that Sita had to go through, but also different from Sita's "agnipariksha" because "unlike Sita, who was a goddess and so pure that she could not fail, Roop is only mortal..." (Baldwin, 2011, p. 217) Her decision would be dependent on a perception of her future status in the Sardarji household. Her contemplative silence is taken to be an answer in the positive and hence her agency is not recognised by Sardarji. The right to decide is not hers. But Roop's silence is not an indication of her acquiescence. Forced to give up two of her children to Satya, Roop over time is nonetheless able to thwart Satya in her attempts to lay claim to her children and emerges the winner in the contest for power – both over her children and over Sardarji.

Patriarchy forbade Roop to own her childhood but very soon after her marriage to Sardarji and after being forced to give up her children Roop begins to own her present. Not at all overtly bold like Satya, she uses her persuasive powers on Sardarji to reclaim her children and bargains for complete isolation of Satya and her bitter and angst-ridden presence from her children. The reader is left with a strong conviction that had Roop been taught a different set of rules while she was a child, she would have had a different and more empowering set of ambitions than merely to get married to a rich husband and be an obedient wife. Fearing a threat to her life from Satya she writes a letter to Papaji pleading for his help. However, this letter is also an act of resistance. Her mind wills that her father should understand her pain by reading between the lines – all that she cannot speak and put down in words, "*In the spaces between the words is your daughter. In the unspoken is the unwritten, there is Roop*" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 335).

Papaji's belief about a married girl coming to stay in her parents' home is steeped in patriarchy. Roop's grieving at having to give up her children is seen by him as giving him "trouble" (Baldwin, p. 339). When he accuses her of going ahead with her marriage because "all you wanted was to have pretty clothes and to sit on chairs in a rich man's home" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 339), Roop comes to the realisation that this was after all how she was conditioned to think, "Pretty clothes – were they really all I wanted or all I knew to want?" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 339) A better life for her meant this. The taboos that were placed on her "offered his Roop no choice" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 340). She does not articulate her protest directly but wills him to read between the lines – almost the first conscious step that she takes towards empowerment. Her predicament is that of the woman who wants to fight back but has not been taught to. She has selected what she has been taught to select and now is confronted with an issue she was not prepared for. However, she liberates herself from the silencing that occurred when she was restrained from confronting Satya's unkindness and jealousy. At a loss as to who to turn to for help and deeply missing her own dead mother, she draws from her own inner reserves of strength.

Even after marriage, the idea of home acquires meaning as a site of personal struggles for Roop. She realises that both her father's home and her husband's home are mere illusions of safety and protection as any transgression from the rules laid down within them would entail the risk of abandonment with nowhere to go. Refusal to give up her daughter to Satya carries with it the threat of being sent back to Papaji to become a burden upon him. The birth of a son is also no consolation. Born underweight, with a thin chance of survival, it sets her wondering once again, "If he should die, what can stop Sardarji from sending her home in disgrace?" (Baldwin,

2011, p. 286). A new world of fear opens up before Roop, a world that was invisible under the illusion of the home as secure. The stable ideas of her relation to the home and her family are upset and what takes its place is a threatening fear of loss of security. Baldwin has also engaged with the complexity that characterises the father-daughter relationship within Sikh home and culture. Even as a child Roop has been aware of the contradictions and differences in her relation to her father. The protection that Papaji's home offers is associated with the idea of threat – threat to her honour and her father's honour. Hence, Roop's fear of her body is shaped by Papaji's protection. As she grows into a young girl she cannot venture even as far as the post office, cannot glance or speak to men outside the family and the *chunni* on her head which is keeper of her shame, must not be allowed to slip even for a moment to her shoulders. Roop learns to fear her own body as an instrument that lures men to lust.

Thus, Roop is made to learn about the threatening world outside and the men within it. The idea of the home and the fear in the heart emerge, interestingly, as response to the threats that the outside world poses. The fact that “in Roop that dread runs much deeper than in many other girls, runs deep into bone” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 135) stresses the complex relationship Roop shares with her father, for the reason for this deeper dread is that “Bachan Singh's love is a love stronger than any father's in the village” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 135). While there is surrender to the laws laid down by him, there is also the desire to break free. One of the reasons she looks forward to getting married is to find freedom from her father's restrictive authority but absolute freedom is never achieved. She must revert to her father's home to seek security from threats that she faces at Sardarji's home. There is a tension between the desire for the protection provided by this love and the consciousness that she has to pay a cost for this

love and also consciousness of exclusion and denial. The same feeling of terror, this time terror of being abandoned, is what pushes her into giving up her daughter and then her son to Satya. Roop purchases security, comfort and privilege of home after marriage at a great price. It is to escape the threat to her life from the vindictive Satya that she takes the risk of losing both her homes – the married one and the natal one. Emerging out of her passive state, she exercises agency by making a statement different to the one expected of her. Arriving to stay at her father's home for longer than culturally acceptable for a married woman is an action fraught with the risk of rejection. It is not only a desire for protection of her earlier home that Roop seeks but also asserts her right to it.

With Partition, Punjab was divided compelling Hindus and Sikhs to migrate to India on a large scale. As a consequence, the families of Sardarji and Papji were forced to move to India for safety. This exodus of Hindus and Sikh was also necessitated out of fear for their women's honour. In the atmosphere of general carnage and bloodshed, there was a consequent loss of human values. For example, when Roop finds Huma, her childhood friend, in the grip of the abductors she takes no steps to save her. In fact, as the muezzin's call is heard, the division between Roop and Huma is asserted and Huma is left to be abducted and soiled. In these troubled times there is no place for pity and compassion. The myth of Sita is invoked to justify this dehumanisation, "*Compassion is weakness, disloyalty to the Sikhs. Beware of pity. Pity charmed Sita, pity for an old beggar lured her out of her circle so Ravana could steal her away from Ram*" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 514). When she takes on the responsibility of crossing the "boundary penned by Sir Cyril Radcliffe" (Baldwin, p. 501) into India in the wake of Partition with her children, she has little idea of what awaits her on the Grand Trunk

Road. However, this ability to travel in the most trying of times risking all, implies a measure of autonomy and an ability to shun passivity as well as acquiescence in the face of crisis and to exercise some control over the circumstances of her life. Being witness to the horror unleashed on the roads and watching the fate of many others, Roop is yet unwilling to surrender with her inner self goading her, “ *Don’t die – Sardarji still needs you. Don’t die like this, like a dog smeared on a dirt road. If you die let death have meaning, let it be for a reason*”, and “*Live, survive*” (Baldwin. 2011, p. 538). That she will not give up is evident in her reprimand to Narain Singh, “Don’t talk to me about fighting or dying – we’re going to *live*.” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 538) Roop has borne witness to the phenomenon of living and surviving as a woman. She finally recognises her own strengths – those she has drawn from Satya learning from her ability to give commands; from her own role as Choti Sardarni and the affection Sardarji accords her; from her role as a mother who is victorious in reclaiming her children; from her experiences and fight for survival on the Grand Trunk Road during Partition; from the story of the small boy selling newspapers in New Delhi station, himself a victim of Partition; from her own witnessing of the scenes of Partition’s horror and death; and from her ability to reveal to Sardarji about the long held secret of her physical impairment so that a diminished in spirit Sardarji may take strength from it and get his life back on track with the business of living.

It is the incidents at Partition that make Roop evolve into her own. One comes across a Roop who negotiates between the old ways and new ways of living – from home to husband’s home and then after crossing borders leaving Rawalpindi and Lahore behind forever to make a new home in New Delhi. Partition witnesses the empowerment of Roop who helps her family escape and plunges into a role that neither

Papaji nor Revati Bhua had ever prepared her for. When the inevitable happens during Partition and Sardarji has to let go of all that he has on the other side of the border – ancestral house, mills, land and job – Roop sets off with the children and their caregiver Jorimon, and the two family faithfuls Dehna Singh and Narain Singh to cross the border into India with Sardarji to follow soon. Already a victim of Partition Roop here takes on the role of witness to Partition’s mayhem and violence. That she is able to use her wits to fight her way through the madness that was let loose on the streets makes her Partition’s survivor too. Roop has come a long way from the girl who wanted a chair to sit on in the school in Ferozepur and rebelled against working in the kitchen in Bhai Takht Singh’s school for girls. On the verge of being discovered as Sikhs about to flee for the border, she convinces the potential Muslim attackers and rapists of being Muslim herself and even trades her gold bangle for the much needed water for the car. She rises to the rescue of Jorimon with all her might and saves her from being raped. More trauma of the witness and survivor awaits her in New Delhi as she, in a strange place having lost all possessions and security to Partition, must wait for Sardarji to arrive by train from Lahore. Eight days pass as she visits the station daily. She witnesses the bloodbath that has taken place on the trains and the plight of other victims but she also witnesses the grit and determination in the small boy Zorawar who is determined to take care of his mother in the refugee camp, his father having been killed. His story fills her with hope to carry forward. Roop takes on more strength and shows resilience that gives stability to her own refugee family as well as others.

The Partition experience works towards the reconfiguring of Roop’s identity from a dormant, obedient and mostly self-centred wife to a woman who is able to successfully deal with crisis and who makes a difference towards her family’s survival.

The Partition experience emerges as a constructor of identity in Roop's case. From the life of wealth, comfort and security, Partition forces on Roop the identity of a migrant as it does on so many others. Starting her journey into the unknown as a refugee, Roop is witness to not only the displacement of others on her way but also to scenes which are heartrending in the extreme. She comes across an old desolate Sikh farmer who wants to know from Roop, "how far is Sikhistan?" (Baldwin, p. 513) reminding her of her own Papaji whose whereabouts as those of the others of Pari Darwaza were not known to her. The way the burqa clad woman on the street is pulled into the lorry by a Sikh soldier makes Roop doubt the intentions of her own Sikh people. The burning villages on the outskirts of Lahore remain imprinted forever on her mind. But whatever the temptation to help, Roop steels herself to remain immune and follows Sardarji's orders not to stop for anyone. Each scene speaks to Roop of the ghastly transformation that was taking place within India. It is nothing short of an ironic reminder that in her early years before marriage she did not want to die like her mother without ever having even seen the bazaar. What Roop now 'sees' definitely adds to her knowledge of life in a way she had never bargained for.

Roop's transformation involves the unlearning of the lessons of shame that were taught to her since childhood. The scenes of humiliation heaped on women that she witnesses on her escape journey across the border into India, the sexual assault that Jorimon almost endures from men of her own community and Roop's own risk of rape and mutilation teach Roop the reality of a fate worse than death. There is actually a blurring of the lines between the idea of sexualised violence used for exerting dominance over the men of the other community and that over the female body and mind. On one hand, the men's war is with the men of the other community through the

female body, and on the other hand, the assault such as the one on Jorimon proves that men strike at the woman's body also to exercise power over her if she violates his perceived idea of women's shame. Jorimon is attacked by the men to teach her a lesson on shame. Her being a Muslim does not guarantee protection from the Muslim assailants because she is also a woman. Roop's mind is struck with the fact that "*If men treat a woman they know to be of their own quom in this cruel way, can any woman be safe?*" (Baldwin, 1999, p. 542). Thus, in times of conflict women become the target of sexual assault not only because of the symbolic meanings that their bodies contain but also because of the material aspect that the female body has.

It is through the 'shameless' act of disrobing in public that Roop registers her protest against the humiliation caused to women's bodies by the men of every community. The Delhi railway station with varying scenes of carnage becomes the site where another facet is added to Roop's transformation. While she waits for Sardarji to arrive from Lahore on the sixth day after Independence and Partition, she becomes saturated with the stories that she hears of rape, murders and assault of every form. Roop's revulsion and anger at the knowledge of "so much shame, so little izzat for girls and women" (Baldwin, 1999, p. 560) finds expression in the naked protest that she stages at the Delhi station. Her stripping away her clothes is a rebellious challenge to the men and to their hegemonic ideas of shame. Rejecting the clothes that act as reinforcement of her female status and hold her body within their disciplining confines, she protests against the way in which her body has been seen and perceived in the form of numerous objects and roles, but never as simply "human" (Baldwin, 1999, p. 660). Since childhood every experience for Roop has been in terms of her female body and the Partition experience of the other violated women is also because of the meaning that

their bodies carry. This knowledge of her own body and that of the women's experiences merges into one, culminating in the act of resistance and the desire to "*See me not as a vessel, a plaything, a fantasy, a maidservant, an ornament, but as Vaheguru made me*" (Baldwin, 1999, p. 560). Roop's resorting to this outrageous method of protest challenges the socially constructed binaries of the male and the female. This protest is interrupted when a sepoy covers her with his shirt and brings her to the shelter of the ladies lounge. Roop sees in this 'rescue' the intervention of the state because voluntary stripping by the female is a matter of shame. She also sees it as an act that once again lays claim to her body – this time by the masculine state. The sepoy is a state actor designated to check acts of deviation such as hers. Here also her body is under masculine domination for as she says, "*If a man does not lay claim to my body, the country will send someone to do so*" (Baldwin, 1999, p. 561). Patriarchal ideas of shame and protectionism work by laying claim to the female body.

The Partition experience teaches her some lessons that become a part of the process of her transformation. She realises that, "For the first time since her marriage she has no maidservant with her" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 551). She has learnt to come out of her narrow domestic concerns and develop a respect for collective humanity – she uses her wits to save Jorimon from potential molesters and acknowledges the spirit and strength displayed by the young newspaper boy; she learns to accept change and finally to continue moving. She is placed in the privileged location as a witness to the violence both when she is in transit herself from Lahore to Delhi and at the Delhi railway station. This experience helps in Roop's becoming and self-discovery. She achieves self actualisation. Roop has consciousness which is an important ingredient of identity for she is aware of the processes of her mind. She has idea of self because she is cognizant

of the sensations and ideas that pass through her mind. Ironically, the patriarchal Papaji, the confident Jeevan and the authoritative and Oxford educated Sardarji are only shadows of their past selves post-Partition. It is Roop who, in a kind of a role reversal, emerges the strongest of the lot from whom all others draw strength. Roop's ability to keep the family together in the midst of the traumatic incidents is emphasised by Baldwin.

Roop having escaped bodily harm of any kind during this upheaval is not shared by her sister-in-law, Kusum. Kusum is subjected to a violent death and mutilation of her body. This fact is represented as two narratives belonging to two different kinds of violence as narrated to Roop by Jeevan and Papaji respectively. It is Jeevan who first narrates to Roop the violence to Kusum which was supposed by him to have been caused by the other community, i.e., the Muslims. Jeevan has travelled to his home Pari Darwaza, to reclaim/rescue his wife like Ram went to Lanka to rescue Sita. This blend of myth and history makes the irony more poignant as it also entails the difference between the two journeys – Ram rescued Sita but Jeevan could find only the mutilated body of his wife. The first shock that he gets is that he finds “blue [Sikh] door of post office painted green [Muslim]” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 573) Jeevan becomes a witness to history as he tells the story of the violence committed to the body of his wife. He finds Kusum's body to be severely mutilated. Her womb had been ripped open. As the woman is the progenitor, the womb becomes the symbol of generating the progeny. The de-wombing of Kusum is a message for ethnic cleansing not only in the context of the present but also that of the future, “He [Jeevan] received the message. Kusum's womb, the same from which his three sons had been delivered. Ripped out and the message, “we will stamp your kind, your very species from existence” (Baldwin, 2011, p. 576).

Jeevan's story is told to Roop as a kind of memory which would be a legacy retained in Roop's body. His purpose in telling Kusum's story is also as bearing witness to a history that has to be inscribed in the memory of the coming generations. Jeevan's story therefore is for continuity. The facts of violence through Jeevan witnessing it are transported into Roop's memory, "Jeevan continues and his story enters Roop's body. This telling is not for Roop, this telling is for Roop to tell his sons, and her sons" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 573). Jeevan's assumption that although mutilated, Kusum was not raped is counter to all that Roop has experienced and witnessed about women during Partition. The stress on Kusum's body cut 'neatly' into six parts and then as efficiently joined again with the absence of blood is an attempt to deny any possibility of physical violation. In Jeevan's reconstruction of the story of Kusum's dismembered body there is the self-conscious attempt to promote the idea that Kusum was an exception to the sexual violence that women faced during Partition.

It is only later when Roop hears Papaji's story that she learns that the violence to Kusum spread over two layers. One layer of this violence was the familial one and the other was that of the community. Talbot and Singh (2009) suggest that:

For the Sikh community, it [Partition] has become a source of reaffirmation of its self-identity in which violence, valour and martyrdom take a central place with episodes of female suicide to protect family and community *izzat* (honour) valorised as the ultimate sacrifice. (p. 4)

The familial violence is represented by Papaji's story. He narrates how he killed his daughter-in-law Kusum for the sake of his family honour and how Kusum readily agreed to sacrifice her life for the "izzat of her quom" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 588). Butalia

has recorded the accounts of how women during Partition faced violence from two quarters. Apart from rape and mutilation of their bodies that they faced from the men of the 'other' community, some of them were subjected to violence from their own kin. The former was to attack the 'other's' honour and the latter was to preserve one's honour. The violence to Kusum's body comes from both within and without.

Papaji's overemphasis on preserving the ideals of a distinct Sikh masculinity had forced Kusum to mould her role within Papaji's household in all aspects of daily life according to these ideals. She had already learnt to fulfil all gendered expectations so the final one demanded by Papaji at the time of Partition seemingly is a continuity of that blind acceptance of her culture's ideals. According to Nesbitt (2016) "martyr ideals are strong features of Sikhism" (p. 55). The first Sikh martyr is believed to be Guru Arjan Singh who was killed by the Mughals in 1606. The idea of achieving martyrdom or *shahidi* through beheading has been valorised by the Sikhs after the ninth Guru, Tegh Bahadur was beheaded at Aurangzeb's orders in 1675. Guru Gobind Singh's two youngest sons were killed because they refused to convert to Islam. The use of the sword for Kusum's beheading is significant. The sword is synonymous with Sikh identity. Kusum's ready and unhesitating acquiescence to her beheading by sword to safeguard her and her community's honour is therefore linked to the tradition of sacrifice and *shahidi* started by the Sikh Gurus. Papaji's rendering of her story indicates that Kusum has heroically like a true Sikh, maintained her faith and honour under the most difficult circumstances. A model of sacrifice, hers will be a story that will be remembered by her sons for courage and heroism. Seen in this light, Kusum's sacrifice is a source of strength for her community. Her own identity and choice are subordinated to the needs of her family and community. To Papaji, Kusum's being dead or alive is

ultimately of no significance, as long as she has managed to retain the Sikh honour and faith. It is not Kusum's death that Papaji testifies to here, but the grandeur of her sacrifice. Here Papaji is the one who represents Kusum and decides on her behalf about her willingness to be sacrificed and the lack of any pain associated with it. This also validates his own action of beheading her.

Papaji's narration of Kusum's body and her sacrifice confer on Kusum a visibility that was denied to her during her life. He represents Kusum as having exercised choice. As Roop reads it, Kusum had never ventured out of her docile feminine role. She never answered Papaji with a "nahinji or noji", having internalised his patriarchal ideologies. Kusum's assumed willingness can be contested here because refusal was something that life never taught her. As earlier, the idea of the female body in terms of childbearing surfaces again. From Revati Bhua, her grandmother and then her marriage, the paramount importance of giving birth to children has been stressed over and over again for Roop. What concerns Papaji when the Partition violence breaks out, is Kusum being "still of childbearing age" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 586). And that seals her fate. The reference by Papaji to Kusum being of "childbearing age" is a clear pointer that this fact prompted Papaji to kill Kusum so that there is no scope for the 'other's' seed to germinate.

The narrative is interspersed with portions of the text written in italics which, for the most part, convey Roop's thoughts otherwise unvoiced. The martyr identity attached to Kusum by Papaji is reinterpreted by Roop from a woman's perspective. Roop's silent questioning keeps reminding the reader that the story-telling by both Jeevan and Papaji represents the Sikh male perspective on the violence to Kusum. The interpretation of Kusum's body differs significantly in both narrativisations with the

added silent and unvoiced interpretation by Roop. While Kusum's story of sacrifice is being narrated from Papaji's perspective, Roop's thoughts suggest a clear dichotomy between her ideas and her father's. Her oppositional viewpoint against the dominant male one subverts the ideal perpetuated through the two stories. There are two myths, one generated each by Jeevan and Papaji, that Roop interrogates. In Jeevan's story, Kusum is represented as mutilated but there is an insistence on denial of sexual violation. In Papaji's story, Kusum is represented as the dutiful daughter-in-law both in life and in death. His narration attributes an element of 'cheerfulness' to her response to his suggestion of her death. At one go, he wishes away the fear she might have undergone and legitimises his killing of her. Papaji's ability to behead Kusum in one single and therefore painless stroke cannot be for Roop Kusum's true story. Purity in a woman is valorised because that ensures the preservation of the community's honour. For the same reason, during Partition the community needed to protect women from being sexually defiled. Therefore, each telling of Kusum's story seeks to present her in the same dimension – as meeting a violent death without being sexually violated.

Roop becomes forever more conscious of the manner in which both Jeevan and Papaji appropriate the telling of what transpired with Kusum. The past and its myths can be represented as truths in the future through the storytelling method. Story telling has the potential to bind the past with the present and the future. Both Papaji and Jeevan use this method not merely to superficially render the scene of violence. Papaji has already adopted this method many times before in the novel to narrate the stories of Sikh martyrdom to Jeevan. These are retold so as to ensure that they are committed to memory and absorbed by the listener's body, thus preserving them for all times to come. These stories are aimed at exerting a pervasive influence especially on the minds

of the young, in this case Jeevan's children, so that the acts of honour, courage and sacrifice never fade out from the Sikh cultural memory. Papaji's remembering Kusum in a particular way is possible because her voice is silenced. Any refusal or expression of fear or pain on the part of Kusum at her beheading is now forever subsumed by Papaji's 'greater' narrative, which will be told and retold to his grandchildren and to the generations to come. Both Jeevan and Papaji as well as the 'other' community look upon Kusum first and foremost as a symbol of the community.

Roop becomes conscious of the fact that having absorbed the male perspectives, Jeevan's sons would also grow up with the same optical impairment, i.e., "see their women, from the corner of each eye" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 56). This inability to "see what lies directly before them" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 61) is shared by Papaji and Jeevan which will ensure that Kusum's pain would never become part of the dominant narrative. Referring to the martyrdom of the Sikh Gurus and its valorisation within the Sikh cultural imaginary, Nesbitt (2016) mentions that Sikh children get to hear the "rousing accounts...from their elders, and which preachers and artists keep alive within the tradition" (p. 55). Roop realises Papaji's telling "is the telling that she will have to tell Jeevan's sons one day: that their mother went to her death just as she was offered it, baring her neck to papaji's kirpan, willingly, Papaji says, for the izzat of her quom" (Baldwin, 2011, p. 588). Although she does not voice it aloud, Roop's silent questioning implies a consciousness that is aware of the politics men adopt to represent women's bodies. The language that Papaji adopts is guided by the cultural expectations of notions of women's honour. Papaji's version celebrates Kusum's sacrifice in a language that stresses on Sikh martyrdom and bravery. Papaji's telling is similar to the master narratives of Partition which consciously omits those dimensions which does

not tell their version of the truth. The woman's body is used as a site to propagate gendered memories of the Sikh community. What emerges here is Kusum's image as upholder of Sikh values. The purpose is to construct an image of the Sikh women as willing to sacrifice their bodies for the sake of the community's honour and pride. Hence, all details of Kusum's pain or fear are omitted. Papaji's narration does not reflect any hesitation on Kusum's part – her compliance and obedience are stressed. Kusum's story of martyrdom will win approval from the Sikh community. Her violent death and the martyrdom associated with it is a pointer towards the overall Sikh attitude towards women.

The narratives belong to Papaji and Jeevan by turns, but it is Roop's point of view that is privileged and used to present a critique of the violence to women during Partition and the patriarchal injustices heaped on them during routine, everyday life. Kusum's violent death portrayed as painless is silently questioned by Roop, which is a subversion of the masculine stance about female embodiment. Two male voices use a cultural rhetoric to project Kusum to perpetuate a myth about women's role in preserving religious pride and the honour of the race. Roop is able to see through the language that is constructed by the men. Her body carries memories of not only her own experience as a woman and of Partition but also those of other women like Kusum. Papaji's story exemplifies the scale of familial violence against women that was committed during Partition. The familial violence was a result of the fear that the honour of the community would be soiled if women fell into the hands of the other. Thus, the women were sacrificed at the altar of the community's honour. Indirectly Kusum's beheading by Papaji is caused by his fear of her youth and potential fertility and procreative abilities. Whether it is Satya, Roop or Kusum, what determines their

fate is their fertility or lack of it. Appropriation and control of women's bodies signifies a territorial conquest.

The analysis of Baldwin's novel reveals the power that daily life and a hierarchical household exert on women. It is because Roop is able to reinvent herself that she is able to resist being subsumed under the constraints of patriarchy. The ability to challenge her situation within marriage and define her sense of self is what helps Roop later in facing the challenges of not only surviving Partition, but also in helping her family and community rehabilitate as refugees in an alien land. It is found from the analysis that the violence done to Kusum's body during Partition in the name of family honour, particularly within the Sikh religious context, is linked to the larger history of the abuse and oppression of women within the home.

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