

## Revisiting Partition of Punjab: Retrieving Women's Experience through *Khamosh Pani*

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The present article is a step towards retrieving the experiences of women during Punjab's Partition as depicted in the film *Khamosh Pani*, "Silent Waters," (2003) and to provide an alternative to the written Partition history to articulate the woman subaltern's experience of the Partition. Through a thematic and formalistic analysis of the film, this article tries to understand how Partition and the incidents of violence against women, rape, abduction, and killings of women are depicted in the film, and how all these descriptions in the film undermine the official, patriarchal nationalistic, and colonialistic discourses of Partition history.

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The present article contends that *Khamosh Pani*, "Silent Waters," (2003) as a distinct voice from the mainstream Bollywood cinema, sees Partition history in a radically different way than that of the official, colonialist and nationalist historiographies, giving voice to the subalterns of Indian Partition, like minorities, and women. Deploying Rosenstone's (2012) view on the relationship between film and history as a springboard, it considers cinema as a significant medium to engage with Partition history and attempts to foreground how cinematic narratives and practices can be vital resources for rethinking Partition history. The study further taking its impetus from the works of prominent revisionist thinkers of Partition such as Gyanendra Pandey (1992, 2001), Urvashi Butalia (1993, 1998), and Menon and Bhasin (1998), explore how the film *Khamosh Pani* plays a significant role in recovering the woman subaltern's experience during the Partition and the violence and the

trauma they faced by revisiting it from the perspective of the women who have been largely silenced or excluded from the mainstream historical accounts.

*Khamosh Pani* is an endeavour to disrupt the silence about the underbelly of Partition by recovering the excruciating experiences of women. The title of the film '*Khamosh Pani/ Silent Waters*' is a metaphor for the silence surrounding Partition and its female victims. It also connotes the wells in the villages of colonial Punjab that became major sites of forced or voluntary honour killings of female subjects. A discursive silence has always reigned over the subject of Partition while it lingers on in the life of the subcontinent. In this discourse of silence, the most prominent one is the silence around the psycho-sexual violence perpetrated against women. Butalia (1993) recounts how 'A resounding silence surrounds the question of women and Partition' (13) and how 'we hear little about the rape and abduction of women in historical accounts' (1998, 193). The project of nation building in postcolonial India and Pakistan is mirrored in the nationalist historiographies that led to the repression of the dark sides of the Partition since they were seen as blurring the achievements of the freedom movement and colonial liberation. Pandey (2001) points out how Partition violence is presented as 'non-narratable,' or referred to as 'a freak occurrence, like a natural calamity, which requires no historical explanation ("these things happen"); as a characteristic happening in some unassimilated part of the society or the world ("these things happen there")' (46). Partition is seen as a *sudden* rupture in the history of colonial India that came with the wind. However, the Partition of India cannot be seen as an *event* that began and ended in 1947. It continues to shape the extended geopolitical conflicts in many regions of South Asia as well as in the living memory of millions of people<sup>1</sup>. Sarkar also comments on how 'Partition as the underside of independence, remains a festering wound in the collective psyche of South Asia; yet public discourse following a trajectory set by nationalist historiography has celebrated 1947 mainly as the end of alien occupation' (Sarkar 2009, 1). There were few attempts up to the 1970s in the recorded history as well as cinema to deal seriously with the Partition and its aftermath. In the words of Gyanendra Pandey (1992): 'Nationalist historiography, journalism, and filmmaking have tended to generate something like a collective amnesia. Consciously or otherwise, they have represented Partition and all that went with it as an aberration' (32-33).

It is the high politics of the subcontinent that has dominated most of the Partition historiography (Roy 1990). The recorded Partition history has been engaging with the nationalistic exploits of the elite nationalist leaders in the backdrop of the colonial regime: the role of Nehru, Gandhi, and Jinnah and the English in Partition of India.<sup>2</sup> Most accounts deal with the physical act of vivisection and assigning the culpability either to the Indian Nationalist Leaders, Muslim League or the colonial rulers. The nationalist and colonialist historiographies often present conflicting and controversial explanations of the Partition of India.<sup>3</sup> Khan (2007) notes a 'gulf' between the 'later renderings' (204) and the actual experience of Partition.

In mainstream Indian and Pakistani cinema, particularly the years after independence, there was a silence regarding the Partition and its aftermath.<sup>4</sup> Until the 1970s there were mild portrayals of the Partition usually avoiding the bloodshed on screen as we have seen in the films of Ritwik Ghatak, Yash Chopra, Manmohan Desai and M.S Sathyu. After 1984, and 1992 we have films focusing on the need for national unity and integrity. After Kargil war, we have extreme nationalism in *Gadar* (2001), and in the twenty-first century when concerns of gender have taken centre stage we have *Khamosh Pani* (2003) and more recently *Qissa* (2013).

### **Recovering Partition History of Women through Cinema**

Until the 1980s, before the reworking of Partition history by Butalia (1993, 1998), Menon and Bhasin (1998), it has been prominently a male discourse dominated by men; a history of the men, by the men and for the men that has marginalized and/or erased the experiences of women. Women in the subcontinent have been confined to the domestic space and denied the reach to archive. Moreover, the language is essentially man-made and inadequate for articulating concerns of women (Spender 1980), hence the inability of the traditional historical discourse for scripting a female history. Indeed, the oral testimonies of women victims of Partition are seen as an alternative to recover women history of Partition; 'Because women have used speech much more widely than the written word, oral history practitioners have found in interviews and testimonies a rich vein to mine and to surface what, so far, has been hidden from history' (Menon and Bhasin 1988, 9). While the search for an appropriate medium for women history remains debated, the idea that

cinema can be such a medium is contested because the classical Hollywood cinema contains 'patriarchal, phallic and proprietary implications' (Mayne 1990, 97). However, a women's alternative cinema that disowns and sifts all the institutional gender biases of the medium can be used as a political tool (Johnston 1999; Quart 1988) to recover women from the history. Cinematic language deprived of its patriarchal ideological baggage, with the help of innovative strategies can be helpful in giving voice to women. Whereas it would be a far off thing to claim superiority of the film as a medium to articulate the concerns of female victims of Partition over the written history, the present article argues that the films like *Khamosh Pani* can be helpful in what Butalia (1993) calls 'the process of recovering women from history' (13).

While the debate regarding whether 'film can be treated seriously in its own right as a medium for presenting versions of the past' (Miskell 2004, 245) is uncomfortable for many professional historians who consider the written text as the only legitimate and objective medium for historicising 'few academic historians would deny today film's ability to instigate awareness to and enrich the understanding of historical experiences' (Ashkenazi 2014, 289). Nowadays films are 'central to how we think about the past and about history' (Westwell 2007, 587). White (1975) has shown that narrative, artistic, and rhetorical elements are essential to all history writing. History is never an objective retelling of the past events (Jenkins 2003). It is colored with the point of view of the one who writes it, so the truth claims and its pretended objectivity to the past is to be challenged or deconstructed (Munslow 2001). Film as a medium for conveying historical meaning was supported by postmodern historians who believed that 'film is simply another form of historical narrative with its own codes and conventions' (Chapman, Glancy, and Harper 2007, 11). According to Rosenstone (2012), the function of a historian is to study the traces of the past and establish certain facts about the past. But what traces out of a number of traces a historian selects and what he leaves out depends upon his own subjective view (43). A film must not stick to the traces found by the historians but choose its own out of the contemporary reality and must create some of them to suit the requirements 'practices, and traditions of both the visual media and the dramatic form' (43). It is, however, to be noted that films about Partition may not provide 'a detailed factual portrait' of the Partition but 'what they do resurrect are emotional contents' of it, and these films do not create the past that is 'the same as

the past provided by traditional history, but it certainly should be called history— if by that word we mean a serious encounter with the meaning of past events' (Rosenstone 1995, 5). This article neither intends to delve deep into the theoretical debate over the nature and relationship of film and history nor to present a comprehensive analysis of women history through Partition cinema in such a limited space. Partition films featuring the concerns of women can be seen as a welcome corrective to the nationalistic and colonialist biases of history with the help of a study of *Khamosh Pani*.

### ***Khamosh Pani*: Juxtaposing the Present with the Past**

*Khamosh Pani* can be examined in relation to the presentist use of history, a film that helps in the new interpretation of Partition as well as gives a new dimension to the contemporary reality by linking it to the past (Lichtner & Bandyopadhyay 2008, 435). The film juxtaposes the suffering of women in contemporary Pakistan under the totalitarian regimes of military dictators with the misfortunes of women in the post-independence Pakistan and India. It also comments on the domestication of the female subjects in an extremely oppressive social and political system marked by violent past and present. The Partition works as a unifying narrative leitmotif in the film. Set in the village Charkhi of Pakistani Punjab in the late 1970s, *Khamosh Pani* is directed by Sabiha Sumar, a Pakistani-born film director who is known for her documentaries about the rise of extremism in Pakistan and its impact on the condition of women. *Khamosh Pani* is a story of a middle-aged Muslim woman Ayesha (Kirron Kher) and her son Saleem (Amir Malik). The narrative of the film is set in the backdrop of the times of General Zia-ul-Haq's emergency when he dissolved the democratically established government in Pakistan and executed the then Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. On the world stage, the cold war was in its full swing, and the Soviet Union was trying to tighten its stranglehold in Afghanistan.

The film begins with a high angle long panoramic shot of village Charkhi in the Baluchistan province of Pakistan, full of scorching yellow sunlight and a crow cawing and flying over the rooftops. In the background, the voice of *azaan* (a Muslim prayer) can be heard. The shot appears again after few minutes, reinforcing the dryness and remoteness of the landscape. Ayesha and her friend Shabbo (Fariha Zaheen) are

shown barefooted, drying a blood red cloth on the hot roof in the afternoon. The scene suggests the entrapment of women in a stifling environment. When a little girl asks Ayesha, 'Don't you ever go to the well?' Ayesha is immediately disturbed by the thoughts of Partition, and we have the first flashback of the well with the voiceover of Ayesha: 'Summer days in 1947 seemed so much hotter. How we ran. How did we know, it would be forever?' Violence has been an integral part of the lives of millions of women in the subcontinent, either it is the routine violence (Pandey 2006) within the domestic space faced by them in a predominantly patriarchal society or the gender-specific violence during the times of political upheavals in the conflictual space of nations (Purkayastha and Ratcliff 2014, 19). The gender violence in contemporary South Asia and during the Partition share certain attributes; 'It would seem to be quite wrong to regard the rape and abduction of Punjabi women in 1947 as a product merely of the anomie of the times . . . violence against women is embedded in everyday relationships in this society' (Major 1995, 60). Sabiha Sumar, the director of the film comments:

I came across a reference to abducted women on both sides of the border, and also a reference to the Recovery Act . . . Which India and Pakistan signed in 1948. I also thought it was very important that I somehow connect this violence with present day violence so that it's not as if it becomes a historical film that suggests that violence occurred and then it ended, but rather that it is a continuous process. I wanted to show the continuation of the violence against Ayesha. (Sumar 2005)

### **Religious Nationalisms and Sexual Violence during Partition**

Ahmed (2002) calls Partition 'a gory consummation of a long process of mutual demonising and dehumanising by Hindu and Muslim extremists' (9). The rising tide of religious nationalisms in the twentieth century India fueled by colonial masters swept away the harmony of communal relations (Pandey 1990). It was the loss of the pluralistic traditions and rise of communalism during the Partition era that led to sexual brutalities against women, objectifying the body of women as territories of revenge: 'The performance of nationalism –through embodied acts of sexual violence, conversion, martyrdom and state

violence —is enacted upon female bodies that are transformed into political artefact' (Menon 2006, 29). The unique interplay of ideologies of communalism, socio-economic and gender dynamics is accountable for the politics of sexual violence in South Asia. Veer (1994) believes that 'the nineteenth-century nationalism in India has fed upon religious identifications . . . Nation building is directly dependent on religious antagonism' (2). Even in India religious hostility or intolerance is the basis of the so-called nationalism of the right-wing Hindu fundamentalists today (Chhachhi 1991, 144); this kind of everpresent religious bigotry in the name of nation-building is satirised by Sumar in *Khamosh Pani*. In the film we see that Rashid (Sarfraz Ansari) and Mazhar (Adnan Shah) try to engage the village community in promoting the cause of General Zia-ul-Haq: this includes the spread of Islamic religious traditions, using the mosque for political activities, forcibly shutting down the market for *namaz*, raising the wall of a girls' school and confinement of women to the domestic spaces. Ayesha's son Saleem and his friend Zubair accompany Rashid, and Mazhar to Rawalpindi to participate in a rally where Sumar intermingles the images of fast socio-cultural transformations alongside co-existing hetero-geneities.

When Ayesha comes to know about the activities of Saleem she forbids Saleem from joining Rashid and Mazhar; Saleem conveys to her that he has found a noble purpose in the dissemination of Islamic traditions and Ayesha should be proud of him. As Ayesha expresses her apprehension that politicians are using faith for their self-seeking motives, Saleem starts suspecting her loyalty to Islam and chides her saying, 'You don't know anything, and you take the blasphemy you teach as the name of Allah . . . Why should a true Muslim fear Islam?' Ayesha had married one of her abductors and converted into his religion. Over the years Ayesha has adopted Islam with all her heart and soul teaching *Quran* lessons to the village girls. However, she still finds her at crossroads as she is considered an outsider and is asked to provide a confirmation and commitment in the public square stating that she has nothing to do with her former religion, Sikhism. Deserted by Allabi, her lifelong friend Shabbo, who tells her not to attend her daughter's marriage ceremony, and above all her own son in whom she has invested all her hopes, her life, Ayesha sees no light before her but the darkness of silent waters; the bloody waters of the village well, and the fate which she had defied thirty years ago calls on her again. One night Ayesha gets up from her sleep, prays for the last time according to

Islamic rituals, and jumps into the village well. After Ayesha's death, Saleem offers her belongings to the river that included a copy of Sikh religious scripture.

The film presents the view that proliferation of the extremist and religious nationalisms is the cause of the turbulent histories as well as the present-day forms of violence in South Asian societies. This violence saw a consummation in Partition and the ruthless exploitation of thousands of women. Later, when the spectres of Partition visited the subcontinent in the form of 1971 civil war in East Pakistan, around two hundred thousand women faced the trauma of rape (Saikia 2011, 60) as sexual violence was used as a genocidal strategy by the Pakistani army (Sharlach 2000, 89). Again, in the 1980s, there was rampant sexual violence against Hindu women and men to dispel them from Bangladesh.<sup>5</sup> Feminists today should be more and more aware of the growing religious fundamentalism since it 'uses women's bodies as a battlefield in its struggle to appropriate institutional power' (Jayawardena and de-Alwis 1996, ix).

### **Partition's Women: Honour killings and Partition of Punjab**

*Khamosh Pani* helps demystify narratives of Partition that describe it as a small detour on the road to freedom. It questions the communal politics and violence in the South Asia by depicting females as the 'chief sufferers' of Partition of India; "'power rape" —the raping of women in order to demoralise and defeat rival men in a particular society—is particularly common in northern India' (Major 1995, 60). The men of the different communities abducted, murdered, raped and killed the women of the other religious community. In some cases, the police were involved in the abduction and rape of women: 'the police officers who were appointed to protect the women themselves committed the worst crime' (Singh 1998, 14). Gender-based violence such as 'stripping; parading naked; mutilating and disfiguring; tattooing or branding the breasts; knifing open the womb; raping, of course; killing fetuses . . . tells us about women as objects in male constructions of their own honour' (Menon and Bhasin 1998, 43). The attached stigma of abduction and rape led to sacrificial or honour killings. Apart from the violence coming from the outside of their community, women were the victims of the violence from their own communities and families. Many women were killed by the men of their own communities to save their honour: 'for many



women it was not only miscreants, outsiders or marauding mobs they needed to fear—husbands, fathers, brothers, and even sons could turn killers’ (255). Butalia (1998) quotes an example of Mangal Singh from Amritsar who killed seventeen women and children of his own family to avoid their rape or conversion: ‘After leaving home we had to cross the surrounding boundary of water. And we were many family members, several women, and children who would not have been able to cross the water, to survive the flight. So we killed—they became martyrs’ (194). The paradox is horribly simple: women just as secure in the hands of their adversary whose attack to ravage their honour was preferable to the brutal extermination by their own families. A vast number of women were killed or were forced to take their lives at the altar of religion to escape from the cruelties of disgrace. Talib (1950) a Sikh historian comments on the incidence in the village Thoa Khalsa that was attacked in March 1947, ‘After long and heroic resistance, 200 Sikhs were killed. The women were asked to embrace Islam, but 93 of them, old and young, decided to escape dishonour by drowning themselves in a well’ (83). Talib celebrates sacrificial killing of women in the name of saving the honour of the community. Das (1995) argues how during violent times a woman’s body is taken to be a symbol of honour or identity of the whole community:

The woman’s body . . . became a sign through which men communicated with each other. The lives of women were framed by the notion that they were to bear permanent witness to the violence of Partition. Thus, the political programme of creating two nations of India and Pakistan was inscribed upon the bodies of women. (56)

Preckel (2008) believes that ‘Rape and sexual violence are symbols of newly created borders and boundaries on the real landscape. They are signs of forcefully set marks on the body separating “our” from “other”’ (74). Surprisingly enough, all and everything about women in the third world is decided by men. In *Khamosh Pani*, Ayesha/Veero’s father wants her to jump into a well, her brother wants her to return to India, her son wants her to renounce the Sikh religion because he is turning into an Islamic fundamentalist’ (Kher 2003). In the film, a Sikh pilgrim remarks that some of the Sikh women were left in the village during Partition to which another Sikh strongly opposes and proudly affirms: ‘Not a

woman survived. The women went to my uncle, and said, "Shoot us." He kept firing and firing, all 22 women, our honour was saved, we killed them, and the Muslims could not touch them.' This mass killing of women or sacrifices in the name of protecting the honour of the community is shown in the film *Tamas* (1986) when the daughter of Gurbachan Singh leads Sikh women to a well to jump into it. The well is the central motif in the narrative structure of *Khamosh Paani*. Ayesha, formerly a Sikh girl named Veero, now converted to Islam, never dares to go to the village well of Charkhi. The reason behind Ayesha avoiding the well is that she witnessed her two sisters jumping into a well during Partition whereas she herself avoided that sacrifice by running away. In one of the flashbacks in the film, the well is depicted overshadowed by violent dust storms with a voiceover of Ayesha herself:

Two Countries were born, men abducted women, fathers killed their daughters. Everyone said it was to save their honour. Some young girls died, others survived, people moved like the sea, leaving everything behind, broken memories, half-dreamt dreams, places of worship.

The film shows that there were thousands of other Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh women like Veero. Amin (Salman Shahid), the postman, had a daughter named Mina who was left in India when he moved to Pakistan. Among the pilgrims to *Panja Sahib*, there was one named Jaswant (Navtej Johar), Ayesha's Sikh brother. Jaswant discovers that his sister Veero was living as a Muslim woman Ayesha, but she declines to identify him. Saleem also becomes aware of his true identity of 'mixed blood' since he is the son of a Sikh woman and a Muslim man. Saleem denounces Ayesha as an infidel and asks her what he should do now. When Allabi's husband discontinues her from fetching water for Ayesha, she herself goes to the well. In a nightmarish flashback, Ayesha once again reminisces the incidence of sacrificial killings of women during Partition. Ayesha sees that her father was reciting *mool mantra* 'and the women including her mother and sister were jumping into the well. However, Ayesha runs away, her younger brother Jaswant tries to capture her but she runs away. Ayesha's refusal to die sacrificially during Partition marks her agency. When her brother meets her after decades he beseeches her to come home because their father wishes to see her for the last time so that he may die peacefully. Ayesha replies: "Wasn't

killing mother and Jeeto enough? He wanted to kill me for his peace, what will he do if he sees me alive, and a Muslim? How will he go to Sikh heaven?"

It is noteworthy that dealing with the sensitive issue of sexual violence Sumar has taken care to evade melodrama and luridness. The abduction of Ayesha is shown in flashback scenes, but nowhere has it been evident what happens to her; the spectators are left to presume what might have been the fate of Ayesha as she is captured and incarcerated by the men of a different community. The scene is followed by shadow cricket images on television, a sound of commentary, and the ball going from one hand to another. According to Mulvey (1999), filmmakers must 'find cinematic strategies to depict the violence in ways which don't incite the audience members who might be so inclined to identify with the perpetrators' (95). Sumar deliberately avoids depicting rape on the screen by using cinematic montage to construct more tolerable substitute narratives and avoid the usual linkage between rape and stereotypical descriptions of Muslim male as a violent, sexually proactive and destructive to women. Similarly, the scene of sacrificial killings at the village well avoids much detailed description, but it is only through successively broken flashbacks of Ayesha. To convey the trauma and pain of women Sumar has skilfully used soundtrack as a 'non-verbal, aural representational strategy, it demonstrates that Ayesha's trauma may be unspeakable in the present, but it is not entirely unrepresentable. . . is temporarily resolved in the soundtrack' (Sundar 2010, 285). Sumar takes pains to avoid scopophilic perspective of the camera; the woman is the subject not the object of the cinematic narrative.

The flashback technique has been used to represent the painful and upsetting hallucinations or recollections of the village well that trouble Ayesha. Mulvey (1999) holds that alternative cinema's 'formal preoccupations reflect the psychological obsessions of the society which produced it' (71). The repetitive flashbacks of the village well that disturb Ayesha stand for the memories of Partition that haunt the collective memory of the two nations. The intermittent nature of these flashbacks further conveys that the sexual violence is the part of the living reality of the existence of Partition victims like Ayesha, intermixing the temporality and spatiality of Partition with the 1970s' and twenty-first century Pakistan; Partition is thus a continuous and unfinished affair. Flashbacks in the film are 'a cinematic representation

of memory and of history and, ultimately of subjective truth' (Hayward 2000, 133). The film uses the flashbacks to resolve the mystery behind Ayesha's troubled relationship with the present and agonising Partition history. By focusing on the torturous experience of Ayesha, flashbacks force the spectators to question the patriarchal reactionary structures of post-partition societies manifest with zealot nationalisms that have interdicted the healing processes for Ayesha and thousands of other women. Flashback codes in the film are marked by close up shots of Ayesha or voiceover. The voiceover in the film appears in the narrative voice of three women characters; it is in the form of a background voice to Ayesha's visions of the well, and after her death it is the voice of Shabbo as an annotation upon the demise of Veero, and later when the film shifts to the present day Pakistan, it is Zubeida's voice. The use of female voiceover gives a sense of authority to the female characters (Silverman 1998) in the film that appear more or less like the omniscient narrators.

Interestingly, the film was funded by fourteen different agencies mostly the European and American. Although the politics of the reception of Sumar's film can be placed in the broader spectrum of the contemporary politics of the region and the changing perceptions of Muslim masculinities in the shifting cartographies of global relations especially after 9/11, the film is remarkable in itself as an articulation of the victimization of women, especially the marginal women. It is dissimilar to popular Bollywood films that deploy melodrama and emotional re-telling of Partition. The film's handling of the theme of abducted women is much more nuanced and sensitive than that of Deepa Mehta's *Earth* (1998); Mehta's account of Ayah, the chief female sufferer of Partition in the film is voyeuristic followed by a dramatic abduction scene in the end. Unlike *Gadar* (2001) *Khamosh Pani's* treatment of themes, characters, religious or national identities is quite refined. Its portrayal of female characters is much more convincing; they are active agents, not passive female objects. Sakina in *Gadar* is a marionette shifting interchangeably in the hands of her father or Sikh husband. Ayesha is different as we see that she is a self-made woman who makes her livelihood by giving Quran lessons to Muslim girls. Similarly, Zubeida (Shilpa Shukla) is a progressive woman highly aspirational of moving upwards in life, has a love affair, and dreams of a college education. While Ayesha was confined to the four walls of the house, Zubeida's assertion is an attempt at the destabilisation of gender roles.

Rafina in Sumar's *Good Morning Karachi* (2014) represents the next step in Zubeida's struggle against this inheritance of violence. *Khamosh Pani* depicts the misfortunes of a woman at the hands of society and her family, at the hands of an enemy turned family, and a family turned enemy. The incessant violence against women after Partition in the name of religion reveals the precarious nature of women's lives and safety in South Asia on the one hand as well as an agonizing amalgamation of death in life and life in death for females during Partition.

During the Partition, Ayesha chose to dismiss the commandment of her father by refusing to jump into the village well, and later she decides to reject the demands of her son to publicly affirm her belief in Islam by jumping into the same well. She exercises her right to take her own life but not to succumb to the dictates of a fundamentalist patriarchal society. It is an act of subversion on the part of Ayesha and reveals the ability to say no to the prescriptions of the institution of patriarchy. In the similar way, in *Pinjar* (2003) Puro decides to stay with Rashied and that decision is symbolic of the negation of the authority that made it compulsory for the women to follow Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act<sup>7</sup> and return to their relatives.

The film is notable in the discourse of Partition history because it voices the pain and suffering of those abducted women who were left behind in the 'other' country and who willingly or forcibly adopted the religion of their abductors after marrying them. However, these women have to face the questioning attitude or suspicious glances of the community that treats such women as outsiders. This is a new issue raised by the film since most of the earlier Partition research has ignored the issues of women, and even those who engage with the issues of women speak either of the incidents of the victimisation of the abducted women or the double displacement caused by the Abducted Persons Act. But there has not been much written or said about the identity issues of those women and their children who converted into the 'other' community and were still facing the discrimination because they were treated differently from the people who were born into that religion.

### **Conclusion**

While Partition and its legacy continue to haunt Punjab, cinema can be a vital medium to historicize and construct alternative versions to the official, nationalistic and colonialist historiographies of the Partition. On

the whole, *Khamosh Pani* can be seen as the cinematic manifestation of a female historiography of Partition. By foregrounding the experiences of women, particularly the agony, miseries, and trauma of women during Partition, it brings out the fate of marginalized women -- past, present, and future -- in societies dominated by the ideologies of communal intolerance, and patriarchal religious nationalisms. However, it is only through a nuanced use of film semiotics and cinematic apparatus—different types of shots, flashback, voiceover, and sound—that *Khamosh Pani* tries to disturb the still waters of the repressed female history of India's Partition. The film depicts the collective psychosis of communal hatred during the Partition and draws parallels to the India and Pakistan in the 1970s and present. It is worth mentioning here that extremism and parochial nationalist tendencies are on the rise in the entire subcontinent including India where parallel movements of extremist intolerance can be seen. Jameson (1986) believes that 'All third-world texts are necessarily. . . national allegories . . . the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society' (320). *Khamosh Pani* can be treated as an allegory of the violence of Partition faced by numberless faceless women as well as their predicament in contemporary Pakistan and India under the siege of factionist Hindu-Muslim fundamentalisms. This film is a visual reminder of the ongoing dangers of religious nationalisms in South Asia and the precarious nature of a woman's existence whether in the home of her father, husband, or son.

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- <sup>1</sup> See for example (Kaul 2001), and Butalia (2015). Talbot and Singh (2009) note that conflict between India and Pakistan over Kashmir has often been termed as "the unfinished business of Partition."
- <sup>2</sup> For the prominent high politics accounts of Partition of India see Jalal (1985); Wolpert (1984); Philips and Wainwright (1969); Mahajan (2000); Campbell-Johnson (1953).
- <sup>3</sup> The historiography of Partition of India is highly influenced by the nationalistic and imperialist perspectives, for example the Indian national

perspective sees Partition as the result of the sectarian policies of the Muslim League and the policy of divide and rule of the English, for example, see Lal and Johari (1988). Similarly, the official Pakistani perspective blame the congress which represented the interests of Majority and the Hindu practices of discrimination which suppressed and exploited the Muslims in India, for example, see Zafar (1995); West Punjab Government (1948). The British perspective of Partition sees the Partition as an inevitable result of the age old Hindu-Muslim hostility and hail the role of British administrators and soldiers, for example, see Moon, Mansergh, and Lumby (1979); Mansergh et al. (1970).

<sup>4</sup> See for example Sarkar (2009); Sarkar attributes this silence to the newly independent nation states and their hopes of national integration and nation building. There has been little response in the mainstream Hindi cinema to deal seriously with Partition of India as compared to the Jewish holocaust. This silence and lack of memorialisation is considered as one of the major reasons of the inability of the nation states to come to terms with their past as well as the recurrent communal riots and pogroms.

<sup>5</sup> Taslima Nasreen in her novel *Shame* (1994) depicts horrible accounts of sexual violence against Hindu women. Nasreen claimed that many of these depictions were based on actual instances of such violence.

<sup>6</sup> Sacred verse of Sikhs, written by Guru Nanak Dev, contained in their religious scripture the Guru Granth Sahib.

<sup>7</sup> Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Act, 1949 was an agreement between the newly established nation states of India and Pakistan to resettle the abducted women with their own communities. But with the passing of time most of the abducted women had become part of the family of their abductors. In some cases such women were married and had children and did not wish to leave their new families.

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