Discourse on Gender Nature of Violence and Ethno-Religious Identities in the film "Khamosh Pani" in the Wake of Subcontinent Partition-1947

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Abstract: *The article explores the themes of gendered violence and ethno-religious identities in the film "Khamosh Pani" (Silent Waters), a pivotal narrative from 1947 when British India was divided into two independent dominions. It highlights the film's profound impact on individuals and communities, particularly women's traumatic experiences. The article also highlights the historical context of the partition, emphasizing its effects on gender dynamics and ethno-religious identities. The film presents various forms of gendered violence, such as physical abuse, sexual abduction, and psychological trauma, and the motivations behind these acts. It also discusses how the partition of India influenced the construction and reinforcement of ethno-religious identities, leading to increased divisions and conflicts within communities. The article also examines how gender violence became a tool for asserting power within these fragmented societies. The article highlights the agency and resistance of women in "Khamosh Pani" as they navigate and challenge the oppressive environment created by the partition. It calls for further research, awareness, and action to address these issues in contemporary society. The film serves as a catalyst for dialogue and social change, aiming to promote a more inclusive and equitable society.*

Introduction

The partition of subcontinent in August 1947 refers to the division of British India into two independent nations: India and Pakistan. This partition was principally based on religious lines, with India being largely Hindu and Pakistan being created as a Muslim-majority state. The partition displaced an estimated 10 million to 20 million people in its aftermath and was accompanied by widespread violence, forced religious conversions, mass abductions, communal conflicts, heinous sexual and gender-based violence, resulting in one of the largest and most tragic population transfers in history. Unlike the Holocaust, which was state-led, the Partition is more akin to the brutal, ethnic violence that has been observed in genocides like Rwanda – a by-product of decolonization (Diboyan & Goliath, 2023; Shrivastava, 2022).

Instead of using the term "day of liberation," Saadat Hasan Manto chose to refer to the occasion as "the day of the division of India into two countries (Sengupta, 2011)." referring to the unheard levels of violence, bloodshed and their

profound effects. According to Urvashi Butalia, communal riots in present-day India are indicative that the effects of the upheaval of 1947 have not yet subsided (Butalia, 1994). The South Asian holocaust resulted in the deaths of almost two million Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs; forced migration of 12–15 million people; at least 75,000 women were raped (Ahmed, 2002). Sadly, women were not only kidnapped and raped but also forcibly married, converted, and pushed back into their "proper homes" by the state (Butalia, 1994). In certain instances, individuals were reportedly subjected to fatal harm at the hands of their own families. Tragically, some were compelled to take their own lives, ostensibly to preserve notions of 'sanctity' and 'purity'.

Extremely tragic and unfortunate, this violent partition had an impact on society that was profound and far-reaching, markedly in terms of gender dynamics and ethno-religious identities. Gender violence became a prevalent and devastating consequence of the partition. Women, in particular, bore the brunt of this brutal ethnic and sectarian violence, experiencing physical and heinous sexual assault, abduction, and forced religious conversions. The communal tensions and conflicts during the partition fueled a sense of insecurity and vulnerability for women, as they became targets for violence due to their ethno-religious identities (Debnath, 2016).

Furthermore, the partition led to the division and fragmentation of communities and the creation of distinct ethno-religious identities. It resulted in the uprooting of people from their homes and ancestral lands, leading to the loss of social networks, cultural ties, and shared histories. The division along religious beliefs reinforced the sense of identity based on religion, often leading to heightened communal violence, tensions and conflicts (Ahmad, 2021).

The British India partition led to the physical division of territory but also had long-lasting sociocultural effects. It reshaped the socio-political environment of India and Pakistan, influencing policies, governance, and intercommunity relationships. The partition's aftermath was intricately entwined with gender dynamics and ethno-religious identities, adding to the continued difficulties and complexity faced by cultures in the area.

"Khamosh Pani," ' (silent waters, (2003), directed by a well-known Pakistani director Sabiha Sumar, is a critically acclaimed, feature length historical film based on a true story of a Pakistani village that serves as a snapshot of the sufferings of the spatial division of the Indian Subcontinent that provides a powerful exploration of the intricate interplay between gender violence and ethno-religious identities in the wake of the partition following the British 'withdrawal' from the subcontinent of India in 1947. Although "Partition" is an emblem for the widespread religious violence that affected Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, the film focuses exclusively on the traumatic experiences of a Sikh family, all of whose members fled to India except for one woman (Veero subsequently converts to Islam, marries one of the young men, and reemerges as Ayesha) who remained in Pakistan (Jan, Ashraf, & Shah, 2021). Released on 15 August 2003, the film presents a poignant story set in Charkhi, a quaint little village near Rawalpindi, Pakistan, concentrating on the experiences of a widow named Ayesha (Veero). Initially born Sikh, Veero converts to Islam after the atrocities of the partition, and is named as Ayesha. Back in 1947, at the time of Pakistan's independence, Charkhi was home to both Sikhs and Muslims. Charkhi is where Punja Sahib, the second holiest shrine of Sikhism after Golden Temple in Amritsar in India, is also situated.

The film's importance lies in its ability to throw light on the multifaceted repercussions and consequences of the partition, specifically concerning gender dynamics and ethno-religious identities. Through Ayesha's story, the film "Khamosh Pani" unveils and presents the impacts of the partition on individuals as well as communities, specifically examining how gender based violence becomes intertwined and inseparable from the process of social and communal division and fragmentation. Ayesha's journey embodies the struggles and violence's faced by many women during that time. As she confronts with personal loss and societal

upheaval, she becomes an emblem and symbol of resilience, strength and resistance. The film depicts the challenges she faces due to her gender, ethno-religious identity and the violence perpetrated against her. It represents a nuanced portrayal of the ways in which gender violence is used in this patriarchal society as a weapon to assert control, to reinforce divisions, and to enforce patriarchal values and norms within fractured communities. "Khamosh Pani" encourages viewers to address the lingering effects of the partition and to consider more general concerns of violence, identity and power relations by highlighting the intricacies of gender violence and ethno-religious identities. The movie acts as a medium for comprehending how intricately entwined these concepts are and how important they continue to be in influencing post-partition society. "Khamosh Pani" provides a thought-provoking exploration of the overlapping between gender, violence and ethno-religious identities, highlighting the need for spreading awareness through continued dialogue and to bring a social change by addressing the underlying issues it arises. As a piece of cinema, it offers a potent forum for promoting empathy, dispelling stereotypes, and promoting conversations about the complexity of history, identity and the human experience.

Historical Background

The British India partition in the year 1947, ending three hundred years of colonial rule, was the culmination of several socio-political factors that led to the upheavals and violent divisions and the subsequent creation of two independent nations, India and Pakistan. Among them, first and foremost, was the British authority over the Indian subcontinent that had a substantial impact on the dynamics that eventually led to division. The British executed the policies of divide and rule, and manipulated existing religious and cultural differences to maintain their control. They also favored and privileged certain religious groups, leading to the discrimination and polarization of communities religiously. Similarly, the early 20th century witnessed a surge in nationalist movements in the British India, with the Indian National Congress and the Muslim League turning up as prominent

political bodies. While the Indian National Congress demanded for a united and secular India, the Muslim League called for a separate and independent homeland for Muslims, fearing discrimination and marginalization within a Hindu-majority country. Furthermore, Communal tensions between Hindus and Muslims were fueled by socio-religious reform movements, such as the Arya Samaj and the Aligarh Movement. These movements supported preserving and advancing individual religious identities, which exacerbated religious polarisation and increased demand for separate religious spaces. Communities subsequently started to create their own institutions and locations that were solely devoted to their religious practices. The desire to uphold cultural traditions and foster a sense of belonging within their respective communities propelled this trend of building separate religious spaces.

The idea of the Two-Nation Theory was another factor, proposed by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, a leader of the Muslim League, gained traction among Muslim communities. It was argued that Hindus and Muslims were distinct nations with separate political aspirations, necessitating the creation of a separate Muslim-majority state. Further community tensions were made worse by "The Second World War" because the British split Indian troops according to religion, deepening division. During this time, political turmoil and economic hardship widened religious communities' differences even more. In winding up, Lord Mountbatten, the last Viceroy of India, who also became the first Governor-General of Independent India (Kumar, 2019), devised a plan for partition known as the Mountbatten Plan, which proposes the division of British India into two dominions, based on religious lines. The hasty nature of the partition, coupled with communal violence and mass migrations, resulted in widespread bloodshed and displacement. The socio-political factors, communal tensions, and divisive ideologies led to violent divisions during subcontinent partition, shaping India and Pakistan's socio-political landscape and inter-communal relations.

During the partition of Indian in 1947, women

experienced specific challenges and different forms of violence based on their ethno-religious identities. The turmoil and violence that were perpetrated across communal lines during the partition intensified the vulnerability of women, imperiling them to immense traumas. Women from both Hindu and Muslim as well Sikh societies were targets of kidnapping, and forced conversions (Saxena, 2014). This included cases of women being forcibly taken from their homes, and coerced into converting to the religion of the abductor.

Molestation and sexual assault was used as a weapon to demoralize and dominate women during the violent partition. Women from all communities were subjected to rape, humiliation and physical violence. They were also the victims of mass killings and massacres that occurred during that time. including indiscriminate attacks on entire communities, resulting in the loss of countless lives, including women and children (Butalia, 2017; Das & Singh, 1995).

During that time, violence against women was an extensive situation with tragic experiences. They faced the loss of their homes, families, and communities as they were forced to flee from their villages and towns and sought refuge in unfamiliar areas, enduring extreme hardships.

Those who survived the violence often faced societal stigma and marginalization. They carried the burden of trauma and were ostracized by their own communities for bringing shame or dishonor. In addition, the partition stripped women of their agency and autonomy, as their lives were dictated by the chaos surrounding them. They faced limitations in decision-making under patriarchal control and oppression within their communities. These experiences were deeply rooted in their ethno-religious identities. The violence aimed at women was often perpetrated based on their religious background, with perpetrators seeking to assert dominance over women from different communities. These challenges faced by women highlights the urgent need for gender-sensitive perspectives when examining the historical event. Recognizing the specific forms of violence endured by women adds depth to the

understanding of the partition's human impact and underscores the importance of addressing gender-based violence and promoting gender equality in post-partition societies.

Gender based Violence (GBV) and its Manifestations

Gender based Violence is defined as violence (physical, sexual, and/or psychological) against a person on the basis of their gender. The terminology is employed to emphasize the reality that women are disproportionately exposed to various forms of violence, both in private and public domains, due to prevailing structural power imbalances rooted in gender. Women are more vulnerable to violent acts during disputes that are specifically related to their gender. When women are discussed at all, it is often in terms of gendered violence. Though deserve to be discussed as more than victims of gendered violence. In the film "Khamosh Pani," different forms of gender based violence are portrayed, emphasizing the thoughtful impact of such violence on women in the wake of the partition. The film depicts these forms of violence, shedding light on their overwhelming concerns and the enduring trauma experienced by the female characters. Gender-based violence takes physical, sexual, emotional, and psychological forms. Physical abuse is a prominent form of gender violence showed in the film. Women are subjected to physical violence, including beatings, slaps, kicks and other forms of bodily injury. These acts of violence are often inflicted by family members, community members or even strangers, reflecting the pervasive nature of violence against women during this period.

"Khamosh Pani" also addresses the vexing issue of sexual abuse and assault. The film portrays occurrences of rape and attempted sexual violence against women, highlighting the vulnerability and powerlessness experienced by the female characters. The depiction of sexual assault accentuates the dehumanizing nature of violence against women and its long-lasting psychological toll. The film, which bluntly shows the cost of independence that woman, had to pay way back in 1947 and the psychological trauma endured by women, shows how the

constant uncertainty and loss they experience contribute to severe psychological distress. The trauma is further exacerbated by societal stigmatization, isolation and the internalization of shame, leading to a profound impact on their mental well-being. While not directly acts of violence, the forced displacement experienced by women in the film has significant gendered implications. The loss of homes, families and communities disrupts the social fabric and support networks that women rely on. This displacement and separation leave women vulnerable to exploitation and experiences of violence and trauma. By depicting these innumerable forms of gender violence, "Khamosh Pani" aims to raise awareness about the widespread nature of violence against women during the partition and its consequences. The film highlights the physical, sexual and psychological toll on women, emphasizing the urgent need to address these issues and promote gender equality. Through its portrayal of gender violence, the film invites viewers to challenge the patriarchal norms and systems that perpetuate such violence in society.

Ethno-Religious Identities and Division

The identities of people who survived Partition shape the ways in which the stories are remembered by others. The acts of violence depicted in "Khamosh Pani" during the partition can be understood by analyzing the motivations behind them, which are influenced by a combination of factors including ethno-religious identities, societal norms and power dynamics. The partition of the British India was primarily based on religious lines, leading to heightened ethno-religious identities and tensions. The acts of violence portrayed in the film reflect the desire to assert dominance over women from different religious communities. The perpetrators view women from "other" community as objects to be conquered or as symbols of the perceived threat posed by "other" group.

The deeply ingrained patriarchal norms and gender roles within the society contribute to the acts of violence against women and determine the subordinated position of women (Hadi, 2017). Women are seen as vessels of communal honor and their violation is believed to bring shame to the community (Ismail, 2020). The perpetrators, driven by patriarchal beliefs, seek to maintain control over women's bodies and behaviors, using violence as a means to enforce societal norms and reinforce traditional gender roles. Violence is pervasive in many patriarchal societies where women are treated as commodities and ascribed with honour, financial status and property (Bhattacharya, 2020). Power dynamics also play a substantial role in the acts of violence shown in the film. The perpetrators, mostly male members of the community or authoritative individuals, exploit their power to assert control and supremacy over women. The violence acts as a tool to exert power, reinforce hierarchies and maintain the status quo. Moreover, the atmosphere of uncertainty and insecurity during the division added fuels to the acts of violence. Communities perceive threats to their survival, leading to a heightened sense of defensiveness. Women become easy targets as acts of violence against them are understood to weaken the opposing community and consolidate power.

The narrative of the movie is propelled by fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is the only factor to blame for the identity crisis that both Saleem and Ayesha/Veero experienced. Ayesha faces Veero, a man experiencing internal strife, as she becomes entangled in the intricate web of racial and religious affiliations. This internal conflict gives rise to a hybridized identity, characterized by its non-static nature. This amalgamated sense of self emerges as a product of intertwining Pakistani, Indian, Muslim, and Sikh cultural and ideological underpinnings. They were so suppressed by the fundamentalists that Ayesha/Veero eventually commits suicide and Saleem is deemed invisible in his society. Their ultimate action such as suicide and isolation was resulting from the identity crisis they experienced in the wake of fundamentalism which influences Ayesha/Veero's and Saleem's lives drastically (Mohammad Muazzam, Shaukat, Kashif, & Tariq, 2022).

It is essential to note that while ethno-religious identities, societal norms and power dynamics contribute to the motivations behind the acts of

violence, they do not justify the violence inflicted upon women. The film aims to shed light on these underlying motivations, urging viewers to critically examine and challenge the societal structures and belief systems that perpetuate gender violence, particularly in times of social upheaval and communal tensions. The partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947 had a profound impact on the construction and reinforcement of ethno-religious identities, ultimately leading to increased divisions and conflicts. The partition itself was based on the premise of creating separate nations for Hindus and Muslims, resulting in the formation of India and Pakistan. This division along religious lines contributed to a heightened sense of religious identity and an "us versus them" mentality, deepening communal divisions.

The partition marked a significant moment in the construction of ethno-religious identities. The process of dividing the subcontinent along religious lines reinforced the idea that religious identity was a defining characteristic of individuals and communities. People were categorized as Hindu or Muslim, and this categorization became a central aspect of their identity, influencing their interactions and perceptions of others. This intricate web of ethno-religious identities has persisted through generations, shaping social hierarchies and influencing political discourse in South Asia. Despite efforts towards secularism and inclusivity, the partition remains a haunting reminder of how divisions based on religion can have lasting effects on societies. The partition further reinforced existing communal divisions and created new ones. Communities that had coexisted for centuries suddenly found themselves separated along religious lines. The violence, forced migrations and displacement during the partition exacerbated feelings of mistrust, fear and animosity between religious communities. The division along religious lines resulted in the loss of shared histories, cultural ties and intermingling of traditions (Dalrymple, 2015). Communities that had previously shared cultural practices, languages and social norms found themselves divided by political borders. This loss of shared heritage contributed to a

further sense of separation and otherness between different religious communities. The partition also ignited communal tensions and conflicts, as religious identities became politicized. The division of land, resources and power between India and Pakistan, coupled with the perception of religious minorities being marginalized, led to communal violence, riots and massacres. The heightened communal tensions and conflicts persisted long after the partition, shaping the sociopolitical landscape of both nations.

The construction and reinforcement of ethno-religious identities during the partition played a significant role in the increased divisions and conflicts that followed. The legacy of these divisions continues to impact the region today, underscoring the need for ongoing efforts to promote inter-communal harmony, understanding and reconciliation.

Women's Agency and Resistance

Women's agency refers to their capability to describe and act on aims, make decisions that matter to them, and contribute in the economy and public life (Kabeer, 2005). In "Khamosh Pani," the depiction of women who fight gender violence and assert their agency in spite of perplexing circumstances is a major theme that showcases the resilience and strength of these characters. The film's central character, Ayesha, exemplifies a woman who resists gender violence and seeks to assert her agency. As a widow in a conservative society, she faces societal pressures and restrictions. However, Ayesha refuses to conform to traditional norms and challenges the patriarchal structures that seek to control her. She takes courageous steps to protect her daughter and actively seeks knowledge and independence, defying the constraints placed upon her.

Veero, a younger woman in the village, also exemplifies resistance and agency. Despite being subjected to gender violence and oppression, she demonstrates remarkable strength and determination. Veero defies societal expectations and engages in activities traditionally deemed inappropriate for women, such as riding a motorcycle. She represents the

defiance and rebellion against oppressive norms.

Zubeida, Ayesha's daughter, represents the younger generation's determination to break free from oppressive traditions. She questions societal norms and expectations, striving for education and independence. Zubeida's resistance lies in her pursuit of knowledge and her refusal to accept the limitations placed on her by gender and social conventions.

These women navigate a hostile and patriarchal environment, defying the gender violence they encounter. Their resistance is rooted in their determination to forge their own paths, challenge societal norms, and seek autonomy. Their actions inspire viewers to question oppressive structures and champion women's empowerment. Through the portrayal of these resilient female characters, "Khamosh Pani" highlights the agency and strength of women, even in the face of extreme adversity. It emphasizes the importance of challenging gender violence, empowering women, and advocating for gender equality within communities marked by the legacy of the partition and its aftermath.

In the film women employ various strategies and acts of resistance to navigate and challenge the oppressive environment created by the partition. These acts of resistance highlight their resilience and determination to assert their agency despite the challenging circumstances. Seeking knowledge and education was a key approach, which was adopted by the women. Ayesha and Zubeida challenge societal expectations by valuing education and actively pursuing it. Education empowers them with the tools to question oppressive norms, broaden their horizons, and envision a different future beyond the confines of their immediate surroundings.

The women in the film challenge traditional gender roles by engaging in activities typically considered the domain of men. Veero's rebellion against societal expectations is symbolized by her riding a motorcycle, an act that defies gender norms and asserts her independence. These acts of defiance serve as a powerful form of resistance against gender-based oppression. The women form support networks and find strength in solidarity with each other. Ayesha finds solace and support from her fellow widows, who share their experiences and provide emotional support. These networks of women provide a sense of community and empowerment, challenging the isolation imposed by societal norms.

The women actively question and challenge patriarchal authority figures. Ayesha defies her son's attempts to control her, asserting her autonomy and challenging the traditional gender hierarchy within the family. This act of resistance disrupts the power dynamics that perpetuate gender-based oppression.

The women in the film strive for economic independence as a means of challenging the oppressive environment. Ayesha takes on the role of a water vendor, providing for herself and her daughter. By becoming self-sufficient, the women reclaim agency and reduce their dependence on patriarchal structures. Through these strategies and acts of resistance, the women in "Khamosh Pani" navigate and challenge the oppressive environment created by the partition. They actively challenge gender norms, seek education, build support networks, question patriarchal authority and strive for economic independence. These acts of resistance not only empower the individual women but also contribute to the broader transformation of gender dynamics within their communities, paving the way for greater gender equality and agency.

Impact and Legacy

The long-lasting impact of gender violence and ethno-religious identities depicted in "Khamosh Pani" resonates with the realities of contemporary society, highlighting the relevance of these issues in ongoing discussions and efforts towards social change and reconciliation. The film features the enduring consequences of gender violence. The trauma experienced by the female characters in the film echoes the experiences of many women who have survived violence and face its long-term effects, such as psychological distress, social stigma and disrupted relationships. The film reminds us that addressing gender violence

remains a pressing issue in contemporary society, emphasizing the need for comprehensive support services, legal reforms and cultural shifts to eradicate such violence.

The ethno-religious identities portrayed in the film continue to shape contemporary society. The divisions and conflicts that emerged during the partition have left a lasting impact, affecting inter-communal relations, political dynamics, and social cohesion. The film prompts reflection on the consequences of deeply entrenched identity-based divisions, highlighting the importance of promoting tolerance, pluralism and interfaith dialogue to foster mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence.

The film underscores the importance of ongoing efforts to address and reconcile the legacies of violence and division. Recognizing the historical injustices and acknowledging the suffering of affected communities is crucial for healing and reconciliation. Various initiatives, such as truth and reconciliation commissions, memorialization projects, and community dialogues, have been undertaken to foster understanding, promote empathy, and build bridges across divides.

"Khamosh Pani" emphasizes the significance of dialogue and social change in healing the wounds of the past and fostering a more inclusive and equitable society. Honest and open conversations about the atrocities committed during the partition and their impact on individuals and communities are necessary for confronting historical injustices. These dialogues can lead to collective introspection, empathy, and a commitment to address the underlying structures and beliefs that perpetuate violence and division. Furthermore, social change is crucial in transforming gender dynamics and challenging the patriarchal norms that perpetuate violence against women. Efforts to promote gender equality, empower women and eliminate discrimination are essential for creating a society that respects and upholds the rights and dignity of all individuals. Within the poignant narrative of the film "Khamosh Pani," the profound impact of gender violence and ethno-religious identities on contemporary society is vividly illuminated. The movie serves

as a poignant reminder that these issues are not isolated incidents but rather deeply entrenched within the fabric of our collective existence. By portraying the intricate interplay between societal norms, violence, and identity, the film urges viewers to recognize the urgency of addressing these challenges.

"Through its powerful storytelling, 'Khamosh Pani' becomes a catalyst for ongoing efforts to confront the far-reaching consequences of violence and division. It advocates for a collective commitment to social reform, encouraging open discourse, understanding, and empathy as indispensable components of positive change. The film serves as a call to action, emphasizing that atonement and reconciliation are crucial steps towards forging a more inclusive, tolerant, and ultimately, a peaceful future for all.

Conclusion

"Khamosh Pani" signifies and examines the composite bond between gender violence and ethno-religious identities post-subcontinent division, providing crucial conceptions. The partition increased divides and conflicts, which violently split communities along religious lines. The film looks at the impact of 1947 Indian subcontinent division on gender roles, ethno-religious identities. Women experienced gender violence during the partition depending on their ethno-religious identities, including physical torture, sexual abuse and assault, and psychological trauma, reflecting the difficulties and struggles they encountered during a period of societal upheaval. The movie explores the impact of this split on ethnic and religious identities and gender relations. The violence portrayed in the films is driven by ethno-religious identities, societal norms, and power dynamics, with perpetrators exploiting power imbalances to control women from diverse religious communities. The movie shows women standing up to gender abuse and claiming their autonomy in spite of difficult conditions. These women show strength and resilience by engaging in acts of resistance including obtaining education, questioning gender norms, creating support systems, and fighting patriarchal power. In today's culture,

the concerns of gender violence and ethno-religious identities are still pertinent. The movie serves as a reminder of the current problems women confront and the necessity of addressing the violence and division's legacies. This article places a strong emphasis on the necessity of ongoing study, awareness, and action to solve the concerns brought up in the movie. It emphasizes the significance of advancing gender equality, combating patriarchal traditions, encouraging inter-communal communication, and fighting for a more inclusive and equitable society. By discussing the concerns raised in "Khamosh Pani," society may endeavor to build a future that supports the rights and dignity of every person, irrespective of gender or ethno-religious affiliations.

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