
	<p>Solo International Collaboration and Publication of Social Sciences and Humanities E-ISSN: 2988-3512 Vol.4, No.2, 2026, pp. 461-474 DOI: https://doi.org/10.61455/sicopus.v4i02.545</p>	
<p>Received November 05, 2025</p>	<p>Revised March 27, 2026</p>	<p>Accepted April 10, 2026</p>

The Intimate Archive: Gender, Memory, and Agency in Partition Narratives

Mahnoor Fatima¹, Muhammad Bilal Sarfraz², Muhammad Rehan Sabir³, Alwy Ahmed Mohamed⁴

^{1,2}University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan

³Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan

⁴Aga Khan Education Service, Mombasa, Kenya

¹mahnoorftyma@gmail.com, ²thebilalsarfraz@gmail.com, ³rehanzayer@gmail.com,
⁴alwyahmed94@gmail.com

Abstract

Objective: This study aims to criticize the historical narrative of the 1947 Partition of India that focuses too much on political and state aspects and ignores women's personal experiences. In addition, the concept of intimate archive was introduced to understand how women build meaning in life after violence. **Theoretical framework:** Approaches used include Feminist Historiography, Trauma Theory, and Critical Archive Studies to show that archives and testimonies are not objective, but rather the result of constructions influenced by power relations and individual experiences. **Literature review:** Previous literature has tended to focus on macro aspects such as politics and conflict. Instead, this study highlights the work of Saadat Hasan Manto and Amrita Pritam as well as feminist oral histories that describe women's experiences in a more personal and profound way. **Methods:** The method used is qualitative through close reading of literary works and oral history analysis to explore hidden meanings in women's experiences. **Results:** Three forms of intimate archive were found, namely meaning in objects, memories in the body, and the use of silence as a strategy. These findings show that women have an active role in shaping identity and meaning in life. **Implications:** The findings of the study expand the perspective of archives, not only as official data but also as representations of personal experiences. The concept of an intimate archive can also be applied to other studies that address marginalized experiences. **Novelty:** Novelty lies in the concept of an intimate archive that views testimony as an active process in building meaning, not just a record of experience.

Keywords: partition, intimate archive, feminist historiography, memory, narrative agency.

INTRODUCTION

The 1947 Partition of India remains one of the most consequential events of the twentieth century. Historical scholarship has largely emphasized elite political negotiations and territorial demarcation. As a result, Partition is often framed as a geopolitical event shaped by figures such as Lord Mountbatten, Jawaharlal Nehru, and Muhammad Ali Jinnah, or by the drawing of the Radcliffe Line. This focus marginalizes gendered violence and everyday experiences during Partition. Local brutality, fractured kinship networks, and disrupted domestic life receive limited attention. Reliance on official sources such as state archives, census data, and legal

records further obscures the lives of ordinary people who experienced displacement and communal violence most directly [1].

Feminist historiography has challenged this limitation. Works such as Urvashi Butalia's *The Other Side of Silence* foreground women's testimonies through oral histories, letters, and personal narratives [2]. Similarly, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's *Borders & Boundaries* documents sexual violence, including abduction and forced conversion, while emphasizing women's ethical agency under extreme conditions [3]. Together, these studies shift the analytical focus from the nation-state to intimate domains of life. They also establish testimony as a legitimate historical source rather than a supplement to official archives.

Despite these interventions, feminist scholarship has paid less attention to how experiences are narratively shaped and archived. The concept of the intimate archive addresses this gap. Unlike formal archives, the intimate archive is not a static collection of documents [4]. It is an interpretive practice rooted in everyday acts of remembering, narrating, and rebuilding. It encompasses bodily memory, material objects, and relationships shaped by loss and ambivalence. Through these practices, individuals actively construct personal histories at the margins of official documentation.

The intimate archive extends earlier efforts to recover silenced pasts by shifting attention to narrative production itself. This study draws on feminist historiography, trauma theory, and critical archive studies as its methodological framework. Through close readings of Saadat Hasan Manto's short fiction, Amrita Pritam's Partition narratives, and testimonial fragments collected by Butalia, the analysis identifies three practices of intimate archiving: the accumulation of material objects, the inscription of memory on the body, and the strategic use of silence [5]. These practices reveal forms of survival, identity formation, and moral agency that remain illegible within bureaucratic and nationalist archives.

The article advances two central claims. First, intimate archives disclose gendered forms of moral, narrative, and corporeal agency that state archives cannot adequately represent [6]. Second, they challenge conventional categories of evidence by foregrounding narrative labor as central to survival and testimony. The intimate archive thus functions as a methodological tool that enables critical interpretation rather than simple recovery. It shows how survivors reconstruct identity and claim historical presence in the absence of formal records.

Partition histories, therefore, do not emerge solely from political decisions or state documentation. They are also produced through objects preserved in homes, bodily memories, and ethical choices surrounding silence and disclosure [7]. Attention to these intimate practices links ethical recovery with analytical rigor. The intimate archive offers a distinctive approach to studying gendered trauma, narrative agency, and survival in contexts of mass violence.

Novelty and Implications. This study offers a distinct theoretical and methodological contribution through the formulation of the "intimate archive" as an analytical lens for reading Partition narratives. Its novelty lies in repositioning testimony, memory, and narrative not as supplementary or secondary to official history, but as active and constitutive processes of historical production. Rather than treating archives as fixed repositories of truth, the study conceptualizes them as dynamic, interpretive spaces shaped by lived experience, affect, and power relations. In doing so, it departs from both traditional historiography and earlier feminist interventions that primarily focused on recovering silenced voices without fully interrogating the narrative processes through which those voices are constructed, mediated, and preserved [7][8].

Another innovative aspect of this study is its integration of materiality, embodiment, and silence into a single conceptual framework. By identifying objects, the body, and narrative gaps as interrelated archival practices, the research expands the scope of what counts as evidence in historical analysis. This approach not only deepens the understanding of gendered trauma but also highlights the ethical and narrative labor involved in survival. The emphasis on silence as a strategic and meaningful form of expression further challenges conventional assumptions that equate absence with lack, thereby offering a more nuanced reading of trauma and memory [8].

The implications of this study are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it provides a transferable framework that can be applied to other contexts of mass violence, displacement, and marginalization, where official archives are incomplete or exclusionary. It encourages scholars to engage more critically with non-traditional sources such as oral histories, literary texts, and material culture, and to recognize their epistemological significance. Practically, the concept of the intimate archive has relevance for interdisciplinary research, including gender studies, cultural studies, and memory studies, as well as for initiatives in public history and digital archiving [7].

Furthermore, this framework invites a rethinking of ethical responsibility in historical scholarship. By foregrounding the agency of marginalized subjects in shaping their own narratives, it challenges researchers to move beyond extractive models of knowledge production toward more reflexive and interpretive practices. In this sense, the intimate archive not only expands historical methodology but also redefines the relationship between history, memory, and justice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Early state-centered histories of Partition (1947) largely ignored women's experiences. These accounts prioritized political events and elite actors, leaving gendered violence and everyday life unexamined [8]. Feminist scholars first identified these omissions and questioned the male-dominated production of historical knowledge [9]. Their work exposed structural gaps in the historical record created by the absence of women's voices.

Butalia's work foregrounds testimonies of women, children, and other marginalized groups through oral histories and personal narratives [10]. These accounts reveal forms of trauma and displacement excluded from official archives. Similarly, Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin's *Borders & Boundaries* documents gender-based violence, including abduction, rape, and forced conversion, while emphasizing women's ethical decision-making under extreme conditions [11]. Together, these studies shift Partition historiography from state-centered narratives to intimate domains of experience. They also establish testimony as a primary mode of historical mediation rather than a supplementary source.

Oral history scholarship has since expanded into literary and cultural representations of Partition. Works such as Amrita Pritam's *Pinjar*, Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India*, and Saadat Hasan Manto's short stories present Partition through intimate narrative forms [12]. These texts depict emotional injury, moral conflict, and subtle resistance to patriarchal and communal power. They also demonstrate how agency and survival are produced through narrative choices, including selection, omission, and tone [13]. Trauma theory and cultural memory studies further argue that narrative functions as a site of ethical and political mediation rather than simple representation [14].

Recent scholarship has emphasized the material dimensions of memory. Studies show how objects such as textiles, letters, photographs, and personal belongings transmit memory across generations [15]. The 1947 Partition Archive exemplifies this

approach by documenting objects alongside oral testimonies. Memory thus emerges as both linguistic and material practice. The concept of the intimate archive integrates these perspectives by centering the narrative role of objects in preserving identity, continuity, and moral coherence after mass violence.

A further theoretical turn examines narrative gaps, silence, and intergenerational transmission. Scholars argue that absence is not a failure of memory but a deliberate strategy, described as a “grammar of trauma,” through which marginalized subjects resist patriarchal and nationalist representation [16]. Holocaust studies on postmemory demonstrate how descendants inherit, reinterpret, and ethically negotiate traumatic legacies long after the initial event [17]. These inheritors actively shape the moral and narrative value of the past rather than passively receiving it.

Table 1. Literature Review

Subheading	Key Focus	Main Contribution
State-Centered Historiography	Emphasis on politics and elite actors	Marginalizes women’s experiences and gender-based violence
Feminist Interventions	Critique of male-dominated historiography	Recovers women’s voices through testimony and oral history
Testimony as History	Personal narratives as sources	Establishes testimony as a primary historical source
Literary Representations	Partition literary works	Depicts trauma, moral conflict, and narrative agency
Material Memory	Objects as carriers of memory	Shows how memory is transmitted through material culture
Silence & Trauma	Silence as a narrative strategy	Interprets absence as a “grammar of trauma”
Intimate Archive Framework	Integrative analytical approach	Links memory, narrative, and agency in historical production

Within this framework, the intimate archive functions as both a methodological tool and an interpretive lens. It positions testimony, literature, and object-memory as interconnected practices of historical production. The intimate archive links ethical recovery with analytical rigor. It offers a gendered approach to studying historical violence beyond the authority of official archives. Through intimate archival practices, those who inherit trauma reclaim historical agency and narrative control.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative interpretive methodology grounded in feminist historiography, trauma theory, and critical archival studies [18]. It employs close reading as its primary analytical method to examine how women’s experiences of Partition are narratively curated through memory, embodiment, material objects, and silence. These elements constitute what this study conceptualizes as the “intimate archive”.

The corpus consists of selected short stories by Saadat Hasan Manto, the novel *Pinjar* by Amrita Pritam, and oral testimonies documented in Butalia’s *The Other Side of Silence*. Texts were selected through theoretical sampling rather than representational aims. They were chosen because they foreground gendered violence, survival, and ethical decision-making, and because they offer sustained engagement

with bodily experience, narrative fragmentation, and moral negotiation. The corpus is not exhaustive and does not claim to represent the totality of the Partition experience.

In addition to the primary corpus, selected Partition narratives by Khushwant Singh and Salman Rushdie, along with the film adaptation of *Pinjar*, are referenced as contextual and comparative texts to extend the analytical applicability of the intimate archive framework rather than as core objects of analysis.

The analysis proceeds through close reading attentive to three features: material objects, corporeal inscription, and narrative gaps. Objects, gestures, silences, and repetitions are examined not as symbolic motifs but as archival practices through which memory and identity are preserved outside official documentation. Particular attention is paid to what is narrated, withheld, or rendered unspeakable, treating absence as analytically meaningful rather than as lack [19].

Literary texts and oral testimonies are read in dialogue but are not treated as epistemologically equivalent. Testimonies are approached as mediated narratives shaped by memory, ethics, and social constraint, rather than as transparent records of events. Literary texts are not used to verify historical facts, but to illuminate narrative strategies through which experience is ethically processed and made legible [20]. This approach avoids treating literature as illustration or testimony as unfiltered evidence.

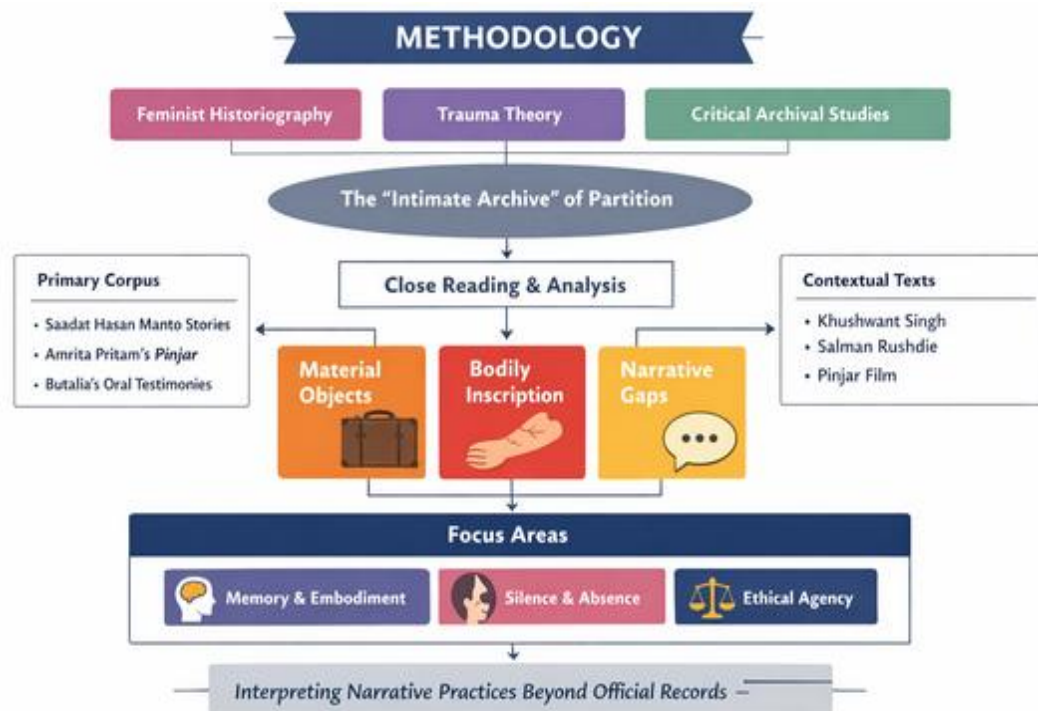


Figure 1. Research Method Diagram

The study does not seek to reconstruct empirical events of Partition. Instead, it focuses on the narrative processes through which experiences of violence and survival are curated, interpreted, and transmitted. By foregrounding narrative labor over factual recovery, this methodology enables critical engagement with forms of archival production that remain invisible within state-centered historical records.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents three analytical findings that demonstrate how intimate archives operate as sites of gendered memory, ethical agency, and historical production in Partition narratives.

Embodiment, Violence, and the Intimate Archive in Manto's Partition Fiction

The finding demonstrates that embodied responses in Partition narratives function as non-institutional archival records that register trauma, ethical rupture, and survival beyond state documentation. Reading Saadat Hasan Manto through the lens of the intimate archive positions his fiction as a form of alternative archival practice. His stories do not merely depict violence. They record ethical choice, psychological rupture, and survival under extreme conditions [21]. Manto's realism foregrounds disorientation, numbness, and moral conflict. These dimensions are largely absent from formal historical documentation [22].

In *Mozel*, Manto presents a Jewish woman who resists rigid communal identities during the Partition violence. *Mozel* defies religious and social conventions. She uses her body and possessions to protect others. When a Sikh girl is threatened, *Mozel* gives her clothes to conceal her visible religious identity. This act temporarily erases visible communal markers. It carries both material and ethical significance. By risking her own safety, *Mozel* transforms embodiment into moral action [23]. Her gesture produces an intimate archive of ethical kinship that exceeds sectarian boundaries. It stands in contrast to state-centered nationalist historiography.

Khol Do offers a darker articulation of the embodied archive. The story follows *Sirajuddin's* search for his abducted daughter, *Sakina*. When she is found in a relief camp, a doctor asks someone to "open it," referring to a window. *Sakina* instinctively lowers her *salwar*. Her response is reflexive rather than intentional. It reflects conditioned behavior shaped by sustained sexual violence [24]. Trauma is inscribed on the body. Language loses meaning. Agency is reduced to bodily reaction. This moment exposes gendered violence and silence routinely excluded from official archives [25].

In *Thanda Gosht* (*Cold Flesh*), Manto depicts moral and psychological disintegration after communal riots. The narrative centers on *Ishwar Singh*, who experiences sexual incapacity following his participation in communal violence. Before dying, he confesses that he abducted a Muslim girl only to discover she was already dead. Her body was "cold." This revelation exposes the dehumanization produced by communal brutality. Bodies become objects. Ethical judgment collapses under violence. The metaphor of "cold flesh" captures the erosion of moral life and the enduring imprint of trauma [26].

Manto's narrative method thus functions as an alternative archive. His fiction documents psychological breakdown, ethical ambiguity, and embodied suffering ignored by state records. He rejects binary moral judgment and foregrounds fractured subjectivity. Through bodily detail and narrative restraint, Manto constructs an archive of survival shaped by ethical struggle [27]. Self-reconstruction emerges as moral and narrative labor [28].

Community, Gender and Counter-Histories

This subsection draws on a comparative literary example to demonstrate how intimate archival practices operate at the level of community ethics rather than individual embodiment. The finding reveals that everyday ethical practices and relational choices operate as collective intimate archives that preserve moral life during communal breakdown. While Manto focuses on individual bodies, *Khushwant Singh's*

Train to Pakistan (1956) extends the intimate archive to the level of community [29]. Set in the village of Mano Majra, the novel depicts a fragile moral order shared by Sikhs and Muslims before the Partition violence. Daily routines and mutual trust structure communal life. This order collapses with the arrival of “ghost trains” carrying corpses. Fear replaces coexistence. Suspicion fractures social bonds [30].

Singh frames the Partition as moral disintegration rather than political transition. Community ethics are revealed through everyday interactions and informal trust networks. The ghost train symbolizes both mass violence and relational collapse [31]. Nooran’s choices exemplify intimate ethical agency. By remaining in India, she balances family loyalty, personal attachment, and constrained autonomy. Her relationship with Jugga’s mother rebuilds networks of care across communal divisions [32].

Singh contrasts grounded ethics with abstract political reasoning. Iqbal, the ideologically driven intellectual, remains immobilized by ideological detachment. His failure exposes the limits of formal politics during a moral crisis [33]. Jugga, labeled a criminal, acts decisively. His final act of cutting the signal wire to save the refugee train is relational rather than ideological. It archives an alternative masculinity grounded in ethical responsibility.

Train to Pakistan (1956) thus extends the intimate archive from the individual to the collective. Moral resistance persists through care, loyalty, and sacrifice. When institutions fail, ethical life survives through everyday action. Singh shows that historical meaning is preserved not only by states but by ordinary people who sustain fragments of a moral world worth saving [34].

Feminine Counter-Archives and Memory Practices

The following analysis incorporates selected narrative instances as comparative illustrations of feminine counter-archival practices, extending the framework beyond the primary corpus. The finding shows how women-centered narrative and mnemonic practices actively contest state-controlled historiography by producing alternative forms of archival authority. Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children* (1981) integrates historical events with magical realism to narrate India’s passage from colonial rule through Partition. The novel disrupts state-centered historiography by merging personal memory with national history. Every day life and the extraordinary coexist. Private experience becomes historical evidence [35].

Saleem Sinai, born at the moment of independence, embodies this convergence. As narrator and protagonist, he fractures linear historical time. His recollections privilege secrecy, fantasy, and subjectivity over official chronology [36]. History appears unstable, layered, and intimate.

Magic, secrecy, and storytelling structure the novel’s approach to identity. Rushdie minimizes formal political narration. He foregrounds emotion, memory, and narrative practice. Women serve as custodians of suppressed histories. Figures such as Amina Sinai, Mary Pereira, and Parvati-the-witch preserve knowledge excluded from official records [37].

Rushdie’s fragmented meta-narrative operates as an archival intervention. Saleem’s broken autobiography challenges nationalist historiographical coherence. Female characters enact subversive archival practices beyond state control. Mary Pereira’s infant swap restructures genealogy and destiny through secret ethical agency [38]. Parvati’s concealment of Saleem in a wicker basket functions as a portable archive of survival. These acts resist linear historical authority.

Amrita Pritam’s *Pinjar* constitutes a sustained intervention against post-Partition archival and juridical regimes. The novel challenges the logic of the Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) framework. State documentation reduced women to forms of communal property. *Pinjar* demonstrates how identity can be actively curated against bureaucratic erasure [39].

Pooro’s forced renaming as Hamida signifies state- and patriarchally sanctioned erasure. Yet the novel stages a counter-archive through private rituals, memory, and ethical reflection. These practices preserve continuity of self beyond official classification [40]. Pooro’s decision to protect Laajo marks ethical agency grounded in relational care.

Her refusal of repatriation crystallizes this process. Identity integrates trauma, attachment, and moral choice. Feminist criticism reads this moment as archival self-cataloguing. Dwivedi’s film adaptation reinforces this logic visually through spatial enclosure and restrained bodily movement [41].

Butalia’s work provides the empirical and methodological counterpart to the intimate archive. Her work privileges lived experience over bureaucratic narration. Oral testimonies, letters, and diaries resist legal classifications such as “recovered” or “missing”.

Silence is central to this method. Pauses and narrative breaks function as ethical withholding rather than failure. Absence becomes evidence [42]. Literary and testimonial archives converge through secrecy, ritual, and embodied resistance. Together, they clarify the structure of the intimate archive across textual, mnemonic, and embodied dimensions.

Partition produced deep personal suffering that legal frameworks failed to record. Women were reduced to objects of recovery. This study positions the intimate archive as a corrective. It highlights embodiment, silence, and narrative as modes of ethical agency.

Women’s bodies emerge as sites of contradiction. They were instruments of control and sites of moral claim. Silence, fragmentation, and selective disclosure function as archival strategies [43]. Through these practices, women preserved memory and agency beyond state recognition. The intimate archive thus redefines evidence, history, and survival in the aftermath of mass violence.

Table 2. Summarizing the Results and Discussion

Subsection	Focus	Key Findings	Implication
Embodiment and Violence (Manto)	Body as archive	Trauma inscribed through bodily response, silence, and moral rupture	Expands archives beyond documents to embodied memory
Community and Counter-Histories (Singh)	Collective ethics	Everyday care, sacrifice, and relational decisions preserve moral life	Community acts as an intimate archive during crisis
Feminine Counter-Archives (Rushdie, Pritam, Butalia)	Women’s narrative agency	Memory, secrecy, and ritual challenge state historiography	Women produce alternative archival authority
Silence and Narrative Gaps	Absence as meaning	Silence functions as ethical strategy and “grammar of trauma”	Redefines absence as evidence

Intimate Archive Framework	Integrative concept	Links body, objects, and narrative in historical production	Reframes history, agency, and survival beyond state records
-----------------------------------	---------------------	---	---

Analysis

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that intimate archives operate across bodily, relational, and narrative registers. Texts discussed beyond the primary corpus function as illustrative extensions of the argument and do not alter the study’s central analytical focus on Manto, Pritam, and feminist testimonial archives. Rather than supplementing official history, they constitute parallel systems of historical production grounded in ethical agency and lived experience. This analytical framing clarifies how gendered memory practices generate historical meaning in contexts where institutional archives fail or are erased. This article, “The Intimate Archive: Gender, Memory, and Agency in Partition Narratives,” offers a significant and theoretically rich intervention in Partition studies by shifting analytical attention from state-centered historiography to the intimate, gendered experiences of women. Its central contribution lies in proposing the concept of the “intimate archive” as both a methodological tool and an interpretive framework. Through this concept, the study challenges dominant historical paradigms that privilege official documentation, elite political actors, and territorial narratives, and instead foregrounds the lived, embodied, and narratively mediated experiences of marginalized subjects—particularly women.

One of the strongest aspects of the article is its clear critique of conventional historiography. By highlighting how the 1947 Partition of India has been predominantly framed through geopolitical and administrative lenses, the study exposes the epistemological limitations of state archives. These archives, while often treated as authoritative, systematically exclude forms of violence and survival that do not conform to bureaucratic categories. The article effectively demonstrates that gendered violence, domestic disruption, and everyday ethical decision-making remain underrepresented in official records. This critique aligns well with feminist historiography, which has long questioned the neutrality and completeness of historical knowledge production. The integration of feminist historiography, trauma theory, and critical archive studies provides a robust theoretical foundation. The article does not merely reference these frameworks but synthesizes them in a meaningful way. Feminist historiography enables the recovery of marginalized voices; trauma theory offers insight into the fragmented, non-linear nature of memory; and critical archive studies interrogate the power structures embedded in archival practices. Together, these approaches support the central claim that archives are not neutral repositories but constructed spaces shaped by ideology, power, and subjectivity.

The concept of the “intimate archive” is particularly innovative. Unlike traditional archives, which are static and institutional, the intimate archive is presented as dynamic, interpretive, and embedded in everyday practices. It includes bodily memory, material objects, silence, and narrative acts. This reconceptualization expands the definition of what constitutes historical evidence. The article convincingly argues that memory inscribed in the body, objects preserved within domestic spaces, and even deliberate silences function as alternative forms of archival production. This perspective is especially valuable in contexts of mass violence, where formal documentation is often inadequate or absent.

Methodologically, the study’s use of qualitative interpretive analysis and close reading is appropriate and well-executed. The selection of texts—short stories by Saadat Hasan Manto, Amrita Pritam’s *Pinjar*, and oral testimonies from Urvashi Butalia—provides a rich corpus for analysis. The decision to use theoretical sampling

rather than representational sampling is justified, as the study aims to explore conceptual depth rather than empirical generalization. The close reading approach allows the author to uncover subtle narrative strategies, such as fragmentation, repetition, and silence, which are central to the functioning of the intimate archive.

The findings are organized around three key dimensions: material objects, bodily inscription, and narrative silence. Each of these dimensions is supported by detailed textual analysis. For instance, in Manto's stories, the body becomes a site of trauma and memory, as seen in *Khol Do*, where the protagonist's involuntary physical response reveals the deep psychological impact of sexual violence. Similarly, in *Thanda Gosht*, the metaphor of "cold flesh" encapsulates moral disintegration and the dehumanizing effects of communal violence. These examples effectively illustrate how literature can function as an alternative archive, capturing dimensions of experience that are absent from official records.

The discussion of community-level archives, particularly through Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan*, adds another layer to the analysis. By extending the concept of the intimate archive beyond individual bodies to collective ethical practices, the article demonstrates the flexibility and applicability of its framework. The contrast between ideological abstraction and relational ethics—embodied by characters like Iqbal and Jugga—highlights how moral agency operates in everyday contexts. This section reinforces the argument that historical meaning is not solely produced by institutions but also by ordinary people navigating crisis through acts of care, loyalty, and sacrifice. The analysis of feminine counter-archives, especially in the works of Salman Rushdie and Amrita Pritam, further strengthens the article's argument. The discussion of *Midnight's Children* illustrates how narrative fragmentation and magical realism can disrupt linear, state-centered historiography. Meanwhile, *Pinjar* is presented as a powerful critique of post-Partition legal frameworks that reduced women to objects of recovery. The character of Poro/Hamida exemplifies how identity can be actively reconstructed through memory, ritual, and ethical choice. These examples underscore the role of women not merely as victims but as active agents in shaping historical narratives.

Another notable strength is the article's treatment of silence. Rather than interpreting silence as absence or failure, the study conceptualizes it as a strategic and ethical form of expression. This aligns with trauma theory, which recognizes that certain experiences may be unspeakable or resistant to representation. By framing silence as part of the "grammar of trauma," the article adds depth to its analysis and avoids simplistic interpretations of testimony. However, the study is not without limitations. As acknowledged in the conclusion, its reliance on literary texts and selected testimonies may limit its representativeness. The focus on canonical authors such as Manto and Pritam, while justified, may inadvertently privilege certain linguistic and cultural perspectives. Additionally, the subjective nature of the intimate archive poses challenges for empirical validation. While the article addresses this by emphasizing interpretation over positivist verification, further methodological reflection on how to balance subjectivity and analytical rigor would strengthen the study [\[43\]](#).

Despite these limitations, the article makes a substantial contribution to multiple fields, including gender studies, literary studies, and historiography. Its interdisciplinary approach and conceptual innovation provide a valuable framework for future research. The notion of the intimate archive has potential applications beyond Partition studies, particularly in analyzing other contexts of mass violence, displacement, and trauma. It also opens up possibilities for exploring digital and material forms of personal archiving in contemporary settings. In conclusion, this article successfully redefines the boundaries of historical inquiry by foregrounding the intimate, the embodied, and the narrative. It challenges dominant epistemologies and

offers a nuanced understanding of how memory, gender, and agency intersect in the aftermath of violence. By positioning the intimate archive as a site of historical production, the study not only recovers marginalized voices but also rethinks what it means to write history.

CONCLUSION

This study argues that a full understanding of women's experiences during the 1947 Partition requires sustained attention to intimate archives where memory, ethics, and survival intersect. State archives and legal records remain insufficient. They fail to capture the everyday practices through which women preserved identity, agency, and moral continuity. Acts such as Poro's private prayers, Mary Pereira's infant exchange, and strategies documented in oral histories function as deliberate archival practices. They constitute intentional modes of self-curation under conditions of extreme rupture. Women's bodies emerge as living documents that register trauma, resilience, and moral negotiation. Silence through pause, omission, or fragmentation operates as an ethical archival strategy rather than absence. It preserves knowledge beyond bureaucratic and nationalist frames. These micro-practices reveal forms of agency rendered structurally invisible by state-centered historiography. They demonstrate that historical knowledge is actively produced through everyday ethical practice, even under coercive and violent conditions. The intimate archive thus expands what counts as historical evidence. It foregrounds moral and narrative labor and clarifies the gendered dimensions of trauma and resistance. The framework has limitations. It relies heavily on literary texts and available testimonies, which may privilege certain social, linguistic, or regional perspectives. Intimate archives are also inherently subjective and resist complete empirical verification. These constraints, however, do not diminish their analytical value. They instead call for careful interpretation rather than positivist validation. The concept of the intimate archive has broad applicability. It can inform comparative studies of mass violence, analyses of intergenerational memory, and research on digital or material forms of personal archiving. By reframing intimate practices as sites of historical production and ethical reasoning, this study moves beyond recovery as an end goal. It offers a transferable lens for interpreting gendered trauma, moral agency, and survival in contexts of catastrophic historical change.

Acknowledgments

The authors gratefully acknowledge the institutional support provided by the University of the Punjab, Lahore, Pakistan, and Government College University Faisalabad, Pakistan, and the Aga Khan Education Service, Kenya, for facilitating this research. We extend our sincere appreciation to colleagues, mentors, and peer reviewers whose insightful feedback strengthened the conceptual and analytical depth of this study. We are also indebted to scholars of Partition studies whose pioneering works informed our framework. Any remaining errors or interpretations are solely the responsibility of the authors of this article.

Author's Contributions

Mahnoor Fatima conceptualized the study, developed the theoretical framework, and led the writing of the manuscript. Muhammad Bilal Sarfraz contributed to literature review, data interpretation, and critical revisions. Muhammad Rehan Sabir assisted in methodological design, textual analysis, and manuscript editing. Alwy Ahmed Mohamed provided supervision, validation, and final review of the manuscript. All authors discussed the results, contributed to revisions, approved the final version, and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this article. This research was conducted independently without any financial, commercial, or institutional influence that could be perceived as biasing the findings or interpretations. No funding was received from external organizations with vested interests in the subject matter. The authors affirm that the study reflects their academic integrity, objectivity, and commitment to ethical research and publication standards in all respects.

REFERENCES

- [1] D. Semerene, “The trans gender subject of fashion,” *Int. J. Fash. Stud.*, vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 145–160, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1386/inf.00105_1.
- [2] M. Micir, *The Passion Projects: Modernist Women, Intimate Archives, Unfinished Lives*. Princeton University Press, 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1080/24692921.2021.1888007>.
- [3] A. Malhotra, “Stories and Histories: Gendered Performances, Caste and Sociability in some Punjabi Domestic Tales,” *Gen. Hist.*, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 149–166, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0424.12736>.
- [4] S. J. Yoon and R. Udor, “How hegemonic masculinity injures migrant men: A multilevel analysis of African men in South Korea’s low-wage labor market,” *Gender, Work Organ.*, vol. 32, no. 3, pp. 1192–1218, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.13206>.
- [5] N. Kalra, L. Habumugisha, and A. Shankar, “Impacts of an abbreviated personal agency training with refugee women and their male partners on economic empowerment, gender-based violence, and mental health: a randomized controlled trial in Rwanda,” *BMC Public Health*, vol. 24, no. 1, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-024-18780-8>.
- [6] S. C. Y. Appiah *et al.*, “Burden of intimate partner violence (IPV) among persons living with HIV and AIDS in Kumasi, Ghana,” *Discov. public Heal.*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12982-026-01723-6>.
- [7] X. Wang *et al.*, “A Social Network Analysis of a Multi-sector Service System for Intimate Partner Violence in a Large US City,” *J. Prev.*, vol. 45, no. 3, pp. 357–376, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10935-024-00774-2>.
- [8] L. Wood, E. Baumler, R. J. V. Schrag, A. Kramer Jacobs, J. R. Temple, and E. Clark, “Short-Term Health and Safety Outcomes Associated With Digital Hotline Use at Interpersonal Violence-Focused Agencies,” *Inq. (United States)*, vol. 62, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00469580251381991>.
- [9] A. Cattagni, I. Semlali, N. Stanley, and N. Romain-Glassey, “Swiss young people’s experience of living with parental intimate partner violence and other adversities,” *Child. Youth Serv. Rev.*, vol. 179, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chilyouth.2025.108580>.
- [10] J. K. Campbell, J. Howland, B. Insalaco, and G. Lawrence-Soto, “Knowledge, Perceived Competence, and Behaviors Relative to Traumatic Brain Injury Among a Sample of Domestic Violence Emergency Shelter Advocates in a New England State,” *Violence Against Women*, vol. 30, no. 11, pp. 2808–2827, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012231163577>.
- [11] S. E. Scott, C. Laubacher, J. Chang, E. Miller, S. G. Bocinski, and M. I. Ragavan, “Perinatal Economic Abuse: Experiences, Impacts, and Needed Resources,” *J. Women’s Heal.*, vol. 33, no. 11, pp. 1536–1553, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1089/jwh.2024.0119>.
- [12] J. Walker, S. F. Kelty, and C. Ng Tseung-Wong, “Bystander Intervention in Coercive Control: Does Relationship to the Victim, Bystander Gender, and Concerns Influence Willingness to Intervene?” *J. Interpers. Violence*, vol. 39, no. 15–16, pp. 3791–3815, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241234350>.
- [13] P. P. Tsui, “Erotic capabilities: A feminist analysis of sexual justice and pleasure in heterosexual sex partying,” *Sexualities*, vol. 27, no. 4, pp. 918–938, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13634607211060507>.
- [14] A. Mackey, J. Bigalky, and P. Petrucka, “Blending Methodological Commitments: Narrative Inquiry and Intersectionality in Responding to the Challenges of IPV Research,” *Int. J. Qual. Methods*, vol. 25, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069261436031>.
- [15] E. Mitchell *et al.*, “Agency in young people’s unsafe abortion trajectories in Papua New Guinea,” *Cult. Heal. Sex*, vol. 28, no. 3, pp. 289–303, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2025.2456623>.
- [16] K. J. Spearman, A. Durfee, M. E. Bagwell-Gray, and J. Messing, “Navigating Protective Precarity: A Thematic Analysis of Civil Protective Orders and Child Custody for Maternal Survivors of Intimate Partner

- Violence,” *Fem. Criminol.*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 60–76, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15570851251388463>.
- [17] N. Lyons, B. Baer, N. Sookhoo, A. Sirjusingh, R. Bridgelal-Nagassar, and C. Allen, “Development of Trinidad and Tobago’s first National Clinical and Policy Guidelines on Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Violence,” *Rev. Panam. Salud Publica/Pan Am. J. Public Heal.*, vol. 48, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.26633/RPSP.2024.72>.
- [18] M. Mulyadi, “Penelitian Kuantitatif Dan Kualitatif Serta Pemikiran Dasar Menggabungkannya,” *J. Stud. Komun. dan Media*, vol. 15, no. 1, p. 128, 2013, <https://doi.org/10.31445/jskm.2011.150106>.
- [19] A. Sholikhah, “Statistik Deskriptif Dalam Penelitian Kualitatif,” *KOMUNIKA J. Dakwah dan Komun.*, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 342–362, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.24090/komunika.v10i2.953>.
- [20] A. A. Mekarisce, “Teknik Pemeriksaan Keabsahan Data pada Penelitian Kualitatif di Bidang Kesehatan Masyarakat,” *JJurnal Ilm. Kesehat. Masy. Media Komun. Komunitas Kesehat. Masy.*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 145–151, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.52022/jikm.v12i3.102>.
- [21] J. P. Meyer *et al.*, “A PrEP decision aid for women survivors of intimate partner violence: Task-shifting implementation to domestic violence service settings,” *PLoS One*, vol. 19, no. 9, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0310837>.
- [22] T. Eshetu *et al.*, “Towards person-centred maternal and newborn care in Ethiopia: a mixed method study of satisfaction and experiences of care,” *BMC Pregnancy Childbirth*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12884-024-07116-4>.
- [23] K. Stallone, “Love in war? The strategic use of intimacy in armed conflict,” *Third World Q.*, vol. 45, no. 5, pp. 870–887, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2023.2276817>.
- [24] P. Davies, C. Barlow, and R. Fish, “‘It was a challenge to look at things from a perpetrator perspective’. The problem of holding domestically abusive men to account in multi-agency partnership work,” *Criminol. Crim. Justice*, vol. 26, no. 1, pp. 102–118, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/17488958241231873>.
- [25] A. Lahti, “Violent Entanglements: Intimate Partner Violence in LGBTIQ + People’s Relationships,” *J. Fam. Violence*, vol. 39, no. 7, pp. 1255–1268, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-023-00637-0>.
- [26] V. Hui, L. Tian, M. Eby, B. Zhang, and R. E. Constantino, “Evaluating website resources shared online amongst women with intimate partner violence experiences: analysis of an online health community,” *Front. Psychol.*, vol. 17, 2026, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2026.1750050>.
- [27] M. Rahmatizadeh, “Navigating Dating Violence: An Intersectional Analysis of Agency Among Young Iranian Immigrant Women,” *Affil. - Fem. Inq. Soc. Work*, vol. 39, no. 4, pp. 719–733, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08861099241245947>.
- [28] H. Avieli, “The Social Response to Survivors of Attempted Intimate Partner Homicide,” *Violence Against Women*, vol. 32, no. 3–4, pp. 847–864, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012251319318>.
- [29] K. M. Chronister, N. Kumar, M. M. Mendoza, and L. A. Goodman, “Evaluating the Nature and Prevalence of Economic Empowerment Services Provided to Intimate Partner Abuse Survivors,” *Violence Against Women*, vol. 30, no. 8, pp. 1825–1841, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012241239939>.
- [30] S. Fernqvist, M. Flinkfeldt, and H. Tegler, “‘He Won’t Pay’: The Entanglement of Financial Abuse and Negligence in Swedish Child Maintenance Processes,” *Violence Against Women*, vol. 30, no. 15–16, pp. 3879–3899, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012231185538>.
- [31] J. Uysal *et al.*, “Strategies to address reproductive coercion and intimate partner violence in Nairobi family planning services: qualitative client and provider perspectives,” *Sex. Reprod. Heal. Matters*, vol. 33, no. 1, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/26410397.2025.2570528>.
- [32] C. F. Rizo, E. Armora Langoni, H. L. McNaughton Reyes, Q. Benavides, S. R. Radtke, and T. Jiwatram-Negron, “Feasibility Evaluation of a Parenting Group for Latina Survivors of Intimate Partner Violence,” *Violence Against Women*, vol. 31, no. 14, pp. 3678–3703, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012241289421>.
- [33] N. Sheeran, A. Jenkins, T. Humphreys, S. Ter Horst, and M. Higgins, “Investigating the Impact of Reproductive Coercion and Intimate Partner Violence on Psychological and Sexual Wellbeing,” *J. Interpers. Violence*, vol. 40, no. 3–4, pp. 726–755, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241253026>.
- [34] K. A. Randell *et al.*, “COVID-19 Pandemic Impact on United States Intimate Partner Violence Organizations: Administrator Perspectives,” *J. Fam. Violence*, vol. 40, no. 4, pp. 635–648, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10896-023-00641-4>.
- [35] L. J. Mitchell, “Domestic Space, Intimate Surprises: The Bonds and Bondage of Enslaved, Khoisan, and Settler Women in the 1825 Koue Bokkeveld Revolt,” *South African Hist. J.*, vol. 76, no. 3, pp. 263–283,

- 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02582473.2024.2423182>.
- [36] C. Nordby, K. S. Douglas, A. G. Vølstad, T. B. Brevik, S. K. Bjørkly, and S. K. B. Vatnar, “Compliance with mandatory reporting of intimate partner violence among professionals in Norway,” *BMC Public Health*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-025-22637-z>.
- [37] C. van Baak, V. Eichelsheim, D. Weenink, and M. R. Lindegaard, “Why Do Bystanders Report Intimate Partner Violence? Insights into Real-Life Reasoning from Those Who Actually Intervened,” *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, vol. 39, no. 13–14. SAGE Publications Inc., pp. 3207–3238, 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605241227156>.
- [38] C. T. Carney, M. R. Keibell, L. Eriksson, and R. M. Carr, “Different Scripts, Different Casts: A Crime Script Analysis Indicating Intimate Partner Violence Is Not All the Same,” *Violence Against Women*, vol. 30, no. 9, pp. 2096–2127, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012231153361>.
- [39] E. Alisic, A. Groot, H. Snetselaar, and T. Stroeken, “Raising a child bereaved by domestic homicide: caregivers’ experiences,” *Eur. J. Psychotraumatol.*, vol. 16, no. 1, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/20008066.2025.2463277>.
- [40] K. K. Sandhu and H. Barrett, “Girls just wanna have fun! South Asian women in the UK diaspora: Gradations of choice, agency, consent and coercion,” *Women's Stud. Int. Forum*, vol. 102, 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2023.102859>.
- [41] Z. Khazai, M. Muntinga, and P. Verdonk, “‘First you are a victim, then a survivor and finally, a warrior’: Perceptions of refugee women on sexual and gender based violence in the Netherlands,” *Glob. Public Health*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441692.2025.2574000>.
- [42] M. Ford-Gilboe *et al.*, “Exploring the implementation of an evidence-based health promotion intervention for women experiencing intimate partner violence (iHEAL) in diverse contexts: Study Protocol,” *PLoS One*, vol. 20, no. 9 September, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0330285>.
- [43] E. Bourke, “‘I would not have taken her for his sister’: financial hardship and women’s reputations in the Hartlib circle (1641-1661),” *Seventeenth Century*, vol. 37, no. 1, pp. 47–64, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0268117X.2021.1896377>.