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# Tittle: Burning Bodies, Broken Systems: Unmasking the Triangle of Cultural Violence in Thrity Umrigar's Honor

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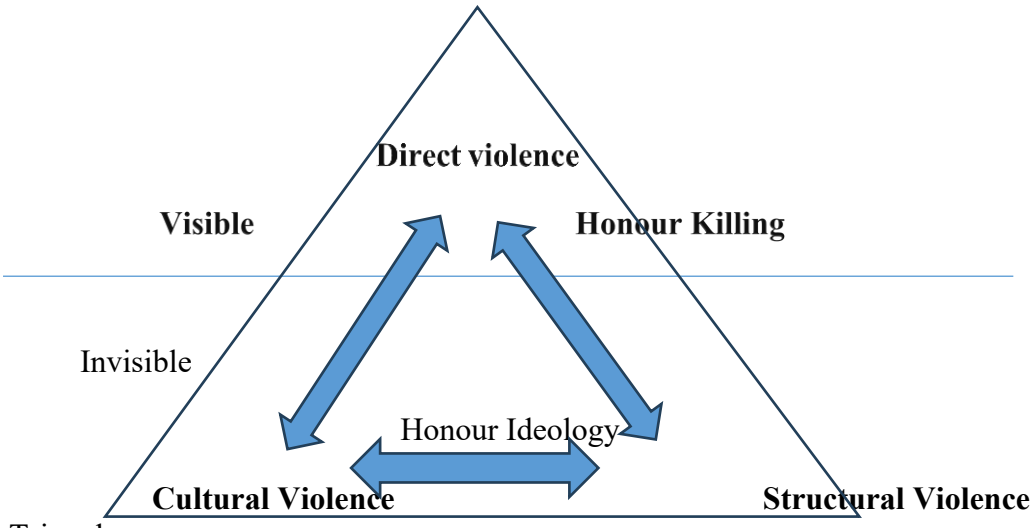
**Abstract:**
In a time when honour violence is understood as a traditional custom, its practice may seem irrelevant in an age of globalization and technological progress. *Honor* (2022), by Thrity Umrigar, reveals not only honour-killing violence in some Indian societies but also the larger and more hidden dimension of honour belief. The paper investigates the relationship between honour and cultural violence in Umrigar's *Honor*. Characters, obviously, suffer due to traditions, practices, and institutional inequality; invisibly, they are victims of cultural violence. Johan Galtung, in the theory of cultural violence, introduces a form of violence that is embedded in the structure of society, widening the gap between what is and what is supposed to be. In cultural violence, Galtung combines direct and structural violence, justified by cultural violence, which is exemplified by religion, ideology, and language. In Umrigar's novel, honour is exploited to legitimize violence visibly and invisibly, underlining its complicated role in patriarchal India. The novel demonstrates that violence is structured by society and cultures, religion, ideology, or language can turn the violence into an accepted message. The visible repression imposed on characters for rebelling against their social traditions and attitudes depicts the hidden structural violence in the name of so-called honour.

**Introduction:**
Thrity Umrigar's *Honor* introduces Meena's story, a Hindu girl who marries the Muslim Abdul. Before her murder by her brother, Meena's half face and body melt down as she helps her burning husband (by her brothers and men from her village). *Honor* is narrated by Smita, the Indian-American journalist, and is interrupted by chapters written in italics by Meena. Johan Galtung's notion of cultural violence clarifies how religion, ideology, and language rationalize systemic violence against vulnerable groups. Honour, in the novel, is portrayed as the most dangerous value, hard to achieve but often treated as more important than huma's life. The novel exposes that violence is not just physical but also buried in social structures, unpacking its stratified presence in the Indian community.In the essay *Violence, Peace, and Peace Research* (1969), a twenty-first-century peace researcher, Johan Galtung, describes violence as being "the cause of the difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is" (Galtung 168), that is, what an actual condition is and how it ought to be. Building a theory of violence, Galtung incorporates structural and cultural violence into his model, claiming that violence prevents human beings from meeting their needs, and violence often gets hidden in the symbols of the cultures justified by religion, ideology, language, art, and science. Galtung's cultural violence is part of a three-part framework explaining the origins, expressions, and victims of domination and subjugation. It is considered the least obvious type, as harm seems easier to justify or overlook; it often goes unnoticed, and Galtung stresses the importance of distinguishing it. Cultural violence, seen as part of culture, legitimizes both direct and structural violence, making them seem acceptable and reinforcing societal conflicts. Galtung in *Cultural Violence* (1990) defines it as "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic,

mathematics) that can be used to justify, legitimize direct or structural violence." (Galtung 291) He adds that one way cultural violence occurs is by transforming the moral perception of any violent deed, changing it "from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable" (Galtung 292). For instance, in *Honor*, the tradition of defending family and community honour is used to give the green light for violence and crimes against many characters, rendering them legalized. Another method involves making reality unclear, preventing us from recognizing certain acts as violence. The bias against Muslims in the Hindu community, in the novel, is masked under nationalism, defending India against the potential harm of Muslims Galtung affirms that cultural products can legitimize violence, which itself is a form of violence called 'cultural violence,' by making it seem normal. Johan Galtung and Dietrich Fischer in *Johan Galtung: Pioneer of Peace Research* (2013) elaborate more on those elements or products of culture, "the intellectual justification for direct and structural violence through nationalism, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination and prejudice in education, the media, literature, films, the arts, street names, monuments celebrating war 'heroes', etc" (Galtung and Fischer 12). Galtung links direct, structural, and cultural violence, viewing them as interconnected parts of a single system. Violence studies focus on how violence is used, justified, and internalized. Cultural violence reveals how society legitimizes acts like marginalizing, repressing, harming, or killing in the name of protecting family and community honour, often framing such violence as a moral duty. Galtung's *Cultural Violence* presents a framework for understanding violence, describing it as avoidable insults to basic human needs that reduce their satisfaction. According to him, there are four fundamental needs: survival, well-being, identity, and freedom. Denial of these needs causes 'repression,' resulting in a loss of individual freedom. These needs are related to direct and structural violence, and the typology demonstrates how failure to meet the needs first destroys and inflicts violence in communities. He gives an empirical study of the important components, connecting direct, structural, and cultural violence. Direct violence can be seen as bodily harm, for example, war and physical attack, and they are commonly regarded as the most important targets of peace studies. He confirms that peace does not refer only to the absence of war but to other forms of invisible violence, stressing the underlying power dynamic that gives rise to direct violence. He further introduces the concept of structural violence; the systemic inequalities embedded in institutions that hinder the fulfilment of basic needs. This form of invisible violence has similar harmful effects and most often uses indirect means that avoid confrontations, allowing offenders to appear pacifist while causing suffering. Structural violence has many manifestations, the most prominent is the ongoing harm of losing freedom and identity that creates conditions leading to direct violence. The major constituents of structural violence include: alienation; lack of connection to cultural systems, and repression, which often manifests through detention, expulsion, and deportation. These are the micro, institutional injustices that hinder the fulfilment of fundamental human needs. In Umrigar's novel, structural and indirect violence are displayed in the restrictive value systems of the Indian rural communities.Exploitation is the defining feature of the categories of organizations identified by Galtung, through which power dynamics create unequal transactions amongst the groups. He uses the metaphor of the 'topdogs' and the 'underdogs' to present them. Topdogs refer to those individuals who benefit disproportionately due to interactions in society and accumulate wealth and opportunities in disproportionate amounts to themselves. On the other hand, underdogs are the marginalized ones, who can be affected by exploitation with severe negative outcomes. Galtung investigates the problem of cultural violence, providing an analysis of the main fields, such as religion, ideology, and language, that can be used to justify direct violence as well as structural violence. He presents a triangle of violence with the different forms of violence taking up a vertex in the triangle and thus revealing how cultural factors can legitimize violence and shape norms in favour. In this triangle, cultural violence lies at the base, legitimizing structural and direct violence; structural violence forms another corner, and direct violence the upper one. The triangle provides a model for the interconnection among the three forms of violence through various perspectives.




Galtung's Violence Triangle

Galtung's concept provides a framework for apprehending the connections between direct, structural, and cultural violence. His work highlights the need to consider all three in literary studies for a comprehensive approach. Umrigar's *Honor* shows how honour-based violence affects Indian society, with minorities suffering from the visible and invisible aspects of honour. The novel is set in 2022, yet minorities still suffer from imposed, constructed cultural and social expectations of honour, which might be seen as primitive and rigid by modern standards. The idea of honour generally includes an individual's thoughts, beliefs, and behaviours. However, there is no universal cross-cultural definition of the term, as it varies across societies based on their cultural values, norms, and traditions.

**Honour**

The concept of honour is not new in literature; nonetheless, Umrigar challenges and questions the very construction and tradition of honour and honour-based violence in India through a modern perspective. Gary Ferraro and Susan Andreatta, in *Cultural Anthropology: An Applied Perspective* (2014), note that "all cultures are composed of material objects; ideas, values, and attitudes; and patterned ways of behaving" (29), meaning that honour is among these material objects and part of behavioural patterns. Aisha Gill, in *Patriarchal Violence in the Name of 'Honour'* (2006), explains that honour is an inclusive concept, covering a wide range of behaviours, and that "codes of honour define the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and even thought" (2). Any violation of traditional, accepted standards of honour codes merits punishment, which can take different forms, including banishment, exile, forced marriage, or, most often, killing. Most honour-based violence is committed to preserve the family and community's honour. However, most honour crimes and violence worldwide are committed against women. Aisha Gill et al. in *'Honour'-based violence in Kurdish communities* (2012), define honour-based violence as "comprising any form of violence perpetrated against women that is associated with patriarchal family, community or other social structures" (75), so they perceive it as a form of violence against women. According to Joanne Payton, in *Collective Crimes, Collective Victims: A Case Study of the Murder of Banaz Mahmod* (2011), a gender binary exists in the Middle East regarding the idea of honour (75). Rupa Reddy, in *Domestic Violence or Cultural Tradition? Approaches to 'Honour Killing' as Species and Subspecies in English Legal Practice* (2014), her review of the current literature on honour, explains interconnected themes that help understand gendered ideas of honour and its role within a patriarchal system that controls and enslaves women. These themes include the dual notions of male 'honour' and female 'shame'; the view of women as possessions of their male relatives; and efforts to regulate female behaviour, especially regarding sexual independence (28). On the other hand, honour-based violence in *Honour-Based Violence: Experiences and Counter-Strategies in Iraqi Kurdistan and the UK Kurdish Diaspora* (2016) by Nazand Begikhani et al., is recognised as different from "domestic and gendered violence on the basis that it occurs within a framework of collective family and community structures. Thus, 'honour' crimes are perpetuated within patriarchal norms and traditions and a strict code of silence about such issues" (Begikhani et al. 4). As a result, honour is gendered and has different meanings for men and women. The initial reading of *Honor* reveals that it focuses primarily on Meena's honour killing; however, the narrative expands to impact other victims, including male characters, justified by the need to defend a social concept of honour.

**The Hidden Power of Honour**

In Umrigar's novel, people are grouped based on factors such as gender, caste, and religion. Each group has its own values and codes that members are expected to uphold. The villagers view violence as a necessary way to restore or defend their family's and the village's moral standards and virtue by removing any evil or shame that threatens their integrity. Despite strong cultural influences, Meena and Radha try to improve their financial situation by challenging the social norms of their community. Violence becomes clear when Meena and Radha start working. In their village, women are not allowed to work outside the home; therefore, when the sisters decide to work in a factory, the villagers marginalize them under the orders of Rupal, the village chief, who "terrorized her even before her marriage" (35). In the story, Rupal acts as Galtung's 'topdog'. Protecting honour in this context is not only about killing; it begins with maintaining its structural form. Galtung's concept of structural violence appears in Meena's story through the marginalization justified by Rupal, who prevents the neighbour from talking to her and Radha, the 'underdogs'. Instead of physical harm, the community's removal of social recognition from the girls is just as harmful, turning them into 'ghosts'. Meena confesses to Smita:
Rupal had already punished Radha and me by forbidding all our neighbors from talking to us. Think of that, Didi. Friends we had grown up with, grandmothers who had known us from the moment of our birth, people we had celebrated and mourned with—none of them speaking to us. With a snap of his fingers, Rupal had turned us into ghosts." (Umrigar 181The punishment covers every part of their daily life in the village; they do not just break their brother's words but also challenge an established tradition. Govind states: "No woman in our village had ever left home to go work for strangers. It is the strictest taboo. It is my misfortune that both my sisters defied not only my authority but also the authority of our village elders." (136) He justifies this by saying, "Because it is the law, passed down from our forefathers" (136). Govind's words are symbolic, reflecting the depth of the customs and norms that construct women in the public realms by enforcing strict prohibitions. The ban on the employment of women is viewed as unchangeable and an inherited law that legitimizes gender-based violence and makes it natural as well as morally right. This not only strengthens men's dominancy but also diminishes women's autonomy and forces victims to accept their repression and view women's economic independence as a threat to the societal balance of their village. It also reveals structural inequalities as a form of 'law', thus continuing cycles of exclusion justified by respecting tradition. In line with Galtung's confirmation of exemplifying gender division as 'fragmentation', Govind's speech shows the impact of cultural violence in perpetuating gender discrimination that sustains the power dynamic between genders. The prohibition on women working outside the home varies in Indian societies, and it is both a restriction and a deviation of honour, especially in Vithalgaon. Meena asks women from other villages whether their men similarly refuse the idea; they deny it. So, Radha says, "Only Vithalgaon has such backward customs." (146), highlighting that this matter mainly shapes the violence of Vithalgaon women. This shows the importance of examining different cultures to understand regional varieties of cultural violence, which makes it hard to find a universal theme, especially within a single novel. Evidence from Umrigar's *Honor* reveals that the concept of honour varies by place, even within India. Meena and Radha, because they do not conform to the societal expectation, for honour codes, of their village properly, are marginalized as contaminated women; even storekeepers refuse to speak to them, saying, "Bas, we had to put the money down on the counter...They took whatever amount they wished...we could not touch the fruits or vegetables" (182). In the market, this discipline acts as structural violence, shaming and controlling their behaviour in public and economic transactions. They live under a siege, deprived of freedom, alienated by the violation of their basic needs of liberty. Therefore, the discourse on violence shows that, beyond shaping the cultural environment that makes violence acceptable and legitimate, as Galtung suggests, gender relations are central to the root causes of violence. Violence in *Honor* is linked to power and gender dynamics, which are sustained through ongoing violence. Umrigar shows that violence and gender are mutually reinforcing.A core concept in cultural violence is exploiting the underdog through structural mechanisms. Women like Meena and Radha, from lower classes, are victims of patriarchal exploitation within their community. Meena and her sister are exploited first by their brothers; they do not get enough to eat because the men in their family eat first, even though they work in the fields, factory, and at home too. For instance, Radha complains, "I am tired of being hungry all the time." (117), and though they buy food, still the brothers must eat first, besides enduring insults from Govind, the head of the family. The sisters' earning is kept by Govind, who reasserts control by deciding how they should spend it, strengthening their patriarchal dominance; Govind's patriarchal control is justified even when he fails as a provider. Most of the characters, especially women in *Honor*, accept these beliefs as natural, considering women's service to their brothers part of love and duty, like Meena's certainty that "This is how Ma raised us. In honor of her…" (117) Meena's

acceptance of the violence demonstrates how patriarchy implants and sustains itself via women's tolerance and self-sacrifice, rendering structural, and later direct, violence appears right and gentle. Govind dehumanizes his sisters because they are seen as debased and exploited. Meena experiences rejection from both her Hindu and Muslim communities because she defies the long-held established traditions by working outside the home and marrying a Muslim man. She admits, "After my marriage, the Hindus treat me like I am a Muslim. But the Muslims in this village still consider me Hindu."" (92) The interfaith marriage renders Meena marginalized as an outsider, being "the dog who belongs neither in the house nor on the streets,'" (93). Her state reflects how culture enforces rigid margins, denying her agency, safety, and worthiness within the religious and gender norms. The experience of such marginalization is described as Meena's "fate," almost implying that both she and the community have accepted this suffering as destiny, which highlights the extreme violence with which culture constructs rigid in-group/out-group boundaries. Meena's acceptance of her state shows how cultural violence quietly enforces acceptance of structural violence. Meena defies the norms and natural expectations when she decides to press charges against her brothers in the police and the court. Naturally, embedded within a patriarchal and gendered structure in the village, no woman is allowed to sue a man, especially family members; "Everyone was against reopening the case," (84) and even her mother-in-law opposes her action. Therefore, she again departs from the traditional codes of behaviour in her community. Consequently, "All of them agreed that my Hindu brothers were correct for avenging the dishonour I had brought to my family by marrying Abdul. Even Abdul's old neighbours and friends, those who loved him, felt he had committed an unnatural act, bringing a Hindu bride into his home" (84). The community believes that women could never surpass men because men are naturally and inherently superior; the patriarchal oppression of Meena is justified by the very concept of "nature." So, both communal and gender oppression are reinforced by religious divides, which condemn Meena's fight for her rights within a community governed by unchanging patriarchal norms. The community in Meena's village labels her and her husband as dishonourable and considers it an appropriate punishment for their actions. Meena and Radha's exploitation is justified by religious ideologies promoting gender and patriarchal violence in Vithalgaon. Religion in *Honor* suggests how divine power is used to legitimize violence and oppression, mostly through rules or God's order. Religion is exploited to enforce gender and honour codes within the village community. In *Honor*, religion often intersects with gender and caste, forming the cultural violence that is hidden by honor-based violence. For example, Govind believes that "God made it so, this division of labour. It is the destiny of women to birth and raise children and keep the house. Men are the breadwinners. Everyone knows this" … "at least in Vithalgaon." (136). It is a common belief in Vithalgaon that men work outside while women stay home, and any violation is subject to communal punishment. This explains why Rupal frightens and threatens the girls with a goat's head on their door. Rupal is considered the representative of religion in Vithalgaon, the novel; his words are imposed as law. When the girls ask Arvind to clean the mess Rupal causes, he says, "This is women's work!" and admits, ""This is why women are forbidden from having jobs outside the home. Rupal is right. You are acting like a man. I now see the truth of his words."" (131) Their patriarchal ideology denotes that women's position is saved at home, vindicated by their chief-man's confirmation. Hence, here, cultural violence becomes the catalyst that exposes the various forms of justified violence against marginalized characters, in Umrigar's *Honor*. In the conservative community of Vithalgaon, this complex form of cultural violence mainly dominates women's bodies, economy, and behaviours.In fact, hardly any religious belief supports violence unless its supporters manipulate it. Long emphasizes that typical Hindu belief is 'ambivalent' toward violence; there are nonviolence ideals promoted by Mahatma Gandhi and the allowance of violence "to defend Hinduism being endorsed by the Hindu nationalist movement" (196). This double view of violence reflects the cultural conflict within the system—between traditional rationalizations for honour violence, represented by Rupal, and the demand for justice and change, described by Smita and Anjali. Rupal's role as a village leader gives him the power to deceive people as God's messenger; "Rupal had magic powers, and a special mobile phone that allowed him to talk straight to God. Whatever God would tell him, he would repeat to us" (115). He penetrates his false values and ideologies into the impoverished villagers, using his supernatural influence to hold his dominance. Most villagers in Vithalgaon are illiterate and easily accept his speech and acts as accurate, which helps him exploit them more, especially women. He claims that "Everybody in this village defers to me. People come from other villages to ask my advice when they are sick or need their marriage horoscope read." (156). Rupal admits his false dominance in the village saying that if anyone refuses to fulfil his orders, he will use his magical power to harm them: "I am a man with many powers. Sitting in my home, I can unleash a plague upon New Delhi. I can make a plane fall

out of the sky. I can send a hundred snakes into that lawyer's office" (156). His claim proves how he takes advantage of superstitions to instill fear and violence within the community. Rupal's depiction as a powerful man who possesses "jadoo" (magic) and has the power to speak with God, privileges him to discipline and punish others for resistance, thus upholding his dominance. He does not allow women to attend his meetings; "Only men are allowed at our meetings. Even if a dispute involves a wife or a sister, the woman must stand outside the house and call out her complaint" (157). Then, Rupal culturally and religiously sanctions gender inequality in the community. Likewise, when Mohan tries to discuss changing his traditional tyrannical manner with his people, Rupal dismissively rebukes him, calling him a "city babu," highlighting his resistance to modern ideas. Govind always relies on him for advice on every detail of their family life, including how to prevent his sisters from working. He is the one who urges them to keep their sisters' earnings and savings. Although the girls fight against oppression, many subtle forms of violence are normalized and remain unspoken. Karma, a central concept in Hindu belief, influences many in Honor. Karma is described as "every thought, word, and deed carries with it a like reaction. Beings are born, live, die, and are reborn based on their actions. Every good deed brings a reward, and every bad deed a punishment" (197). It is also connected to rebirth (reincarnation), as each action has consequences that shape a person's life; good deeds result in better rebirths, while evil deeds cause suffering. He claims that God "visited him and warned that I [Meena] would be reincarnated one thousand and one times in lesser forms." (85) The invocation of divine law compels Meena to follow her community and Rupal's rules out of fear of spiritual punishment and social ostracism. By stating that Meena will be transmigrated into lesser forms, it fuels cultural violence by framing a sin against social and political resistance to patriarchal and communal structures as a moral failing with repercussions in the afterlife. If she continues with her complaint in her rebirth, she:come back as a lowly worm to be stepped upon by men. This is the Hindu law of reincarnation and karma, he said. If I stayed on this wicked path, I would endlessly repeat the cycles of life, being born as lower and lower life forms. It was my karmic duty to forgive my brothers and repent for my sins. He warned me to not listen to Anjali. She was a creation of the devil, sent to corrupt me." (Umrigar 85) Rupal tries to convince Meena that she must accept her punishment for her evil deed to avoid a lowly rebirth. Meena trusts Rupal's words but realizes that in her current life, she is stepped on by men like a worm, so she does not expect her rebirth to be better. Then she continues her lawsuit for her daughter's benefit. Rupal's authority effectively illustrates how cultural violence operates through employing traditional norms, religious ideologies, and patriarchal control in sustaining the societal structure and repressing resistance and challenges, such as Meena's demand for agency. Manoeuvring religious faith serves Rupal's aim to control every aspect of the village, even its economy; he lends villagers money at high rates, deterring them from improving their social standing. In this manner, Rupal preserves the status quo of the village's existing social order. What distinguishes Umrigar's *Honor* is the depiction of some perpetrators as victims of cultural violence. Meena's brothers, Arvind and Govind, are marginalized and treated as inferior, dishonourable characters, and living on the outskirts of the village. A man from their village denies their belonging to them, says that they "don't live among us little people any longer." (128) The whole family and community are responsible for preserving the honour of its member, especially of a woman. People judge the brothers based on their responses to their sisters' deviation from established traditions, believing honour depends on controlling others' actions. The honour system of the village validates violence and women's murder, rendering an individual's status and self-worth dependent on others. Kirtil et al. argue that "'honour' invested in control over women and specifically women's sexual conduct, control over economic and social resources, and property are often closely connected in these dynamics." (345) Meaning that honour is not only an individual matter, but it is also linked to relatives. This underlines the significance of men's interference in regulating female members to avert shame. That is why villagers expect the brothers to take action to protect the family's honour. Rupal states that he advises Govind "to beat Meena and forbid her from leaving the house... He can watch his sister" (Umrigar 153). Within the patriarchal society in *Honor*, even men do not enjoy equal privileges. For example, a poor man from a marginalized ethnic community might face cultural violence despite enjoying limited male privilege, since gender roles are socially constructed. Accordingly, in Vithalgaon, a patriarchal society, adherence to gender roles is unavoidable, such as female modesty and male authority.Furthermore, the villagers no longer respect the brothers because they do not fulfil their traditional roles as men or family heads. Arvind informs Meena that they "cut his nose" (103) after taking the job in the factory, and even the "men in the village mocked him because we earned more than he did" (103). The expression "cut his nose" is a violent phrase; it symbolizes the loss of their honour and social standing in the village, the state itself considered worse than death in many

eastern cultures. Furthermore, in patriarchal society, women, specially those earning more money, are accused of disrupting the social order through "cutting" their men's nose, mortifying them, and rationalizing their marginalization. Govind complains that "even small children laughed behind his back" (114); they became the subject of gossip among "the old men who sat around all day drinking chai and gossiping" (114). These daily attitudes and customs serve as a form of social punishment that perpetuates the patriarchal system of the village through humiliation and marginalization. Here, the function of cultural violence is to depict these humiliating performances as normal, acceptable, and still necessary; instead of being violent, the culture consents and boosts their use against those who defy traditional roles. The brothers are aware of their roles in family and society as men, saying, "how will we ever find a match for Arvind after the shame you and Radha have brought on us by working? The whole village is spitting on us because our sisters have turned their own brothers into eunuchs" (114). They are victims of society themselves, yet they act as perpetrators of honour violence. Honour violence most often targets those who do not conform to the established traditional and constructed norms.*Honor* reveals systemic, culturally justified violence through the Hindu-Muslim conflict, which is both physical and structural. According to Galtung, structural violence is subtle, embedded in systems that oppress and cause injustice among nations. Chrobak also notes that structural violence can occur without perpetrators' or victims' awareness. (173). Violence takes on a legal meaning when it relates to the "legal order"; then the "action that violates this order is treated as violence; any action that establishes or protects it (even if it involves the use of force) is not considered to be violence" (Chrobak 173). Therefore, in the name of honour, judges and police justify killing to protect the legal system. When Abdul is burned to death, the police list "Unknown Persons" in the First Information Report, even though the entire community knows who the perpetrators are. This demonstrates an institutional approval of protecting dominant caste or religious interests and silencing minority victims. It allows men like Rupal and Meena's brothers to avoid punishment: The police did not come that night. Did Rupal pay them to stay away? In Birwad, we have a saying:" Thieves come when you don't expect them; the police don't come when you expect them." Even if the police had shown up, they would have stood joking and laughing while my family screamed for help. Or maybe they would have burned the other Muslim homes in the main village. Why? Because most of the police are Hindus. Why? Because they are the police and who will stop them? (Umrigar 106)Police, as a state institution, are supposed to protect citizens by definition; however, *in Honor*, due to the ingrained prejudice and corruption, they often fail to protect minority groups. Bribing the police and judges is a common act in Indian society in the novel. For example, Rupal affirms that he notified them not to interfere in the act of burning and murdering, as the officer is his relative. This dynamic creates a deep distrust in the justice system, while the violence is justified as a private matter that does not need the police and the state's interference. Thus, redefining the notion of honour as shame for minorities and nobility for offenders. Most police officers, being from the Hindu community, are viewed as more loyal to their religion than justice, risking both failures to protect Muslims and participation in violence, which perpetuates violence and impunity. Meena's testimony of 'Half of Birwad' witnesses the violence against her and Abdul reflects her awareness at the same time; the failure of the state's intervention suggests its rationalization and acceptance. Meena's vulnerability reveals the embeddedness of violence in social structure; she finds herself caught in a complex web of various forms of direct, domestic, cultural, and structural violence. This reveals the complexities of violence: direct, structural, and cultural in perpetuating repression and denying access to justice. Rupal and Govind, the perpetrators in the novel, rationalise honour violence based on moral grounds that ultimately protect their perceived honour. For example, in court, Rupal cries loudly, the "judge is in our pocket" (247), Anjali explains, "they've bribed the judge. Obviously." (247). Illustrating the difficulty minority characters experience in gaining legal justice and equality in rural India in the novel. Moreover, the weight of honour ideology not only influences adjudicatory outcomes but also leads the quest for justice in general.

**The Atrocity of Honour**

Meena's marriage to Abdul, a Muslim, is a break from her community's traditional religious, cultural, and gender expectations. When Rupal learns about Abdul's proposal, he accuses Meena of tainting her virginity and must test her purity: "Rupal wanted to do... a private test. An inspection. To... find out." … "if Abdul had defiled me." (182). Rupal's insistence on the test can be seen as an act of rape involving. She refuses, threatening to throw herself into the river, then Rupal comes with a mythical story to justify forcing Meena to walk on hot coals, claiming that if Meena's "feet got burned, it meant I was not... a virgin." (182). This is a typical example of cultural violence in the novel, bringing in a mythical story emphasizing the ideology of women's honour and purity to justify physical (direct) violence. The act is legitimized as an acceptable, even legal, form of cultural,

religious, and gender-based direct violence where a female's chastity becomes a public issue that must be preserved through rituals that devalue her dignity and health. Patriarchal dominance over women's conduct, in the novel, is evident, reinforcing that any sort of rebellion is treated as immoral and a threat to caste, religion, and honour social systems. Thus, Meena's victimization is not only a result of one factor, whether religion, gender, superstition, illiteracy, or ideology, but is rooted in the interface of all these factors. Because she is a woman, her virginity can be tested, and her honour and purity are considered of the utmost importance. With burned feet, Radha helps her escape to find refuge in Abdul's hut. In the name of honour, the brothers and villagers, guided by Rupal's advice, set fire to Abdul and Meena's hut. During the incident, Abdul burns to death, and Meena is severely disfigured, losing half of her face and hand. The act of burning reflects how the ideology of honour reveals other forms of bias (religion and gender) that can lead to violent acts. She is left maimed with a disfigured face, "It was as if lava had flowed down the left side of her visage, destroying everything in its path." (87) Meena's initial portrayal to readers is distorted, which, according to Galtung's typology, is an aspect of direct violence labelled as 'maiming,' a threat to the 'survival need.' In Galtung's triangle, direct violence is not just sudden physical abuse; it has structural roots. It manifests physically as an ultimate form of violence. Galtung states it clearly, "When Other is not only dehumanized but has been successfully converted into an 'it', deprived of humanhood, the stage is set for any type of direct violence, blaming the victim. This is then reinforced by the category of the 'dangerous it', the 'vermin', or 'bacteria'" (Galtung 51).Because of her new half-melted face, Meena loses her job and has nowhere to start a new life; she accepts Ammi's brutality and harm, wondering if her face will cause babies to cry. She feels hopeless, dishonoured, and isolated, experiencing shame and loss of self-esteem, which makes it hard to function in society. Ann E. Cudd, in *Analyzing Oppression* (2006), affirms that most victims of violence are exposed to the experience of "shame and a loss of self-esteem", which often hinders social performance. They become victims of 'violence', 'loss of self-worth' from being "dominated, humiliated, and violated," (92) and loss of social connections and survival mechanisms. These factors get worse by structural violence, specifically when based on forced behaviours like sexual direction, gender, or race (92). In *Honor*, Meena almost experiences most of the feelings connected to domination, humiliation, and violation. She realizes that she is unwanted and has no place in this world: "I could hear the birds cawing as they made their way home. And it seemed to me that everything... had its place in this world. Except me. That my true home was inside this loneliness" (94). Her brothers' exploitation extends beyond burning her and Abdul; they rob her, stealing her salary to pay bail, and later kill her, burning her body to teach the other Muslims a lesson. Smita witnesses this brutal act, when she asks them to stop, they answer, "We are only here to take care of the whore." (265) After they confirm Meena is dead, they begin searching for little Abru because she "is living proof of our disgrace, miss," (266) Rupal said. "To be honest, it is more important for us to find her than it was to kill the whore." (267) In the name of honour, Meena is tortured, and no one in the village helps her until she faces her doom. This shows how honour killing is justified, with restoring honour serving as a green light for violence and killing. The act legalizes the killing of an innocent woman and her husband on the grounds of love and creating a new family. This situation exemplifies the extent to which cultural violence, in the name of honour, influences individual and collective experiences, simultaneously supporting deep-rooted forms of violence. The act moves beyond the visible cruelty of burning a life, to the everyday humiliations, exclusions, and vindictive shaming performed by family, neighbours, and the state, which lays bare the invisible and even the ingrained nature of such violence. Here, gender, caste, nationalism, and religion, combined with ideologies and language, form an inescapable web; Meena tries to escape for herself and her daughter, but the cultural system kills her Meena's marginalization and social shame, in the novel, are strengthened by violent discourses about Meena's behaviours. The villagers gossip about Meena's reputation, claiming that "stitching those Western clothes, working beside people from unknown castes and creeds, would corrupt her morals" (152), and "sewing men's jeans all day would turn Radha and me into males" (115). Likewise, they extend discourses that affect the social realities, implying that women who work outside the home naturally bring about evilness; they claim that "some demon had entered them. Some people in the village swore they saw a black halo around them when they went to work each morning" (136-7). These rumours function as a social and cultural sanction for violence; likewise, language serves in constructing violence and marginalization, not only reflecting it. The villagers in both communities, Hindu and Muslim, consider her a bad example of a sister and a bride, legitimizing the violence against her. Through language, they stereotype her and her justifying her victimization, calling Meena and Radha "whores" and "fallen women" throughout the novel. Ellen W. Corsevski, in *The Physical Side of Linguistic Violence* (1998),

affirms that "[l]inguistic violence is in fact a form of physical violence... linguistic violence impacts its targets or victims, in a very palpable and physical way" (Corsevski 513). Studies show that victims often suffer from physical lethargy and depression. Additionally, they frequently develop physical illnesses (ibid.). Meena's brothers and mother-in-law identify her with humiliating titles, such as 'whore', 'cow', and 'snake', reflecting their hatred and cultural violence. These insults deepen her dejection and even cause physical harm. For example, in court, when Govind sees her misshapen by the fire, calls her "Whore," "Cocksucker. We will show you." Meena uttered a pitiful sound. "The judge is in our pocket," … "We are going to win. Mark my words" (Umrigar 247). Smita notices that "Meena's hand go limp" and that she "looked as if she could barely stand up on her own" (246), and she "past the point of speech. She looked at Anjali mutely, tears spilling from her eye" (247). The brothers' verbal abuse denies Meena agency and renders her voice inaudible; the impact is so profound that they make her physically ill Galtung, in his theory of cultural violence, does not specify a particular gender as victims, as does Umrigar, who portrays female and male victims of the same category of violence. Abdul, throughout his life, experiences a deficiency of many basic human needs. For example, he endures poverty and underprivileged working conditions. He works long hours with Meena in the factory; "Sweat ran down our faces, but we couldn't stop to wipe it off" (163). It seems that Umrigar intentionally names him, Abdul, to highlight his state and fate: "Abdul. It is a Muslim name meaning 'servant.' And all his life that's what he did, serve someone" (83). Like other Muslims in the novel, Abdul faces marginalization and exploitation, and ultimately, his freedom is denied. Though he is Indian, he is still not allowed to talk to any Hindu woman. He lives with his family in an isolated and poorer village than Meena's; they are considered even lower than the inferior caste. His decision to marry a Hindu girl renders him a victim of cultural violence and leads him to be burned alive by Hindus. During the act of burning, neither Muslims nor Hindus save or help him, but Govind describes the scene humorously, the "fucker dance as he burned." (142). Galtung elaborates that 'direct violence' is "intentional, directed against a specific group or person, and involves hurting or killing people." (11) The interfaith marriage of Abdul and Meena is considered not just a personal choice but a form of collective defiance, a welfare disturbance, and a violation of traditional norms. Muslim and Hindu neighbours believe that Meena's brothers are right to seek vengeance to restore their honour because of the dishonour their sister brings to her family (84). Thus, the whole act of honour killing is justified and accepted, since Abdul commits "an unnatural act, bringing a Hindu bride into his home" (84). Abdul's experience of direct violence is rooted in the structural embodiment of honour, nationality, and religious ideology. This idea, which makes the recognition of violence widespread, grounds cultural violence: traditions, ideologies, languages, and values that shape violence not as an individual act but as a required response, denoting that if violence benefits social harmony, it must help a higher purpose. This central move turns direct violence into a socially accepted way of holding order. Hence, Abdul becomes a victim of cultural violence, a Hindu mob, including Meena's brothers, who come from their village, led by Rupal, kill him, leaving behind a banished brother, a miserable mother, a misshapen wife, and an unborn child. Furthermore, the ideology of nationalism, in *Honor*, intersects with religion, forming cultural violence that is validated under the umbrella of honour saving. In connecting religious beliefs to ideologies, Cavanaugh argues that what is significant in any ideology is not its content or beliefs, but how it, whether religious or secular, functions in people's daily lives to provide a context of meaning and social order (58). He believes that if we focus on the content of the ideology, then politics and nationalism are akin to religions, with their own mythologies, rituals, and symbols. The fact that people are willing to kill or die for their country shows that secular beliefs can have repercussions just as strong and "religious" as those of traditional religions (Cavanaugh 25). This questions traditional beliefs that view religion as the only trigger of violence; on the contrary, exploring what religion can do, whether social, psychological, or political, whatever is considered sacred can be perceived as a form of religion. These viewpoints are related to the context of *Honor*, demonstrating the blurred boundary among religion, honour ideology, and nationalism. Consequently, secular gender and nationalist ideologies can appear religious because they evoke similar levels of devotion and sacrifice. Even Galtung emphasizes this by stating that "The ideology of nationalism has its roots in the figure of Chosen People, religiously or ideologically justified" (52). Thus, in *Honor* Hindus see themselves as the chosen who own the land (India), while Muslims are the "dangerous it", 'the dogs.' As evidence, Rupal, defending the brothers' act of violence against their sister and her husband, maintains that "Either they will remain free, or they will get the death penalty and become martyrs. Either way, they have restored their family name" (156). Rupal justifies the violence against Abdul and Meena by linking it to religion and nationalism; they will be 'martyrs,' which holds religious and national importance. In both cases, they defend Hinduism,

their faith, and India, their homeland. Nationality and religion intersect to create religious nationalism, a form of violence not addressed by Galtung. In *Honor*, understanding cultural violence requires considering religion. Villagers see violence against Abdul and Meena as a divine duty, claiming it protects Hindu honour and teaches Muslims their place. They connect nationalism to religion to validate violence and marginalization. Hindus, in the novel, dehumanize Abdul by considering him only a dog, portraying his murder as necessary to defend Hindu's honour. The act of burning is viewed as a duty, showing how extremists employ religion to create a sharp social division. Umrigar depicts the role of the violence of religious nationalism in enforcing hierarchies by dominating and repressing minorities. In *Honor*, all Muslim characters like Abdul are by birth Indian; yet their religious differences justify the violence against them, for example, Govind informs Smita that: We are all having our stations in life. God has made it so. We have allowed these Muslim dogs to live in our Hindustan as our guests. But a dog must know who is its master, correct? Muslims must keep to their own villages and, above all, they must stay away from our women. That is a fact." He lowered his voice. "This is their jihad. You understand? They force our women to bear their children so they can multiply and take over Hindustan." (Umrigar 139)Govind's words reveal the ingrained religious nationalism and dehumanization of Muslims that Umrigar conveys in her novel. By calling Muslims, in the novel, "dogs" various hierarchies are established in Indian society, like Hindus as the rulers or Galtung's topdogs and Muslims as the inferior, underdogs, justifying segregation and marginalization of Muslims from Hindus, especially women, defended by fears of cultural, social, and religious purity. The word "jihad" reflects a conspiracy-driven obsession that operates hatred and violence in the community, stereotyping Muslims via cultural violence that causes enmity, exclusion, and destructive conflicts. In *Islam and Violence* (2011), Beverley Milton-Edwards observes how a reduced, violent reinterpretation of jihad has been promoted in Western discourse and used to portray Islam as inherently violent, "a faith of violence". Western discourse has mostly focused on this radical meaning, making it the default view of jihad and, by extension, of Islam. Because this violent jihad is sensational and conspicuous, it shapes the common "Western vernacular"; many Westerners associate 'jihad' solely with terrorism, overlooking its non-violent or spiritual dimensions of Islamic practice. This narrow focus reinforces the idea that Islam is naturally more violent than Christianity or other religions. Thus, the term 'jihad' itself is cultural violence, justifying discrimination and killing, not just for the sake of saving the honour of their family or community, but of a whole country. Discourses reinforce boundaries, using metaphors like "A mongoose cannot lie down next to a snake." (84), and the "timeless truth" that a "Hindu and Muslim could never be together—everybody knew" (124). Another story is that what Meena and Abdul do "is against the natural order of things. Can a fish fall in love with a cow? Can a crow fall in love with a tiger?" (139). As well as allegories questioning cross-religious love to justify rejection and prejudice. Such language demonstrates the perceived impossibility of peaceful coexistence. It employs violent expressions to show hatred and dehumanization, often grounded in cultural practices like dietary restrictions, such as "beef-eaters," which become religiously sanctioned insults to Muslims and justification for violence.

**Conclusion**

So far, certain aspects of culture make violence seem acceptable and justified. Galtung's concept of cultural violence helps explain the different types of violence in Umrigar's Honor. By examining the experiences of various characters, the novel shows how religion, ideologies, and language are used to turn the red light of violence into a green one, making it appear rational. These interconnected forms of cultural violence remain significant as long as social justice is not achieved and honor-based oppression continues. The novel is not only a story about one character's physical suffering; it also exposes a whole group of Galtungian 'underdogs' whose experiences are suppressed by master narratives. It portrays the role of cultural beliefs rooted in honour ideology that justify and defend both visible acts of violence and invisible forms of structural violence suggested by its title, revealing the complex nature of cultural violence in patriarchal Indian communities. So far, Umrigar's *Honor* furthers an essential discussion of the numerous factors involved in cultural violence by unveiling the role of cultural discourses of honour in maintaining it across different societies.

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