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South Asian Women Writers Breaking the Tradition of Silence

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Content

1. Introduction

The phenomenon of gender-based violence has become a too-frequent and ubiquitous issue nowadays. Manifested through various forms and supported by an overwhelming number of agents[1], male violence against women is not always perceived as a violation of human rights[2]. In these circumstances, its victims become each day more numerous[3], also due to the fact that they are prevented from reporting the crimes and the perpetrators remain unknown and unpunished.

Many social systems around the world are confronted with the phenomenon in discussion but few have shown their willingness to attempt to sanction the abusers and protect the victims. Gender-based violence has reached outrageous proportions[4] due to an encouraging gender-biased social system, which has endorsed the construction of a tradition of silencing the issue and the victims with the help of a series of agents involved in propagating this tradition. Nevertheless, it is exactly the tradition of silence, which proves that the witnesses and the victims of male violence are prevented from revealing their victimization. More precisely, the fact that the number of the authors who have approached this delicate question is insignificant in relation to the number of crimes (reported or unreported), suggests that speaking about gender-based violence represents an exception.

The present paper aims at approaching the exceptional cases of five South Asian women writers who grapple in their novels with different manifestations of male violence against women. What will be examined is their aesthetic perspective and representation of the given topic, as well as their significant contribution to the effort of breaking the silence on gender-based violence by transforming it into a speakable subject.

In doing this, the paper will serve as an attempt to answer the following questions: do the literary texts try and succeed in mirroring a social gender-biased reality? how do they approach and illustrate the phenomenon of gender-based violence and its implications?

Despite the fact that the present topic is imbedded in a controversial political debate, the present paper will be limited to analyse its aesthetic engagements by focusing on the following fictional works: Manju Kapur (India) – *Home*, Taslima Nasrin (Bangladesh) – *My*

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[1] One of the agents propagating gender-based violence is represented by the mass-media, as Lashgari notes - 'paradoxically, the violence permeating the media – television, movies, newspapers- makes it more difficult, rather than easier, for us to hear. Packaged and sanitized, 'violence as entertainment' can have an anaesthetising effect that prevents us from feeling or acting.' (See Lashgari, Deirdre (ed.), *Violence, Silence, and Anger. Women's Writing as Transgression*, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995: 2).

[2] See Appendix: 1.

[3] 'There are no signs of crimes against women declining so far.' (See Rustagi, Preet, *Gender biases and discrimination against women*, New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies (& UNIFEM), 2003: 73).

[4] See Appendix: 1-2.

Bengali Girlhood, Mukhtar Mai (Pakistan)- *In the Name of Honor,* Tehmina Durrani (Pakistan) - *My Feudal Lord*, and Anita Nair (India) - *Ladies Coupé*. The visible interest in the South Asian[5] literary writing is legitimized by the writers' argument that the social systems referred to in the texts display a visible predisposition to protect the male abusers and silence the victims. In an attempt to explore their indictments, it is relevant to introduce theories and empirical results from the area of sociology and psychology, as well as pertinent statements of literary critics, Indian and Pakistani writers and journalists.

The present paper will contextualize and thematize the issue of gender-based violence and the silence camouflaging it on the basis of the following structural outline: the next chapter will provide a brief view on the phenomenon of violence, then it will deal with one of its particular areas, namely violence against women. Further, the paper will provide the reader an introductive outlook on gender-based violence, its various implications and the objectives of the three sub-chapters on child sexual abuse, rape, and intimate partner violence.

The third chapter will be dedicated to the question of silence on male violence against women; the purpose of this chapter will be to investigate the causes of this particular type of silence, its mechanisms and the factors that contribute to its propagation. Also, in focusing on the possibilities and consequences of disrupting the silence on male violence, the paper will seek to discover what are the costs and chances of success of such an non-conformist endeavour.

Finally, the last section of the thesis will be concerned with the review of the main ideas developed along the two main chapters in order to verify the substantially and relevance of the arguments.

[5] I will use the term 'South Asian' in a restrictive sense, namely in reference to three social and cultural spaces – India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. Also, I will keep in mind the fictional references to these spaces and the way the protagonists and writers identify themselves in relation to them.

2. Violence

The multiplicity of implications and meanings of the concept and phenomenon of violence has fascinated various scholars of political science, psychology, sociology, or philosophy. In an attempt to explore its significance and purpose, Hannah Arendt opens up new perspectives on violence, thus challenging simplistic and limiting definitions of the term that only engage with its physical manifestations.[6] Therefore, the political theorist argues that

> *Violence*, finally, as I have said, is distinguished by its instrumental character. Phenomenologically, it is close to strength, since the implements of violence, like all other tools, are designed and used for the purpose of multiplying natural strength.[7]

However, what Arendt does not incorporate in her discourse on violence is the idea of vehemence, damage, and impetuosity suggested by the Latin etymology of the concept – 'violentia'. It may be argued that in mentioning that violence's purpose is 'of multiplying natural strength' the theorist leaves space for the reader to reflect on the possibilities of increasing one's natural strength. In this sense, innumerable conceptualizations of violence have been developed, either by exposing it as an instrument of political manoeuvres (colonization), of historical figures (Vlad Tepes as 'Dracula'), and of social issues (revolutions), or by envisioning it as a goal, a cause or an effect. Violence has also been approached from different literary angles when speaking of the rights of minorities in terms of class, gender, race, ethnos, or religion. At the heart of all these thematizations on violence resides the pervasive concern with the desire for power, be it legitimized or not. As noted by the Indian writer Meenakhsi,

> The aim of both physical and psychological violence is the same: the disempowerment of persons which ensures domination over them.[8]

Meenakhsi's perspective on violence, as a way of achieving (more) power in order to dominate other individuals, foregrounds the idea of abuse as a further central concept lying at the basis of the present paper.

A prerequisite for the examination of the literary representations of abuse and violence is to define the two terms. Therefore, both concepts will be employed and analysed in the following sub-chapters based on the fact that not only *violence* but also 'the term *abuse*

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[6] A case in point is the definition of *violence* as a 'behaviour involving physical force intended to hurt, damage, or kill.' <http://www.askoxford.com/concise_oed/violence?view=uk>
[7] See Arendt, Hannah, *On Violence*, New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970: 46.
[8] See Thapan, Meenakshi, *Images of the body and sexuality in women's narratives on oppression in the home*, New Delhi: Centre for Contemporary Studies, 1996: 8.

includes physical as well as non-physical acts'[9]. Moreover, it should be mentioned that in the context of the chosen narratives all forms of violence and abuse are regarded as a deliberate means of inflicting verbal, physical, and emotional (or psychological) injuries on an individual in order to achieve different goals.

The following section of the paper aims at introducing a specific form of violence and at addressing its central implications and aspects.

2.1. Violence against women

What numerous statistics and sociological studies on male violence against women strive to communicate is the pervasiveness and high frequency of this phenomenon that cuts across all categories of female victims and male abusers. At the heart of these researches lies the assumption that violence against women represents a strategic device employed by men within male-dominated social systems in order to maintain women's low position. As Francine Pickup remarks,

> The violence to which women are subject *is not random, or abnormal,* or defined by specific circumstances alone. It is used as a weapon to punish women for stepping beyond the gendered boundaries set for them, and to instil in them the fear of even considering doing so. It is a systematic strategy to maintain women's subordination to men.[10]

Seen thus as a widespread commonality rather than various isolated cases, the present issue implies the idea that female victims experience a twofold torment: the act of violence *per se* and the lack of legal and social norms that fail to sanction the abusive act, hence discouraging the victims to report the crime.

Whereas sociological and psychological studies approach the issue of male violence against women from an objective perspective, their theories being supported by empirical evidence, literary texts engage in presenting the subjective aspect of the problem. Unlike scientific researches, which provide wide ranges of numbers and theoretical arguments, writers strive to particularize extensive series of ciphers and thus envision the story of only one case of gender-based violence at a time. In doing so, they intend to present the reader

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[9] See Saravanan, Sheela, ''Violence Against Women in India'', *Institute of Social Studies Trust*, (2000): 27. 20 Jan. 2009 <http://www.idrc.ca/uploads/user-S/10286562430Violence_Against_Women_in_India_By_Sheela _Saravanan_(ISST)_.pdf>

[10] See Pickup, Francine, *Ending violence against women: A challenge for development and humanitarian work*, Oxfam: Oxford, 2001: 303 (my emphasis).

what figures cannot, namely the situational factors leading to the violent act, the abuser's gestures, the victim's reactions, her thoughts and feelings.

Numbers cannot voice the devastating experience of having been abused, nor can they provide an image of the victims or the offenders. By contrast, literature enables one to express how 'a woman endures an invasion of self, the intrusion of inner space, a violation of her sexual and physical autonomy.[11]

Moreover, since few of the women who experience male violence find the courage to press charges against the assailant, a high percentage of abusive cases are not included in the official statistics. Nevertheless, Tehmina Durrani, Taslima Nasrin and Mukhtar Mai have discovered a different method of inscribing their experience; as they argue, the three authors have disclosed their victimization to the readers, thus formulating a literary testimony. However, despite their real experience, the three textual representations of gender-based violence will be primarily analysed as fictional texts, together with Manju Kapur and Anita Nair's stories that raise no pretension to real events.

At this point, it is imperative to clarify the meaning of the concept of gender-based violence, whose significance is essential for the present thesis. Therefore, this notion will be operationalized as bearing the meaning of 'male violence against women' and defined as 'any attack directed against a (usually female) person due, at least in part, to a disadvantaged position within male-dominated social systems.'[12]

The phenomenon of gender-based violence may take diverse forms of manifestation. Nevertheless, the purpose of this paper is to analyse only three of them, namely female child sexual abuse (narrated by Nasrin and Kapur), rape (Mukhtar Mai), and intimate partner violence (Nair, Durrani, Nasrin). In examining these discourses on male violence against women, the following aspects will be taken into consideration: the circumstances of the violent act, the assailant's pretext to use violence, his behaviour towards the victim, the detailed description of the act, the woman's reaction to the male violent behaviour, her strategy of resisting and fighting back, as well as the stylistic techniques employed by the authors. A further interesting element to be approached is the idea of the authorial intention, which implies the question as to whether the narrator's voice and perspective juxtaposes the one of the victim.

When speaking about male violence against women, it is useful to specify which methodological approach will be employed. In this sense, starting from Margaret Abraham's

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[11] See Stanko, Elizabeth A., *Intimate Intrusions: Women's Experience of Male Violence*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985: 9.
[12] See Kilmartin, Ch./ Allison, J., *Men's Violence against Women*, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2007: 5.

dichotomist pattern of analysis of domestic violence[13], it should be noticed that since the present paper is primarily concerned with the representation of diverse forms of violence against *women*, approaching the 'feminist perspective', which focuses on 'the abused woman', represents the best option.

Additionally, it is worth remarking that the analysis of the above-mentioned issues will be complemented by scientific arguments from the field of psychology and sociology. The present paper will seek to demonstrate that since not all of these theories are rooted and refer to the South Asian area and yet support and reinforce the ideas formulated in the South Asian literary works, gender-based violence is a phenomenon that transgresses cultural or ethnical particularities.

Taking this idea a stage further, it should be pointed out that in exploring the question of the power structures at the level of each of the seven given relations 'victim – assailant', it is important to consider a particular thesis. More precisely, the paper will verify the validity of the widespread idea about the role of patriarchy in legitimizing the phenomenon of gender-based violence, expressed by researchers from India, Pakistan, and U.S.A. as it follows:

> The patriarchy must be emphasised as the institutional source of violence against women and contextualised with other realities of class, caste and race.[14]
>
> Women in Pakistan continue to be victims of this senseless violence. Though patriarchal family and tribal traditions exacerbate violence against women, it is ultimately the responsibility of the Pakistani government to protect these women and to prosecute those who commit these horrible atrocities.[15]
>
> Gender-based violence is only partly centered in the individual psychology – the beliefs, decisions, and personality characteristics – of the attacker. It is also woven into the cultural fabric of a society that grants disproportionate power to men. […] Within these cultural conditions, violence-prone men feel entitled to wield that power irresponsibly, and social systems often fail to hold them accountable for their violence.[16]

This having been said, the following three sections of the thesis are dedicated to the detailed analysis of female child sexual abuse, rape, and intimate partner violence. It is significant to mention that the asymmetrical proportions of the sub chapters is legitimized by the fact that

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[13] 'Two main theoretical approaches have so far dominated the study of domestic violence; these are the 'family violence perspective' and the 'feminist perspective'. In the former perspective the family is considered to be the basic unit of analysis, whereas in the feminist perspective the abused woman is taken as the unit of analysis.' (See Abraham, Margaret, ''Speaking the Unspeakable: Marital Violence against South Asian Immigrant Women in the United States'', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies,* (1998): 5. 14 Jan. 2009 <http://ijg.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/5/2/215>)
[14] See Jesani, Amar, ''Violence Against Women: Health Issues Review of Selected Works'', (1998): 12. 10 Jan. 2009 <http://www.cehat.org/dilbackmaterial/A76.doc>
[15] See Bettencourt, Alice, ''Violence Against Women in Pakistan'', (2000): 6. 18 Jan. 2009 <http://www.du.edu/intl/humanrights/ violencepkstn.pdf>
[16] Kilmartin, Ch./ Allison, J. 2007: 61-62.

the majority of the present narratives addresses the question of intimate partner violence[17], whereas only two of them grapple with the topic of child sexual abuse and one with that of rape.

2.1.1. (Female) Child sexual abuse

The present subchapter on child sexual abuse is mainly based on literary representations of sexual violence against female children, namely Manju Kapur's novel *Home* and Taslima Nasrin's autobiographical text *My Bengali Girlhood*. The fact that these narratives differ in terms of their writers' geographical (Indian, respectively Bengali) and religious (Hindu, respectively Muslim) background, as well as the fact that one is fictional (Kapur's) and the other inspired by events experienced by the authoress (Nasrin), provides us with the opportunity to examine comparatively how the two writers have transposed this delicate and too often unspoken issue from the area of male violence against women into words.

In the case of Nisha (Kapur's character) and Nasrin as protagonist, one may remark a first similarity: both characters have been sexually abused[18] by male characters from their familial circle at an early age. Sandra Butler, a sociologist concerned with the traumatic effects of incestuous assaults, emphasizes the crucial role of the early stage of psychological development of children who are sexually abused by a male relative. Therefore, at a literary level, both Nasrin and Kapur reflect in their writings how the young victim 'has not yet developed an understanding of sexuality that allows him or her to make a free and fully conscious response to the adult's behaviour.'[19]

The omniscient narrator in *Home* clearly alludes to the fact that the young female victim's reaction to the first signs of sexual abuse indicates her lack of maturity and her childish behaviour as she starts crying and seeks for her mother's protection.

> Entranced, he put his hand on the inside of her beckoning thigh and whispered, 'How soft you are, Nisha.'
> An intent look came on his face, his gentle fingers kept up a steady stroking. He began to trace the elastic of her panties all around the leg. 'What are you doing? Chee, that's dirty, take your hand away,' she cried, but Vicky was in no state to hear her. [...]
> He put those fingers against his mouth. 'Give me your hand,' he went on. 'I want to show you something.'

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[17] Another argument may be read in Appendix: 2.

[18] I will employ the following definition of child sexual abuse – 'any sexual activity between a child and a closed related family member (incest) or between a child and an adult or other child from outside the family. It involves either explicit force or coercion or, in case where consent cannot be given by the victim because of his or her young age, implied force.' (See Ernst, Lisa (ed.), *broken bodies, broken dreams. Violence against women exposed*, Malta: Progress, 2005: 19).

[19] See Butler, Sandra, *The Conspiracy of Silence*, New York: Bantam, 1979: 2.

> ‘I don’t want to see.’ Nisha was crying.
> ‘Of course you do.’
> ‘No, I want to go to Mummy. Leave me.’
> ‘See, another secret.’ And quickly, so quickly that she didn’t know how it happened, he introduced it to her. Terror-stricken, she looked at the black thing sticking up, and then quickly looked away. [...]
> Vicky gripped her wrist so hard and painfully that her fingers opened around the big dark thing. [...] When she tried to struggle, he increased the pressure of his hand. [...]
> ‘It’s our secret. If you tell anyone, they will beat you and me.’ He gripped her arm. ‘No one must ever know. No one. You understand.’
> Nisha nodded wordlessly.[20]

It is important to notice how the narrator constructs the scene by introducing to the reader an ‘entranced’ Vicky whose gestures are initially rather seducing than violent – he ‘whispered, ‘How soft you are, Nisha’’ and ‘his gentle fingers’. Moreover, it seems that the first phrases of the passage indicate the assailant’s point of view, since Vicky feels ‘entranced’ and touches Nisha’s ‘beckoning thigh’.[21] Furthermore, the narrator shifts the attention from the perspective of the abuser to that of the child victim, followed by a gradually increasing tempo of replicas between the two protagonists. One might presume that the authorial intention is to create the impression of a crescendo rhythm in order to allude to the idea of an abusive sexual act.

Taking a closer look at this episode, one may remark that Nisha’s attitude reveals a series of interesting ideas. First, if at the beginning of the scene the young female protagonist appears to be strong enough to withstand Vicky’s assault and express her repugnance, she rapidly loses control over her body when he uses violence to make her surrender to his plans. Therefore, the narrator skilfully underlines the significance of violence, may it be verbal or physical, in the case of a sexual assault with the help of expressions like ‘gripped’, ‘painfully’, ‘increased the pressure’.

Secondly, the quotation emphasizes Nisha’s reactions – her evident disgust and high discomfort – ‘Chee, that’s dirty, take your hand away’, her fragile emotional state - ‘terror-stricken’, as well as her powerlessness and confusion caused by her lack of experience and her physical weakness in comparison to her abuser’s scrupulousness and physical strength. Once the perpetrator assures himself of his victim’s silence and submission, he sees no reason why he should not repeat the experience. Thus, he denies her the right to choose, by refusing or accepting his intentions; it seems that he does not consider it necessary to ask for her consent. Furthermore, the narrator underlines the fact that Vicky develops a

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[20] See Kapur, Manju, *Home*, London: Faber &Faber, 2006: 58-59.
[21] The argument is supported by the idea that only an ‘entranced’ male protagonist could refer to a child’s leg by means of the expression ‘beckoning thigh’, which suggests seductiveness.

distorted image of Nisha, reducing her to the role of a sexual object designed to fulfil his needs.

> Meanwhile Vicky's preoccupation with Nisha increased, his eyes fixed on the small white hand that had caressed him [...] Just thinking of the excitement and the release made him long for it again.[22]

Not surprisingly, Nisha becomes Vicky's victim once more, the phenomenon of revictimization being easily predictable in this situation.[23]

A similar prediction could be reached when reading Nasrin's story on the same topic; like Nisha, the seven-year old girl protagonist Taslima experiences feelings of powerlessness, confusion and humiliation as two of her uncles sexually abuse her. However, their attitude towards the victim displays different strategies of manipulation and silencing. Uncle Sharaf's behaviour resembles that of Vicky; both characters impose their will on their victims by force and threaten them with a fierce punishment unless they keep silent. Additionally, they both ignore the physical harm they cause their younger female relatives during the sexual assault, apart from the obvious emotional injuries. More precisely, Vicky 'was in no state to hear her', he disregards Nisha's recurring refusal and 'increases the pressure' when she tries to escape from his grip. At her turn, Nasrin the narrator presents an unscrupulous Sharaf who is amused to take advantage of his younger niece and shows no sign of compassion.

> Uncle Sharaf laughed and threw him self down on me. Then, with one hand he removed my shorts once more, and with the other took off his own, pressing his willie hard against my body. My chest felt heavy; I could not breathe. I tried to push him away. 'What are you doing, Uncle Sharaf? Let me go!' I shrieked, pushing with all my might. But I could not move him an inch. [...] Uncle Sharaf pushed himself harder against me. It looked so ugly to me, I covered my eyes with my hands.
> Suddenly, a rat scurried across the floor. The noise made Uncle Sharaf jump off the cot. I did not lose a second. Pulling my shorts up I ran out of the room as fast as I could, with not a thought to spare about the snakes in the bushes. My heart thudded crazily, as if a hundred rats were jumping in my chest.
> Uncle Sharaf called after me in a threatening voice: 'Don't tell anyone about this. If you do, I will kill you!'[24]

Significantly, the two female children attempt to defend themselves and escape their male oppressors' entanglement; although they are confused and too inexperienced to understand the implications of the event, both naively asking 'What are you doing?', they feel that it is something that should not happen and strive to return to a safer environment.[25] Instinctively,

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[22] See Kapur 2006: 60.
[23] 'Once a person has suffered an attack, she is at greater risk of being targeted by a perpetrator in the future.' (See Kilmartin, Ch./ Allison, J. 2007: 79).
[24] See Nasrin, Taslima, *My Bengali Girlhood*. Vermont: Steerforth, 2002: 71-72.
[25] An explanation for their reaction is provided by Saravanan - 'Children are not given proper answers when they ask questions about sexual organs. *They get the messages that certain body parts are dirty and they should never*

Nisha and Taslima comprehend that their abusers are stronger than they are and that they are trapped. Hence, both seek to evade the distressing scene by looking away or covering their eyes. The traumatic feelings triggered by these violent acts are textually mirrored by highly suggestive phrases like ‘terror-stricken’ or by means of comparison - ‘a hundred rats jumping in my chest’. Furthermore, Taslima’s second sexual victimization (quoted below) is narrated with the help of phrases like ‘horror’, ‘went numb with fear’, or ‘totally petrified’.

> To get my hands on the matchbox I moved nearer to Uncle Aman. He pulled me to him. Then, instead of giving me the matches, he started tickling me [...] I shrank like a snail. He picked up my tense, curled-up body and threw it in the air. He caught me as I fell, his hand sliding down my body, stopping at my panties. Then he began pulling my panties down. I tried to roll off the bed. My feet were on the floor, my back still on the bed, my panties near my knees, my knees neither on the floor nor on the bed. [...]
> Uncle lifted his lungi. I saw a big snake raise its head between his legs, poised for attack. I went numb with fear, but to my greater horror, the snake did attack, in that little place between my thighs – once, twice, thrice. I remained totally petrified. Staring into my wide eyes, Uncle said, ‘Would you like a candy’? Tomorrow, I will buy you candy. Look, here’s the matchbox. Take it. And listen, sweetheart, don’t tell anyone that you have seen my cock and I have seen your little sweet pussy. It’s bad to talk about such things. You must tell no one.’ [...]
> Uncle Aman had told me not to tell anyone else. I started to think he was right. It was not something one talked about. Suddenly, at the age of seven, I was filled with a new awareness. Whatever had happened was shameful, and it would not be right to talk about it. It had to be kept a secret.[26]

Unlike Nisha, Taslima becomes the victim of two male abusers, both being her uncles, each of them expressing themselves differently. Whereas Sharaf threatens to kill her if she fails to remain silent, Aman, more experienced, treats Taslima according to her young age. In this sense, he seeks to trick her by promising to buy her candies, calling her ‘sweetheart’, and then *typically* impel the victim to preserve the secret. When employing the term ‘typically’, what is meant is the common strategy used by the offender to persuade the victim that she will also suffer severe consequences in case the abuse is disclosed. Nisha and Taslima perceive the gravity of the threats more acutely than other victims of sexual assault whose abusers are unfamiliar to them. In other words, ‘the female child is powerless: her position in the family structure (as child, not adult), her lack of life experience do not often give her the structural or emotional power to fend off sexual advances.’[27]

Returning to the remark mentioned at the beginning of this subchapter concerning the dissimilarities between the two literary illustrations of child sexual abuse, it is noteworthy that Nasrin’s autobiographical writing slightly differs from Kapur’s fictional narrative mainly due to the unequal textual representation of the emotional and psychological effects of the abuse.

be talked about. So, when a child is abused, there is total silence. *The child knows that there is something wrong going on*, yet the child does not have the language or the words to express it.’ (See Saravanan 2000: 33, my emphasis).

[26] See Nasrin 2002: 94.

[27] See Stanko 1985: 23.

The poignancy of being the victim of such a violent act determines Nasrin to seek refuge in writing about her unspoken experience; the vehemence of her long hidden feelings, the tumult of her memories, and the need to disclose the crime in detail offer her the necessary tools to fabricate a reliable and authentic storyline. Moreover, the Bengali writer Nasrin strives to generate the impression that the abuse is narrated from the perspective of her self as a child. Hence, she suggests that the tone and the linguistic repertoire of the fragment are instruments employed by a female child narrator, whose naivety hinders her to comprehend that her descriptive speech on the sexual abuse involves taboo issues concerning language and behaviour. The advantage in opting for a first person narrator's perspective confers her story a plus of authenticity and veracity, attributes that lack in Kapur's third person narrative. Moreover, it is easily noticeable that Kapur creates a skilful description of Nisha's experience but does not elaborate on the victim's inner discourse.

The protagonist Taslima, despite her youth and naivety, is affected by the violent events that suddenly generate the seven-years-old girl's untimely psychological maturity, manifested in her reflection on the implications of the experience. Analysing the threats of her abusers and internalizing the feelings of shame and humiliation, Taslima herself feels guilty and responsible[28] for what has happened to her.

At the end of this section, it should be mentioned, in relation to the last two distinctions between Nasrin and Kapur's stories, that neither the religious, nor the territorial factor seems to play a decisive role in the question of child sexual abuse.

2.1.2. Rape

> ''Rape is a man's right. If a woman doesn't want to give it, the man should take it. Women have no right to say no. Women are made to have sex. It's all they're good for. Some women would rather take a beating, but they always give in.''[29]

The pungent and misogynist tone emanating from the fragment above, which quotes a sexual aggressor's perspective on rape, represents only one example out of many that have influenced researchers of gender-based violence towards a certain direction of thought. Therefore, the feminist political activist S. Brownmiller argues that in the case of rape 'the

[28] E. Stanko explains how in the case of a young victim of sexual violence, 'by the time she is old enough to understand or at least to know that something is seriously wrong, the feelings of guilt, self-blame and humiliation may be well entrenched.' (25)

[29] This is a rapist's statement about rape, for further details see Ernst 2005: 153.

intent is not merely to 'take', but to humiliate and degrade'.[30] Moreover, 'sexual violence is less the expression of an individual man's unrestrained sex drive than it is a reiteration of patriarchal social structures and norms. Rape is primarily motivated by power, not sex.'[31]

When speaking about rape, a wide series of issues of ethical, legal, psychological, or social nature comes into question. Nevertheless, the interest of this section is to explore the moral, emotional and psychological implications of such an act from a literary perspective, namely Mukhtar Mai's illustrative novel *In the Name of Honor*.

Unlike any of the other four narratives that are in discussion in the present paper and which engage to some extent with the question of violence against women, Mai's piece of writing deals exclusively with the most severe form of sexual assault, namely rape. Like Nasrin and Durrani, Mai also avows that her literary discourse emerges out of her own experience; therefore, she suggests that she embodies the voice behind the lines of *In the Name of Honor* and is at the same time the female victim protagonist.

According to Mukhtar Mai's story, an ever-lasting game of power between the clans of the same caste in the Pakistani village Meerwala has led to a gang rape dictated by unwritten rules applicable in the case of a question 'of honour'[32]. The narrator mentions that the Mastoi clan has manipulated the tribal council responsible for solving internal conflicts and thus had Mai's family punished by raping one of their female members. As a result, Mukhtar Mai becomes the victim of a group rape (four male aggressors) despite the fact that Mai herself, as she is arguing, was not directly involved in the presumed divergence. Nonetheless, the female narrator clearly avows that her experience is strongly suggestive of women's condition in the village Meerwala where tribal rules dictate women's lives, her argument being supported by a researcher on women's rights in Pakistan[33]. Furthermore, according to Mai's argumentative line, the fact that a woman has been gang-raped as an aftermath of a disagreement between two clans proves that women('s bodies) are used as weapons in men's[34] tribal war for power and prestige.

> For them, a woman is simply an object of possession, honour, or revenge. They marry or rape them according to their conception of tribal pride. They know that a woman humiliated in that

[30] See Brownmiller, Susan, *Against Our Will*, New York: Penguin, 1975: 378.
[31] See Anderson, I./ Swainson, V., ''Perceived Motivation for Rape: Gender Differences in Beliefs About Female and Male Rape'', *Current Research in Social Psychology* Vol. 6 No. 8 (2001), in Ernst 2005: 153.
[32] 'According to Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of Unicef, in 1997 at least 300 women were killed by men in the family for so-called reasons of 'honour' in a single province in Pakistan.' (See Romito, Patrizia, *A Deafening Silence. Hidden violence against women and children*, Bristol: Policy, 2008: 18)
[33] 'Strict family, tribal and traditional Pakistani Islamic values dictate that women are considered property of male family members. Pakistani society essentially views a woman as being owned by her father or brothers before marriage, and her husband after marriage' (See Bettencourt 2000: 3).
[34] The writer suggests that women play no role in decision-making issues.

> way has no other recourse except suicide. They don't even need to use their weapons. Rape kills her. Rape is the ultimate weapon: it shames the other clan forever.[35]

However, the female protagonist fails to carry out the expectations of a conventional community, namely to commit suicide; instead, she finds enough strength to fight against the tribal conventions. Hence, she seeks revenge by embarking on the mission to struggle to prove in front of a legal commission that she has been raped and that her aggressors should be punished. In Brownmiller's formulation, women like Mai eagerly struggle to make 'rape a *speakable* crime, not a matter of shame.'[36]

Mukhtar Mai finally succeeds in publicly disclosing the crime, her abusers and the exact order and details implied by the act in front of the judiciary. Nonetheless, what is noteworthy about the process of transposing her statement into a literary form is that, unlike Nasrin and Kapur[37], her narrative does not provide precise information on *how* the crime has been committed, but it chiefly focuses on the victim's emotional and physical reactions.

> I am there, true, but it isn't me anymore: this petrified body, these collapsing legs no longer belong to me. I am about to faint, to fall to the ground, but I never get the chance – they drag me away like a goat led to slaughter. Men's arms have seized mine, pulling at my clothes, my shawl, my hair.
> ''In the name of the Koran, release me!'' I scream. ''In the name of God, let me go!''
> I pass from one night to another, taken from the darkness outside to the darkness inside an enclosed place where I can distinguish those four men only by the moonlight filtering through a tiny window. Four walls and a door, guarded by an armed silhouette.
> Escape is impossible. Prayer is impossible.
> That is where they rape me, on the beaten earth of an empty stable. Four men [...] I don't know how long that vicious torture lasts. An hour? All night?[38]

Taking the comparison a stage further, it is remarkable that Mai displays a tendency to conceal shameful (in her view) details of the 'vicious torture' as she calls it, whereas on the contrary, the other two writers seem to be much more concerned with creating a realistic and complete illustration of *how* the sexual abuse happened. An explanation might be the fact that Nasrin and Kapur may invoke the point of view of the girl victim who is not aware of the cultural taboos of sexual acts. On the contrary, Mai writes about an experienced mature woman, who has internalized strong feelings of shame and humiliation and is aware of the fact that her testimony represents an exception in the context of a community that maintains silence about severe cases of gender-based violence.

[35] See Mai, Mukhtar, *In the Name of Honour*, New York: Atria, 2006: 10.
[36] See Brownmiller 1975: 396.
[37] See previous section on child sexual abuse.
[38] See Mai 2006: 9.

One could further argue that unlike Mai, Nasrin's focus on reconstructing the puzzle of an event that she has experienced as a child may imply that over the years she had the time to reflect on and overcome to some extent her emotional trauma.

Mai's textual representation of the abusive act brings to light a significant sense of authenticity translated into the following observation: at a conscious level, the victim perceives how the magnitude of the event triggers the dichotomy between her mind and body. The narrator brilliantly records this detail suggesting that the shock caused by the gravity of the act 'petrified' her body; the impossibility to pray or to escape, as well as the awareness of this fact, impels her to put her body (as the direct sufferer of the assault) at distance from her mind. Mai actually refers to an interesting defensive process -effacement or denial ('I am there, true, but it isn't me anymore') as a way of dealing with a traumatic experience.

The narrative might represent a strategy of rapprochement; more precisely, Mai constructs her discourse in the form of an inner dialogue by which she seeks to re-establish the connection between her body and mind. In the case of a traumatic event, the victim's first sign of recovery usually consists in accepting the emotional and psychological damage inflicted on her and discussing about it. In doing so, the victim allows herself to recollect and formulate a multitude of reflections and details about the event, like in Mai's case - 'I am about to faint, to fall to the ground', 'arms have seized mine, pulling at my clothes, my shawl, my hair'. The phrase 'they drag me away like a goat led to slaughter' alludes to the abusers' use of violence - expressed by the verb 'to drag', to the gravity and brutality of the act - suggested by the term 'slaughter', as well as to her position - that of a goat which, being 'dragged' to slaughter, has no possibility to defend itself. In fact, Mai's position as victim of four men's abuse indicates that her possibilities of fighting back are rather unrealistic[39].

Further on, Mai gradually shifts away from the animalistic image of the goat to men's sphere and then to divinity. In an attempt to awake her abusers' compassion or moral sense, she first invokes the sacred book of Islam, the Koran, and then God's name - ''In the name of the Koran, release me!'' I scream. ''In the name of God, let me go!''. Despite the fact that her initiative proves to be unsuccessful, the larger implication of the idea of divinity in the profane context of the rape might suggest that in such a moment of crisis Mai's only hope remains

[39] 'No simple conquest of man over woman, group rape is the conquest of men over Woman. It is within the phenomenon of group rape, *stripped of the possibility of equal combat*, that the male ideology of rape is most strikingly evident [...] proof of a desire to humiliate the victim *beyond* the act of rape through the process of anonymous mass assault.' (See Brownmiller 1975: 187, my emphasis).

God, although 'prayer is impossible'. The presence of the divine element invests Mai's narrative with a subtle sense of morality and religiousness.

Returning to the scene that narrates the sexual abuse, it is relevant to examine the role played by violence in the given context. Therefore, what first strikes the reader is the textual indication of the abusers' violent behaviour – 'they drag me', 'men's arms have seized mine, pulling at my clothes, my shawl, my hair', which points out the fact that the rape involves more than a presupposed physical desire, since it provides proof of evident violent manifestations. Therefore, the present textual example seems to confirm Brownmiller's view that 'in a sexual assault physical harm is much more than a threat; it is a reality because violence is an integral part of the act.'[40]

Moreover, after the abuse comes to an end, the victim is allowed to leave the 'enclosed place'. Nonetheless, according to the fragment below, Mai continues to feel a high degree of discomfort and shame, increased by the awareness that 'the entire village' knows what has happened behind the doors and the embarrassment that they see her half naked.

> Then they shove me outside, half naked, where I stumble and fall. They throw my shalwar at me [...] Everyone is waiting. I am alone with my shame before the eyes of the entire village. I have no words to describe what I am at that moment.[41]

These highly suggestive lines are charged with the victim's acute feelings of shame, humiliation and helplessness; at the same time, one should not overlook Mai's talent of creating a powerfully emotional image of herself as protagonist. At this point, it is worth mentioning that the writer skilfully traces the victim's weariness as she appears in front of the crowd. What the narrator might want to indicate by 'I stumble and fall' is that the aggressors have managed to shatter Mai's dignity, honour and mental stability[42]; literally referring to the protagonist's stumble, Mai inscribes her fall at a metaphorical level.

Keeping in mind the narrator's comments and reflections on the experience of having been raped due to a matter of tribal vengeance, one could infer that the aggressors were not driven by an irrepressible physical impulse but by their desire to take revenge, to humiliate and dishonour a female relative of their offender. According to Mai, this solution represents the most efficient one for the abusers since 'for them, a woman is simply an object of possession, honour, or revenge'.

[40] See Brownmiller 1975: 384.
[41] See Mai 2006: 10.
[42] It seems that 'the experience of fear, helplessness, or horror is nearly universal in those who have experienced rape.' (See Kilmartin, Ch./ Allison, J. 2007: 72).

The fact that Mai has broken the conventions of her community by not only surviving the rape but also reporting it does not automatically imply that the experience has not re-shaped her life. On the contrary, she confesses how she felt some days after the rape:

> I feel guilty for having been raped, and that is a cruel feeling, because what happened a few days ago was not my fault. As a child, I did not want that chick to die, just as I did nothing to deserve my shameful punishment. The rapists? They don't feel guilty at all! But I, I cannot forget, and I cannot speak to anyone about what happened to me - it's just not done. Besides, talking about the rape would be unbearable for me, and whenever fresh memories of that appalling night invade my thoughts, I drive them frantically from my mind. I don't want to remember! [43]

The effects of the abuse invade the survivor's world accompanied by feelings of self-blame and confusion; Mai, herself, feels guilty for having been abused although she is aware of the fact that it was not her fault. Additionally, she is intrigued because *she* and not the abusers take responsibility for the crime. Whereas she has experienced a violation of her body and mind, which caused her feelings of shame, strong discomfort and self-blame, the rapists appear not to feel responsible or guilty because they believe to have accomplished a legitimate act of revenge.

At another level, according to research on trauma and rape, the victim's sense of self-blame is explicable, since 'many survivors engage in self-blame by rationalizing that they must have directly or indirectly participated in their own victimization. [...] However, this process may cause the survivor to sacrifice self-esteem because of the self-loathing that accompanies self-blame.'[44]

In addition, her desire to forget, to lose no time reflecting on the event, and to fight against the memories that 'invade' her mind, represent clear signs of trauma[45]. Furthermore, psychoanalytical studies inform us that traumatized individuals suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder and that one of its criteria consists in 'the re-experiencing of the traumatic event, which can take several forms: intrusive thoughts; repeated nightmares; or, less commonly, flashbacks in which the event seems as though it is actually happening again.'[46]

Once more, the scientific perspective indirectly comes to assure us of the legitimacy expressed in Mai's literary representation regarding her traumatic manifestations. Besides, the following reflections of the Pakistani female victim in question reinforce the assumption that the female protagonist displays indicators of post-traumatic stress disorder.

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[43] See Mai 2006: 25.
[44] See Kilmartin, Ch./ Allison, J. 2007: 71.
[45] The argument is supported by the qualified opinion that 'the conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud is the central dialectic of psychological trauma.' (See Herman, Lewis Judith, *Trauma and Recovery*, New York: BasicBooks, 1997: 1).
[46] See Kilmartin, Ch./ Allison, J. 2007: 74.

> The rest is a nightmare I keep trying to forget. Telling my story over and over - I simply couldn't do that. Because to tell is to relive it. [47]

In conclusion, Mukhtar Mai's unexpected decision of fighting against suicide and resignation, as well as her unusual endeavour of bringing her case to the Court, has propelled her to write about her experience and struggle, thus providing the reader with a narrative about rape and surviving rape. In an attempt to explore the literary representation of this particular form of violence against women, I have discovered that most of Mai's ideas are scientifically mirrored in studies on rape.

2.1.3. Intimate partner violence

In an attempt to answer a journalist's question with respect to the causes of domestic violence, the academic and sociologist R. Gelles succeeds in disentangling the knot of the enumerable implications of this issue by stating in a clear-cut manner that 'people hit and abuse family members because *they can*.'[48] The sociologist's apparently simplistic location of this specific form of violence against women asks for further explanatory notes. In this sense, we learn from him that 'the psychiatric model serves as an ideal smokescreen to blind us from considering social organizational factors that cause family violence'[49] and from F. I. Nye that 'violence in the family is more frequent in societies that have no legal or other normative structure prohibiting it'[50]. In other words, Gelles' explanatory construction- '*they can*'- may be understood as the lack of protective legislative norms and social support in a society that does not take a stand against domestic violence despite the fact that this phenomenon involves violations of basic human rights. This legislative failure may be rooted in that society's gender-based social dynamics that view domestic violence as a private (familial) issue.

Furthermore, M. Abraham briefly presents the arguments of the feminist perspective on the social mechanisms leading to domestic violence.

> According to this (feminist) view, wife-abuse is not a mere act of deviance or a breakdown in the social order but arises out of the normative structure that defines women as inferior, reaffirms dominance and aggression as positive attributes in men and under-represents women in all spheres of social, economic and political life (Dobash and Dobash, 1981). Dominance by men in heterosexual intimate relationships is seen as having its roots in the patriarchal values of society at large, often mirrored in that society's legal structure. [51]

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[47] See Mai 2006: 33.
[48] See Gelles, Richard J., *Intimate Violence in Families*, London: SAGE, 1997: 133.
[49] See Gelles 1997: 127.
[50] See Nye, F. I., ''Choice, exchange, and the family'', in W.R. Burr, R. Hill, F. I. Nye, & I. L. Reiss (eds.), *Contemporary theories about the family* (Vol. 2, pp.1-41), New York: Free, 1979: 36.
[51] See Abraham 1998: 6.

Astonishingly, it seems that not only feminist activists often accused of radicalism have come to this conclusion but also male researchers like R. Gelles or Amar Jesani[52], co-ordinator of the Centre for Studies in Ethics and Rights in Mumbai.

Manifested at a psychological, emotional, verbal, and/or physical level, the intricate issue of intimate partner violence[53] appears to have awakened the interest of female writers as well. Pushing aside the veil of conventional silence that conceals such a delicate subject, Anita Nair, Tehmina Durrani, and Taslima Nasrin take on the challenging task of narrating about male violence against female partners. Notwithstanding the fact that their stories operate with different cultural and religious markers (Indian, Pakistani, Bengali, respectively Hinduism and Islamism), the idea that runs through all three narratives addresses women's struggle to break free, in one way or another, from a violent marriage.

What is relevant to mention at this point is the idea that the concept of 'intimate partner violence' refers to all forms of partner abuse, starting with the less visible ones – psychological, verbal and emotional, up to violent physical acts leading to the female partner's death. It should be stressed that even in the case of psychological, verbal or emotional violence, which causes the victim's severe feelings of humiliation, low self-esteem, inferiority, or helplessness, the corrosive power of the frequently recurring abuse may traumatize the victim or drive her to commit suicide. Therefore, due to the fact that some forms of domestic violence fail to be noticed by the others because they manifest at a psychological or emotional level, one might be tempted to believe that only visible signs of physical violence may be labelled as 'intimate partner abuse'. What is at issue is the idea that the abuser or an outsider cannot draw a line between what they perceive to be 'abuse' or a mild negative commentary about the female partner. As a result, the present paper analyses the phenomenon in question while keeping in mind that all forms and degrees of partner violence may be equally damaging and will be referred to as 'intimate partner violence ' or 'abuse'. Additionally, when operating with the concept of 'intimate partner violence' or 'domestic violence', what is meant is 'male partner violence or abuse against the female partner'.

A first approach of the present topic deals with the most imperceptible form of domestic violence, namely the one that manifests at the psychological and emotional level.

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[52] Both names are mentioned previously.

[53] I will employ the following definition of domestic violence – the 'behaviour someone uses to control a spouse, partner, date, or elderly relative through fear and intimidation. It can involve emotional, sexual, and physical abuse, as well as threats and isolation. In most cases, men are the abusers.' (See *Healthline*. 18 Jan. 2009 <http://www.healthline .com/sw/wl-recognizing-domestic-violence>)

Mapping the possible meanings and expressions of the psychological domestic violence represents a common interest for the female writers mentioned above. In this sense, the Indian author Anita Nair offers a voice in her fictional work *Ladies Coupé* to one of her female narrators, namely Margaret Paulraj. In an attempt to carry out the task of narrating her story, Margaret mainly explores her hidden feelings and unspoken thoughts pertaining to her relationship with Ebenezer Paulraj, her husband. The reader learns that the spouses' careers indicate a shared direction of thought and level of education: the wife teaches chemistry at the same institution that is managed by her husband, the literature teacher. However, Margaret suggests that Ebenezer's incessant yearning for recognition drives him to adopt the following strategy: he seeks to preserve his reputation and to impress the others by diminishing his wife's merits.

> ''Maggie, why are you so quiet?'' No one called me Maggie except Daphne. They all turned to look at me. 'She's not a great one for discussions. She doesn't have an opinion about anything. The only time I've ever seen her truly animated was many years ago in Kodaikanal. There was this student Alfred …' Ebe butted in and steered the attention away to a reminiscence; yet another piece of history that revealed what a brilliant man Ebenezer Paulraj was. [54]

In front of the guests, Ebenezer denies his wife the possibility to answer a question addressed to her; in doing so, he silences Margaret and formulates derogatory observations regarding her ability to discuss. Margaret's embarrassment is emphasized by the phrase 'they all turned to look at me' and by the fact that although they were waiting for her to reply, her husband speaks *about* her. As the narrator suggests, the male protagonist achieves his goal: 'steering the attention away' from his wife to a story that emphasizes 'what a brilliant man' he was. Moreover, the narrator skilfully alludes in the following fragment to the husband's spirit of competition; his offending remarks about the discipline taught by his wife (chemistry) indicate that he appears to perceive her as his rival.

> …there can't be a more dry or boring subject than chemistry. … Frankly, if you want my opinion, when I think of chemistry, what comes to mind is the odour of rotten eggs. [55]

> When Ebenezer Paulraj was offered the post of Principal of the S.R.P. Trust School four years ago, we left Kodaikanal to come to Coimbatore. As his wife and a postgraduate in chemistry with a degree in education and ample experience, I was offered the post of Head of Department of chemistry. I was expected to teach the senior school. 'But since this is the first batch and there is only one class, you might have to handle some junior classes too,' Ebenezer Paulraj said, as he described the school, the teachers, the challenge his job posed, the wonderful opportunity it was going to be for him. I listened quietly, wondering why he bothered at all. He had already made up his mind. [56]

Beyond the image of what appears to be a happy marriage, functioning on the basis of a balanced power structure, the narrator divulges the unknown details of a relationship in which

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[54] See Nair, Anita, *Ladies Coupe*, London: Vintage, 2003: 135.
[55] See Nair 2003: 138.
[56] See Nair 2003: 121.

psychological violence[57] against the wife represents a recurring reality; in this sense, it is advisable to take into account the following view on this form of violence:

> Perhaps the most invisible aspect of intimate-partner violence is psychological violence, though it is likely the most pervasive type of maltreatment that women in violent relationships are made to suffer. Psychological violence includes manipulative or threatening behaviours that are used to instil fear […] It also includes verbal abuse, such as making comments that are derogatory, demeaning or embarrassing. [58]

Apart from verbally abusing his wife by means of ‘derogatory and embarrassing comments’, as shown above, Ebenezer also seems to display ‘manipulative behaviour’ towards his wife, which is a further indicator of emotional violence. At a textual level, there are two instances proving the legitimacy of this assumption. First, in her view, Margaret has no other option than to follow the patriarchal conventions demanding her to take on the role of house-wife as soon as she returns from her intellectual work to the domestic sphere.

> ‘‘What about me? I wanted to ask. Don’t I have the right to have any expectations of him? Don’t I work as hard as he does and more because I run the house as well? Why do you think he is busy and I have all the time in the world?’’[59]

Another significant detail exploring the conjugal dynamics that may play a role in creating a tense atmosphere in the present case involves the spouses’ status within and outside the domestic sphere. Therefore, we learn that not only within the household but also at work, the relationship between the two partners is based on an asymmetrical power structure: the male partner strives to control and dominate his wife. Within the domestic space, as Margaret argues, Ebenezer takes on the role of the patriarch; at work, as director of the institution where his wife is employed he treats her accordingly, as suggested by the following passage:

> I flung the rubber band on the table and snapped, ‘How could you do this to a child? How could you humiliate him so badly? Don’t you realize what you could have done to him? You might have scarred him for life. And for what? An extra inch of hair?’
> Ebenezer Paulraj touched the blue beads of the rubber band thoughtfully. ‘I suppose you took this off Alfred’s hair. That was very silly of you.’
> ‘Answer me, Ebe. Don’t tell me I’m silly. Why were you so cruel to a child?’ Exasperation made my tone sharper than I meant it to be.
> ‘Madam,’ Ebenezer Paulraj said in a voice that I had never heard him use before, ‘I would like to remind you that I’m in charge here and not you. I do not like anyone flouting my authority and the next time you do so, I will have to take strict action. I will not let who you are influence my decisions. Do you understand?’ […]
> And I. Perhaps that was the first time I began to question my feelings for Ebenezer Paulraj. Suddenly Ebe was a stranger and a despicable one at that. A bully and a tyrant.[60]

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[57] I refer to ‘psychological violence’ keeping in mind that ‘forms of psychological abuse were also found to exist, for instance, in verbal abuse, sarcastic remarks in the presence of outsiders, imposing severe restrictions on freedom of movement, totally ignoring the wife in decision-making processes, making frequent complaints against her to her parents, friends, neighbours, and kin much to the embarrassment of the wife.’ (See Saravanan 2000: 55)

[58] See Weiser, I., ‘‘Personal Correspondance’’ (August 13, 2005), in Ernst 2005: 121.

[59] See Nair 2003: 120.

[60] See Nair 2003: 137.

The husband’s reaction to the reproaching remarks of his employee and simultaneously his wife is mirrored in his ironic response – ‘that was very silly of you’. He addresses his wife as ‘Madam’ although she approaches him as her husband and not her superior or colleague - ‘Ebe’. The use of the diminutive form of his name, Ebenezer, indicates the female protagonist’s emotional involvement. By contrast, the male partner answers in a detached and authoritative tone by reprimanding Margaret that ‘I’m in charge’, she should not question ‘my authority’, and that the next time she will dare to challenge his decisions he ‘will have to take strict action’. ‘Perhaps that was the first time’ when the female protagonist became aware of her husband’s cruel behaviour towards her and a young innocent student; as a result, she shifts from affectionately addressing him ‘Ebe’ to considering him a distant ‘Ebenezer Paulraj’ who is a ‘bully’, ‘stranger’, and ‘tyrant’.

Moreover, the scene triggers Margaret’s unspoken frustration, which she fervently expresses only to herself; also, the female protagonist realizes that her marriage ‘suffocates’ her.

> A hysterical laugh ran up my throat. But I swallowed it down as I had all these years swallowed my sense of pride. Suddenly I felt suffocated by my marriage. […] The anger in me bubbled but there was little I could do apart from letting it bubble.[61]

This fragment sheds light over Margaret’s impasse: she becomes aware of her frustration and rage against her husband but she ‘swallows’ it down in order to protect her marriage.[62] Apart from the unequal gender roles distribution within the marriage, there is a second element that indicates the husband’s intention to manipulate his wife’s personality. Therefore, at the beginning of their conjugal life, Margaret accepts her husband’s decision to abort their unborn child in spite of her disagreement.

> I stopped and pulled at his sleeve. ‘Ebe, I’m not sure. I don’t feel right about this.’ When I saw his mouth thin, I added, ‘I don’t think the Church would approve of this either.’ […]
> ‘Right now that cell in you is just that: a cell with no soul or feelings. If you had a boil that turned septic, wouldn’t you have it lanced? Just think of this as a tumour that has to be removed.’ [63]

Once more, Margaret affectionately attempts to confess to ‘Ebe’ her distress and uncertainty. The husband’s reaction reinforces the idea of the powerful emotional damage he causes his wife by referring to their unborn child as ‘that cell in you’, which indicates his detachment from the foetus, and by constraining his wife to ‘think of this as a tumour that has to be removed’. His expressions suggest a critical degree of cruelty and lack of sensibility that he

[61] See Nair 2003: 139.
[62] Her mother instructs her that ‘it is a woman’s responsibility to keep the marriage happy. Men have so many preoccupations that they might not have the time or the inclination to keep the wheels of a marriage oiled. Ebenezer is a busy man. You must understand this and behave accordingly.’ (See Nair 2003: 120).
[63] See Nair 2003: 113.

projects onto her psychic. Thus, the verb 'to lance' implies the image of a piercing knife employed in a surgical intervention and the attribute 'septic' suggests the idea of an infection that damages the body. Both terms emphasize Ebenezer's unscrupulousness, his inconsiderate attitude towards his pregnant wife as he explicitly expresses his wish to 'lance' the 'cell with no soul or feelings'. In doing so, he aims at manipulating his wife's perception of the foetus by implying that the foetus is a malign entity that has to be 'removed' and a 'boil' that 'turned septic'.

It is only years later that Margaret grasps the gravity of the decision and of the fact that her husband has exerted such overwhelming power over her. Long after Margaret becomes aware of her subservient position in relation to her husband she succeeds in planning her revenge - empowering herself by manipulating her husband. Strikingly, the female protagonist manages to achieve this change in a non-violent manner; thus, she triggers and maintains her husband's addiction to *her* irresistible dishes and thereby gradually destroys his perfect image about himself – his Achilles' heel.

> Ebe slowly became a fat man. A quiet man. An easy man. […] And Ebe became a man I could live with once again.[64]

Unlike Nair, Tehmina Durrani approaches the issue of psychological violence within a couple in a different manner. In the case of the female Pakistani's writing, it seems that the larger question of domestic violence has found its best-expressed and complex literary representation. Durrani's autobiographical novel, *My Feudal Lord*, features the writer herself as the main character in a narrative about an abusive husband. Bearing resemblance to Nair's male protagonist, the husband in Durrani's novel occupies an important function within society; more precisely, Mustafa Khar is presented as one of the most influential Pakistani politicians. In this sense, one may surprisingly surmise that domestic violence cuts across the idea that the higher the level of education or the social status of a husband, the lower the expectancy of intimate partner violence.

As the story reveals, Durrani's female protagonist embodies the figure of a wife who frequently becomes the victim of her husband's aggression. Whereas the Indian author Anita Nair discloses Margaret's victimization by her partner at a psychological and emotional level, the Pakistani writer's male character transgresses this level; his behaviour displays a plurality of other forms of intimate partner violence. However, the following fragments primarily serve as Durrani's narrative exemplification of male psychological violence against the female partner.

[64] See Nair 2003: 142.

> The psychological damage was worse. Now, whenever Mustafa came home, I shuddered in fright. His unpredictable word was law. It was not for me to reason. My love for the man had now turned into fear. I knew that anything that I might say or do could make him angry. […] I began to say my prayers under my breath constantly: to keep him cool, to soften his heart toward me, to make him love me. I was incapable of thinking of any other issue. [65]

> I became incapable of thinking logically; indeed I was afraid to think, for irrationally I was certain that he could penetrate my mind. He fed this fear frequently, by saying, 'I know what you're thinking, Tehmina, believe me. You daren't think of anything that I have forbidden you to think about.' My brain was washed, bleached and hung out to dry. I was afraid to sleep, lest I dream images that would annoy him.[66]

What is relevant and striking about these pieces of confession is not only the critical degree of emotional harm inflicted by the husband upon his wife, but also the narrator's observation that explicitly emphasizes 'psychological damage' being 'worse' than physical abuse. As an aftermath of the abuse, Durrani realizes that her love for her husband has 'turned into fear' and the new feeling denies her the possibility to perceive him as a close person. Thus, violence has generated a gap between the spouses; she refers to him as 'the man', a formula that obviously denotes emotional detachment.

Furthermore, it is imperative to remark that unlike physical abuse, psychological or emotional violence represents a more powerful instrument of harming the female partner. In other words, the wife in *My Feudal Lord* feels the pressure of her husband's threats even in their absence; she is 'incapable' of thinking, acting, or sleeping for fear she might trigger his anger. What the narrator suggests is that the victim has internalized her abuser's menaces and warnings, as well as the injuries she usually suffers unless she complies with his instructions, up to a point where she is 'incapable of thinking logically' or even 'afraid to think'. The fear and helplessness that she describes leave space only for prayer; her emotions and senses are reduced to a single permitted feeling, namely fear. As proof, terms denoting fear - 'fear' and 'fright'-, have been explicitly employed five times within the two fragments (ten lines) above; their recurrence is highly suggestive of the poignancy of the violence.

Nevertheless, the following scene, which incorporates representations of emotional, physical, verbal and psychological violence, seems to demonstrate that the situation can further escalate and reveal new forms and levels of aggression. Therefore, what is remarkable about the passage below, apart from the phenomenon of violence *per se*, is the fact that the female protagonist is pregnant and the father of the unborn child is her husband and at the same time her abuser.

> 'Who the hell are you to think? I have asked you a question. Answer me!' He grabbed my right wrist and twisted, forcing me to my knees. Even as a shriek escaped from my lips, I told myself

[65] See Durrani, Tehmina, *My Feudal Lord*, London: Corgi, 1998: 105-106.
[66] See Durrani 1998: 108.

> to be quiet, lest the servants, or his mother, hear. He released his grip and I scrambled to my feet, gasping, rubbing my sore arm. He ordered me to sit down again on the bed, and the interrogation continued. […] Suddenly he threw me down on to the bed and jumped on me. Sitting astride my belly, he slapped me in the face repeatedly with his open palm, forehand and backhand. The sounds of his blows seemed too loud to remain confined to the four walls of the room. […] I no longer knew what was happening […] I did not know how long the beating lasted. It could have been two hours. The intensity made it an eternity. Then, quite suddenly, it was over. His fury was sated.
> I begged in a weak voice, 'Please, God! I need to go – I need to go – to the bathroom.' He allowed me to stagger off. [67]

Seemingly, the husband's 'fury' has been generated by the fact that his pregnant wife had dared to think. In an attempt to correct her mistake, the husband's violent behaviour seems to function as a form of punishment. Moreover, as one may learn from the following quotation, the male abuser's intention is mainly to control his wife's thoughts ('you daren't think of anything that I have forbidden you to think about'), behaviour, reactions, and speech.

> Domestic violence is understood to be a continuous series of actions, which are divers but characterised by a common purpose: control, through psychological, economic, physical and sexual violence, of one partner over the other. It involves the other being considered not as a person, but a thing which may be at your service, kept under control, made use of when needed and on which to unleash rage and frustration.[68]

At this point, it is interesting to examine the power relation between the two characters involved in the scene above by focusing on the semantic aspect of the quotation, too. Therefore, in constructing her discourse, Durrani operates with phrases and terms like 'he ordered me', he threw me down', 'he slapped me', 'the sounds of his blows', 'his fury was sated', 'I begged'. Taking a closer look at the structure of these phrases one may point out the fact that they clearly indicate who the abuser is, the exact violent move of the abuser, and who the victim is ('he slapped me'). Additionally, the same textual structure suggests that the male character, in performing the action (slapping, throwing, ordering), undoubtedly exerts an indisputable power over the female character whose weakness and submission seem to represent her hope for survival. Moreover, the fact that the female protagonist employs the expression 'I begged in a weak voice' as she seeks to move away from the room suggests that even after she realizes that it 'is over', 'his fury was sated', she finds it necessary to ask for permission to move, which 'he allowed me'. It is also important to remark the suggestive power of the phrase 'his fury was sated' explicitly indicating that the husband perceives his wife, in Romito's formulation, as 'a thing on which to unleash rage and frustration'.

As stressed by Romito in the quotation above, the key-element that motivates the abuser's violent behaviour towards his wife is the need or wish to control and humiliate her.

[67] See Durrani 1998: 102-103.
[68] See Romito 2008:17.

In this sense, the image that Durrani presents in the passage in question, of the husband who forces his wife to knee in front of him (‘forcing me to my knees’) - an evident sign of subordination, after having verbally offended her, represents a case in point.

Further, emphasizing the male partner’s lack of consideration for his pregnant wife and his unborn child, the narrator describes how he carelessly ‘threw me down on to the bed and jumped on me. Sitting astride my belly, he slapped me.’ In spite of the remark that he sits ‘astride’ her ‘belly’ although she is pregnant, the victim does not express any visible sign of concern for the damage her child could suffer as a consequence of her husband’s violence. Unexpectedly, what the narrator does mention, even twice (‘Even as a shriek escaped from my lips, I told myself to be quiet, lest the servants, or his mother, hear’ and ‘the sounds of his blows seemed too loud to remain confined to the four walls of the room’) is her anxiety about the fact that someone may overhear her screams and realize she is being beaten by her husband. Like Mukhtar Mai, Durrani’s female protagonist seems to feel (as) guilty (as the aggressor) for being abused, due to the shame and stigma attached to the image of a female victim of male violence[69]. Durrani narrates about the wife’s efforts to keep the secret of her victimization; despite the increasing intensity of her pain, she struggles to remain silent (‘even as a shriek escaped from my lips, I told myself to be quiet). The wife’s anxiety becomes a recurring pattern in the Pakistani writer’s novel; hence:

> To the accompaniment of the continuous yells of a bewildered baby, he tore my sari to shreds and beat me savagely, avoiding my face.
> Next morning I faced my mother as if nothing had happened. I was learning to hide my feelings – and my bruises – from the world.[70]

Internalizing an intense sense of fear and the idea that domestic affairs with no exception represent a private conjugal matter, Durrani the protagonist is ‘learning to hide’ any physical or emotional signs of the systematic intimate partner violence ‘from the world’, whereas Durrani the narrator and writer, by means of the literary discourse, discloses the secret to the world. Emerging from an imperative need to preserve the façade of a happy marriage, the wife conceals her husband’s brutal behaviour and its consequences, literally translated into expressions like ‘he tore my sari to shreds’, ‘beat me savagely’, ‘my bruises’. Indicating the husband’s similar intention of hiding his aggression against his wife, the narrator also stresses a highly relevant fact concerning the husband’s aggressive attitude. Thus, the phrase ‘he beat me savagely’, and the observation ‘avoiding my face’, skilfully suggests that the abuser’s manner of using violence betrays his destructive drive – by means of the term

[69] This argument is also supported by the following statement: ‘A couple of women also hinted that men know that their wives cannot report such punishment even to their own parents or seek medical treatment due to a sense of shame.’ (See Saravanan 2000: 55).
[70] See Durrani 1998: 114.

‘savagely’-, and the fact that he premeditates his moves and strategically prevents himself from causing any sign that may indicate his crime. The use of the notion ‘crime’ becomes legitimate as long as it is specified that the narrative suggests the husband’s awareness of violating a legal (and moral) regulation; it is exactly this awareness that urges him to avoid molesting the victim’s face. Also, according to the narrator’s argumentation, Mustafa displays a constant concern with his reputation; as an experienced politician, the male character is aware of the value of diplomacy. More precisely, his cautiousness secures his prestigious image thus making it hard for his wife to prove the contrary.

Further exploring the aspects and implications of the husband’s behaviour towards his wife, Durrani insists on disclosing innumerable scenes of domestic violence between the same couple. At the same time, one may note that in operating with recurring issues, like the wife’s concern with hiding her husband’s violence or the husband’s strategic violent manifestations, the writer emphasizes the critical degree of brutality reached by the male abuser, as well as the systematic appeal to violence as a form of punishment and control. Examining the behaviour of male individuals like Mustafa in relation to their female partners, researchers have managed to define it with the help of the notion ‘battering’. Therefore,

> We use the term *battering* to describe male-to-female violence. Battering is more than physical aggression. It is the systematic use of physical aggression or the threat of physical aggression to intimidate, subjugate, and control another human being.[71]

This larger definition of ‘battering’ offers the reader a scientific device that facilitates a better understanding of Durrani’s textual reference and illustration of this term. In this sense, the following fragment accurately mirrors the present theoretical idea regarding an individual’s systematic use of aggression in order to ‘subjugate and control’ his partner, even when *he* has committed a mistake. Within the given situation, where the wife expresses her anger at her husband’s affair with her adolescent sister, it is surprising that the male partner resorts to aggressive gestures, namely physical abuse, verbal abuse and sexual abuse.

> Some of his blows were errant. My mouth showed blood. […] The force of his blow interrupted me. ‘Stand up, you bitch!’ he commanded. There was a new, ominous, more methodical timbre to his voice. ‘Stand up.’
> I was barely able to rise, but I did as he ordered.
> ‘Take off your clothes,’ he shouted. ‘Every stitch. Take …them…off.’ […] He backed off and sat in an armchair. He watched as I slowly began to remove my shirt. […] He sat in the chair with his arms extended on either side, like a king on his throne. […]
> Never before had I felt so totally humiliated, so utterly controlled. I could see on his face the awareness of the importance of this moment. This episode would cripple my spirit – perhaps beyond salvation. From this moment forward, it would be nearly impossible for me to function as an individual. There was not one iota of self-esteem left.[72]

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[71] See Anderson, Stephen/ Schlossberg, Margaret C., ‘‘Systems Perspectives on Battering: The Importance of Context and Pattern’’, in Kilmartin, Ch./ Allison, J. 2007: 138.
[72] See Durrani 1998: 165.

In creating a powerful scene dominated by the husband's thirst for power and subjugation, the writer also addresses the question of the wife's sense of disempowerment, especially by means of the metaphor 'crippled my spirit', which suggests the profoundness of the victim's emotional and psychological agony. The abuser's offending words ('Stand up, you bitch'), commands ('he commanded', he ordered', 'he shouted'), or blows, which cause the victim's mouth to 'show blood', represent Mustafa's punitive measures. The observation 'my mouth showed blood' implies the idea that the victim alerts the reader by means of a visual remark of the gravity of her abuser's blows. In addition, the narrator might suggest that although the assailant presumably sees the effects of his violence, he does not put an end to it.

Hence, the writer focuses on the emotional effects of the abusive act upon the female protagonist. Arguing that the husband has succeeded in denigrating and obliterating the dignity of his wife - 'I felt so totally humiliated, so utterly controlled', and shattering her self-respect –'cripple my spirit', 'there was no iota of self-esteem left', Durrani accentuates the idea that the male character has transformed the process of domestic violence into a game of power. Furthermore, the narrator's observations hint at the husband's triumphant feeling suggested by phrases like (he sat) 'like a king on his throne' or his 'awareness of the importance of this moment'.

Transgressing the borders of Pakistan, it is interesting to remark that the Bengali writer Taslima Nasrin, like Nair and Durrani, thematizes the question of male partners' desire to disempower their wives in her novel. However, in *My Bengali Girlhood,* the issue of domestic violence does not represent the central theme but is only occasionally narrated from a third person's perspective. It is namely the perspective of the young daughter who witnesses how her father's aggressive behaviour generates and widens the chasm between him and his wife. Thus, Nasrin's dominant male protagonist fails to embody a different set of values and behavioural patterns than those characterizing the above-mentioned male partners in Nair and Durrani's novels. Foregrounding the implications of the issue approached by Nasrin in the following passage, it is significant to mention that 'in general, male batterers adhere strongly to masculine ideologies, and to the beliefs that violence is a justifiable means for problem solving and that men should control their female partners'.[73]

> His roaring voice took my breath away. My pen, poised over the margin, trembled, as did the fingers that were curled around it. Then I heard Ma scream. I jumped up from my chair and ran to stand at the door to Ma's room. What I saw was horrible. Baba sprang on Ma, just as a tiger attacks its prey. […] He caught Ma's hair, threw her to the floor, and kicked her chest and stomach. On his feet were strong, sturdy shoes from Bata.

[73] See Kilmartin, Ch./ Allison, J. 2007: 46.

> Ma tried to roll under the bed but failed. I was joined at the door by Dada, Chhotda, even Yasmin. Like small mice we watched in silence as blood started pouring from Ma's nose and mouth and she screamed in pain, ''He's killing me! Help! Save me!'' None of us dared to step forward. Ma continued to groan; the floor was flooded with her urine.
> ''Will you keep saying those filthy things? Will you I really will kill you today!'' Baba gasped, speaking between short breaths.
> ''No! Let me go. I'll never say anything again. Please let me go, I beg of you!'' Ma pleaded with folded hands, tears streaming down her face, sitting half naked on the wet floor.[74]

In an attempt to restore and strengthen his dominant power position within the family, the husband punishes his wife for having shown disobedience, thus challenging his authority. Undeniably undermining his wife's dignity and self-esteem, textually reflected as (he) 'threw her to the floor', and striving to obtain her total submission by means of physical intrusion, visible in 'she screamed in pain' and (he) 'kicked her chest and stomach' with 'strong, sturdy shoes', the abusive spouse coerces his victim to comply with his will. Moreover, accepting to 'never say anything again', the wife implores her husband to refrain from abusing her in an overtly humiliating manner – 'Ma *pleaded with folded hands*, tears streaming down her face, sitting half naked'.

A further element hinting at the family's awareness of the father's power position within the domestic sphere implies the narrator's (as witness) understanding of the violent act. Nasrin describes the scene with the help of phrases like 'Baba sprang on Ma, just as a tiger attacks its prey', and 'like small mice we watched in silence'. Symbolically, the narrator emphasizes the helpless position of the mother presented as 'its prey', the powerful role of the father - the tiger, as well as the children's impossibility (as 'small mice' in front of a tiger) to rescue their mother. Additionally, the fact that Nasrin presents the wife as a 'prey', thus accentuating her incapability to defend herself, confirms the theory that 'with different processes of socialisation that men and women undergo, men take up stereotyped gender roles of domination and control, whereas women take up that of submission, dependence and respect for authority.'[75]

Taking a closer look at Nasrin's fragment, one may notice that contrasting Nair's narrative but resembling Durrani's textual illustrations on domestic violence, there is an additional issue gaining contour, namely that of eye-witnessing an abusive act. The aggravating element in the present case is not only the young age of the witnesses, but also that one of their parents is the abuser and the other one his victim. Whereas Durrani mentions the presence of the couple's baby at the moment of the abuse - 'to the accompaniment of the continuous yells of a bewildered baby', Nasrin's discourse suggests that she, together with her

[74] See Nasrin 2001: 100-101.
[75] See Saravanan 2000: 2.

siblings, 'Dada, Chhotda, even Yasmin', have reached a level of psychological development that allows them to grasp the implications of the witnessed act. At a textual level, one may learn that one of the children remarks 'what I saw was horrible', as well as the fact that the victim, their mother, in a desperate attempt to escape her husband's aggression, seeks salvation from her witnessing children – 'He's killing me! Help! Save me!' Nonetheless, 'none of us dared to step forward'. This last phrase suggests the children's fragile emotional condition caused by the event. The fact that none of them found the courage ('dared') to confront their father and help their mother alludes at their feelings of fear and helplessness.

In other words, the children's presence maximizes the gravity of the effects of domestic violence since 'it can be as damaging for children witnessing domestic violence exerted by one parent against the other as direct abuse'. [76] In this sense, it may be pointed out that for a child like Nasrin the protagonist, who refers to her parents as 'Baba' and 'Ma' – terms denoting affection, bearing witness to her father's brutal behaviour toward his wife, the child's mother, leads to severe emotional damage. More precisely, researchers argue that

> Children also suffer as a result of the violence directed at their natural or adoptive mother. Children who witness parental violence are at higher risk of anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, nightmares, and other problems such as persistent aggressivity.[77]

In an attempt to sum up the plurality of narrative perspectives, approaches and stylistic devices employed by the three female writers engaging with the question of intimate partner violence, it is important to keep in mind Nair's strategy of accentuating the severe consequences of a partner's demeaning observations about his wife. Equally significant is the reflective gist of Nasrin's piece of narrative, indicating the perspective of the witness, and her reference to specific animals' symbolism in order to denote the power positions of those involved in an act of domestic abuse; also noteworthy are the vehement tone and intensity that emerge from Durrani's text.

Furthermore, having examined diverse illustrations of a particular form of violence against women provides us the opportunity to locate the main causes of the present question. Therefore, endorsing the ideas formulated in the literary narratives of the three authors, one may note that 'several triggers for violence that are notably consistent throughout the world include: perceived disobedience of a female partner, suspicions of a female partner's infidelity, failing to care ''adequately'' for children, questioning a man about money and refusing sex. In other words, violence often results when a man believes his wife or girlfriend has contravened conventional gender roles. His violence serves to assert and maintain his

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[76] See Ernst 2005: 122.
[77] See *Amnesty International*. 25 Jan. 2009
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?lang=e&id=551AF81791C9B08580256F7300553101>

authority and domination.'[78] Regardless of the reason that has triggered the abuse, *despite* the lack or *due to* the writers' own experience of such an event, at the heart of the fragments discussed along this section resides the common interest in disclosing and elaborating on women's experiences as victims of domestic violence.

Finally, unlike the cases of rape and sexual abuse discussed in the precedent sections of the present paper, the phenomenon of domestic violence involves an additional aggravating factor. It is namely the idea that the abuser is in all three studied cases the husband of the victim, thus their closest person; besides, two of the narratives feature the abuser as the father of the victim's child(ren). According to the authors, in spite of their cultural, religious and ethnical differences, the partners in their texts have established a (conjugal) relationship on the basis of mutual affection and respect. It is therefore puzzling to read that in spite of the profound bond that unites them, one of the spouses systematically abuses the other one and that at least in India this type of abuse 'consistently tops the list of the highest crime rate.'[79]

2.2. Consequences of violence against women

Having explored the five female authors' narrative approaches of the causes and manifestations of child sexual abuse, rape, and intimate partner violence, the focus of this section is directed at the effects of various forms of gender-based violence upon the female victims.

First, it is important to point out that all five authors have addressed the common issue of violence against women in spite of their characters' (victims and abusers) demonstrated a wide range of differences in religious orientation and practice, social status, age, level of education, or ethnical background. In other words, no matter if the abuser is a famous politician, a school director or a representative of a tribal clan, or if the victim is only seven-years old, a chemistry teacher or a female member of a poor clan, the phenomenon of violence against women represents a pervasive rather than isolated or exceptional matter. What is more, the diversity of the victims and abusers' features come to reinforce the gravity and magnitude of the problem in discussion.

[78] See Ernst 2005: 116.
[79] As one may read in 'cruelty by the husband and his relatives as registered under IPC section 498A consistently tops the list of the highest crime rate.' (See Rustagi, Preet, *Gender biases and discrimination against women*, New Delhi: Centre for Women's Development Studies (& UNIFEM), 2003: 72).

In mapping the main implications of the present phenomenon, researchers argue that this type of abuse represents the cause *and* effect of an asymmetrical gender-based distribution of power positions.

> These crimes (rape, sexual assault, intimate partner violence) are both cause and effect of an inequitable power structure between the sexes. Hence, men's violence against women and gender inequity have a mutual dependence upon each other. For example, a woman whose husband beats her thinks that she cannot leave him because of her economic dependence on him, or because she is afraid that he will injure or kill her if she leaves.[80]

Furthermore, reflecting on the idea of cause and effect, one may notice that it also appears at the level of the discussed texts. In this sense, it is noteworthy to analyse how the female protagonists deal with their experience as victims.

Starting from the remark that some of the female protagonists employ violence as a means of revenging the violence they have suffered, one may challenge the limitation of the above mentioned dyad of elements that are 'mutually dependent'. Thus, it is arguable that not only does gender inequality cause gender-based violence and vice versa, but gender-based violence can *also* cause violence, thus interrupting the cycle of the dyad. The following scene from Durrani's novel represents a case in point.

> Mustafa insisted and I resisted. He pulled me by the hair, swung me around and employed his favourite threat: 'I'll break every bone in your body.'
> I grabbed the pot from the stove and threw it at him. He screamed in pain from the burning brew. For a moment he was paralysed. Then, as he raised his hand to strike back, I pushed him in the chest and yelled, 'The next time you raise your hand to me I will pick up a knife and kill you!' There was power and conviction in my voice, although my heart was beating madly. I had declared war.[81]

In the context of the prior arguments that avow gender inequity (manifested as the wish to control and humiliate) as the trigger for violence against women, one may learn from Durrani's fragment that the victims' possible response to violence is violence. Even if Mustafa's abusive punitive methods have repeatedly assured him of his wife's growing submission ('employed his favourite threat'), the victim has internalized not only feelings of fear and humiliation but apparently also frustration and fury against the abuser. At the level of the narrative they are expressed by phrases like 'I grabbed', 'threw at him', and 'I pushed him in the chest and yelled'. Therefore, her own violent reactions may be understood as more than self-defensive strategies ('I resisted'), namely as a possibility of fighting back, suggested with 'power and conviction in my voice' by the threat 'I will pick up a knife and kill you!'

Emerging from the intention to punish her rapists, the narrator in Mai's novel locates, like Durrani, the same idea of the victim's latent desire to violently revenge.

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[80] See Kilmartin, Ch./ Allison, J. 2007: 9.
[81] See Durrani 1998: 188.

> Now it's my turn to seek revenge. I could hire men to kill my attackers. The gang would charge into their home, armed with guns, and justice would be done. But I have no money![82]

Driven and convinced of the necessity that 'justice would be done', Mai's protagonist develops unexpected strategies of revenge. Surprisingly, the traumatized female victim of a gang rape, who has initially considered committing suicide due to her position as survivor of a shameful event, has come to formulate destructive ideas like 'I could hire men to kill' and 'the gang would charge into their home, armed with guns'. According to the narrator, what prevents the victim from committing a violent misdeed is the lack of financial resources.

At another level, the Bengali writer Nasrin also undertakes the task of narrating about a victim's desire to revenge by referring to the reflections of the child victim of sexual abuse. Thus, Nasrin the narrator confesses to the reader that due to the protagonist's helplessness (as a child) she punishes her abusers by means of her imaginative power.

> After what Uncle Sharaf and Uncle Aman did to me, I wanted them to get leprosy and die quickly.[83]

> ''What happens if someone sprinkles salt on wounds?' […] 'It causes enormous pain.' […] Even today I use that method in my mind to punish people. I punished Uncle Sharaf and Uncle Aman. Today, I wanted to cause a great deal of pain to Getu's father but all I could do was imagine hurting him, nothing more.[84]

Having had her childhood shaped by two abusive events, the young girl has managed to fabricate a method of punishing her abusers and revenging her pain that does not directly inflict any damage on them. Despite the fact that her mental punitive exercises fail to materialize, the important issue at this point is that the child's universe has been invaded by violence. What is more, it is not only violence manifested in a physical form that shatters her sense of safety and simple-mindedness but also sexual violence, whose implications overpower a child's ability of understanding. However, she appears to have discovered a standard strategy of releasing her anger at the ones who abuse her, since she describes how she punishes her father for physically aggressing her as it follows:

> I have now lost count of the number of times Baba hit me, the number of times I prayed for his death. I wanted him to get very, very sick and die the same day.[85]

Formulating the victims' desire to cause psychological or physical injuries to their perpetrators, the authors suggest that the female victims, in their attempt to subvert male violence, often display destructive reactions. The discussed fragments imply that the victims internalize the mechanisms of the present phenomenon up to a point where they transform themselves into abusers.

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[82] See Mai 2006: 19.
[83] See Nasrin 2002: 185.
[84] See Nasrin 2002: 295.
[85] See Nasrin 2002: 203.

Nevertheless, a different set of consequences of gender-based violence marks the emotional and psychological destabilization of the victims by emphasizing their feelings of alienation, marginalisation or displacement. For example, Nasrin points out the young protagonist's schizoid sense of identity caused by the experience of the sexual abuses.

> After that, I felt myself split in two. One half went out with all the other children, played games, and ran around. The other half sat alone and depressed by the pond […] Alone, even in the middle of a crowd. Thousands of miles separated this lonely girl from all the others. When she stretched her arm, she could not touch anyone, not even her mother.[86]

The metaphorical vision of this introspective moment clearly suggests the event's dramatic impact upon the personality of the victim. However, what actually triggers the girl's inner dichotomy is her yearning for compassion and protection, her need to speak out the 'unspeakable'[87]; this idea is expressed by (I) 'sat alone and depressed', 'alone, even in the middle of the crowd', 'she could not touch anyone, not even her mother'. Her confusion and shame keep her apart from the others; the abuse separates her from the ones around her since she is the only one (except the abusers) who carries the burden of knowing. Not being able to trust her suffering and humiliation to her closest protector, namely her mother, idea expressed by means of the remark 'not even her mother', causes a barrier between her and all the others. Significantly, the girl victim in Manju Kapur's novel experiences similar feelings of alienation and loss of motherly protection.

> In the days that followed, Nisha grew silent. For the first time she felt divided from the family she had so unthinkingly been part of. Her mother was always so particular about her being clean, now she had done something dirty. Her hand had touched that filthy black thing.[88]

The Indian female writer's discourse provides the reader an insight into Nisha's sphere of emotions and thoughts. Marking the difference from Nasrin's narrative perspective, one may notice that Kapur operates with the omniscient perspective of a third person narrator in revealing the effects of Nisha's victimization. What is more, whereas the Bengali author's fragment above impresses the reader due to the powerful metaphorical image of the shattered sense of identity of a young victim, the idea of Nisha's estrangement from her family, and particularly from her mother, is conveyed in a detached tone. However, it is worth mentioning that the narrator subtly notes the changes in Nisha's behaviour by means of the adverbial marker 'unthinkingly' and the verb 'grew' (silent). Thus, the writer may hint at the fact that the child develops ('grew') a particular behavioural response to the stressful event, namely one dominated by silence, effacement, and reasoning. Contrasting her unquestioned ('unthinkingly') feeling of attachment to her family, Nisha becomes aware of the distance

[86] See Nasrin 2002: 95.
[87] I will approach the idea of 'unspeakable' in the section ''Silence - a cultural construction?''.
[88] See Kapur 2006: 60.

between her and the others. Moreover, according to Kapur's text, what seems to have triggered the victim's sense of alienation is the idea that she has disappointed her mother and feels guilty for having 'done something dirty'.

Taking the idea a stage further, one may remark that the Pakistani writer Mukhtar Mai also introduces in her novel the question of the effects of an abusive sexual event (gang rape) on the female victim. According to the narrator's account, age seems to play an insignificant role when it comes to experiencing a traumatic episode. More precisely, one may argue that Nasrin and Kapur's protagonists do not feel marginalised and depressed because they have been sexually abused at a very young age. This is rather the case due to the emotional implications of the experience that overwhelm Mai's mature female character as well.

> After that terrible night in June 2002, I did not have anyone in whom I truly could confide. I became mistrustful, incapable of recovering my former life – the serenity, the laughter, the tranquil journey through the days and nights.[89]

Closely locating the moment of the rape in a temporal frame – 'terrible night in June 2002', which indicates the fact that the event has irremediably marked her life, the victim primarily stresses her unattainable longing for a confider. Like the young character Taslima, the mature victim suffers from the incapability of exteriorizing her sorrow and thereby disentangling her self from feeling estranged and stigmatized. In addition, the narrator succeeds in conveying to the reader the victim's helpless image by operating with expressions like 'I did not have anyone', 'I became mistrustful', 'incapable of'. The reflective fragment also reveals the protagonist's pervasive sense of loss as it mentions the 'incapability of recovering', her 'serenity', 'laughter', and peace of mind. Having mentioned, at an earlier stage, the traumatic indicators of this character's behaviour, one may remark their recurrence in the present fragment as well. In this sense, Mai's allegoric image of the victim's loss of the 'tranquil journey through the days and nights' alludes to her anguish and to the outcome of the involuntary memories about the abuse. Psychologically forcing the protagonist to move back and force in time - 'whenever fresh memories of that appalling night invade my thoughts, I drive them frantically from my mind', the flashbacks from the traumatic past interrupt the linear and 'tranquil' development of her existence. In other words, the rape has instilled deep distressing traces into the victim's psyche.

A similar idea appears in the following excerpt from a study on the possible consequences of violence.

> Physical, psychological and sexual violence often mounts up and leaves deep marks on its victims, who are more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress syndrome and food disorders, try to commit suicide, take drugs, and show signs of various somatic or

[89] See Mai 2006: 81-82.

> psychosomatic disorders. They are also more vulnerable to the risk of suffering further violence.[90]

Indeed, one may notice that both Nasrin and Kapur, in narrating about the children's reaction to the experienced sexual violence, emphasize the fact that the child characters have been re-victimized, either by the same perpetrator (as in Kapur's story) or by a different one (Nasrin); they appear to suffer from depression, anxiety, nightmares, and feelings of self-blame.

> I couldn't possibly pray any harder. Perhaps I was being punished for some sin. At any rate, I began to think of myself as a sinner. When Uncle Sharaf took me to that empty room and stripped me naked, was that somehow *my* fault, *my* sin? Was that why Allah hated me? Perhaps.[91]

> That evening Nisha could not eat. Her mouth felt dry, her head heavy, her hands clammy. When her Dadi coaxed a morsel down, she coughed and threw up. […]
> From being a child who went to sleep the minute her head hit the pillow, she refused to lie down or close her eyes. […] When she dropped off in exhaustion, she awoke crying, 'Why did you let me sleep? I had bad dreams, I had bad dreams.' But she couldn't say what they were.
> 'It was nothing,' they soothed. […] In the nights to follow the child's screaming became worse. As a result it was often impossible to wake her in the morning […] The nights continued the same. In the day she looked pale and sick.[92]

Whereas the Indian author Kapur also focuses on the physical signals of a traumatized Nisha, Nasrin's evident interest in her protagonist's feeling of self-blame highly suggests the important role of the religious factor in shaping Taslima's thoughts on the implications of the abuse. Therefore, the child's process of consciousness, which serves as an attempt to restore her serenity, involves the idea of a rigorous religious education that seems to have triggered the victim's sense of guilt. According to the narrator, the fact that she has intensely prayed – 'I couldn't possibly pray any harder', proves to be ineffective. As a result, she suggests that the only possible explanation left is that she is herself the 'sinner'.

On the other hand, Kapur's narrative discourse does not only clearly exclude the child victim's fault, but it also draws attention to the devastating consequences of the abusive act. Nisha's psychical burden causes her severe emotional disorders like exhaustion –'she dropped off in exhaustion', as well as a high level of anxiety disclosed by phrases like 'she awoke crying' and 'the child's screaming became worse'. Employing strong and suggestive stylistic devices like the repetition – 'I had bad dreams, I had bad dreams', or phrases like 'dropped off', 'awoke crying', the writer aims at disclosing the protagonist's aggravating emotional and physical condition. Moreover, the indication that she 'awoke crying', as well as the child's repetitive accuse of a nightmare, suggest the idea that the image of the repeated sexual harassment torments the young victim even in her sleep.

[90] See Romito 2008: 16.
[91] See Nasrin 2002: 87.
[92] See Kapur 2006: 63-65.

Furthermore, in order to fully comprehend Kapur's observations about Nisha's eating and sleeping disorders, it is worthwhile referring to the following qualified perspective on the psychosomatic and bodily reactions of survivors of severe sexual abuse.

> Some may begin abusing food, abusing drugs, abusing alcohol, or sleeping all of the time, while others may stop eating or sleeping.[93]

According to this view on rape traumatic syndrome, which enables the reader to understand Nisha's peculiar behaviour, one may argue that the young victim suffers from a post-traumatic stress disorder. This might explain why she 'could not eat', 'refused to lie down or close her eyes', and 'looked pale and sick'.

Another way of envisioning the traumatic manifestations of a child who has been sexually abused is provided by Nasrin's illustration of her protagonist's signs of phobias.

> Sometimes I poked my head in, but if I found the room in darkness, I didn't enter. I had no wish to go into a dark room, *any* dark room, again. […] But I did not stir. Ma herself moved away from me. At once, I began to feel scared and insecure, afraid that someone might pull down my shorts again.[94]

> Fear of snakes and fear of men had me petrified in those days. And there was Ma, telling me to go and sleep with my uncles![95]

Undeniably, the protagonist's intense fear of darkness, snakes, and lack of motherly protection emerges from the association with her traumatizing experience, since 'the phobia may be specifically associated with the rape, such as a weapon or location, or more generalized, such as fear of men, of being alone, or of going out at night.'[96]

The stylistic strategies employed by Nasrin in the two fragments above have the role of pointing out the victim's profound emotional distress caused by the perpetrators' brutality. In this sense, one may remark the narrator's gradual indication of the protagonist's phobia. First, Nasrin marks the idea by means of an allusion to the girl's fear of darkness - 'I had no wish to go into a dark room'. The following step resides in particularizing and simultaneously generalizing the object with the help of the modifier 'any' ('*any* dark room'), completed by the adverbial marker 'again', which explicitly hints at the victim's association of any dark space with the one where she has been abused. Furthermore, in combining the anaphoric formulation 'fear of snakes and fear of men' with the metaphoric image created by the verbal phrase 'petrified me', Nasrin highlights the protagonist's intense feeling of fear.

This having been said, there is one last aspect to be taken into consideration, namely the question of legal regulations regarding the issue of violence against women. As mentioned at

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[93] See Kilmartin, Ch./ Allison, J. 2007: 73.
[94] See Nasrin 2002: 88.
[95] See Nasrin 2002: 89.
[96] See Kilmartin, Ch./ Allison, J. 2007: 73.

the beginning of the discussion on intimate partner violence, F. I. Nye argues that this form of gender-based violence is more likely to be found within those social systems that ‘have no legal or other normative structure prohibiting it’[97]. By extension, one may assert that Nasrin, Durrani, Kapur, Mai, and Nair narrate instances of gender-based violence in the context of particular social communities that fail to sanction these acts. Taking a closer look at the textual details, it is relevant to examine Mai’s case of rape, given the fact that she explicitly approaches the problem from a legislative point of view.

> Here in Pakistan, it is difficult for a woman to prove that she has been raped, since she is legally required to provide four male eyewitnesses to the crime. This is to ensure that the law and chiefly the punishment for rape are not misused. Unfortunately, the only eyewitnesses to both my brother’s rape and mine are the criminals themselves![98]

Mai ironically comments on the judiciary dynamics that fail to protect the victims due to their excessive concern with the accuracy of the event; unless four male witnesses to the crime testify the rape, the victim’s charges are dismissed. More significant is the idea that, as the female author notes, victims of rape are confronted with serious obstacles in their attempt to find justice[99]. As Mai asserts, there are specific legal issues involved in the case of this crime suggesting the importance of the gender factor. Thus, the specifications ‘it is difficult for a *woman* to prove that she has been raped’ and ‘she is legally required to provide four *male* eyewitnesses’ suggest that women suffer from institutional discrimination. In other words, the necessity of four male testifiers indicates the low degree of credibility offered by the normative structures to female victims of rape.

Regarding the other four female protagonists who have experienced gender-based violence, it should be noted that neither of them engages with the question of pressing charges against the abuser.

A brief retrospective view on the phenomenon of male violence against women provides the opportunity to formulate a string of conclusive remarks on the purpose of the present chapter. First of all, it is noteworthy that the five female writers have disrupted the tradition of not addressing the question of gender-based violence. In their attempt to dismantle the implications and consequences of male abusive behaviour toward women, the authors have employed various stylistic strategies. Whereas Durrani, Mai, and Nasrin invite the reader to discover their characters’ anguish and struggle by means of introspective, metaphorical and visually powerful passages, Kapur and Nair concentrate on the exterior perspective of the event. Therefore, the Indian author Kapur’s detachment from the position of the female victim

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[97] See Nye 1979: 36.
[98] See Mai 2006: 56.
[99] See Appendix: 2-3.

may be noticed in the use of the third person narrator, the superficial references to the protagonist's emotions and thoughts, and the focus on Nisha's exterior signs of distress.

As for Nair's story, one may note that in designing the protagonists, the writer has managed to convey the impression of an authentic model of a male-dominated relationship that features a dictatorial husband who persistently violates his wife's sense of dignity, self-esteem and self-trust. However, the way out of the psychological violence, as proposed by the narrator, namely the wife's successful strategy of empowering herself by triggering and maintaining her husband's addiction to her food, appears to be rather idealistic.

By contrast, Nasrin's portrayal of the abused wife who finds refuge in an excessive religious practice and frequently maltreats her daughter is more convincing and closer to reality. Apart from the legitimizing idea that Nasrin's novel is autobiographical, also suggested by the possessive determiner in the title *My Bengali Girlhood* and the subtitle 'a memoir of growing up female in a Muslim world', there is a further argument worth mentioning. After a traumatic abuse or many years of suffering from humiliation, lack of recognition and abuse, a woman internalizes the abuser's gestures and attitude in a subconscious or conscious act of resistance. Viewed thus, the female victims in Durrani, Mai, and Nasrin's texts develop (as shown in the present section) plausible strategies of subverting male violence.

Regardless of the perspective and the stylistic particularities in question, the present five narratives dealing with gender-based violence display a variety of similarities. Whether they narrate cases of child sexual abuse, rape, or intimate partner violence, what is relevant about these novels is their common concern with the female victim and the devastating consequences of their abusive experiences. Also, it is mainly Durrani, Nair, Nasrin (domestic violence), and Mai who engulf the idea (mentioned in the introductive part) in their representations of male violence against women that the present phenomenon may be defined as 'a systematic strategy to maintain women's subordination to men.'[100]

In negotiating the meaning and implications of the given five literary texts under the aspect of violence, it has been aimed at maintaining an objective position. That is why it has been distinguished within the framework of each narrative between the female writer, the female narrator, and the female protagonist despite the fact that in the case of Mai, Durrani, and Nasrin (child sexual abuse), as suggested by autobiographical claims, the roles might have juxtaposed. In this sense, even if the writer, and/or the narrator, and/or the protagonist represent one entity, they have been analyzed as separate entities.

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[100] See Pickup 2001: 303.

All in all, in engaging with specific issues of male violence against women, these South Asian female authors have challenged established norms that perpetuate the silence about gender-based violence socially and culturally.

3. Silence

Silence may be understood as a passive or an active act of responding to a provocation; seen as passive, silence may represent the absence of the wish to react to another person's speech. Under its active aspect, silence may be viewed as a strategy of resistance or, on the contrary, as a socially determined incapability to speak. It is precisely the last manifestation of silence that the present section seeks to approach in relation to the literary texts in discussion.

The previous chapter on violence engulfs representations of women who have experienced male violence and camouflaged it by suffering in silence. At this point, it is relevant to analyse the development of the victims' stories and focus on the mechanisms that enable or hinder them to break the silence about their victimization.

In this sense, the next two sub-chapters – on the cultural construction of silence and the role of its agents - will serve as an attempt to contextualize the issue of silence on male violence against women by examining the following questions: has silence on gender-based violence become a tradition? If yes, then how was it possible to establish it as a tradition – by which means and by whom?

Further, in the section on speaking about male violence and its consequences it is important to focus on the literary texts that reveal to the reader what happens to those female victims who challenge this particular tradition, and to understand how they manage to achieve it and what does it mean for them to break the tradition.

3.1. Silence - a cultural construction?

> Our closed society considered it obscene for a woman to reveal her intimate secrets, but would not silence be a greater crime? […] Muslim women must learn to raise their voices against injustice. […] I decided to write this book and break the traditional silence.[101]

The five women writers engaging with the phenomenon of gender-based violence have clearly addressed in their narratives the idea that male-dominated systems seek to propagate women's obedience and low position within the society, amongst other methods, by means of violence. Having examined the victims' violent or/and silent responses to the experienced abuses, what is relevant at this point is to analyse why these women protagonists have appealed to violence rather than communication. More precisely, it is significant to

[101] See Durrani: 375.

comprehend why they have not spoken about their anguish with either their abuser, especially in the cases of intimate partner violence, or the authorities by reporting the crime. Additionally, this section's purpose is to answer the question whether the socio-cultural values and mechanisms presented by the five authors have exerted any pressure on the female protagonists to remain silent about their victimization.

One way of approaching the question is to reflect on various observations of the image and the role of women within the already mentioned South Asian social structures (Indian, Pakistani, and Bengali) by recording how women are expected to behave, think, and speak, and which issues are unspeakable, improper or humiliating.

In this sense, there are antique literary and religious records that have inscribed a wide variety of aspects regarding the Indian, Pakistani, and Bengali systems of values, beliefs and taboos. At the heart of India's major religious system of belief – Hinduism – there are rigorous references to women's responsibilities as wives and it is in these writings that the distinction between the 'good-benevolent-controlled' wife and its reverse, the 'bad-malevolent- uncontrolled' wife[102], is visible. Significantly, the sacred book of Islam - the Koran, which is essential for the Pakistani and Bengali cultural space, re-enacts the strikingly similar idea of the woman's image as a wife and her possibility to be regarded as virtuous.[103]

Nevertheless, one may discover how important and pervasive are these common rules of conduct imposed on women when projected in the reality of the literary texts in discussion, more precisely in the fictional women's thoughts on their condition. A case in point is Mukhtar Mai's protagonist, who compares her status as woman with that of a goat, but also Nasrin, who ironically touches on the significance of gender within her culture, both thus exposing the gender-related power differential.

> Men are the ones who 'know'; women must simply keep quiet and wait. Why tell us anything? Men make the decisions, rule, act, judge. I think of the goats tied up in courtyards to keep them from wandering around the countryside. I don't count for more than a goat here, even if I haven't got a cord looped around my neck.[104]

> My mother had two sons before I was born. Thank goodness for that, or who would have carried on the family name? A girl was no good for that. A girl would add a touch of grace to a home, help her mother with household chores, and keep the men happy.[105]

Mai's female protagonist allows herself to thematize and reflect upon this social inequity due to her condition as victim and the fact that she suffers from the devastating consequences of the gang rape. Nasrin, however, dares to question the patriarchal values by means of ironic

[102] See Appendix: 3.
[103] See Appendix: 3-4.
[104] See Mai 2006: 34.
[105] See Nasrin 2002: 20.

remarks like 'thank goodness for that' because she constantly notices the differentiated position of girls and women compared to that of boys and men within her family[106]. In other words, in a male-centred social structure it is crucial to prioritize men starting from the moment they are born; by contrast, women '*must simply* keep quiet and wait' and 'keep the men happy'. The idea of women's marginalisation by a society that grants men disproportionate power becomes understandable in the context of the social dynamics that dictate the distribution of gender roles. Moreover, these dynamics also envision, in a clear-cut formulation, an extensive string of obligations that a woman should accept but it fails to mention anything about her rights. In this sense, an Indian journalist notes that

> In the name of protecting ''culture'' or ''tradition'', women are constantly told what they can or cannot say, what they can or cannot do, what they can or cannot wear and ultimately what they can or cannot think. We are willing to elevate women to the status of goddesses and worship them. But they must remain obedient and silent.[107]

Speaking of women's desired obedience and silence, it is important to explore the cultural mechanisms through which women in the given Hindu and Muslim societies internalize the roles imposed on them from an exterior force. Referring to the literary texts examined up to this point, one may formulate the following questions: why has a highly educated woman like Margaret developed a submissive, humble, and powerless behaviour toward her husband? Why does Tehmina Durrani the protagonist accept her husband's despotism, intimidation, denigration and violence against her? Why do Mai, Taslima's mother, and the two young abused protagonists choose to hide their victimization and torment?

To start answering these questions, it should be mentioned that the six fictional victims have obviously internalized the image of the virtuous wife promoted within their social system, thus striving to follow the given patterns. Therefore, one of the basic patterns of desired female behaviour deals with the idea of obedience, which has been contextualized by Durrani.

> The moment I heard her whimper, I rushed in and said, 'I'd better take her [the baby] out. She's tired.'
> 'No,' Mustafa said calmly. 'Leave her there.'
> 'But she's tired.'
> 'You *can't* take her out. I have ordered her to stay there.'
> 'Ordered? But, Mustafa, she's only a year and a half.'
> 'So what? She'd better learn to obey from this age.'[108]

Durrani's passage emphasizes that starting from a very early stage of development a woman's construction of identity is controlled by a male entity, which aims at her submission. Apart

[106] See Appendix: 4.
[107] See Kalpana Sharma, ''Women speak out'', *The Hindu* (27 Nov. 2005). 10 Jan. 2009 <http://www hindu.com/thehindu/mag/2005/11/27/stories/2005112700230300 htm>
[108] See Durrani 1998: 142.

from this, young women are instructed to respect and comply with men's decisions and discouraged to behave in an independent manner. In this sense, in narrating the story ''The Karva Chauth Katha''[109], which refers to a Hindu wife's duty to pray and fast for her husband, Kapur ironically underlines how the female listeners are 'seductively' 'invited' to 'identify' with the 'self-disciplined' wife.

> The story concludes and the power of a wife lingers seductively before the listeners, inviting identification, so that the girl who was so foolish could be them, the woman who was so self-disciplined could be them.
> But Nisha was young and protested. 'It was not the girl's fault, it is the brothers who should be punished. They made her a widow.'
> 'It is nothing to do with the brothers', scolded the mother in turn. 'That girl should have followed her elders and not eaten by herself. After all, no one else was eating, were they? She was trying to be independent, and you can see the consequences.'[110]

Accordingly, women's education, in the given narratives, presupposes that they learn how to become ideal wives and mothers, to accept their obedient and servile position and the overarching power of their fathers, brothers and husbands. In this sense, what Margaret discloses about the role she has to perform as a wife – suffering humiliation, denigrating comments made in front of her friends, docility and silence, resembles the observations of the Muslim women protagonists in Mai and Durrani's novels that avow how

> Aside from prayer and the recitation of the Koran, that's the only education we receive. And it teaches us distrust, obedience, submission, fear, abject respect for men. It teaches us to forget ourselves.[111]
>
> We were taught that marriage was a sacred and irrevocable institution. If a husband turned out to be a brute, it was the wife's duty to persevere until she changed his character. A broken marriage was a reflection of a woman's failure.[112]

Since it is women who should strive to maintain by all means the façade of a standard if not happy marriage, there is nothing ambiguous in these passages about who is responsible for any kind of marital failure. Taking the idea a stage further, it is noteworthy to examine the consequences of a conjugal fracture in terms of the wife's position.

> Besides, there was the stigma of divorce. No one had ever been divorced in my family. What God had put together, no man or woman has cast asunder. In respectable families such as ours, no one gave up on their marriage. They gritted their teeth and worked harder to preserve it. If I left Ebenezer Paulraj, I would have to be prepared to lose my family as well.[113]
>
> A Pakistani woman will endure almost anything in order to hold a marriage together. In our society, marriage may be purgatory, but divorce is hell.[114]

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[109] See Appendix: 5.
[110] See Kapur 2006: 95.
[111] See Mai 2006: 91.
[112] See Durrani 1998: 29 and Appendix: 5.
[113] See Nair 2003: 120. Also relevant is that 'in India, a woman […] who leaves her husband's home is rarely accepted, understood or forgiven.' (See Jung, Anees, *Beyond the Courtyard*, New Delhi: Viking, 2003: 26).
[114] See Durrani 1998: 77.

> I was a social and political outcast. People whom I formerly respected turned their backs on me. I shuddered at the realization of the position that a woman falls into after divorce - especially if her ex-husband is an important person. Increasingly I understood why women dare not break away.[115]

In an attempt to justify their female protagonists' silence and (initial[116]) incapability to escape a violent marriage, the Pakistani and Indian authors make it clear that the socio-cultural conventions pressure women to conform by sometimes 'gritting their teeth' and 'working harder'. Unless ready to comply with the norms, as Durrani confesses, the woman becomes 'a social outcast', their decision being thus culturally labelled as an unforgivable mistake.

What is more, many of the 'victims generally feel, it is better to suffer in silence than to be separated from loved ones'.[117] As a case in point, Tehmina Durrani legitimizes her inability to divorce by alluding to her vulnerable position within a marital relation, which resembles a chess game. Differently formulated, in case the wife dares to engage in such an inadmissible process, the husband will sanction her impudence by 'retaining control' of their daughter.

> I dreamed of release, but reality stood in front of me like a stone wall. Divorce was just not possible. British and Pakistani law might be on my side, but in the feudal world, a man retains control of his daughter, and I knew that Mustafa would use her as a hostage to assure my loyalty. I was willing to forsake everything – except Naseeba.[118]

Durrani's statement engulfs serious accusations regarding the 'feudal world', which seems to defy the Law, and regarding her husband; she argues that he would venture to use their daughter as a weapon ('use her as a hostage') in order to manipulate his wife's decisions. According to the narrator, the female partner is entrapped in a relationship that overwhelms her power of endurance. Hence, the reader learns by means of a skilful metaphorical image – 'reality stood in front of me like a stone wall', that the wife 'dreams of release' but reality, like a merciless guardian, does not allow her even this imaginary comfort.

Another theoretical possibility of subverting the male domination and violence perpetrated against women would be to speak out about it. Nevertheless, one may raise the question: what are the costs that these women have to take into account when harbouring the desire to challenge the injunction of remaining silent?

When attempting to break the tradition of silence on gender-based violence, like in the case of a divorce, women obviously risk losing their family, the social position and recognition, as well as their economical security. Many of the 'victims generally feel, it is

[115] See Durrani 1998: 372.
[116] By 'initial', I refer to Durrani's portagnist, who finally found the courage to divorce her husband.
[117] See Saravanan 2000: 56.
[118] See Durrani 1998: 143.

better to suffer in silence than to be separated from loved ones'.[119] Nonetheless, Mai's protagonist believes

> All this strengthens my determination to keep going, to keep seeking justice and truth, in spite of police pressure and a 'tradition' that wants women to suffer in silence while men do as they please.[120]

Aware of the serious impediments she has to confront, the rape survivor's determination to break through a prohibitive gender-biased canon by expressing her anger and struggling for justice might encourage other female victims to report their victimization. Furthermore, when defying such a powerful patriarchal tradition of submission and silence, it is obvious that Mukhtar Mai's endeavour not only demands an impressive degree of courage and hope but it also involves many risks. In this sense, we learn that

> As in every other form of injustice, in the case of women too, there is never total silence on the part of victims. Women do speak up, but psychological and social conditioning makes it doubly difficult for them to voice their anger. Women who speak out run the risk of being ridiculed, lampooned and called 'unwomanly'.[121]

In bringing to the fore the idea that women who voice their anger at the injustice they have suffered are likely to be marginalised and mocked, it is suggested that they represent an exception from the norm (within the social systems in discussion). The socio-cultural dynamics that we have explored above provide an explanation for the fact that these women are considered 'unwomanly' and ridiculous. Accordingly, since they have evidently disobeyed the rules and defied the patriarchal order, the social system sanctions their misconduct by excluding them from the range of respectful, virtuous and serious women. This strategy aims at both teaching the rebels a lesson and preventing other female subjects from endangering the patriarchal social structure.

The tradition of concealing and turning a blind eye to gender-based violence, within the given common context of the novels, has been approached by the female writer Satwant Kaur Rait who remarks '[Asians] tend to push many problems under the carpet, as they are hesitant about raising issues, which may damage family image and reputation.'[122] Speaking about family reputation, she adds that 'family *izzat* (prestige) is important for Asian women and they are expected to maintain it at all costs.'[123] As a result, both Muslim and Hindu

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[119] See Saravanan 2000: 56.
[120] See Mai 2006: 45.
[121] Deepti Priya Mehrotra, ''Beyond violence and silence'', *India Together*, (March 2004). 17 Jan. 2009 <http://www.indiatogether.org/2004/mar/opi-womsafe.htm>
[122] The quotation continues by avowing that 'domestic violence is one of these issues. Domestic violence has always existed in Asian families via physical, mental and psychological aggression, but reference to it has been suppressed or overlooked, as women were totally dependent on men, in a highly patriarchal society.' (See Rait, Satwant Kaur, *Breaking the silence: the voices of Asian women*, Delhi: Ajanta, 2004: 183-184).
[123] See Rait 2004: 172-173.

women take on the role of a 'virtuous wife', thus repressing their anger, frustration, sorrow, and bitterness and bury them in silence, as they are expected to do. Nevertheless, they simultaneously experience an inner conflict between the obligation to be submissive and the desire to break these restrictive boundaries and search for their self.[124]

Having been indoctrinated with this set of values and beliefs from an early age, it comes as no surprise that all fictional women, whose victimization has been examined in the preceding chapter, have internalized a deep sense of compliance with conventions no matter what may occur. Moreover, at this point it should be understandable for the reader, who can make use of his or her freedom of speech, that what a gang-raped woman like Mai[125] suggests by 'I, I cannot forget, and I cannot speak to anyone about what happened to me - it's just not done'[126] is the prohibition to speak about this issue.

A further element, which has been explained in the section on gender-based violence by means of psychological theories, may be now comprehended from a socio-cultural perspective. More precisely, what is meant by this is the feeling of responsibility and self-blame experienced and subsequently expressed by the female protagonists who have been raped[127], sexually abused or have endured their husbands' violence[128]. In the light of Sandra Bartky's forthcoming definition of shame and Rait's relevant remark, the given literary representations of the victims' sense of guilt should dissipate any ambiguity.

> Shame is the distressed apprehension of the self as inadequate or diminished: it requires if not an actual audience before whom my deficiencies are paraded, then an internalized audience with the capacity to judge me, hence internalized standards of judgement. […]For Rawls, shame is an emotion felt upon the loss of self-esteem. [129]

> Mixing with the opposite sex and looking straight into their eyes is not considered acceptable. Having any sort of communication with the opposite sex is considered as flirting and this type of behaviour is not approved of in Asian society.[130]

In the context of a highly restrictive gender-related code of manners, the image of a woman who is raped and, immediately after the event, seen by the entire community half-naked, is irremediably shattered. This is why Mai describes her return home after the devastating experience as the collapse of a' dying animal'.

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124 Relevant are also the statements of Taslima Durrani - 'I dreamed of release, but reality stood in front of me like a stone wall. Divorce was just not possible' (143), and Margaret's - 'Where was I in all this? Margaret Shanthi, the woman. In Ebe's eyes, had I ceased to be?' (See Nair 2003: 118).
125 Here I refer to Mai's affiliation to the discussed patriarchal ideology.
126 See Mai 2006: 25.
127 See the discussion of this argument at page 16 of the present paper.
128 See the section on consequences of violence against women.
129 See Bartky, Lee Sandra, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, New York/ London: Routledge, 1990: 86-87.
130 See Rait 2004: 172-173.

> The moral and physical suffering, the shame, the desire to die, that chaos in my head when I returned alone along the path to my house to collapse onto a bed like a dying animal … I'm able to tell Naseem what I couldn't possibly tell my mother or my sisters, because all I have ever learned since I was a tiny child has been: silence.[131]

Having internalized the community's reaction of her shameful victimization, the fictional woman believes she has lost everything that may guarantee her humanity – self-esteem, self-control, the respect and trust of the community, which awaits her self-annihilation. The rapists have managed not only to invade her physical integrity but also to obliterate her respectability, thus transforming her into a 'dying animal'.

At another level of maturity, when grappling with the issue of the young victims' silence, one may learn that 'even if children are able to articulate their experiences and to recognize that they have been violated, they may correctly realise that reporting the abuse could result in rejection by caregivers who are more intent on protecting the family's reputation than preserving the rights and welfare of the victim.[132] Young Taslima's reflections on her experience of male violence reinforce the argument presented above, whereas the passage about her witnessing the mother's victimization and pain emphasizes her incapability to express her feelings and thoughts.

> Who told me to hide my pain and suffer in silence? Was I afraid that, if I talked about it, no one would believe me, that they would dismiss my allegations, say that I was possessed by some evil spirit, or that I was either a liar or totally mad? Would they hit my hand instead of kissing me and holding me close? Or could it be that no one seemed to be my own, there was no one to hold me if I cried my heart out.[133]

> Ma spent the night lying on the floor, crying. I wanted to sit with her, stroke her back, and say, *Don't cry anymore, Ma. One day I will wipe out your humiliation. I will take revenge one day, I promise!* But I couldn't find the courage to speak.[134]

By and large, one may remark that the victims of male violence in discussion seem to be afraid to speak about the violence they have experienced. However, when they encounter a person who is willing to listen to their story, the abused women break the silence and voice their feelings. Therefore, the protagonist Mai attains what in her community is considered 'the unattainable' – to break the tradition of silence, due to an emphatic listener who encourages her in this direction. What Mukhtar's listener refers to in the following passage is the healing and liberating function of speaking.

> ''You must talk, Mukhtar, and it's by talking that you bring the good and the evil out into the open. You free yourself. It's like washing dirty clothing: when it's all clean again, you can wear it with confidence once more.''[135]

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131 See Mai 2006: 88-89.
132 See Ernst 2005: 22.
133 See Nasrin 2001: 95.
134 See Nasrin 2001: 101.
135 See Mai 2006: 85.

In conclusion, the purpose of the present section was to demonstrate that silence on male violence against women has been culturally constructed and has achieved the status of tradition in the social systems described by the Indian authors Kapur and Nair, the Bengali writer Nasrin, and the Pakistani authors Durrani and Mai. In an attempt to explore the mechanisms that contribute and reinforce this tradition, it was imperative to reflect on women's arguments on maintaining the silence and to have in mind the details of all cases of gender-based violence presented in the previous chapter.

3. 2. Agents of silence

The intricate process of establishing and propagating the tradition of silencing the victims of male violence involves the necessity of agents. The absence of agents, whose task is to assure the optimal functioning of the system by enforcing the corresponding ideological patterns, would lead to a destabilization of the tradition. What defines an agent of silence is the voluntary or enforced endeavour to keep the gender-based violence unspoken; not fighting against the tradition of silence will gradually transform one into an agent.

At the level of the novels in discussion, one may identify three categories of active agents – men, authorities and women. In their endeavour to sanction the subjects who break the rules, these agents fashion diverse preventive and retaliatory strategies.

A first measure of preventing the victims from disclosing the male violence is employed by the perpetrators immediately after the abusive act comes to an end. As shown in the chapter on male violence against women, the abusers who consider that their victims could verbally exteriorize their experience, due to their naiveté or unknowingness of the conventions, issue threats like

> 'It's our secret. If you tell anyone, they will beat you and me.'[136]

> 'If you say anything to anybody,' muttered Vicky unnecessarily into her ear, 'they will beat you. They will lock you up, and never let you go to school.'[137]

It is interesting to remark that both threats have been formulated by the same abuser. However, whereas the first one conveys the message of two individuals hiding a secret, and gives the impression of a warning, the second one refers directly and exclusively to the victim. Additionally, the last menacing comment aims at intimidating the young victim and at

[136] See Kapur 2006: 59.
[137] See Kapur 2006: 63.

convincing her of the dreadful consequences she alone would face, thus discouraging her to speak out. The narrator subtly remarks the futility of the perpetrator's threat – 'muttered Vicky unnecessarily into her ear', given the fact that Nisha, driven by a sense of guilt and shame[138], had seemingly no intention to disclose the repeated experience to anyone.

Regarding the mature sufferers of male violence, it should be noted that none of the abusers consider it necessary to formulate any kind of threat.[139] Nevertheless, Durrani, for instance, casts male protagonists as agents of silence who develop and employ other forms of constraint. The following scene from *My Feudal Lord* introduces Uncle Asad, a male relative of the abusive husband, in the role of the agent whose intention is to re-establish the traditional roles – the wife who dared to break the conventions should be stigmatised and excluded from the society, and the other members of the society, even the close relatives, must marginalize her.

> Uncle Asad goaded me to return […]
> There seemed no justification any more for going back to a marriage that had lost everything. I clung to my beliefs, while everyone around me tried to snatch them away. […]
> When all else failed, he ordered his sister, my Aunt Samar, to get me out of her house. 'Let her go to her father's relatives', he said. 'Just get her out at once.' But Uncle Akhtar refused to turn me out. 'I shall book you a room in a hotel,' Uncle Asad offered. 'I don't want my family to have anything to do with you at this point.'
> 'I don't need you to do me any favours, I snapped. 'You represent the mentality that cripples women. You've just given me the reason that condemns women into bad marriages.'[140]

What the narrator might suggest at this point of the narrative is that Uncle Asad's attempt to repudiate the female dissenter before she critically threatens the patriarchal ideology functions, at the same time, as a means of humiliating and intimidating the wife, as well as aggravating her condition. Differently put, the agent's goal is to deprive her of any economic resources and social connections but also to evade any association with the 'bad-malevolent-uncontrolled wife'. Nevertheless, Uncle Asad's hostile intentions and deeds determine Taslima to strengthen her non-conformist position and condemn the male protagonist's role of an agent of silence.

The second category of agents involved in defending the tradition of silence on gender-based violence features those representatives of the governmental institutions who are responsible with the regulation and control of the state's system of laws and public order. As Durrani and Mai suggest, the women victims of male violence in their narratives have encountered hostility and indifference in their attempt to report the gender-based crime to the

[138] See the section on child sexual abuse.
[139] This idea may be explained by the fact the perpetrators are convinced that their victims, aware of the sanctions, will remain silent or, in Mai's case, the entire community knows about the rape and, to talk about it, 'is just not done'.
[140] See Durrani 1998: 366-367.

competent authorities. In this sense, the following passage illustrates the inexplicable reaction of the authorities in dealing with a woman's testimony of having been gang-raped.

> It's my turn, and as soon as I enter the office of the county police chief, I understand what's going on.
> ''Look here, Mukhtar, we know the Mastois very well, they are not bad men, but you're making accusations against them! Why are you doing that? There's no point.''
> ''But they grabbed me by the arms, and I shouted for help, I begged for mercy….''
> ''Silly girl, you must never claim that. Everything you have said until now, I will write down, and I will read you the preliminary report. But tomorrow, I will be taking you to court, and in front of the judge, you will be careful, very careful: you will say exactly what I am telling you now. I have prepared everything, and I know that it is in your best interest, and in the best interest of your family, and of everyone concerned.''
> ''They raped me!''
> ''You must not say that you have been raped!''[141]

What is interesting and simultaneously aggravating about the scene at the police station is the fact that the accuser experiences a manipulative and corrupted attitude of the police officer, who is not just an ordinary officer but 'the county police chief'. Denying the female victim's constitutional right of pressing charges against the four perpetrators, the local authorities seek to prevent a woman's attempt to voice her victimization and disclose the male abusers. It is thus presumable that such an experience could trigger other female victims' fear and reluctance to report a gender-related abuse. As the Pakistani woman writer Yasmeen Hassan explains,

> Because of such attitudes and apathy on the part of the state, a woman in a violent domestic situation generally has nowhere to turn. If she complains to the police she runs the risk of being raped and abused by them and then returned to her family. If she runs to a state-sponsored shelter, she is imprisoned in the shelter and cannot leave without either a court order or her family's concurrence. If she appears before a court she is often chastised for her behavior in leaving her home and is frequently imprisoned in a shelter.[142]

Returning to Mai's female character, one may locate at the textual level a different state institution[143] acting as an agent of silence by denying the victim's (of gender-based violence) constitutional right of freedom of expression.

> On June 11, I learn that for my safety, I have been forbidden to travel. I had been invited to Canada and the United States by Amnesty International, but when I go to Islamabad to settle some formalities, I learn that I'm on something called the 'exit control list', and am not permitted to leave the country. […]
> In short, it's in my 'interest', as they put it, not to spread my story around the world, and to take care of everything here at home.[144]

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[141] See Mai 2006: 36-37.
[142] Hassan, Yasmeen, ''The Fate of Pakistani Women'', *Herald Tribune* (March 1999). 1 Febr. 2009. <http://www.iht.com/articles/1999/03/25/edhass.2.t.php> Also relevant is the idea that 'the maltreatment of a survivor of gender-based violence by the legal system and/or the media, which are largely controlled by conventionally gendered men, is intimidating to other survivors, who may fear that they will be re-traumatized if they come forward.'[142] (See Kilmartin, Ch./ Allison, J. 2007: 9).
[143] I refer here to 'the president himself' who 'seems to feel that we must avoid ''giving the nation a bad image abroad''.' (See Mai 2006: 154).

According to the narrative, the authorities of the state consider the victim's speech on male violence a matter of state and therefore decide to control her decisions –'the 'exit control list''. Apart from the fact that her first attempt to speak about the crime has been sabotaged by the police, the victim is also hindered to voice her feelings by the highest power of the state. Although the Court has examined the case and declared Mai's victimization, she is regarded as a criminal – she is forbidden to leave the country and is 'under a form of house arrest.'[145]

What Durrani the protagonist narrates concerning her experience of male violence also addresses the question of the authorities' cooperative attitude regarding the tradition of silencing the victims. The abused wife rhetorically asks

> What could the police do? They would admonish Mustafa, but sooner or later I would be alone with him, in a worse predicament than before. My silence was not to protect Mustafa; it was to protect myself.[146]

Since the intervention of the police would be resumed to a gentle form of reproach addressed to the abuser – 'they would admonish Mustafa', the intimate partner violence will further escalate – 'a worse predicament than before'. In this situation, the wife considers it is better to remain silent for fear of the husband's reprisals.

Finally, the last type of agents of the tradition in question features women as its epitomes. Starting from the premise that 'the bystander role is not neutral; it either supports or challenges the violence'[147], one may examine the role women perform in witnessing or listening to female victims' discourses on male violence. Nair's literary representation of a distressed wife, who voices to her mother the issue of the corrosive effects of her husband's psychological violence against her, represents a case in point.

> When I tried to talk to my mother about the unhappiness that swelled my flesh, shadowed my thoughts and tied my tongue, she dismissed it saying, 'It is normal to quarrel with one's husband. Every day won't be the same when you've been married to a man for years. There will be bad days and there will be good days. The trick is to remember the good days'.[148]

Margaret's mother 'dismisses' her daughter's serious complaints referring to her husband's emotional and verbal violence by stating that what she experiences is 'normal'. Propagating the ideology of women's submission and silence, the mother's agency manifests through her discourse. Thus, she minimizes the gravity and intensity of the victim's condition – 'swelled my flesh', 'shadowed my thoughts', 'tied my tongue' – by considering that 'is normal to

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[144] See Mai 2006: 154 -155.
[145] The complete quotation informs that 'I am being held hostage somewhere in Islamabad, and that since I am his client, he absolutely must speak to me. The authorities inform him that as a security precaution, I'm under a form of house arrest.' (See Mai 2006: 154).
[146] See Durrani 1998: 156.
[147] See Kilmartin, Ch./ Allison, J. 2007: 83.
[148] See Nair 2003: 119.

quarrel with one's husband' but the 'trick' is to forget it and only remember 'the good days'. It is hence undeniable that the mother persuades her daughter to suppress her agony, which is expressed by means of an impressive metaphorical device; the anguish Margaret suffers affects both her body and mind, it 'swelled' her flesh, 'shadowed my thoughts' and 'tied my tongue'. This last observation suggests the protagonist's feeling of imprisonment, since she confides the reader that she cannot voice her feelings[149], thus alluding at the past years of silence about her victimization.

The intriguing question of women's agency in silencing other women's sorrow has not escaped the attention of another female writer, namely Tehmina Durrani. The Pakistani author skilfully records a father's concern for his daughter's visible ('I started taking Valium to calm my nerves') but inexplicable ('my father wondered why') mental distress, in stark contrast to the mother, who is presumably aware of her daughter's despair but attempts to camouflage the matter.

> I camouflaged my bruises and buried my humiliation. I started taking Valium to calm my nerves. My father wondered why, and objected, but my mother agreed that I needed the tranquillizer to relieve my tension. I suspected that she knew the cause, but she believed ruthlessly in keeping one's private life locked away. The most she would do was speak in general terms. She advised me: 'If a husband behaves in a strange or unreasonable manner, you should treat him like a sick human being, like someone who needs medical care and treatment. Deal with him like a psychiatrist.'[150]

The effort to prevent the daughter from voicing her husband's violence against her features the mother as an agent of patriarchy and, implicitly, of the silence on male abuse. Like Margaret, Taslima experiences her mother's insensitive speech on a woman's obligation to endure her husband's 'strange or unreasonable' behaviour. In fact, what lies beyond these euphemistic expressions is a husband's abusive attitude toward his wife who, ashamed, camouflages the injuries. Despite the fact that the abused wife has concealed the physical signs of her husband's violence - 'I camouflaged my bruises', she has only partially succeeded - 'buried my humiliation' - in hiding her emotional 'bruises', since it is noticeable that 'I started taking Valium to calm my nerves'. The parents' reaction to their daughter's endeavour reveals unexpected attitudes; the mother pretends that her daughter's situation may be easily worked out with the help of tranquillizers, whereas the male protagonist 'wondered why, and objected'.

In an attempt to analyse the possible factors that have motivated the mother's careless behaviour toward her daughter – advising her to 'bandage' her desperation with sedatives

[149] See also Appendix: 5.
[150] See Durrani 1998: 130.

instead of trying to support her, it is imperative to quote Durrani's forthcoming relevant passage.

> Despite her own knowledge of the details, Mother sided with Mustafa – and Adila. She wanted to evade the issue of divorce at any cost, because there were too many fingers pointing at the reason for it. The scandal loomed overhead and, to divert it, my life was a very small price to pay – perhaps no price at all.[151]

According to the narrator, the female agent in discussion prioritizes the family's reputation at the expense of her daughter's life – 'my life was a very small price to pay'. The mother seems to suggest to her daughter that she should have internalized the idea of a woman's self-sacrifice, thus being ready to 'lock away' her 'private life' in order to avoid a scandal. Once again, one may notice how the traditional system of values pressures women to comply with a submissive, silent and self-sacrificing role within a society based on gender inequity.

Furthermore, when the female victims of male violence fail to speak out about the abuse(s), they actually reveal their spirit of obedience and tolerance toward the perpetrators. More precisely, by remaining silent, the victims strengthen the abusers' violent behaviour and become their accomplices. A silent female victim may become, in S. Bartky's words, 'a self-policing subject, a self committed to a relentless self-surveillance. This self-surveillance is a form of obedience to patriarchy. […] There has been induced in many women, then, in Foucault's words, ''a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power.''[152] In this sense, the following scene illustrates how the victimized woman in Durrani's novel transforms into a 'self-policing subject'.

> When she began to blame Mustafa for her immorality, I cut her short. 'Never speak ill of my husband in front of me', I commanded. […] With a start, I realized that I was hearing Mother's voice coming from my own mouth; she always defended Father like this. However, in both cases it had more to do with ego than with respect for the man.[153]

The passage points out the poignancy of the situation; having had an affair with her sister's husband, Adila asks Taslima for forgiveness and alludes to Mustafa's culpability. By defending her husband, Taslima strives to restore the façade of a marriage featuring two united spouses.

One may assume that Taslima's self-imposed silence develops from the compelling internalization of the conventions and her mother's indirectly expressed view on intimate partner violence. Moreover, the absence of a supportive listener has also contributed to Margaret and Taslima's metamorphosis into 'self-policing agents'. Nonetheless, extending David Ikard's observations on black women's agency of patriarchy - 'the maintenance of his

[151]See Durrani 1998: 358.
[152] See Bartky 1990: 80.
[153] See Durrani 1998: 217.

[the husband] patriarchal authority is dependent upon his wife's complicity of silence. When she breaks the silence expected of her as obedient wife, she unveils the limitations of his authority over her'[154], one may suggest that the two fictional wives in question involuntarily become accomplices of their abusers.

In conclusion, what was sought to be demonstrated by means of the present sub chapter is the idea that the three categories of agents in Durrani, Nair, and Mai's narratives have hindered the victims of gender-based violence to voice or report their victimization.

3.3. Speaking and its consequences

> I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you. To become more intimate with myself and you. To discover myself, to preserve myself, to make myself.[155]

In the Indian, Pakistani, and Bengali narratives in discussion, speaking male violence implies the issue of discourse, as well as that of the mechanisms and forms of speaking. Having shown in the previous two sections that silence on gender-based violence has been mainly culturally constructed and propagated with the help of diverse agents, it is significant at this point to engage with the question of how do women protagonists express their feelings and thoughts concerning the abuse.

First of all, the discussion on the tradition of silence imposed on and internalized by the female victims indicated the idea that any attempt to disrupt the silence would represent an exceptional and dangerous act of defying the patriarchal order. As formulated by Michel Foucault, 'in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures. [156] Moreover, 'not all areas of discourse are equally open and penetrable; some are forbidden territory while others are virtually open to the winds and stand, without any prior restrictions, open to all.[157] Therefore, approaching an area of discourse, which is not 'open and penetrable' but 'forbidden territory', the South Asian female narrators in question are likely to be seen as rebellious daughters of their cultural system.

[154] See Ikard, David, *Breaking the Silence: Toward a Black Male Feminist Criticism*, Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007: 58.
[155] See Lorde, Audre, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, New York: Crossing, 1984:57.
[156] See Foucault, Michel, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, New York: Pantheon, 1972: 216.
[157] See Foucault 1972: 225.

The methods these narrators have employed in order to expose the prevalent violent gender inequity within their community vary from inner monologues[158] to attempts to establish a dialogue with the mother[159]. One may learn from the present literary representations of violence that the process of transforming silence into a voiced discourse does not follow a direct trajectory. More precisely, the majority of the female victims first translate their feelings related to the abuse into thoughts, and only then they struggle to exteriorize their thoughts by means of spoken language.

Nevertheless, as one may notice in the section on child sexual abuse, one of the victims (Nisha) fails to accomplish the second phase of the process. According to the text, it is obvious that the young protagonist involuntarily remembers the abuse but she fails to communicate her thoughts to the others; what should be remarked, however, is the fact that Nisha exteriorizes her anxiety but only via body language – her visible distress or the sleeping and eating disorders. In this situation, it seems that the victim lacks a supportive listener – willing to decode the body language - in order to voice her anxiety and thoughts.

Another female character who expresses her victimization by means of non-verbal language, which may also be defined as ‘mute speech’, is the victim of domestic violence in *My Feudal Lord*. In the absence of a supportive listener[160] and after a long period of enduring her husband’s abuse, Tehmina decides to stop concealing the signs of the physical abuse and disclose her bruises to the world[161]. Therefore, she shifts from acting as an agent of silence to employing a deliberate strategy of exposing the male violence with the help of a non-verbal discourse. In fact, there is no need for a voiced statement since, metaphorically viewed, the bruises speak for themselves and tell the story of a woman who has been abused by her husband. This first step towards breaking the silence encourages her to speak out about the violence to her female friends and to her family.

At a meta-textual level, one may mention that the female writers’ outstanding determination to narrate severe cases of male violence against women has enabled them to be ‘in control’ of the situation. More precisely, one may learn from Patricia Laurence’s passage, by extending her argument to the given South Asian communities, that

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[158] See the quotations marked by the following footnotes: 59, 61, 65, 66, 70, 86, 89, 91, 94, 95, and 140.
[159] See the quotations marked by the footnotes 148 and 150.
[160] Taslima suggests that after her mother has evidently disclosed her position of agent of silence, she must refrain herself from approaching her mother about this issue and confesses that ‘I longed to tell her the real reasons, but I forced myself into a tortured silence.’ (See Durrani 1998: 132).
[161] See Appendix: 6.

> In discourse, the speaker, in the Western tradition, has come to be viewed as the one who is in control; the listener, on the other hand, is viewed as passive and powerless – traditionally, the woman's position.[162]

In the light of the present discussions on conventional gender roles and the particular tradition of silence, it is legitimate to note that Laurence's reference to the 'Western tradition' is also valid in the case of the five South Asian women writers. They have managed to destabilize the traditional distribution of gender roles by breaking the silence on male violence and assumed the active role of the speaker. Indeed, as Audre Lorde suggested, it seems that, by writing, some of the authors in discussion have succeeded in discovering, preserving, and becoming 'more intimate' with themselves; above all, they have tried 'to make themselves'. However, what one may add to Lorde's idea is that these authors have written 'to record what others erase when I' do *not* speak.

[162] See Laurence, Patricia, ''Silence as a Ritual of Truth in Jane Austen, Charlotte Bronte and Virginia Woolf'', in Fishkin, Shelley Fisher / Hedges, Elaine (eds.), *Listening to Silences*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp.156-167, here 159.

4. Conclusion

Starting from the idea that violence against women represents a violation of human rights, the present paper's purpose was to examine how the given literary narratives have represented the manifestations and implication of gender-based violence and how society (the competent authorities) responds to this violation.

With the help of empirical and theory-based arguments, it has been demonstrated that the fictional victims encounter serious difficulties and hostility in their endeavour to disclose their victimization. Moreover, the central argument of the thesis has been to prove that the phenomenon of gender-based violence reaches outrageous proportions due to an encouraging gender-biased social system, a tradition of silencing the problem, and a series of agents that are involved in propagating this tradition. In short, it is the tradition of silence that, after the violent acts have been committed, supports the male abusers to continue to manifest their violence against women.

Nevertheless, female protagonists like Tehmina Durrani and Mukhtar Mai, by disclosing the male abuses, have succeeded in abandoning their roles as self-policing subjects and in producing a rupture within the rigid tradition of keeping the silence on the discussed phenomenon. At the same time, they have also put an end to their experience of violence despite the fact that, in Durrani's case, the endeavour has initially increased the abuser's brutality.

Taking the argument a stage further, one may remark that those female victims that have kept the silence about their victimization have been abused anew; the young Taslima and Nisha have been re-victimized because the crime has not been reported and punished, thus encouraging the perpetrators' behaviour. Nair has adopted the same line of argumentation when describing how Margaret's husband, encouraged by the victim's silence and obedience, has persisted in psychologically abusing her. What is more, one may read in the chapter on agents of silence that these victims have not been able to prevent themselves from becoming and remaining self-policing agents of silence.

At a meta-fictional level, it is significant to reflect on the implications of the literary endeavour of the female writers who have engaged with the idea that silence encourages male violence. Making use of direct (Durrani, Nasrin) or metaphoric and indirect (Mai, Nasrin) terms and images in describing abusive events, some of the narratives (Durrani, Nasrin, or Mai) may be seen as an abused woman's struggle to construct a dialogue with herself in an attempt to rediscover her sense of identity shattered by the violent experience. Writing, in their case, represents a means of empowerment, which can be achieved irrespective of one's religious background, class, caste, and level of education[163].

All five authors have proven their literary talent in various ways - by means of impressive images like Nasrin's description of a victim's acute sense of sorrow and alienation in the form of a split self, or Durrani's feeling of emotional and psychological weariness expressed through the metaphor 'a crippled spirit'. Additionally, their texts induce the impression of authenticity so that it has been difficult at times to distinguish, for instance, between Durrani the protagonist, Durrani the narrator, and Durrani the writer. Moreover, the three authors Mai, Durrani, and Nasrin, whose works are said to be autobiographical, seem to have intentionally interwoven the fictional level with the non-fictional one in order to maximize the degree of authenticity; they have projected not only themselves into fictional characters that bear their names, but also their abusers and other members of their family. In other words, their narratives are constructed on the basis of a non-fictional social community.

Further, their vehement representations of violence and silence give the impression of an avalanche of feelings impatiently waiting to be transformed, after a long-endured silence, into words; also, the high intensity of their discourses on violence seems to be capable of literally breaking a stonewall of silence. What may have triggered their motivation to defy the conventions and write about male violence and the silence surrounding it - 'our closed society considered it obscene for a woman to reveal her intimate secrets', is the interdiction (of writing or speaking about male violence) *per se*.

What is more, once the interdiction has been broken, the agents of silence may intervene and attempt to exclude the culpable writers from the society or the threatening narratives from the literary canon. Since these authors have evidently challenged the norms by producing unconventionally revealing speeches on violence, their works occupy a marginal position within the larger traditional discourse,[164] and their voices are thus unheard.

Finally, even if *My Feudal Lord*, *In the Name of Honor*, *My Bengali Girlhood*, *Home*, and *Ladies Coupé* will be read by few insurgent non-agents, the five South Asian women writers have proven that breaking the tradition of silence on gender-based violence empowers victims to 'make themselves' and encourage other self-policing subjects to speak out and denounce the male abusers.

[163] It is relevant to note that despite the differences between Durrani, who has a high social position and is highly educated, and Mai, who was illiterate and has a low social position, they both managed to empower themselves by writing about their victimization.
[164] See Appendix: 6.

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Appendix

Reference to footnote 2

'Two additional widely ratified conventions, the United Nation's International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and the Convention Against Torture (CAT) establish that torture and inhumane treatment violate international human rights law. Gender-based violence is a direct violation of a woman's inherent right to life, liberty and security of person and to be free from torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment as provided in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (discussed below), the ICCPR and CAT. Pakistan is not party to either the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights or the Convention Against Torture.'[1]

Reference to footnote 4

Disposal of Crimes Against Women Cases by Courts during 1998 and 1999

	Total no. of cases for trial including pending		Compounded or Withdrawn		% of Trials Completed		Convicted(of trials completed)		% of Trials Pending	
Year	1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999
Rape	58555	62486	232	198	16.60	17.23	26.46	27.43	83.00	82.46
Kidnapping & abduction of women and girls	46165	48627	383	445	14.47	15.07	27.70	29.33	84.70	84.02
Dowry Deaths	22055	24534	173	209	15.23	16.25	32.15	33.57	83.99	82.90
Molestation	105204	114801	5542	6030	14.06	14.69	30.60	32.07	80.67	80.06
Sexual harassment	16945	20409	488	497	23.90	28.08	60.10	59.36	73.22	69.48
Cruelty at home	127691	142575	3633	3681	13.21	12.61	19.95	19.01	83.95	84.81
Crimes against women	376715	413412	10451	11060	14.73	15.15	28.53	29.80	82.50	82.17

Source: Calculated from NCRB (relevant years)

[1] See Bettencourt 2000: 17.

Disposal of Crimes against Women Cases by Police during 1998 and 1999										
	Total no. of cases for investigation including pending		Investigation Refused		% of cases investigated		% chargesheeted		% of cases pending	
Year	1998	1999	1998	1999	1998	1999	1988	1999	1998	1999
Rape	20864	21349	36	24	72.06	73.16	62.09	63.59	27.77	26.73
Kidnapping & abduction of women and girls	24966	25481	92	122	63.72	63.31	35.90	36.78	38.31	36.21
Dowry Deaths	8938	9123	45	15	72.72	75.37	63.80	66.43	26.77	24.47
Molestation	35594	37617	39	19	84.98	87.22	77.00	78.71	14.91	12.73
Sexual harassment	8578	9552	11	14	92.08	86.20	88.32	83.46	8.02	13.65
Cruelty at home	49532	53991	114	126	79.08	79.50	65.90	65.37	20.69	20.26
Crimes against women	148472	157113	337	320	77.30	78.03	64.15	64.85	22.90	21.77

Source: Calculated from NCRB (relevant years).

[2]**

Reference to footnote 17

'Estimates of the percentage of women who experience spousal abuse alone range from 70 to upwards of 90 percent. […] Women victims of domestic violence encounter even higher levels of unresponsiveness and hostility, as actors at all levels of the criminal justice system typically view domestic violence as a private matter that does not belong in the courts.'[3]

Reference to footnote 99

'Women who report rape or sexual assault encounter a series of obstacles. These include not only the police, who resist filing their claims and misrecord their statements, but also medicolegal doctors, who focus on their virginity status and lack the training and supplies to conduct adequate examinations. As for the trial in rape cases, typically, in the words of a Lahore district attorney, "The past sexual history of the victim is thrown around and touted in court to the maximum." Furthermore, women who file rape charges open themselves up to the possibility of being prosecuted for illicit sex if they fail to "prove" rape under the 1979 Hudood Ordinances, which criminalize adultery and fornication. As a result, when women

[2]** See Rustagi 2003: 37-38.

[3] See *Human Rights Watch*, ''Crime or Custom? Violence Against Women in Pakistan", *Human Rights Watch* (1999): 1. 3 Febr. 2009. <http://www hrw.org/legacy/reports/1999/ pakistan/Pakhtml-01.htm#TopOfPage>

victims of violence resort to the judicial system for redress, they are more likely to find further abuse and victimization.'[4]

'The fact remains that women in Pakistan using the domestic legal system continue to be discriminated against, put in jail or even murdered. […]The judicial system has failed to protect these women and to act in a non-discriminatory fashion.'[5]

Reference to footnote 102

'Guidelines for the personality and behaviour of upper-caste Hindu wives have been most elaborated in the context of the Dharma Sastras (Rules of Conduct, or Hindu law Books) … number more than 7000. As Susan Wadley points out, a dominant theme is that men are to control women and their sakti. In the literature, women as wives are loosely polarized along a continuum into good-benevolent-controlled (by their husbands) and bad-malevolent-uncontrolled. … It is primarily the 'conscious' versus 'unconscious' binary that is operative'. The 'good' wife is 'domesticated, self-sacrificing, and personally responsible first and foremost to her husband's will and duty.' [6] 'The domesticated wife is proud to be a housewife. She should 'discard the feeling of inferiority in this and think of her house-wifely duties as a great responsibility.''[7]

'The 'unconscious' Hindu woman … fails in the role of mother, wife, and citizen. She 'creates conflict among her children by encouraging individualism and selfishness' and does not 'cooperate' with her husband. She is selfish and indulges in 'personal development and pleasures.' She engages in 'unnecessary competition for equality with men.' She has 'adopted … ideals from the west' and belongs to the 'women's liberation movement', which 'is aimed against men.'' ''The 'unconscious' Hindu woman is unchaste. She dresses and behaves 'in such a manner as to attract … eve-teasers.'[8]

Reference to footnote 103

'One of my eyes remained fixed on the dead termites, the other read the half-eaten words in the holy book. Some of them had been arranged to proclaim the following:

> Everything in the world is for enjoyment. The best thing to enjoy is the virtuous wife. Whatever you see in this world is for consumption by pleasure-seekers. The most precious thing in the world is a virtuous woman.

I was half reclining on the floor, one hand under my chin, the other clutching the book.

> If I were to order anyone to bow, I would certainly order all women to do so for their husbands.
>
> If a wife tells her husband that she is dissatisfied with whatever he does, she will lose all the virtue she may have gained over a period of time, even as long as seventy years. She may have kept roja during the day, and done her namaz at night, but every virtue earned thereby will be lost.
>
> A husband has the right to beat his wife in four different cases: 1. he tells her to dress well and come to him and she disobeys his command; 2. she rejects his invitation to have

[4] See *Human Rights Watch*: 1.
[5] See Bettencourt 2000: 21.
[6] See Patton, Laurie L. (ed.), *Jewels of Authority. Women and Textual Tradition in Hindu India*, Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2002: 164.
[7] See Patton 2002: 165.
[8] See Patton 2002: 169.

sexual intercourse; 3. she ignores her duties, and fails to do her namaz; and 4. she visits someone's house without her husband's permission.

Women who do not get jealous when their husbands take a second wife, but accept it with patience and fortitude, are treated as martyrs by Allah and are sent to heaven.

If pus and blood are oozing from a man's body and his wife licks it up, it is still not enough to pay him back what he deserves.

The man with the lowest rank in the heaven, even he will have eighty thousands servants and sevety-two wives.

If a husband orders his wife to do something, she is bound to follow the order of her husband, even if she is running from one mountain to another'[9].

Reference to footnote 106

'I felt like swallowing poison and ending it all. The world was such a cruel place- better to die than live in it as woman. I had read in a magazine that, somewhere in the world, a girl had become a boy. I longed to wake up one day and find out that something similar had happened to me, that I turned into a boy. That there were no unseemly mounds of flesh on my chest. That I could wear a thin, transparent shirt and roam all over town. That when I returned home late at night after having seen a film and smoked a cigarette with my friends, Ma would serve me the biggest piece of fish just because I was a boy, her son, the one who would carry forward the family name. No matter what I did, Ma would forgive me. No one would order me to cover my chest with an urna, wear a veil, wear a burkha, or stop me from standing at a window or going up on the roof.' [10]

'Man's female companion has been created out of one of his ribs. One of the bones in a woman's neck is crooked. That is the reason why no woman thinks straight, or walks on a straight path. Women are like a field for growing crops. The men are totally free to cultivate whenever they like. If a woman is disobedient, her husband has the right to drive her away from his bed, then he may try to talk some sense into her, but if she remains disobedient, he can beat her. Women can claim only one third of any property owned by their fathers. Men can claim two-thirds. Men can take one, two, three, even four wives. Women may have only one husband. Men can divorce their wives simply by uttering the world *talaq* three times. Women are not allowed to seek a divorce at all. When acting as witnesses to an event, two women are counted as one witness, whereas every single man is seen as a complete witness. […]

But how could there be such differences between men and women? Once Chhotda and I had peered into the room of a medical student in our neighbourhood and seen a human skeleton. Chhotda had told me that it could have been either a man or a woman's; it was impossible to tell. […]

Why should anyone need two women to act as one witness, when the word of a single man was considered sufficient? Didn't women speak the truth? Only men were honest and truthful? Was uncle Sharaf honest?'[11]

'Remember, you are not a little girl anymore. You cannot play or go outside as you used to. You must remain in the house, as all grown women do. And don't prance around everywhere. Learn to sit quietly. Don't go near the men'. [12]

[9] Nasrin : 290-291
[10] Nasrin : 258
[11] Nasrin : 152
[12] Nasrin : 253

Reference to footnote 109

'Sona, Sushila, and Asha dressed in bridal colours, gathered to perform the puja and listen to a story underlining its significance.

The Karva Chauth Katha

> There was once a fourteen-year-old girl, recently married. She was at her mother's house for her first Karva Chauth. She fasted along with her sisters-in-law, but by the time it was evening she had become crazy with hunger. Her brothers, unable to see her plight, climbed the nearest three and shone a torch through a sieve. The moon has risen, now eat, they said. And she did.
>
> Her husband, far away in his own home, died immediately, killed by his wife's unwillingness to examine the moon that was shown to her so ambiguously, through multiple layers of shadow and doubt, hunger and desire.
>
> The girl returned home to a husband embalmed in a tub of oil. Now began her initiation into the true meaning of wifehood. She fasted for one whole year. She prayed to the Devi every chauth. On the fourth day of the waxing moon, she waited to see it climb the sky slowly, slowly, and when she did see it, she completed her puja slowly, slowly. Her mother-in-law watched her like a hawk. She took her pliable daughter-in-law through every ritual in the book, reminding her every second of the day of what she had done, and how near widowhood was upon her.
>
> It was the last fast of that year. The girl's tongue felt thick and swollen with thirst, but her mind was now trained to repress the demands of her body. That they were a source of trouble was as plain for all to see as that body blanketed by strong-smelling mustard oil, glistening through its deep yellow. She was rewarded. Her husband came back to life. Great was the joy and firm was the girl's resolve to follow for ever the path laid down by her elders.' [13]

Reference to footnote 112

'As soon as he could speak to me alone, Father outlined his manifesto: 'I'm making up with you today, despite the fact that I'm hurt and upset by your decision. This is second marriage and I don't want you, for any reason at all, to leave him. You can only leave his home in a coffin. This is the point on which I take you back into the family.'[14]

Reference to footnote 149

'In India we have no provision for protection of a complainant, not even under the Prevention of Dowry Act. A woman who has complained of harassment goes back to the very people against whom she has complained. What security can she possibly feel in such a situation, and how can she continue to act on her complaint?'[15]

[13] See Kapur 2006: 94-95.
[14] See Durrani 1998: 126.
[15] See Saravanan 2000: 56.

Reference to footnote 161

'He backhanded me across the face, raising an instant black eye. Our errand was called off.

As usual, we had guests due that evening, and Mustafa instructed me to wear dark glasses in an attempt to hide the bruise. I found this embarrassing. When someone asked why I was wearing glasses, I simply avoided an answer. Mustafa was nervous, knowing that he could no longer predict my behaviour, and this anxiety was well founded. At dinner I coolly removed my dark glasses, exposing my husband's fury. Someone asked what happened and I replied stoically, 'Mustafa hit me.'[16]

Reference to footnote 164

'An alternative to denying female agency in art is to pollute the agency – that is, to promulgate the idea that women make themselves ridiculous by creating art, or that writing or painting is immodest (just as displaying oneself on the stage is immodest) and hence impossible for any decent woman, or that creating art shows a woman up as abnormal, neurotic, unpleasant and hence unlovable. *She wrote it, all right – but she shouldn't have.*'[17]

'*She didn't write it. She wrote it, but she shouldn't have. She wrote it, but look what she wrote about. She wrote it, but 'she' isn't really an artist and 'it' isn't really serious, of the right genre – i.e., really art.*'[18]

[16] See Durrani 1998: 215-216.
[17] See Russ, Joanna, *How to Suppress Women's Writing,* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983: 25.
[18] See Russ 1983: 76.