Honor as Revenge: Sex, Forced Marriage, and Retaliatory Control in Sabina Khan's *The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali*

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Abstract

This paper explores how *The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali* (2019), the young adult novel by Sabina Khan, represents honour as a retaliatory system of control in the context of a diasporic Bangladeshi-American family, rather than a positive moral virtue. It aims to fill an existing research gap in Muslim YA literature where visibility and Islamophobia often take centre stage over honour-based coercion and how it is narratively portrayed. The analysis focuses on how honour becomes a vehicle for revenge through family-led punishment; how home spaces, cross-border ties, and digital platforms collectively heighten surveillance; and how alternative forms of storytelling and fragile alliances offer limited forms of resistance. Using ideas from intersectional feminist sociology, postcolonial gender theory, and American Muslim cultural criticism, particularly those on honour-based abuse, coercive control, and violence continuum, this study conducts a qualitative close reading of *The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali*, grouping scenes into six types of control: reputational, bodily/domestic, mobility/documentary, marriage-market, pseudo-medical/ritual, and digital/public. It is revealed that honour operates like a retaliatory economy, converting shame into punishment and recasting care as a morally justified discipline. Coercion is found to depend on intertwined mechanisms that push the protagonist from private restriction into transnational and public vulnerability. The grandmother's diary and the support of siblings and friends function as harm counter-archives and escape networks, revealing how far honour-based control reaches and where resistance begins to falter. Ultimately, the article

argues that honour works as a transnational disciplinary system and that American Muslim YA fiction sheds critical light on the infrastructures that sustain modern-day honour-based coercion.

Keywords

الشرف بوصفه انتقامًا: تمثيلات الجنس، والزواج القسري، والسيطرة الانتقامية في رواية سابينا خان *الحب والأكاذيب لرقصانة علي*

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الملخّص

يتناول هذا البحث رواية حبّ *رخسانة علي وأكاذيبها* للكاتبة سابينا خان (٢٠١٩) بوصفها نموذجًا سرديًّا يكشف تمثيلات الشرف كآلية انتقامية للضبط والسيطرة داخل أسرة بنغلاديشية–أمريكية، لا كقيمةٍ أخلاقية إيجابية. ويسعى إلى سدّ فجوةٍ في دراسات أدب اليافعين المسلم، حيث تطغى موضوعات الظهور العلني والإسلاموفوبيا على تحليل الإكراه القائم على الشرف وتمظهراته السردية. تستند الدراسة إلى مقاربات النسوية التقاطعية، ونظرية الجندر ما بعد الاستعمار، والنقد الثقافي للمسلمين الأمريكيين، مركّزةً على ستة أنماط من السيطرة: السمعة، والجسد/البيت، والتنقّل/الوثائق، وسوق الزواج، وشبه الطبي/الطقوسي، والرقمي/العام. وتبيّن النتائج أنّ الشرف يعمل كاقتصادٍ انتقامي يحوِّل العار إلى عقوبة ويعيد تأويل الرعاية كضبطٍ مُشرعن. كما تكشف أن آليات الإكراه متشابكة تدفع البطلة من قيود الخصوصية إلى هشاشة عابرة للحدود. وتؤدّي يوميات الجدة، إلى جانب دعم الإخوة والأصدقاء، دور الأرشيف المضاد وشبكات النجاة التي تكشف حدود المقاومة. ويخلص البحث إلى أنّ الشرف يعمل كنظامٍ تأديبي عابر للحدود، وأن أدب اليافعين المسلم في السياق الأمريكي يقدّم إضاءة نقدية على البُنى التي تُبقي الإكراه القائم على الشرف فاعلًا في صورته المعاصرة.

الكلمات المفتاحية

الإساءة القائمة على الشرف؛ السيطرة القسرية؛ الانتقام كآلية للحوكمة؛ النظرية النسوية؛ سابينا خان.

1. Introduction

Sabina Khan's *The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali* (2019) depicts honour as a form of vengeful control, where familial shame is continuously used to exert certain pressure in one's life inside and outside the home, offline and online. This study explores the novel's grey area between care and punishment within a diasporic setting, leveraging on the postcolonial gender theory, feminist sociology, and American Muslim criticism. My reading reveals how morality, familial reputation, and gender expectations across cultures have long been influenced by the notions of honour and shame.

Honour, according to Peristiany (1965) and Pitt-Rivers (1977), is an essential public moral capital or social currency which must be maintained at all times. It's clear that purity is linked to bodily control and social order as specified by Douglas (1966), whilst internal self-control is, to great extent, a sign of civilisation according to Norbert Elias (1978). In this vein, Honour is reframed by critics like Goffman (1963) and Bourdieu (2001) as an emblematic economy reinforced by stigma, respectability, and "face" saving. Taken together, these traditional views paint honour as a tool for social control rather than a virtue.

I assume that honour leans more towards coerciveness in the South-Asian and Middle-Eastern contexts, used as a mechanism to justify punishment more especially against women accused of bringing shame to their family. In this regard, Kelly (1988), Gill (2014, 2020), Anitha and Gill (2017), Mojab (2012), and Bano (2012) show that honour-based abuse (HBA) functions as a form of collective control rooted in gendered moral economies. More striking, though, is that Stark (2007) and Dobash and Dobash (2020) introduced the idea of coercive control, an ongoing pattern of monitoring and restriction that can replace direct physical violence. My assertion is that, these frameworks reveal how patriarchal families transform moral codes into instruments for disciplining women's bodies, movements, and sexuality.

It could be seen that literary and cultural studies have devoted comparatively little attention to the concept of honour. Research on diaspora and gender (Brah, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Anthias, 1998; Kabeer, 1999) showcases how migration produces multiple layers of social control, while American-Muslim feminist studies (Ahmed, 1992; Wadud, 1999; Kahf, 1999; Chan-Malik, 2018) reinterpret Islamic ideas of modesty, autonomy, and belonging. I ponder that few works, however, combine these sociological, feminist, and religious-ethical frameworks to analyse Young Adult (YA) fiction, a genre increasingly concerned with the representation of Muslim youth in diaspora. The present study therefore situates *The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali* within this interdisciplinary context to particularly investigate how honour, gender, and diasporic regulation are principally represented in contemporary literature.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although Muslim characters and stories are becoming more visible in Anglophone YA fiction (Thomas, 2019; VanderZanden, 2022), I contend that critical discussion has mostly focused on representation and Islamophobia (Ahmed et al., 2021; ElGindi, 2023). A gap persists, i.e., few have examined how honour-based coercion is profoundly depicted, enacted, and resisted in these novels. My observation is that research shows that honour-based abuse (HBA) is a growing global phenomenon (Gill et al., 2023; Villacampa, 2024; Bafouni, 2024). For example, reported cases in the United Kingdom rose by almost 60 percent between 2021 and 2023 (The Guardian, 2024), yet literary criticism has largely overlooked this reality indeed.

Consequently, it is important to note that the ways in which honour shapes family and community dynamics in transnational fiction remain underexamined. This gap is addressed by analysing Sabina Khan's *The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali* (2019) which tells of coercive control in a diasporic setting, clearly depicting how honour, in many ways, transforms explicitly into revenge. Among the

works of Samira Ahmed, Tahereh Mafi, and Nadine Jolie Courtney, Khan's novel stands out for moving beyond external portrayals of Islamophobia to foreground, to a great extent, intra-communal regulation in a diasporic landscape. These threads show how gender, sexuality, and migration intersect, making retaliatory control.

Even so, the fictional narrative of Rukhsana Ali minutely represents honour-governance, exhibiting the circulation of disciplinary power throughout familial and social networks. It demonstrates the conversion of moral codes logic into hints of control and violence, when enabled by patriarchal power in globalised systems. Set against the backdrops of Seattle and Dhaka, the novel shows the cross-border systemic realities of physical assaults, ritualised therapies, and forced engagements all performed under the guise of honour, leading to public retaliations in the form of honour killings and collective punishments (Mojab, 2012; Werbner, 2021).

The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali, as proposed in this study, therefore depicts honour not as a moral virtue but as a scheme of retaliatory control. It explores the re-enactment of coercive family power within domestic, transnational, and digital spheres, illuminating how diasporic settings reconfigure patriarchal authority and moral surveillance.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. 1.To examine how honour is reshaped into a system of revenge in Sabina Khan's *The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali*, expressed through acts of surveillance, punishment, and enforced conformity.

2. To analyse how domestic, diasporic, and digital spaces intersect to escalate coercion and legitimise family control through moral rhetoric of purity, respectability, and protection.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How does *The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali* portray honour as revenge, and what specific acts of coercion or disciplinary practices sustain it?

2. In what ways do domestic, diasporic, and digital spaces converge to intensify control and justify coercive practices through moral rhetoric of purity and protection?

2. Literature Review

The past 20 years have witnessed a major expansion of Muslim representation in *Anglophone* Young Adult (YA) fiction, yet I claim that most criticism still centres on visibility and Islamophobia rather than on the mechanisms of control shaping diasporic Muslim youth (Thomas, 2019; VanderZanden, 2022; Ahmed, 2021; El Gindi, 2023). Actually, empirical and sociological studies position honour-based abuse (HBA) as a growing global phenomenon whose logic of surveillance, coercion, and reputational governance transcends borders and generations (Gill et al., 2023; Villacampa, 2024; Bafouni, 2024; Ridley, 2023). To link sociological mapping to literary form, this study develops a cross-field framework encompassing anthropology and sociology of honour, feminist GBV research, diaspora and migration theory, and feminist cultural criticism. Across these literatures, this research aims to understand coercion as an infrastructural system of power rather than as a set of fragmented incidents.

It may be interested to note that classical anthropology located honour within public moral economies. Peristiany (1965) and Pitt-Rivers (1977) defined honour as a reputation performed, defended, and restored. Douglas (1966) associated honour with purity codes governing the body, while Elias (1978) linked internal restraint to civilisation. Goffman (1963) conceptualised face-work as a social performance, and Bourdieu (2001, p. 241) translated these rituals into symbolic capital and respectability: "the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition". Collectively, these theorists reposition honour from a personal virtue to a public performance, i.e., an exchangeable moral currency. Recent studies extend this genealogy to digital and postcolonial contexts, showing that reputational logics circulate through online networks and diasporic communities (Weber, 2019;

Chaudhry, 2021). At this point, honour thus remains a portable architecture of governance, making it an essential analytic for transnational narratives.

Building on this foundation, I think that feminist and socio-legal scholarship translates these anthropological insights into the analytical vocabulary of honour-based abuse and gendered coercion. Gill (2014, 2020) and Anitha and Gill (2017) define HBA as collective punishment used to restore familial reputation, with kinship operating as the mechanism of enforcement. Subsequent studies (Bano, 2012; Bradley, 2014; Mojab, 2012; Werbner, 2021) catalogue the repertoire of such practices, i.e., surveillance, mobility restriction, confiscated documents, accelerated engagements, trousseaux, and pseudo-therapeutic "cures". Sexual violence, according to Kelly (1988), progresses from daily discipline to explicit harm, while coercive control as per Stark (2007, pp. 5, 228) is the persistence of domination with or without ongoing physical harm: "a strategic course of conduct designed to dominate by entrapment," where "physical assaults need not be continuous to be effective". This drives us to consider Johnson's (2008) assertion that systemic abuse is distinct from episodic conflicts. Key risk factors include intersectionality and migration status (Siddiqui and Gill, 2022; Tahir, 2023).

Albeit unevenly, rights can only protect a person based on where they are positioned in social hierarchies (Merry, 2006, 2009). According to feminist legal frameworks, the idea of control is usually potentially made worse by bureaucracy and ineffective policies (Gill and Begum, 2022). Using these insights can improve the long-standing interpretation of control in fictional narratives.

Honour-based control also extends across borders and institutions, as revealed by diaspora and migration theorists. "Diaspora space" as per Brah (1996) is the intersection between origin and host norms; gendered citizenship was the basis of analysis in Yuval-Davis (1997), whilst translocational positionality namely the space where race, gender, and class meet was

extensively analysed by Anthias (1998). Resistance as affected by resources and agency was examined by Kabeer (1999, 2000), while the exertion of collective pressure via community reputation was explained by Werbner (2021). Cross-border familial disciplining made possible through digital surveillance like family chats, social media, and online gossip was described on other recent studies (e.g., Qureshi, 2021; Chantler and McCarry, 2023). It is no coincidence that control is made possible through sanctioned mobility like the seizing of passports, forced visits, and supervised travels. These insights suggest that the depictions of airport queues, visa offices, and travel itineraries in YA fiction are made on purpose to portray transnational governance.

At home, affection is a cover-up for coercion. Moral order is maintained through the acts of hospitality, gossiping, and shaming, as per the theories of honour as public accounting (Pitt-Rivers, 1977), face-work (Goffman, 1963), and respectability (Bourdieu, 2001). Demeanor, way of dressing, and beauty standards serve as moral tools as per Douglas (1966) and Elias (1978), whilst maternal collusion is a strategic patriarchal scheme (Kandiyoti, 1988). Such authorities, for Sara Ahmed (2004, 2017), are reinforced by sentiments of shame, disgust, and fear. Stephens (2021) extends this logic to multicultural milieus where discourses of "care" disguise surveillance. The home therefore emerges as a micro-institution of governance, transforming affection into discipline.

In literary terms, these dynamics find their most vivid articulation in Young Adult fiction, where structures of power and surveillance are refracted through adolescent experience. Before delving in deep, Trites (1997, 2000) defines YA fiction as a literature of institutional negotiation; Cart (2016) explores its engagement with social realism; and Kidd, Nikolajeva, Coats, and Stevenson (2018) examine its treatment of embodiment and affect. Jenkins and Cart (2006) and Epstein (2013) focus on LGBTQ and inclusion, while Thomas's (2019) research studies racialised visibility, which stubbles with implicit implications

Taken together, these literatures yield a scene-sensitive analytic framework. First, anthropology and sociology illuminate honour as public account and symbolic capital (Peristiany; Pitt-Rivers; Bourdieu; Goffman; Douglas; Elias). Second, feminist GBV studies define coercive control (Stark), the continuum of violence (Kelly), and patterned abuse typologies (Johnson). Third, diaspora theory contributes the logic of transnational enforcement and positionality (Brah; Yuval-Davis; Anthias; Kabeer; Werbner). Fourth, legal theory valuable to shift emphasis to anti-culturalist and rights-based interpretations (Narayan; Volpp; Phillips; Merry; Korteweg & Yurdakul). Finally, YA criticism exposes how narrative form renders the mechanisms of power visible mainly across domestic, transnational, and digital spaces. From these combined traditions arises a six-part model of retaliatory control (Gill, 2014, 2020; Anitha & Gill, 2017; Stark, 2007; Kelly, 1988): (1) reputational governance gossip, communal surveillance, wedding theatre; (2) domestic/bodily governance assault, confinement, beauty norms; (3) mobility/documentary control passports, coerced travel, timed returns; (4) marriage-market manoeuvres viewings, accelerated engagements, alliance bargaining; (5) pseudo-medical/ritual correction drugging, "exorcism," clerical or clinical discipline; and (6) digital/public intimidation doxxing, online retaliation, and shaming economies. These sequencing-aware categories recognise escalation and interaction across domestic, transnational, and digital domains. (Werbner, 2021; boyd, 2014; Marwick, 2013; Phillips, 2015).

Yet two critical gaps remain. First, although HBA and coercive-control studies offer complete typologies, literary criticism rarely applies them to YA fiction at the level of scene and sequence. Depictions of airport document confiscation, ritualised engagements, or pseudo-therapeutic "corrections" are often treated descriptively rather than analytically. Second, Muslim-led YA tends to be examined through the lens of representation instead of as a method of critique that illuminates spatial, procedural, and affective forms of power.

Contemporary Muslim cultural criticism (Shamsie, 2021; Al-Khatib, 2022; Khan, 2023) recognises the witnessing potential of fiction, but its relation to YA literature remains underexplored.

3. Theoretical Framework

The conceptual architecture enabling the interpretation of honour as retaliatory governance is examined through Sabina Khan's *The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali* (2019). In this framework, honour is treated as a kin-mediated, patterned system that transforms reputational anxiety into sanctions across domestic, transnational, and digital environments. Insights from intersectional feminist sociology, postcolonial gender theory, and American Muslim cultural criticism combine into a single analytic spine, thoroughly explaining the operationalisation of coercion within diasporic life. Intersectionality elucidates how sexuality, gender, race, religion, class, and migration status intersect to shape exposure to coercion (Crenshaw, 1991). Postcolonial gender theory traces the historical sedimentation of these exposures through colonial governance, reproduced in modern family institutions (Mohanty, 2003; Abu-Lughod, 2013). American Muslim critics offer insider perspectives on womanhood, faith, and community values, showing that "culture" isn't single and uniformed; rather, it is constantly debated and redefined (Ahmed, 1992; Wadud, 1999; Kahf, 1999; Chan-Malik, 2018). Through such insights, honour can be examined as an ever-changing social mechanism for organising discipline via acts of love, surveillance, and reputational maintenance.

The clarity needed to define coercion directly, without softening or obscuring it, is provided by the framework's sociological basis. Honour-based abuse (HBA), for Aisha K. Gill (2014, 2020) and Anitha and Gill (2017), refers to communal punishment meant to repair or prevent reputational harm, enabled by familial ties. Sexual violence as itemized by Kelly's continuum (1988, p. 76) is described where "women's experiences of sexual violence form a continuum, from those which are clearly criminal to those which are endemic and

normalised in everyday life" Indeed, sexual violence can be understood as the progression of daily regulation into explicit harm, where common acts like monitoring one's way of dressing and appearance turn into coercion. Evan Stark's (2007) theory of coercive control supplies the language of patterned domination, i.e., surveillance, isolation, and threat, that ensures compliance even without continuous physical force. This pattern is unveiled throughout scenes in the novel depicting discovery, assault, confinement, passport seizure, relocation, and pseudo-therapeutic "cure".

Additionally, patriarchal bargaining, for Kandiyoti (1988), comprises maternal complicity as a strategy for survival. Gossip and public events keep reputation in check and uphold moral order, as per Goffman's (1963) face-work and Bourdieu's (2001) symbolic capital theories. The progression of harm in the novel is clarified by the difference between patterned and situational violence (Johnson, 2008). Lastly, anti-culturalists and rights-based advocates like Narayan (1997), Volpp (2000, 2001), Phillips (2007), and Merry (2006, 2009) help maintain focus on structure and power instead of cultural stereotypes.

These sociological frameworks are extended by the American Muslim and postcolonial literary theory by enabling the interpretation of meaning from the lens of Muslim intellectual traditions. The colonial notion of "respectable womanhood" was explicated by Leila Ahmed (1992); Qurʾānic gender discourse was reinterpreted by Wadud (1999), whilst Orientalist notions of Muslim women were challenged by Kahf (1999). These insights show the historical link and political basis of honour and modesty. Chan-Malik (2018) and Bayoumi (2008) trace post-9/11 American Muslim subjectivities shaped by double surveillance, the Islamophobic public gaze and intracommunal moral policing. Sara Ahmed (2004, p. 119) asserts that "emotions do things: they align individuals with communities… by compelling us to turn toward some objects and away from others" demonstrating that theory of affective governance explains how emotions like shame, disgust, and fear become mechanisms of

social control. Whereas Abu-Lughod (2013) and Mohanty (2003) critique "rescue" narratives that reinscribe civilisational hierarchies. These works assert that honour must be read along with its history of colonial legacies, diasporic anxiety, and gendered piety.

The current framework integrates all these strands to explore how retaliatory governance functions within diaspora communities. Building on the works of Stark (2007) and Gill (2020), it deems the family as a micro-state where shame is converted into forms of punishments: physical assaults, confinement, document seizures, forced visits, manipulative therapy, and public shaming. Bourdieu's (2001) respectability and Kandiyoti's (1988) patriarchal bargain reveal an economy of exchange where reputation is traded for obedience, rendering beauty and modesty practices into symbolic capital. Diaspora theory (Brah, 1996; Yuval-Davis, 1997; Anthias, 1998) frames this as double captivity, where adolescents face both kin surveillance and racialised scrutiny by the host society. Kabeer's (1999, 2000) notion of resources and agency illuminates how document or financial control becomes even sharper in limiting autonomy, while Werbner (2021) explains how community reputation is essential to magnify these sanctions across borders. Sara Ahmed (2017) and Narayan (1997) underline how shame and belonging naturalise the making of punishment, while Merry (2009) reveals how rights discourse makes private harm publicly legible. Collectively, these insights conceptualise honour as a transnational disciplinary apparatus that merges affective, reputational, and bureaucratic power.

In sum, this framework integrates mechanistic precision (coercive control, continuum, typologies), situated epistemologies (American Muslim feminist thought, postcolonial theory), and scale awareness (diaspora enforcement and affect). This means that, honour is conceptualised as retaliatory governance, enabling a scene-level reading that traces the transformation of shame into sanction. This synthesis structures the analyses that follow, revealing how

familial, transnational, and digital infrastructures materialise coercive control in Khan's narrative world. To clarify the relationships among these theoretical strands, Table 1 summarises the concepts, theorists, and functions that structure the framework of honour as retaliatory governance in this study.

Table 1. Concepts in the Theoretical Framework: Honour as Retaliatory Governance

Framework Layer	Main Thinkers / Theories	Core Ideas	Purpose in the Study
1. Intersectional & Postcolonial Foundations	Crenshaw; Mohanty; Abu-Lughod; Ahmed; Wadud; Kahf; Chan-Malik	Gender, race, religion, and class intersect to shape control; colonial and religious histories produce modern hierarchies.	Shows how *honour* works through overlapping inequalities in diasporic life.
2. Feminist Sociological Models	Gill; Anitha; Kelly; Stark; Johnson	Defines coercion as continuous control rather than isolated acts; includes surveillance, isolation, and patterned domination.	Provides the conceptual tools to identify and describe mechanisms of coercion in the novel.
3. Reputational & Familial Discipline	Goffman; Bourdieu; Kandiyoti	Gossip, reputation, and symbolic capital maintain moral order; women may comply strategically (patriarchal bargain).	Explains how family and kinship act as systems of social enforcement.
4. Anti-Culturalist Guardrails	Narayan; Volpp; Phillips; Merry	Critiques "cultural defence"; focuses on rights, institutions, and power structures.	Prevents cultural stereotyping and grounds interpretation in social mechanisms.
5. American Muslim & Literary Lenses	Leila Ahmed; Wadud; Kahf; Chan-Malik; Bayoumi; Sara Ahmed; Mohanty	Muslim intellectual traditions resist Orientalist and "rescue" narratives; emotions like shame and fear sustain power.	Reads *honour* as a historically contingent, emotional, and political discourse.
6. Retaliatory Governance (Core Concept)	Gill; Stark; Bourdieu; Kandiyoti	The family operates as a micro-state, turning shame into sanction through assault, confinement, and control.	Defines the novel's main theoretical construct: *honour as governance*.
7. Diaspora & Scale of Control	Brah; Yuval-Davis; Anthias; Kabeer; Werbner	Diaspora produces "double captivity": kin surveillance plus racialised scrutiny.	Shows how coercion travels and intensifies across borders.
8. Mechanisms of Control (A–	Synthesised from feminist	A. Reputational; B. Domestic/Bodily; C.	Provides the six recurring mechanisms

| F) | and diaspora theory | Mobility/Documents; D. Marriage-Market; E. Pseudo-Medical; F. Digital/Public. | used to analyse scenes in the novel. |
| 9. Integrative Outcome | Combined theoretical strands | Coercion merges affect, reputation, and bureaucracy across scales. | Supports scene-level analysis of how shame becomes sanction in the text. |

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative close-reading design, treating *The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali* (2019) as a single-text case study for mapping mechanisms of honour-based control. The analytic wager is that a youth novel can encode a patterned course of conduct, from reputational breach to familial retaliation, that becomes legible through sociological and feminist frameworks. The episode of control or retaliation serves as the unit of analysis, operationalised as a distinct scene in which (a) a coercive act occurs, (b) its justification is expressed through moral language such as care, purity, or reputation, and (c) an effect on the protagonist's autonomy follows. Rather than adopting a theme-driven approach, the design is scene-sensitive, tracing how linked episodes accumulate into a broader pattern of coercion and retaliation.

The analysis follows Stark's (2007) concept of coercive control, Kelly's (1988) continuum of violence, and Johnson's (2008) typology of patterned abuse to identify coercion as a continuous course of conduct rather than a series of isolated acts. These frameworks collectively provide a methodological scaffold for recognising how ordinary discipline and overt violence intersect within the novel's narrative economy.

The corpus consists of Sabina Khan's *The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali* (2019). The analysis is based on four key clusters: domestic assault, coerced relocation, pseudo-therapeutic correction, and public retaliation. Together, they trace how coercion migrates from private discipline to transnational governance and, ultimately, to public harm. Each cluster is interpreted through interlocking conceptual lenses, i.e., Goffman's and Bourdieu's theories of respectability,

Douglas's purity logic, Connell's masculinity, and diaspora positionality (Brah, 1996; Anthias, 1998; Werbner, 2021) to reveal how coercion is reproduced through kinship, bureaucracy, and affective economies.

Scenes were coded for coercive acts, moral justifications, and effects on autonomy, then grouped into six mechanism types: (A) reputational governance, (B) domestic/bodily governance, (C) mobility and document control, (D) marriage-market manoeuvres, (E) pseudo-medical or ritual "cures," and (F) digital/public intimidation. This coding process makes visible the interaction among mechanisms, for instance, how reputational shaming triggers document seizure or pseudo-therapy, aligning with Stark's (2007) understanding of coercive control as an escalating course of conduct rather than discrete episodes.

As a single-text study, reliability emphasises process rather than inter-rater metrics. Cross-lens triangulation and chronological sequencing guard against selective interpretation. The analysis is guided by anti-culturalist and trauma-informed principles (Narayan, 1997; Volpp, 2000, 2001; Herman, 1992) and by American Muslim feminist ethics (Ahmed, 1992; Wadud, 1999; Kahf, 1999; Chan-Malik, 2018), ensuring that interpretation centres on power and structure rather than cultural blame.

Textual evidence is handled with sensitivity: excerpts are brief, contextually situated, and presented without sensationalism to align with trauma-aware ethics.

Ultimately, this methodology treats *The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali* as an auditable case through which retaliatory governance becomes narratively visible. A scene-based unit of analysis, theoretically anchored coding frame, and reflexive ethical design together provide a transparent route from text to mechanism, enabling subsequent analysis to trace how reputational audits, document control, pseudo-therapeutic correction, and digital intimidation materialise the transnational infrastructures of honour-based coercion.

5. Analysis

5.1 Honour as Revenge

Honour in Sabina Khan's *The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali* (2019) is dramatized a retaliatory tool of control instead of an abstract cultural philosophy. In the novel, the first disagreement activates a trigger-to-retaliation chain: discovery, immediate violence, collective mobilisation, and escalating constraint. Upon catching Rukhsana kissing Ariana in her bedroom, Zubaida reacted promptly and publicly. Her open-handed slap lands on the girlfriend instead of her daughter, converting private shame into performative punishment "The slap came so fast… the imprint of my mother's hand blooming red on Ariana's cheek" (Khan, 2019, p. 126). In this episode, the maternal authority protects using physical retaliation. Her subsequent command, "Get out… and don't you dare come near my daughter again" (Khan, 2019, p. 127), is a depiction of the assault as protection instead of aggression, care enacted through violence. The familial authority continues with the father's strike: "My face snapped to the right as Dad's hand made contact with my cheek… My parents had never, ever laid a hand on me before" (Khan, 2019, p. 130). As described by Bourdieu (2001), this sequence is a figurative reinforcement of patriarchal power through disciplinary punishments.

The strike escalates the logic of governance. The father's warning, "Do you want to see your own parents become the laughingstock of the community?" (Khan, 2019, p. 133), turns concern into coercion, with affection taking less priority than reputational harm. Zubaida adds, "They are too freethinking. And now you are becoming like them" (Khan, 2019, p. 135), reframing Western effect as pollution. This idea explicitly purity, normality, respectability align with Goffman's (1963) "moral career of stigma", where familial reputation is more important than the daughter's individuality. Honour is a symbolic capital to be safeguarded at all times, even via sanctioned harm (Bourdieu, 2001).

Khan's economy of discipline is collective instead of individual. The extended familial network becomes a support for enforcement. Prior to the predicament, Rukhsana made a joke about "the arranged-marriage network a bunch of Bengali aunties who had way too much time on their hands" (Khan, 2019, p. 64). But following her sexuality exposure, gossip turns into surveillance. The domestic is now bureaucracy: in Dhaka, Rukhsana finds her mother "clutching … my passport," while her father demands for her phone (Khan, 2019, p. 162). In this vein, emotional injury ("you deceived us") turns into bureaucratic incapacitation, transforming love into state-like monitoring. Stark's (2007) theory of coercive control explains this as emotional retaliation transforming into institutionalised governance in the family micro-state.

The novel's most unsettling transformation is when discipline masks itself as care. Vengeance is disguised as therapy, with tea being drugged and the arrival of the "jinn-catcher": "I just gave you something to help you stay calm," Zubaida comforting her daughter (Khan, 2019, p. 170). The healer is tasked "to get it out of you", with "it" referring to desire (Khan, 2019, p. 172), exemplifying the Foucauldian analysis of the medicalisation of sin. The ritual's aesthetic including "incense, chanting, water poured over head and feet" (Khan, 2019, p. 173) reframes punishment as purification. The prohibitions ("No music or movies … she must not laugh too much," Khan, 2019, p. 173) bring emotion into the state of surveillance. The so-called therapy is actually a ban on joy, a domesticated necropolitics regulating life. The mother's conclusion, "I knew my daughter would never be like that" (Khan, 2019, p. 174), reinstates familial dignity with no thought for the daughter's agency, reinforcing the cycle of Gill (2020) "collective punishment masquerading as morality".

Earlier dinner-table scenes, lectures about "dirty dorm rooms" and "good daughters who live at home and help their mothers" (Khan, 2019, p. 45) all seem like gentle acts, when they are actually a form of grooming to ensure obedience. The pre-Bangladesh warning, "We are giving you a lot of freedom … but that

doesn't mean that we won't take it away" (Khan, 2019, p. 59), is a retrospective language of policy, a preventive act to turn love into a contract of revocable autonomy. Following the exorcism, Zubaida comforts Rukhsana by whispering, "I will take care of all that" (Khan, 2019, p. 175), completing the oxymoron that love is a form of tender control.

The revenge dynamic extends outwardly and becomes the marriage economy. Courtship turns into reputational management. Even before Dhaka, aunties praise "someone who can cook and look after the household" (Khan, 2019, p. 66), reflecting Kandiyoti's (1988) patriarchal bargain, where obedience is exchanged for conditional respect. In Bangladesh, this rhetoric solidifies into a show of discipline. Engagement parties become moral tribunals, with the trousseau replacing the cage. Rukhsana's concealment of her jeans under silks and a hoodie under the bridal veil is an embodiment of dual consciousness: her public assimilation and private subversion.

> "I'd already put in some of the outfits from my trousseau, but now I added a couple of T-shirts, two pairs of jeans, and a light hoodie between the layers of silk and chiffon. Next, I collected my everyday makeup items, put them in a small plastic pouch, and put it in my purse." (Khan, 2019, p. 223)

Bourdieu's (2001) symbolic investment turns into literal fabric: the body being embroidered with compliance.

The sequential episodes, home, bureaucracy, border, clinic and wedding is Khan's materialisation of coercion as proposed by Kelly (1988). Violence is inherited in each space. Rukhsana's protests, "You're acting as if I killed somebody" (Khan, 2019, p. 131) reveals the disproportion between transgression and punishment. The retort "You disgust me … you're sick" (Khan, 2019, p. 132) turns disgust into policy. In this regard, the language transforms emotion into rule, aligning with Sara Ahmed's (2017) assertion that affect itself enacts governance.

Khan's depiction of the extended family places the home in a globalised reputational public. The aunties' supervision of her excursions or the relatives' praises "as they put pieces of sweets in my mouth" (Khan, 2019, p. 195) may seem celebratory but are in fact disciplinary checks. Even silence turns into complicity. The omnipresence of the family's imagined audience, i.e., "the community" confirms Werbner's (2021) assertion that diaspora publics function as "transnational reputation markets" where the female conduct serves as communal currency.

Kandiyoti (1988) explains that women commonly enable the systems that demote them, in order to guarantee safety. The healer's banning of laughter or entertainment turns emotion into surveillance, akin to Sara Ahmed's (2004) "affective economies" where shame binds the subject to familial command. Violence is coded as love, blurring the line between nurture and domination.

The retaliation ends with the activist Sohail's murder. His support for Rukhsana led to his death, externalising domestic and demonstrating how private honour politics turns into social terror. I contend that, the novel's moral geometry renders the same logic that corrects a daughter to authorise the silencing of non-conformists. Stark's (2007) coercive control theory elucidates that intimacy control seamlessly integrates into community control.

The language of purity and protection allows for escalation at every turn. Khan has the literary ability to turn common domestic objects, the slap, the phone, the passport, the cup of tea, into tools of state-like regulation. Rukhsana's first-person narration enables the reader to witness Gill's (2014: 383) "collective control enacted through kinship alliances". Consequently, at the form and theme level, the novel performs a forensic anatomy of retaliation, displaying how shame transforms into a moral currency and how affection, ritual, and bureaucracy transform family love into governance.

5.2 The repertoire of control

Khan treats honour as a system comprising of repeatable moves. The novel provides an arsenal of control that is social (reputation), somatic (the body and its care), spatial (documents and borders), therapeutic/ritual (cure as discipline), and public (risk and retaliation). The family executes what Gill (2014, 2020) and Anitha and Gill (2017) describe as collective punishment; Stark's (2007) coercive control offers the language for its patterned, escalating nature; Kelly's (1988) continuum elucidates how normal disciplining becomes overt harm.

According to Khan, reputation is currency, face and respectability must always be assessed in front of an imagined audience. The novel provides a rather blunt ground rule: "No parties, no shorts, no boys" (Khan, 2019, p. 8). The triple staccato, three monsyllabic nouns, each preceded by "no", imitates policy language, as if a domestic statute had been promulgated. The line is not just parental reproach; based on Goffman's (1963) face-work and Bourdieu's (2001) symbolic capital, it establishes that a daughter's visible conduct affects the family's reputation in the public eye.

Khan turns the kitchen into a tribunal. Zubaida utters: "Daughters and sons are not the same. You have the power to honour our family's good reputation" (Khan, 2019, p. 12). The clause "not the same" is descriptive and prescriptive, marking the gendered double standard as identified by Pitt-Rivers and Peristiany in classic honour/shame systems. The protagonist is co-opted into a collective we via the word "our family": her body bearing the burden of a plural noun.

Auditors are needed for the audit: "the arranged-marriage network … a bunch of Bengali aunties" (Khan, 2019, p. 64). The parataxis, "network … a bunch", transforms family into an institution. Beyond the home, they also police the public space by anticipation. At the mall, Rukhsana states: "We were in public, at the mall … a hundred people who would tell a hundred more" (Khan, 2019, p. 43). The anaphora, "a hundred … a hundred", reflects the escalation of gossip into becoming governance. The father's warning, "Do you want to see

your own parents become the laughingstock of the community?" (Khan, 2019, p. 133) presents the term laughingstock which identifies the sanction motivating all forms of control. Werbner's (2021) diaspora publics, transnational reputation markets, explains the massive work undertaken by this noun: that imagined audiences can substantially affect coercion.

Khan's word-choice ratchets the pressure from face to purity. Zubaida says that "they are too freethinking. And now you are becoming like them" (Khan, 2019, p. 135). This mark implies that the adjective "freethinking" is recoded as contamination: Douglas's (1966) purity/pollution framework renders "becoming like them" as a signal of degeneration that requires ritual cleansing. It is therefore clear why the only "acceptable" future is the one inspected by the gaze of a future mother-in-law during dinners and engagement viewings, a social theatre where all gestures become a measure of morality (Khan, 2019, pp. 190–195).

While reputational governance monitors the surface, domestic governance polices the body. The opening image is sartorial: "oversized hoodie to once again become the shapeless blob my parents preferred" (Khan, 2019, p. 8). The phrase "shapeless blob" erases individuality, the novel's first depiction of bodily compliance presented as love. The mother's instruction follows in the same tone of disguised care: "learn how to prepare these dishes … when you're married, who will come and cook for you?" (Khan, 2019, p. 10). The double question imports a future husband's appetite into a teenage girl's present, revealing how affection becomes training in submission (Connell, 1995).

In addition, the "punitive reset" scene marks the transition from discipline to explicit violence. As told by Rukhsana: "My face snapped to the right as Dad's hand made contact with my cheek … My parents had never, ever laid a hand on me before" (Khan, 2019, p. 130). The rapid "snapped to the right" shifts home discipline into physical assault. The recurrent "never, ever" is an emphasis on trust being lost. The narrative is directly set to examine how language turns

into command. In her outburst, Zubaida snapped, "You disgust me … you're sick" (Khan, 2019, p. 132), turning emotion into regulation. These shifts, from emotion to power, echo the notion of affective governance as per Sara Ahmed (2017).

Transcending the home front, Khan explicates that coercion also occurs elsewhere and involves various elements: passports, airlines, wedding halls, and foreign red tapes. In Dhaka, it begins with the phone and passport seizure "[Mother] clutched … my passport" (Khan, 2019, p. 162). Syntactically short without any further elucidation, the line displays the straightforwardness of the scene. The plot quickly shifts to forced relocation and fast-tracked engagement, turning everything into "urgent" viewings.

A striking account of Brah's (1996) diaspora space and Anthias's (1998) translocational positionality explain how power is exerted through acts of forced relocation, i.e., to a space where greater control awaits. Kabeer's (1999, 2000) resources/agency model clarifies the decisiveness of the passport confiscation: it prevents any form of escape, reinforcing reliance. The "Benarasi silk", "marigold canopies", and "jasmine scent" (Khan, 2019, pp. 212–214) in the Dhaka scenes are a cover for restraint, not merely ornamental. In this instance, ceremony is also known as logistics.

Unlike the earlier encounter, Rukhsana's plan of escape is prudently pronounced: "I folded the jeans and hoodie under the silk … the passport would go into the makeup pouch" (Khan, 2019, pp. 225–227). The procedural prose is technically written, seemingly a draft of an operations plan. Form obscures content: a young woman devising an intricate plan as a retort to a familial disciplinary system. The borders in the novel are tool rather than neutral thresholds. Airports and visa lines serve as narrative metronomes measuring the decreasing line of options, likening the family to a state by designating the state's paperwork.

The jinn-catcher scene is the clearest instance of revenge as care. "I just gave you something to help you stay calm," Zubaida coos (Khan, 2019, p. 170). The triteness of "something", veiled as comfort, hides the chemical element in the teacup. The healer pledges to "get it out of you" (Khan, 2019, p. 172). "It" here is nameless, where desire is tackled as an entity that can be exorcised. The ritual's sensorium, "incense, chanting, water poured over head and feet" (Khan, 2019, p. 173), transforms correction into cleansing, echoing Mojab's (2012) analysis of the borrowing of clinical and clerical scripts by patriarchal power to allow harm.

An alarming line takes place: "No music or movies … she must not laugh too much" (Khan, 2019, p. 173). This is a rule imposition in the guise of "care advice". Governance is extended to affect; joy is reason for suspicion. Affective governance, as per Sara Ahmed (2004, 2017), explains the emotional economy: happiness is merely heteronormative performance. Zubaida declaration, "I knew my daughter would never be like that" (Khan, 2019, p. 174), is performative with the aim to have reality rewritten. Gill's (2020) "masquerade of morality" is fitting in this instance, as the ritual restores the mother's *face* to its pre-scandal shine whilst reducing the daughter into a silent subject.

Khan presents the scene in a soft focus: "my eyelids felt heavy … the room blurred" (Khan, 2019, p. 171). Free indirect discourse bridges the gap between narration and drugged perception, performing the epistemic violence of pseudo-therapy: a drunken state unable to muster the word No. The scene elucidates the ethical intelligence in the novel. By not dramatizing pain and focusing on procedure instead (drug, chant, rule), Khan demonstrates the routinisation of violence under the guise of love.

Private consolation is absent in the novel; retaliation is rendered a public risk through Sohail, the blogger and organiser whose visibility becomes perilous. The causal chain is direct: exposure invites recognition, and recognition invites reprisal. After men are seen "staring … in a way that felt

malicious" (Khan, 2019, pp. 203–204), news of the machete attack follows (Khan, 2019, p. 234). Khan narrates this with deliberate restraint, elliptical reporting, sensory fragments, and abrupt ellipses. Trauma is honoured through quietness rather than spectacle.

This form of violence corresponds with what Boyd (2014), Marwick (2013), and Phillips (2015) describe as networked harassment: when visibility becomes vulnerability. Similarly, Hall (1990) and Gilroy (1993) locate the racialised gaze that renders certain bodies "killable" under moral pretext. In *Rukhsana Ali*, a private family project of honour mutates into a public project of purity, where those who disturb moral order, Sohail foremost, are cast as toxins to be cleansed.

Secondary figures namely Aamir, Shaila, Irfan, Sara, form counter-currents of limited resistance. Their help (Aamir's concealment of passports, Shaila's message-relays, Irfan's false fronts) is brief and precarious, yet essential. The text implies that solidarity exists within vulnerability, not beyond it; these fragile bonds constitute the novel's micro-politics of endurance rather than rescue.

The novel's lexicon, purity, normality, face, care, I consider legitimises punishment. The sequence is deliberate: reputational panic ("laughingstock," p. 133) precipitates domestic assault (p. 130); this licenses document control and mobility restriction (p. 162); these validate pseudo-therapeutic correction (pp. 170–174); and, when defiance persists, collective retaliation follows (p. 234). Each stage carries its own alibi: "we are giving you a lot of freedom … but that doesn't mean that we won't take it away" (p. 59); "I will take care of all that" (p. 175). These statements function as a family-state's legal discourse.

Khan's narrative style is also suggestive. Lush sensory imagery (food, fabric, scent) is switched with elements of bureaucracy (passports, timetables, rules), allowing readers to see the allure of the event and its usage as a tool.

Words of care are actually commands in disguise, rituals concealing regulation. This is where the novel's critical acumen lies.

Lastly, the diasporic element in the novel is crucial. Honour for Brah (1996), Yuval-Davis (1997), and Anthias (1998) functions less as inert tradition and more as a transnational tool. It moves when the familial network moves, to airports, clinics, and wedding halls, infiltrating the religious and digital realms. Honour as revenge, as depicted by Khan, is hence less of a cultural accusation (Narayan, 1997; Volpp, 2000, 2001) and more of a critical revelation of how affect, ritual, and bureaucracy blur the line between coercion and care.

5.3 Counter-archives and fragile solidarities

The counter-archive that is the grandmother's diary serves as an unassuming rebellion in the home front. When Nani offers it to Rukhsana, "This was my diary when I was a young girl. I want you to have it" (Khan, 2019, p. 146), the gesture transfers authority over the family's narrative. The act is deceptively ceremonial, yet it displaces the mother's rhetoric of honour with an older vocabulary of obedience and pain. One entry reads: "Ma told me to wear the green-and-gold sari… They would say yes if my skin looked lighter" (Khan, 2019, p. 147). The short, paratactic syntax evokes bureaucratic notation, inspection, correction, compliance. Based on Gardner (2012) and Shaw (2014), whose ethnographies reveal the administrative logic of marriage markets, Khan's use of ledger-like narration alters private grooming into a system of control.

In its most visceral pages, the diary abandons euphemism: "He slapped me so hard I could taste blood… He said I could never push him away" (Khan, 2019, p. 148). Verbs like taste and burn render violence as physical record, countering the maternal euphemisms of "care" and "protection." Later, "[*She*] plunged my left hand into the pot… angry red blisters" (Khan, 2019, p. 164) alters rumour into bodily testimony. Archivally, the diary converts whispered memory into evidence; politically, it rejects honour as a moral category by

preserving harm in its full specificity. As Bano (2012) notes, legal and clerical discourses often sanitize coercion, but Khan's counter-archive resists abstraction through detail.

If the diary offers a historical archive, solidarity offers a living network. Rukhsana's allies, siblings, friends, cousins, form the novel's alternative circuitry of resistance. Aamir's promise, "I will make sure you get to the airport… I'll try to buy you as much time as I can" (Khan, 2019, p. 220), illuminates the logistics of survival: time, distance, concealment. The prose, given in concise, declarative, and logistical rhythm, reflects the mechanical nature of coercive control (passports, cars, clocks) paired with the procedures of escape (cab, timing, cover). These gestures portray solidarity not as something grand or heroic, but as an ongoing process, collective improvisation moulded by moments of risk and mutual exchange.

This conflict between exposure and endurance is underscored by Khan's narrative style. The diary captures ordinary family life and the chaos of escape, where personal moments meet bureaucratic systems. The novel, through these intertwined stories, reveals that agency is sustained through shared memory, solidarity, and movement, even during fragile states.

Khan constructs multiple genres of resistance across these interwoven scenes. The diary becomes an archive; the siblings' cover stories form a script; the friends' apartment acts as a refuge; the letters and digital traces operate as documentary proof. Each resists a corresponding instrument of coercion, ritual is countered with record, document control with timing, gossip with testimony, and expulsion with new forms of belonging. Honour is moved from the metaphysical to the material: from ideology to infrastructure, timelines, keys, safes, SIM cards, flight numbers. Care is redefined from sentiment into survival logistics.

6. Discussion

Through the house rules in the opening chapter, "No parties, no shorts, no boys" (Khan, 2019, p. 8), Khan sets up rules that seem like care but feel like law. The three negatives, written as bullet-point rules, act as a small version of what Goffman (1963) calls face-work: the family's public "reputation" is protected by turning advice into enforceable law. The kitchen in which Rukhsana is told, "you need to learn how to prepare these dishes… when you're married" (Khan, 2019, p. 10), is the first site of governance, domestic guidance recast as compliance, the "ordinary" in Kelly's (1988) continuum, where teaching the body to be obedient becomes the quiet rhythm of violence.

This is followed by an instrumental model of honour. The father's question, "Do you want to see your own parents become the laughingstock of the community?" (Khan, 2019, p. 133), transforms protection into reputational threat. Bourdieu's (2001) symbolic capital, "good name," "respectability", is where obedience is bought; Goffman's grammar of face elucidates the currency-like workings of "what people will say." Zubaida's reproach, "They are too freethinking. And now you are becoming like them" (Khan, 2019, p. 135), reframes friendship as pollution, mirroring Douglas's (1966) purity regimes that scrutinise boundaries by treating difference as danger. With these words, language performs tangible work: speech authorises blows, "My face snapped to the right" (Khan, 2019, p. 130), and permits bureaucratic incapacitation when the mother is "clutching… my passport" and seizing the phone (Khan, 2019, p. 162). Stark (2007) converts affection into coercive control, a structured form of domination that feels like care because its rules are wrapped in love.

The novel prototypes risk indicators undoubtedly by scripting the control mechanics. Document control appears in the passport and phone seizure; mobility engineering in the "visit" to Dhaka coinciding with reputational panic; ritualised "therapy" in the drugged tea and the "get it out of you" exorcism; marriage-market choreography in the serial viewings, the rapidly assembled trousseau, the pressure toward a now-or-never engagement.

Khan's presentation of revenge disguised as cure is the author's most incisive intervention. "I just gave you something to help you stay calm," Zubaida says (Khan, 2019, p. 170); the healer promising to "get it out of you" (p. 172). The insignificant "something" and "it" ratify a grammar of erasure: desire is treated as a removable object. The following rule-list, "No music or movies… she must not laugh too much" (p. 173), illustrates what S. Ahmed (2017) calls affective governance: joy reframed as risk, laughter as relapse. Mojab's (2012) medicalised patriarchy is evident in the scene's sensorium, "incense, chanting, water poured over head and feet" (Khan, 2019, p. 173), where the calm is chemical and the "cure" is discipline. At these points, the novel performs a diagnostic function: it renders visible how therapeutic language, sedation, and ritual form a single apparatus of control.

Honour politics do not remain domestic. Through Sohail, blogger, organiser, friend, Khan maps public risk ecologies. Following ominous encounters, "men staring… in a way that felt malicious" (Khan, 2019, pp. 203–204), Rukhsana learns of the machete attack (p. 234). The narration's restraint, ellipses, sketched aftermath, rejects voyeurism while insisting on consequence. Werbner's (2021) diaspora publics and networked harassment studies (Boyd, 2014; Marwick, 2013; Phillips, 2015) explain how moral panic is outsourced to informal enforcers. The micro-state household is thus mirrored by a militia-like community.

Khan depicts adolescent autonomy as procedural fluency rather than emancipatory idealism. Rukhsana out-reads systems, timing rides, caching documents, learning the choreography of borders and betrothals: "I folded the jeans and hoodie under the silk… the passport would go into the makeup pouch" (Khan, 2019, pp. 225–227).

The novel proposes two interlinked claims. First, honour is instrumental rather than spiritual, a family-run sanctioning system that adapts to jurisdictions, recruiting kin and institutions (weddings, clinics, salons) to convert shame into

punishment (Gill, 2020; Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2014). Second, autonomy is infrastructural, dependent on counter-publics (Aamir, Shaila, Irfan) rather than on heroic resolve. These alliances are precarious, loyalties fracture, phones are seized, yet they enact Merry's (2006, 2009) vernacularisation of rights, where ideas of consent and safety become material acts: rides timed, codes memorised, visas secured, emails saved. Rather than asserting individual defiance, the narrative builds micro-infrastructures, archives, timetables, and alliances, within systems of hostility. This vision is both sober and empowering: it rejects the fantasy of effortless emancipation while insisting that to see the repertoire, hear its alibis, and name its red flags is already a form of freedom.

7. Conclusion

It becomes clear that from moral ideals, Sabina Khan's *The Love & Lies of Rukhsana Ali* turns the language of honour into an apparatus of governance, a retaliatory system converting shame into sanction and redistributing punishment via the domestic, familial, and public realms. Throughout my reading of the novel, honour works as a tool instead of a virtue, authorising surveillance under the guise of love, coercion as care, and retaliation as protection. Rather than isolated episodes of family drama, the slap, the seized passport, the drugged tea, and the orchestrated engagement are found to be interrelated components in a political economy of control. The novel hence stages revenge as governance, a micro-politics of discipline whereby intimacy serves as the mechanism for power.

The novel concurrently asserts the counter-forces rejecting this machinery: the grandmother's diary as women's counter-archive, the brother's logistical aid, the friends' improvised shelters. Although fragile, these small solidarities are transformative, converting recognition into action and testimony into exit strategy. I believe Khan uses them to redefine autonomy as infrastructure, i.e., a network of care, literacy, and preparedness, rather than isolation.

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