



10-1-2018

Gender, Religion and Partition: The Shifting Sītā in Chandra Prakash Dwivedi's Pinjar

Shamika Shabnam
McMaster University, shabnams@mcmaster.ca

Recommended Citation

Shabnam, Shamika (2018) "Gender, Religion and Partition: The Shifting Sītā in Chandra Prakash Dwivedi's Pinjar," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 22 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol22/iss2/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UNO. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Religion & Film by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@UNO. For more information, please contact unodigitalcommons@unomaha.edu.

Gender, Religion and Partition: The Shifting Sītā in Chandra Prakash Dwivedi's *Pinjar*

Abstract

My paper aims to negotiate the political illustration of the pure Hindu woman as propagated during the India-Pakistan Partition of 1947. The split of British India was followed by communal violence and the mass abduction of women from both sides of the Indo-Pakistan border. Amid the wave of sectarian belligerence, the abducted Hindu woman was popularly classified as Sita from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, who was held captive by the diabolical enemy or 'Muslim Ravana.' I examine how religious narratives during the Partition era endorsed a reductionist dichotomy of India-Pakistan, Hindu-Muslim, and the juxtaposed iconographies of the Hindu Sita and the Muslim Ravana. In tracing the dialogue on Hinduism, gender, and the nation in the 2003 Period Drama film *Pinjar*, I offer insights into ways in which the film contests religious/religio-national gendered subjects by portraying hybrid spaces, liminal identities, and psychically fluid boundaries.

Keywords

Partition, Hindu Woman, Fluidity, Rewriting Identity

Author Notes

I am a PhD candidate in English & Cultural Studies at McMaster University. My research interests include, Postcolonial, Partition and Memory Studies with a focus on South Asia. My thesis will be exploring the 1971 Partition of Pakistan, with Bangladesh emerging as an independent nation on 16 December 1971. My project aims to examine cultural memory (as opposed to Bengali nationalist memory) that succeed in creating historic spaces for minority and gendered groups that have been forgotten in the process of nation-making.

Introduction

*Will rain fall,
will the earth still bear its burden
without splitting into two ...*

—*Many Rāmāyaṇas*

The medieval poet Kampan¹ composed these lines in the verses of *Irāmāvatāram*, the Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* (the theological narration of Hinduism) produced during the twelfth century AD.² The epigraph here evokes the fire god Agni’s vehement response to Rama’s significant error of questioning Sita’s purity (*pavitratā*), which results in her undertaking of the fire ordeal (*agniparikshā*) as a testament to her unwavering chastity.³ Rama holds Sita culpable for her abduction by the demon Ravana who imprisons her in Lanka. Kampan elucidates the ramifications of Rama’s desertion of *dharma* (religio-ethical traditions) through Agni’s ardent evocation of the “splitting” earth.⁴ The image of the earth in Kampan’s verse is interlinked to the rightful anger of Sita, whose enagement would trigger the annihilation of the “universe.”⁵ As Shulman portrays, the militant earth-to-goddess connection in Kampan’s text is not explicated in Valmiki’s⁶ classical version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* where Sita’s rhetorical response to Rama’s wrongful accusation is devoid of Agni’s zealous personified intervention.⁷ As Thapar⁸ contends, the *Rāmāyaṇa* does not consist of a homogeneous narrative wherein it belongs to a static “moment in history;” rather, it contains “its own history” that is rooted in the multiple renditions created in fluid time and space.⁹ With manifold paradigms,

omissions, and interpretations, the *Rāmāyaṇa* is in a continuum flux of re-mythologization that articulates the alternate conceptualizations of the characters within the epic.

In keeping with the notion of mythological fluidity, my paper examines how Chandra Prakash Dwivedi's 2003, (pre) Partition-based film *Pinjar* ("Skeleton" or "Cage"),¹⁰ reworks the historical memory of the 1947 India-Pakistan Partition and the *Rāmāyaṇa* mythology. Through such reworking *Pinjar* depicts the complex, hybridized identity politics that India was less willing to recognize during the early 1940s. The division of the subcontinent produced what Meghna Guhathakurta¹¹ accurately deems "a politics with religious difference as one of its key praxes" where Hindustan was considered "the homeland for Hindus" while Pakistan became "the homeland for Muslims."¹² The Partition was followed by communal violence and the mass abduction of women from both sides of the split border. Amid the wave of sectarian belligerence, the abducted Hindu woman was popularly classified as Sita from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, who was held captive by the diabolical enemy or the Pakistani 'Muslim Ravana.' Political debates and religious narratives during the Partition era propagated a reductionist dichotomy of India-Pakistan, Hindu-Muslim, and the juxtaposed iconographies of the innocent Hindu Sita and the demonic Muslim Ravana. However, the 1947 split planted arbitrary lines that cultivated fluid, fragmented, and re-mythologized identities across Indo-Pakistani borders. In tracing the Partition rhetoric of the Sita narrative, I argue that *Pinjar*

contests the construction of religious/religio-national gendered subjects by portraying liminal identities, porous spaces, and psychically fluid boundaries.

I offer insights into the metamorphosis of the film's protagonist Puro, whose uniform characterization as a Sita-like Hindu woman is distorted through the doubly-bound, Hindu-Muslim identity of Puro-Hamida. This form of religio-spatial dislocation emerges after her abduction, which determines the shifting trajectory of her personhood. The re-telling of the *Rāmāyaṇa* during 1947 includes the Muslim male in a Hindu mythology only to highlight his demonization. *Pinjar* reinterprets the Partition era's use of the *Rāmāyaṇa* through an intricate portrayal of the Muslim man who undergoes a process of gradual un-demonization that makes way for his engagement in an inter-religious relationship with a Hindu woman. I analyze how the film's mythological reworking differs from the various versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*, be it Valmiki's classical interpretation, Kampan's Tamil composition, or the poet Tulsidas' (Tulsi's) medieval rendition called the *Rāmacaritamānasa*. *Pinjar's* re-mythologization showcases human bonds and affective relations that add complex dimensions to characters who embody Sita and Ravana. Through the portrayal of a new syncretic relation between a Hindu-Muslim woman and a Muslim man, the film invites us to rethink the *Rāmāyaṇa's* espousal of a virtuous yet flawed Sita who is recreated in the mythological rhetoric of 1947.

My methodology includes the discourse analysis of theoretical texts that draw on the reconstruction of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the politicization of the Hindu

religion. My paper develops a sustained conversation about the politico-masculine regulation of Hinduism, as discussed by Diana Dimitrova,¹³ Madhu Kishwar,¹⁴ and Jyoti Mhapasekhara,¹⁵ which nurtures an idealistic and seemingly justified representation of the Sita-like Hindu woman. While Kishwar and Mhapasekhara both examine the politicization of religion from an angle of patriarchy, Dimitrova offers a theological interpretation of the figure of the Hindu goddess by delving into the different interpretations of goddess-like images within plays, poetry, culture, and much more. My intervention draws on the dichotomization between Hindu Sitas and Muslim Ravana of the Partition period. The theorization of Sita's characteristic ambiguity, as posited by Heidi Pauwels through an analysis of the different *Rāmāyaṇ-ic* renditions,¹⁶ formulates my argument regarding the near faultless depiction of the Hindu woman during Partition.

Pinjar has been an important influence for theoretical conversations around Partition, cinema, and gender issues in India. Theorists like Patrick Hogan approach the film from a religion-based angle by offering multiple reinterpretations of Hindu classical epics such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Mahābhārata*,¹⁷ and by concentrating on how religious intervention dictates and modifies the lives of the film's characters. Elaborating upon religion, nation, and cinema, Kavita Daiya bases her argument on ethnic violence and inter-ethnic relationships in *Pinjar*.¹⁸ I draw on the works of Hogan and Daiya, and concentrate on Partition Scholars such as Urvashi Butalia¹⁹ and Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin²⁰ to expand on the socio-

religious conceptualization of the abducted Hindu woman.²¹ I provide a renewed analysis of the film's merging of female identity across religion and nation, which destabilizes the homogeneous embodiment of the Hindu Sita as a political trope for a pure, Hinduized India.

The Sitas of the Partition

Kishwar argues that the politicization and ““appropriation”” of religion propagates the social legitimation of ideologies that function under nationalist agendas.²² The focus of this contention is on the Hindu religion which, as Kishwar states, requires extrication “from [...] politicians who are interested more in nationalism than Hinduism.”²³ One of the significant perils of religio-political doctrines is, what Lele calls, the justification²⁴ of an ideology that is interwoven in a narrative of masculinist oppression. Mhapasekhara's quote, “all religions are dominated by men and the elite class,”²⁵ points to a masculine authority expressed through the religio-political (public) regulation of “*maryādā*,”²⁶ which is best translated as the ethical propriety of conduct that works to shape the ideal national subject. The gendering basis of propriety policing was imperative to a *Brāhmin*²⁷ (priestly-caste) politicization of the woman as an allegory for Hindu nationalism.²⁸ Dimitrova attests that the restriction and regulation of the Hindu female was a production of “male fantasy.”²⁹ This form of phallogentric imaginary espoused a mythical representation of the pure Hindu woman modelled after the virtue of Sita from the

Rāmāyaṇa. The dominant conception of the Sita-like woman was articulated during the India-Pakistan Partition of 1947 when the largescale abduction of women from both sides of the national borders, was transmuted as an offshoot narrative of multiple Hindu Sitas (from India) being abducted by Muslim Ravanaas (from Pakistan).

Exacerbated by inscribed lines and mapped borders, the sectarian violence of 1947 resulted in a cataclysmic upheaval through the coercive dislocation of stateless refugees, as Hindus and Sikhs migrated to India, and Muslims to the newly-created Pakistan.³⁰ Geographical and religio-national borders may be arbitrarily drawn, but these boundaries remain unclear to those who have been displaced, those who straddle between borderlands, and those who never moved from their homes during partition. Along with the extensive exodus of refugees, the zenith of partition violence instigated the mass abduction and rape of women. This form of gendered atrocity marked the abducted woman as a “violent shuttling”³¹ symbol between enraged male perpetrators from India and Pakistan. Against the backdrop of deep-seated religious disparity amid geographical bifurcation, the *Rāmāyaṇa* operated as a political trope to (incorrectly) underscore the Muslim desecration of the Hindu home as the classical site of a Hindu India.

Hindu Sita, Muslim Ravana

The ideal Hindu nation was doubly mapped onto the home as well as the domestic female as conveyor of a nationalist vision that was embodied through her purity. The appellation of “*grihalakshmi*” (housewife as a propitious symbol of the wealth goddess Lakshmi)³² further evoked the domestic Hindu woman’s emulation of Sita who herself is an incarnation of Lakshmi, as illustrated through Valmiki and Kampan’s versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*.³³ The Lakshmi-like ‘pure’ woman occupied a fluid, liminal space as she straddled between the mythical and the corporeal through her emulation of Sita to become a near “Spouse Goddess.”³⁴ The religio-metaphorical (masculinized) border of the Hindu home was commensurate with the *Rāmāyaṇa*’s “*Lakshmana Rekhā*” (“The Line of Lakshmana”) projected as the boundary of religio-ethical propriety. Agrawal and Brown provide a synopsis of the *Lakshmana Rekhā*: when Rama, Lakshmana (Rama’s brother), and Sita were in the forest, Ravana’s henchman lured the brothers away from their abode. Prior to leaving, Lakshmana drew a line around Sita that would protect her “as long as she did not cross it.” Tricked into crossing the line, Sita was abducted by Ravana.³⁵ The patriarchal regulation of female morality could be traced to the mythical representation of Lakshmana as the substitute male protector of Sita in Rama’s absence. The articulation of Sita’s purity, which was exemplified in concomitance with her religio-ethical duties, was rhetorically implemented as a narrative to exculpate³⁶ the socio-religious sacrilege of the abducted woman during the Partition

era. The idea was that if the profoundly chaste goddess Sita came under Ravana's captivity, then the Sita-like Hindu woman is no exception. This inevitably elicited the militant Hindu construction of the perilous Muslim male that functioned under the popular rhetoric of the 'Muslim Ravana' who captured Hindu women who were emulators of Sita.

Unwriting Lines

In focusing on the Partition period, Menon and Bhasin aptly assert that "the women of both religious communities [Hindu and Muslim] [...] became the respective countries."³⁷ This argument conveys the notion of the female body as an "inscriptive surface"³⁸ prone to the perpetual mapping, reading, and writing of nationalist ideologies. A dichotomous interpretation could be posited in relation to the iconography of the woman and the nation. The (familiar/homely) female as bearer of a 'pure' nationalist vision contrasted with the (unfamiliar/other) abducted woman as a geographical and sexual (geo-sexual) body-cum-territory to be conquered and indelibly defiled by the avenging enemy. The abductor's sexual possession of the female body was translated to the mutilation of the respective rival nations and its religions. The *Rāmāyaṇ-ic* re-inscription of Partition horrors created a liminal anachronistic space that transpired and surpassed the crevices of the bordered nations. The rhetorical formation of such an anachronistic space rendered (a Hindu) India as an untainted site of mythological sanctification while

reifying (a Muslim) Pakistan as a cartographically misplaced realm of the *Rāmāyaṇa*'s desecrated, “forbidden”³⁹ Lanka (present-day Sri Lanka). According to Kabir, historical origins “are read back into events in the pre-colonial past to facilitate what Simon Gikandi calls a ‘mythopoesis of history’ that justifies contemporary aggression against reified ‘others.’”⁴⁰ In relation to Kabir’s observation, the religio-historical space in the *Rāmāyaṇ-ic* retelling during Partition incorporated the Muslim ‘other’ into the narrative fold of the classic epic, only to foreground his diabolical association with Ravana. This further exonerated the metonymic representation of the abducted Hindu woman as an objectified site of geo-sexual enemy oppression.

Apart from re-narrating the threat of the other man, the spatio-temporal reinterpretation of the *Rāmāyaṇa* further accentuated the Hindu woman’s impeccable fulfilment of religio-ethical obligations that surpassed certain mistakes committed by the mythical Sita. The different re-workings of the *Rāmāyaṇa* offer various reasons that result in Sita’s abduction by Ravana. Both Valmiki’s *Rāmāyaṇa* and Tulsidas’ *Rāmacaritamānasa* signify Sita’s “desire for [a disguised] golden deer” as the cause of her abduction.⁴¹ As Pauwels argues, Sita’s predilection for aesthetically alluring and shape-shifting creatures is depicted as a “fatal mistake,” which signals victim-blaming due to unwarranted “desire” showcased by the abductee.⁴² Though Valmiki and Tulsidas’ texts do not contain the engraving of the *Lakshmana Rekhā*, the “*Rāmāyaṇa* tradition” adapts this popular

metanarrative.⁴³ As the story unfolds, Sita's transgression of the line of *Lakshmana* resulted in her abduction by Ravana who lured her into stepping out of the inscribed boundary. Alternate interpretations hold Sita culpable for breaching the "magic" line as the boundary of religio-ethical propriety, which is classified as Sita's mistake that ultimately engenders her captivity.⁴⁴ The mythic construction of Lakshmana's line is applied to the construct of the Hindu home that surrounds the Sita-like woman of the Partition era, and illustrates the dangers of home-crossing/border-breaching through abduction. However, unlike Sita's purported errors, abducted Hindu women were not portrayed as transgressing their homes out of extraneous desire, but were rather represented as coercively displaced by the Muslim Ravana. This offshoot of socio-mythical rendition not only exonerates the taint of the abducted Hindu woman, but represents her as a selective emulator who, while attesting to Sita's unswerving purity, does not adhere to the goddess' flaws that speak to her ambiguity (as inscribed under misogyny).

Pinjar

The iconography of the Hindu Sita and the Muslim Ravana transpires under a complex intermingling of deep-rooted communal belligerence in *Pinjar*. The film is set in the milieu of religious violence in Punjab during 1946, which marks a sectarian holocaust that ignites during the 1947 India-Pakistan Partition. *Pinjar* occupies a liminal time-space as it straddles between the pre- and post-Partition

events that mark a shift from colonial sovereignty to the debacle of a divide-and-rule “policy of the British.”⁴⁵ Amid the apex of pre-Partition violence between Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, the film depicts the transition in the inter-religious relationship between Puro and her abductor Rashid. The narrative unfolds with an exuberant Puro who readily agrees to “cross a river of fire”⁴⁶ as Ramchand’s Sita (Ramchand is her fiancée). The *Rāmāyaṇa* works as a trope in the film where Puro prefigures her devotion to Ram/a (Ramchand) through her allusion to Sita’s fire ordeal. The illustration of the devoted wife/woman characterizes Puro as the unerring emulator of Sita who exemplifies unswerving loyalty to Rama. While Valmiki does not speak of any premarital encounter between Rama and Sita, Tulsidas has the two characters meet before marriage. However, Tulsi deliberately keeps their meeting within the “bounds of propriety” where no traces of voyeuristic affection is evident from either Rama or Sita.⁴⁷ Puro and Ramchand’s first meeting takes place within the remits of propriety similar to that of Sita and Rama’s encounter in Tulsidas’ rendition. Like Sita’s devotion towards Ram, Puro illustrates pure love for Ramchand, which is interwoven with religio-mythical strands (i.e. Sita’s fire ordeal) to underscore the ethical duties of a Hindu woman. The retelling of the *Rāmāyaṇa* in the film portrays a Hindu Sita (Puro) being abducted by a Muslim Ravana (Rashid) into the uncanny geo-space yet to be identified as Pakistan. *Pinjar* explores the innate ‘otherness’ intertwined in

religious identities, and how the outcomes of communal violence are meted out to the woman.

Sita's Mistake?

The upheaval of Puro's life is caused through her abduction by Rashid Sheikh after she transgresses her home to collect vegetables. The crossing of the home projects an ominous breaching of the *Lakshmana Rekha*, which works against the codification of the Hindu woman during Partition. However, *Pinjar* presents a complex layering in the plot, where Puro's act of stepping beyond her home is carried out under parental insistence. One witnesses Puro's momentary hesitation as Tara, her mother, asks her to pluck a few okras from the nearby fields without envisioning any lurking danger. The interlinked evocations of Puro's fear and hesitation, accompanied by an ominous background music, foreshadows her harrowing abduction. The build-up of her captivity is depicted through sinister, pre-abduction encounters between Puro and Rashid, as the former becomes the interface of religio-gendered desirability. Arguably, Puro's abduction is expedited through a seemingly innocuous parental sanction, as a familiar field transforms into a perilous site that enables the execution of gendered violence. This form of parental intervention acts as a means to assuage Puro's mistake of inauspicious boundary transgression by signifying her obedience towards her mother and elders.

Puro's captivity is plotted by Rashid's kinsmen as a means to avenge the oppression that previous generations of the Sheikh clan had endured under her paternal ancestors who are known as the Shahs. What started off as an economic dispute between the two families in the past led to the abduction and violation of the Sheikh women by men from the Shah household. By carving a pre-Partition narrative of Hindu men as abductors of Muslim women, *Pinjar* complicates the notorious equation of the Muslim with Ravana and/or the nineteenth-century depiction of the Muslim man as the precarious eradicator of Hindu land and leadership.⁴⁸ While ritually touching the *Koran*, the Sheikh men pledge to settle scores by abducting a woman from the Shah family. The touching of the *Koran* evokes a religious connection to the enmity against the Hindu 'other' who is responsible for the lingering dilapidation of the Sheikhs across generations. Among the domain of familial male avengement, Puro becomes a shuttling commodity of coercive exchange, whose abduction marks the fulfillment of settling inter-generational scores reinforced through religious differences.

The cinematic trajectory represents Puro as the Sita-like Hindu woman who goes beyond the frontiers of ethical propriety due to parental 'error' rather than self-created desire-cum-mistake. Tara's sanction provides a modification of the *Rāmāyana* that connotes Sita's shortcoming as the cause of her captivity. In relation to the Sita myth, Pauwels notes the inevitability of female castigation in spite of her unwavering wifely devotion and purity,⁴⁹ both of which are features of religio-

ethical duties. The mythical ideology of gendered castigation lingers into *Pinjar*, where Puro's family affirms her as one who has sinned against Hindu principles by destabilizing the allegorical relation between the home and the woman. After days of solitary confinement as an abductee, Puro eventually escapes to her parent's house. Distraught with what she has endured, Puro pounds her fists on the iron threshold of her parental abode, and as her father unlatches the door, she tumbles on the floor of the courtyard entrance where Tara embraces her. This scene is redolent of a double recovery whereby the abducted woman not only returns to her home, but metaphorically reverts back to her mother's womb. This echoes the mythical Sita's return to (the womb of) Mother Earth who, as Bhattacharji describes, shelters the goddess from the external world.⁵⁰ Kishwar observes the dominant construction of Sita, whereby the ideal of "Sita Mata (*jagajananī*, mother of the world)" not only portrays her as "the daughter of Earth but Mother Earth herself."⁵¹ In *Pinjar*, the embodiment of Sita as one who straddles between daughterhood and motherhood is partially reinterpreted as the film depicts a child-like Sita (Puro) who overlaps the internal-external⁵² Hindu-Muslim borderlines. Like a beleaguered infant deprived of maternal affection, a perturbed Puro collapses on Tara's lap and reiterates the term "*ma*" as she clenches her mother's shawl amid ample tears. Against the backdrop of a perilous night in *Pinjar*, the camera portrays the close-up of a weeping Tara who cradles her daughter's head in her arms with agonizing whispers of "Puro, my child, Puro." However, Tara's momentary

affection is disrupted as Puro ceases to be an innocuous infant, and is instead admonished for her desecrated religious morality due to her status as the abducted female.

Unwriting the Hindu Woman

In spite of the trauma of a coercive displacement, the abducted woman of the Partition period was subjected to the effacement of socio-religious purity and the re-inscription of perpetual defilement (this re-echoes the alleged desecration in the Sita narrative). Through her social death, the abducted woman was marked as a ghostly pariah excluded from the religious community, family, and home. The woman of the Partition era inevitably endured what Urvashi Butalia calls a “patriarchal, male-centered and oppressive” victimization, either at the hands of her abductor or those of the men from her family.⁵³ Butalia’s notion is prefigured in *Pinjar*, as Puro is blatantly disavowed by her father who points to the desecration of her religious morality (“*Terā dharm gayā*”-“your morals have been destroyed”). If the pure Hindu woman in *Pinjar* is a metonymy for Hindu *dharma* (religious/ethical traditions), then the social eradication of such *dharma* translates to Puro’s supposed impurity. Such socio-political constrictions prevent Puro’s parents from accepting her back, unlike the mythological Rama who holds up the possibility of Sita’s return through her proof of innocence. Puro’s impurity here is seemingly produced by her (reluctant) transgression of the home and the

metaphorical line of propriety. Her familial and socio-religious mutilation marks her as a depersonalized remnant of the Sheikh realm that is deemed a bitter manifestation of Ravana's diabolical domain. Unlike *Irāmāvatāram*, *Pinjar* does not showcase the divine intervention of a deity who zealously defies Sita's condemnation. A despondent Puro realizes that nobody would believe the truth of her purity due to longstanding religious, moral and gendered conventions deployed around the Hindu female.

Moreover, Puro's lingering absence has shifted her family's circumstances, whereby her younger sister Rajjo is due to wed Ramchand's cousin. Marrying off the 'inviolable' daughter of the Shah household becomes the only recourse to salvage a near disintegrating family honour. Such mandatory female intervention reiterates the patriarchal rhetoric of the woman as bearer of religio-ethical and social sanctity. Puro's return would result in the annihilation of her family by the Sheikhs, and the potential breakage of Rajjo's marriage. As Lalita Pandit indicates, Puro's family's "conditions of life [...] are larger than this one girl."⁵⁴ This form of complex injustice renders no space for Puro to reclaim her purity within the private domain of what was once her home. Her inability of recuperating her purity evokes the Sita narrative of transgressing boundaries, whereby "there is no returning" once the line of Lakshmana has been crossed.⁵⁵ The brief mingling of Puro's cradled child-body with her "desecrated" female body is abruptly severed, as Tara laments her daughter's fate stating that "*beti* [child], if only you had died at birth." The quote

almost serves as an ironic contradiction to Tara's albeit unintentional sanction that inevitably led to Puro's abduction.

Tara preordains the new-born female child's death as a means to un-write a future suffused with stigma for the familial and religious community. Her comment also foreshadows abducted and violated women of the Partition which, as Menon and Bhasin argue, created conditions wherein dilapidated mothers bemoaned their daughters' birth.⁵⁶ Bound by the constraints of ethical morality, the patriarchal status-quo, and the fear of annihilation by the Sheikhs, Tara is rendered powerless in terms of safeguarding her daughter, and is instead obliged to repudiate Puro. Through the alleged violation, along with the expulsion from her home and community, Puro becomes the victim of a double abjection. The sealed iron-gate of her house is tantamount to a colossal, socio-religious boundary with the slight figures of mother and daughter on either side. Within her abode, Tara sheds excessive tears as she lingers near the gate while a despaired Puro kneels on the ground, extends her arms, and cries for her mother. The deposit of effaceable mud on Puro's forehead functions as a grotesque reminder of her status as the soiled pariah who belongs to the external side of the gated boundary.

Rewritten Sita

Though excluded from the familial domain, Puro succumbs to her commodified status and acquiesces to marry Rashid in exchange for the protection of her family.

Pinjar offers a gender perspective where Puro's initial resistance seems to be more as a woman who is forced to marry her abductor, than of a Hindu woman coerced to marry a Muslim man. However, religion cannot be disentangled from the violence that Puro endures after a tattoo of an identifiably Muslim name, "Hamida" is engraved on her forearm to prevent investigation and inquiry in the Muslim-dominated village of Sakkardali, which is home to Rashid's ancestors. For Puro, the carving of a tattoo is an ordeal that she endures with clenched lips and a quivering expression. With an extended forearm as a surface of inscription, Puro looks away in abhorrence as "Hamida" gets inscribed in her skin, which is portrayed through an elongated shot of her arm adorned with bangles, yet scarred with a new name written in Perso-Arabic/Urdu with no traces of the Sanskrit Sita. This prefigures the branding of the skin during the Partition era, as a way of sexually commodifying the abductee. The tattoo of Hamida integrates in Puro's flesh and binds her to Rashid as the diabolical Ravana, and reflects her physical confinement as an imprisoned Sita in a pre-partition Muslim household or *pinjar* ("cage"). Puro vigorously rubs her forearm to efface the name, but her perpetually re-written skin creates no scope for erasure. This form of violation through the imprint of a new moniker as a safeguarding symbol induces the sexual appropriation of Puro, whose identity is fragmented through the coercive mingling of one body with the doubly-bound, Hindu-Muslim identities of Puro-Hamida.

The social stigma associated with the interreligious overlapping of Puro-Hamida is destabilized as time lingers into 1947. The upsurge of sectarian violence, exacerbated by inscribed lines and mapped borders, leads to a genocidal uprooting, which, in turn, causes Ramchand and his family to flee from Ratthoval (Pakistan) to Hindustan. During their exodus Hindu refugees are attacked by Muslim rioters, when Ramchand's sister Lajo gets abducted. This vehement scene concludes with the petrified shrills of "*ma...ma* save me" as a screeching Lajo is separated from her family and taken to Ratthoval by her abductor Allahdita. The surviving refugees of the riot attacks are escorted to a Hindu campsite in Sakkardali by the Punjab Boundary Force (PBF). The Indo-Pakistan campsite juxtaposes the nationally monitored migration (via the PBF) with the personal loss and grief of the refugees. The campground is a morbid repository for surviving refugees as well as a bartering location for nearby villagers who aspire to make profits by providing edibles to the migrants, preferably in exchange for gold ornaments. Puro comes to know of the Ratthoval refugee camp and visits the site in the guise of a provision-seller as a pretext for meeting Ramchand.

Upon conversing with him for the first time, she learns of Lajo's abduction and takes on the onus of recuperating her. One witnesses Puro-Sita-(Hamida) as a rescuer in lieu of a more passive Ram-(chand) who contrasts with the mythical Rama's pledge to rescue Sita.⁵⁷ Ramchand also mentions Lajo's tattoo that is engraved on the latter's forearm, in case this mitigates the private search and

recovery mission for Puro. Within the doubly-bound identities of Puro-Hamida, one hitherto witnesses a desolate Puro with fragments of her past life slipping into her sporadic daydreams. This differs from the incessant dormancy of Hamida as a person, reduced to a word that remains but a skin-deep inscription with its use in the form of a quotidian Muslim expression, Hamida *begum* (respectable woman). The imprinted moniker gradually comes to signify Puro under the guise of a bedsheet seller called “Hamida” who navigates through the social spaces of Ratthoval as part of her plan to locate and rescue Lajo.

Skins, Identities, Markings

With a Hindu past at the zenith of communal violence, Puro is vulnerable to acute scrutiny in the Pakistani, Muslim-dominated territory of Ratthoval. To prevent such inspection she gets into the skin of Hamida *begum* as a method of amalgamating with the backdrop. With a boisterous temperament, fluid mobility, astute bargaining abilities, and a predilection for chewing betel leaves, Hamida self-marks her body as a working-class female who traverses through the tortuous spaces of Ratthoval without trepidation. Her marked body as a second skin is symbolically shed once she enters the private domains of her household wherein Puro-Hamida and Rashid curtly discuss alternate strategies that Hamida, as a performer, should contrive in an effort to rescue Lajo. The Ravan-ic element

connected to Rashid alleviates as he engages in helping Puro with her rehabilitation plan.

Hamida implements shrewd anecdotal skills to extract information about Ramchand's mansion, which is now owned by Lajo's abductor Allahdita. Acting on her surmise she visits the house to seek Lajo; beguiling Allahdita's mother into conversation, she enters the house and requests for a glass of water and instead receives the slightly more luxury beverage *lassi* (curd-based drink), which is served by a dejected young female who, with downcast eyes, takes slow feeble steps towards Hamida. Under the ploy of examining the young girl's pulse, Hamida discovers Lajo's tattoo, perpetually inscribed on her forearm and partially cloaked under the sleeve of her *salwar kameez* (traditional attire). While the tattoo on Puro's skin vitiates her flesh, Lajo's inscription is carved on her skin in the form of body art. Earlier in the film, Puro attempts to obliterate her tattoo to reclaim her skin, whereas Lajo's tattoo, as bodily adornment, corroborates her identity. Both these early scenes follow a sequential pattern where Puro's repugnance towards her indelible 'stain' shifts to a close-up shot of Lajo's squinting face as the needle stings its way into her skin. The initial aesthetic element of Lajo's tattoo is destabilized to serve the functional purpose of her recovery by Puro-Hamida who revisits the mansion on three consecutive days.

Upon Hamida's second visit, she finds no traces of Allahdita's mother in the outer courtyard and intrepidly enters the inner domains of the mansion where

she sees Lajo. In an affective effusion Puro drops her protruding sack on the ground as she approaches Lajo to reaffirm their family ties- “you are Lajo, right, my sister-in-law [who is married to Puro’s brother Trilok]?,” in response to which a sanguine Lajo attempts to confirm whether the bedsheet seller is indeed Puro. The act of dropping the bedsheet sack does not correspond to the complete symbolic shedding of Hamida, as Puro is well aware of her surroundings. Though in abruptness, the sack as a key paraphernalia is placed at a reachable distance where Puro could effortlessly access the object and slip back to Hamida to evade further peril. In this poignant scene, the female body unfolds the doubly-bound, hybridized identities of Puro as she embraces Lajo who collapses in her arms.

The commonality between Puro as the rescuer and Lajo as the abductee is their status as dislocated remnants of an exuberant Hindu past, upon which they establish solidarity through the coming together of abducted bodies that bear traces of familial relations. The shot of the two bodies depicts a weeping Puro cradling Lajo against the sombre background of an usurped mansion. Amid inexorable tears, Lajo implores Puro to take her away, which evokes an earlier scene where an escaped Puro entreats her mother to send her to Amritsar. The iconography of the abducted woman as the soiled miscreant jettisoned in the territory of the abject is contested here, whereby Lajo’s body, as a surface of indelible defilement, is destabilized and re-presented as a site of harrowing injustice. State intervention during late-1947 shifted the iconography of the tainted woman through a judicial

rehabilitation of the abducted female. From a mythical angle, the retelling of the *Rāmāyana* articulates the nationalist/patriarchal repatriation of manifold Sitas. Against this scenario, Lajo as a potentially rescued Sita seeks momentary aspiration of her recovery, which she fears would dwindle upon Puro's departure. The female camaraderie established within the abductor's house is prone to erosion with the concomitant eradication of abductee and rescuer (former abductee). Puro is cognizant of the perils involved, for which reason she pleads Lajo to be "mindful as someone may arrive at any moment." In the process of slipping back to Hamida, Puro makes a reluctant yet hasty departure as she consoles a distressed Lajo and pledges to rescue her. The scene ends with a faint bodily contact when Puro's fingers slip away from Lajo's hands as the latter remains with extended arms seeking refuge.

Lajo manages to elude her abductor and escape with Rashid's help, whose recurring "*himmat*" (courage) places him in a shifting status from abductor/Ravana to co-rescuer/non-Ravana. As Hogan notes, Rashid's act of carrying Lajo away on a horse duplicates his previous abduction of Puro.⁵⁸ Due to Lajo's disappearance, Hamida becomes a dubious suspect as Allahditta affirms the nebulous mapping of religion onto the (female) body: "a Hindu's name is not inscribed on their forehead." This statement posits an ironic contrast to the metonymic reference of woman to religion. As Ahmed and Stacey suggest, "the skin is [...] assumed to reflect the truth of the other and to give us access to the other's being."⁵⁹ In the

backdrop of sectarian belligerence in *Pinjar*, the near slippage of the admissible, Muslim female body as double skin is prevented through the conspicuous bodily inscription of “Hamida” which, etched on Puro’s skin, validates her performative religious identity in front of Allahdita.

In the form of a talisman, the Muslim appellation convincingly displayed by Puro-Hamida negotiates the male gaze by shifting the female body from an avenged “territory to be conquered, claimed or marked”⁶⁰ to one that reclaims a rightful place within the religious and national sphere of Pakistan. Hamida’s witty disclosure of the tattoo functions as a riposte to Allahdita’s statement regarding skin imprints as markers of religious identities. She implies that a name inscribed on the forearm (if not on the forehead) should suffice as testament to one’s religious truth. The ink on the skin as external bearer of truth renders Hamida’s performativity as justifiable, while Puro’s truth resides within the skin, invisible to male scrutiny where the abductor has no inkling of her identity. After the disclosure of Hamida’s tattoo Allahdita’s mother requests Puro to leave, adding that “he [Allahdita] has gone crazy,” which immediately debunks the male suspicion of the female. From an indelible stain to a protective talisman, the shifting significance of the tattoo prevents Puro-Hamida from being marked as an embodied ‘other’ and permits her (Sita) to walk out of the ordeals of Ratthoval unscathed.

Porous Lines, Mingling Bodies

The iconography of the Hindu Sita that was taken up during the Partition period is disrupted in *Pinjar* through a complex embodiment of Puro-Hamida as the new Sita India's Partition has created. The Puro-Hamida link represents the mingling of one body with two identities that blur the divisions of religion and nation. Amid the backdrop of rigid national lines, the fluidity of identities allows Puro to cut across communal boundaries, and surpass the mythic border line (*Lakshmana Rekha*) to rescue her sister-in-law. The transgression of imaginary boundaries does not signify the violation of home-borders and the national geo-space, but rather points to Puro's intrepid recuperation of a female coercively displaced from her home on the obverse side of the national border. The official rehabilitation of abducted women in 1948 provides the impetus for Lajo's recovery at the Wagah border. The border site is a paradoxical in-between space that blends the Indo-Pakistan soil yet demarcates it through frontier lines, boundary check-points, military authorities, national flags, and much more.

Lajo, Ramchand and Trilok pass into the Pakistani vicinity of the Wagah border, as evident through the inscription of "*Pakistan Zindabad*" (Hail Pakistan) over the rampart wall. Lajo is indeed located, but it is Trilok's encounter with Puro that lingers on screen where, amid an emotional reunion, one witnesses the sheepish demeanour of Rashid as the perpetrator of turmoil upon the Shah household. The border as a returning trajectory is also a site of re-turning when new beginnings

cannot be inscribed. Trilok asks Puro to return to India like “all Hindu girls” who are going back to their “home.” He further adds that Ramchand is “still willing to marry you. He realizes your misfortunes and you can start your life afresh.” The idea of “Hindu girls” returning to their homes under the state-legitimized rehabilitation process, illustrates a post-Partition reorganization of the Hindu home as Hindustan in microcosm. In equating ‘Indianess’ with ‘Hinduness,’ Trilok propagates religion as intertwined with the nation. The *Rāmāyaṇa* is not only evoked but reinterpreted where Ramchand represents a “different version” of Ram, as he accepts Puro without demanding any ordeals from her, unlike the epic’s hero who asks Sita to endure the fire-test (*agniparikshā*).⁶¹ However, Ramchand’s acceptance of Puro takes place once the repatriation of abducted women is mandated by the state, prior to which he barely attempts to trace her whereabouts. Sexual and psychic violence bleeds into the glorified socio-national rhetoric of rehabilitating the Hindu Sita in her home and religious community.

Puro-Hamida, however, “makes the non-normative choice to refuse the offer of [physical] inclusion and interpellation into [the] family, community and nation that was once denied to her.”⁶² She entreats Trilok to believe that an imagined remnant of Puro is also returning with Lajo to India. This form of symbolic crossing through a ghostly simulacrum of the self, displaces religio-national boundaries and illustrates Puro’s multi-placedness across arbitrary lines. The imagined mapping of the self beyond Pakistan’s border develops a permanently

psychic if not physical connection between space and subject as Puro's mythic desire for India also makes it a "place of no return."⁶³ Like the tattoo on her forearm, Puro's re-transformation is indelible as the perennial identity of Puro-Hamida bears no scope for her to resume the past on a clean slate as simply Puro. At the border, one witnesses a distraught Puro who re-turns to search for Rashid as he dwindles from her sight (site) to let her return to her "country." A once diabolical perpetrator metamorphoses into her "truth" as she claims that "[Pakistan] is her home now." The merging and multiplicity of identities dislocates the religio-national depiction of a static home, as Puro-Hamida remains in Pakistan and legitimizes an inter-religious relationship. As Kavita Daiya contends, the film's denouement subverts "the title's suggestion that abduction, rape or ethnic violence constitutes death for the female social subject."⁶⁴ In portraying the emergence of Puro-Hamida as "the new woman India's Partition has given birth to,"⁶⁵ the film further complicates the split between the Indian Hindu Sita and the Pakistani Muslim Ravana. In fostering inter-ethnic identities and hybrid spaces, *Pinjar* contests what Daiya calls the "[u]topian imaginings"⁶⁶ for religio-ethnic citizenship propagated by the respective nation-states of India and Pakistan.

Conclusion

Kampan's *Irāmāvatāram* depicts Sita expressing righteous anger after Rama doubts her purity.⁶⁷ Anger, in Kampan's text, becomes a powerful tool that

reinforces Sita's innocence while drawing attention to the oppressive policing of female propriety. Sita's rage is not articulated through speech, but rather translated into a metaphorical representation of the "splitting" land, which is vocally emphasized through the fire god Agni's remonstrance. The earth, imagined as Sita, demonstrates the foreshadowing of destruction as an outcome of Rama's doubt. As Kampan reveals, Sita bears innocence while Rama commits a significant mistake that ruptures the sentiments of pure love between the mythological characters. Time (prolonged captivity), space (Lanka as forbidden realm), and bodily absence (from Rama's kingdom) dictate the fidelity of Sita. Kampan's explicit depiction of Rama's error contrasts with Valmiki and Tulsidas' focus on Sita's purported mistakes. As Madhu Kishwar notes, Tulsidas presents Rama as the epitome of righteousness,⁶⁸ which, I argue, inevitably codifies Sita as a flawed goddess who fails to abide by Rama's principles as she succumbs to her desires. The erasure of Sita's innocence, where her 'fatal mistake' contradicts her faithfulness to Rama, makes way for Tulsidas to interpret the fire ordeal as an acceptable means for Sita to recuperate her supposedly lost purity.

The image of the flawed goddess is rewritten in 1947, where the Hindu woman was put on a pedestal as the impeccable spouse goddess who signified a pure Hindu nation. The Partition rhetoric of the blameless woman-as-Sita is modified in *Pinjar* where the faults and flaws of the characters are portrayed as fluid traits. The shifts in characterization take place through Puro and Rashid's

shared experiences, encounters, and fears that re-inscribe the abductor-abductee dynamic into an affective relation grounded in truth and togetherness. The iconography of the Muslim Ravana is destabilized through Puro's affirmation of Rashid as her "truth." Rashid's embodiment of Puro's truth invokes a unity that takes a coercive, socially 'mistaken' association and transforms it into a syncretic relationship. While the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Rāmacaritamānasa* assert Sita's mistake of getting herself abducted, *Pinjar* complicates victim-blaming through showcasing affective ambiguity as Tara (Puro's mother) wishes for the death of a blameless Puro due to an ironic mistake of crossing the line of socio-religious propriety. Sita from *Irāmāvatāram* expresses anger towards her accuser Rama, whereas Puro, as the mourning Sita, laments her separation from Tara who occupies a tense positionality amid affect (love) versus duty (society). Tara's social responsibility comes at the expense of disavowing affect, where her affirmation of Puro's social death contrasts with her tears as she sends her daughter away. Puro's state of bereavement fosters personal reinvention of the self as Sita.

Through her reconstruction of the Hindu Sita, Puro distinguishes herself from the Sitas of both the Partition era and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. *Pinjar* obscures the dualism between the homogeneous Hindu Sita and Muslim Ravana by illustrating a remade Sita who is both Hindu (Puro) and Muslim (Hamida), and who engages in affective relations that stretch across national boundaries. Puro's camaraderie with Lajo, which is evoked through willful tears, hope (of rescue), and bodily

embrace, becomes a sticky relation that remains past Lajo's recovery. In rescuing Lajo and learning to love Rashid, Puro recuperates Sita from being subjected to codified pedantry and punitive ordeals. Sita's qualities of love, devotion, and faithfulness mark her as a role model for Indian women. However, it is important to note that the mythological Sita should not be held accountable for her abduction (which is something that Kampan's text draws on more so than the other versions). Puro, as the runaway Sita, undergoes punishment by being disowned by her family. *Pinjar* offers a renewed interpretation of Sita (Puro) who contests the existence of a perpetually 'sinful' abductee, by embracing the many shifts and pluralities that are embedded in the reproduction of her identity. In a liminal state of being, Puro marks herself as the new Sita of Pakistan with shadowy imprints in India. The syncretic Sita from *Pinjar* is one who mingles two religions and two nations in one body.

¹ Kampan, also known as Kamban or Kambar, was a Tamil poet and composer of the medieval era.

² David Shulman, "Fire and Flood: The Testing of Sītā in Kampan's *Irāmāvatāram*," in *Many Rāmāyaṇas*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 89.

³ As Patrick Hogan states, "the *Rāmāyaṇa* is one of the two main Sanskrit epics [the other being the *Mahābhārata*] and has the status of a –or even the- central religious text for many Hindus" (141). As part of the lyrical narrative, Ravana is the antagonist who abducts Sita in the absence of her husband Rama-the protagonist of the *Rāmāyaṇa* and the incarnation of Lord Vishnu. Though under Ravana's captive, Sita remains faithful to her husband, and upon her rescue by Rama, with the trusted help of Hanuman (the monkey god), she is asked to undergo a fire ordeal (*agniparikshā*) to prove her fidelity. She passes through the fire unscathed and returns to Rama's kingdom, where there are talks of Sita's questionable fidelity due to her lingering captivity in

Ravana's abode. Rama abandons an impregnated Sita in the forest, and with the gradual passing of time, he offers to accept her, provided she undergoes another fire-test. Sita refuses and summons the earth to "receive her" (141). Patrick Hogan, "Toward a Cognitive Poetics of History: *Pinjar*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and Partition," in *The Indian Partition in Literature and Films: History, Politics, and Aesthetics*, ed. Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Debali Mookerjee-Leonard. (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), 121-122, 129-130, 141. The different versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* offer altered narratives that speak to the author's intentions. Valmiki's classical version of the epic differs from Tulsidas' medieval text, *Rāmcaritmānasa* where Rama is said to have banished "only the shadow Sita" while keeping the real Sita "by his side" (287). For conversations about the different interpretations of the epic, see Madhu Kishwar, "Yes to Sītā, No to Ram: The Continuing Hold of Sītā on Popular Imagination in India," in *Questioning Rāmāyaṇas*, ed. Paula Richman. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 285-308; The idea of the shadow Sita as "body double" is also evident in Heidi R.M. Pauwels, *The Goddess as Role Model: Sītā and Rādhā in Scripture and on Screen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 386.

⁴ Shulman, "Fire," 105. For discussions based on the popular reception of Rama as the unjust husband, see Kishwar, "Yes," 285-292.

⁵ Shulman, "Fire," 105.

⁶ Valmiki produced the classical version of the *Rāmāyaṇa* (around the time period of fifth century BC).

⁷ Shulman, "Fire," 91-93.

⁸ Romila Thapar is an Indian historian and scholar whose work entails ancient Hinduism, the reconstruction of religion, and the reception of religion, among other aspects of research.

⁹ Paula Richman, "Introduction: The Diversity of the *Rāmāyaṇa* Tradition," in *Many Rāmāyaṇas*, ed. Paula Richman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 4.

¹⁰ *Pinjar* is centered on Amrita Pritam's 1950 novel of the same title. Chandra Prakash Dwivedi, *Pinjar*, Film, Twentieth Century Fox, 2003; Amrita Pritam, *The Skeleton and that Man* (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1987).

¹¹ Meghna Guhathakurta extends conversations around Partition by exploring the 1971 independence and secession of Bangladesh, and the ways in which certain communities were effected by both the 1947 Partition and the 1971 secession.

¹² Meghna Guhathakurta, "Amidst the Winds of Change: the Hindu Minority in Bangladesh," in *Minority Nationalisms in South Asia: South Asian History and Culture*, ed. Tanweer Fazal (London and New York: Routledge, 2013), 126-127.

¹³ Diana Dimitrova, *Gender, Religion, and Modern Hindi Drama* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008), 23-48, 49-70.

¹⁴ Kishwar, "Yes," 285-308.

¹⁵ Katherine K. Young, "Women in Hinduism," in *Today's Woman in World Religions*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 91. I use Mhapasekhara's argument about religion and gendering, which is provided in Young's chapter on "Women in Hinduism."

¹⁶ Pauwels, *Goddess*, 391, 393, 399-400.

¹⁷ See Endnote 2.

¹⁸ Kavita Daiya, *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender, and National Culture in Postcolonial India*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 150, 177-178.

¹⁹ Urvashi Butalia, "Community, State and Gender: Some Reflections on the Partition of India," in *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*, ed. Mushirul Hasan. (New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 178-207.

²⁰ Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin. *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998).

²¹ Butalia concentrates on the perils of partition and the community that repudiates the abducted woman. In building on the image of the abducted woman, Menon and Bhasin posit interview-based analyses on the predicaments of families and communities who have endured the perils of partition through loss of land, nation, loved ones etc, and much more.

²² Young, "Women," 96.

²³ Young, "Women," 96.

²⁴ The main argument that Lele posits is that ideologies function in justifying oppression under the pretext of communal solidarity. The contention here is that justification works as an instrument that obscures dominant oppression. Jayant Lele. "The Two Faces of Nationalism: On the Revolutionary Potential of Tradition," in *National and Ethnic Movements*, ed. Jacques Dofny and Akinsola Akiwowo (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1980), 207.

²⁵ Young, "Women," 91.

²⁶ Pauwels, "Goddess," 381.

²⁷ According to the Hindu *varna* or caste system, *Brāhmins* (of the priestly caste) belong to the highest stratification, with *Kshatriya* (of the warrior caste), *Vaishya* (of the commercial/trading caste), and *Sudra* (of the lower artisan caste) to follow consecutively.

²⁸ For discussions on the nineteenth-century 'pure' Hindu woman see, Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*. (New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001), 36, 43, 48. For conversations pertinent to the nineteenth-century new woman and the spiritual home see, Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 120, 140-141.

²⁹ Dimitrova, *Gender*, 16-17.

³⁰ The Indo-Pakistan Partition was agreed upon in a legislative meeting on June 3, 1947 (Pandey 33). This resulted in a cartographic anomaly as national border-zones were produced along the states of West Bengal, Meghalaya, Assam, Tripura, and Mizoram which shared the boundary with East Pakistan (present day Bangladesh), and Punjab, Rajasthan, and Gujarat with West Pakistan.

³¹ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "Can the Subaltern Speak?," in *Reflections on the History of an Idea: Can the Subaltern Speak*, ed. Rosalind C. Morris (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 61.

³² Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, c2000), 159. Chakrabarty is a historian and subaltern studies scholar who has engaged in work related to the working classes in India, the masses, and much more. The idea of "grihalakshmi" is directly translated as the goddess (*Lakshmi*) of the home (*griha*). Chakrabarty discusses this term in connection to the representation of the female in some of Rabindranath Tagore's writings. The notion behind the goddess-like woman who resides in the home is very much applicable to the Sita-like Hindu woman.

³³ Shulman, "Fire," 93, 104.

³⁴ Dimitrova, *Gender*, 47.

³⁵ Mackenzie Brown, and Nupur D. Agrawal. "The Rape that Woke up India: Hindu Imagination and the Rape of Jyoti Singh Pandey," *Journal of Religion and Violence* 2, no. 2 (2014): 240.

³⁶ The exoneration of the Hindu abductee through the Sita reference is also mentioned in Hogan, "Toward," 130.

³⁷ Menon and Bhasin, *Borders*, 43.

³⁸ Kathleen Canning, "The Body as Method?: Reflections on the Place of the Body in Gender History," *Gender & History* 11, no. 3 (November 1999): 500.

³⁹ Robert P. Goldman, "Rāvaṇa's Kitchen: A Testimony of Desire and the Other," in *Questioning Rāmāyanas*, ed. Paula Richman. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), 106.

⁴⁰ Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *Partition's Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia*, (New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2013), 17.

⁴¹ Pauwels, *Goddess*, 385.

⁴² Pauwels, *Goddess*, 385, 391-400.

⁴³ Pauwels, *Goddess*, 392.

⁴⁴ Pauwels, *Goddess*, 413. For the interpretation of Ramanand Sagar's television series *Rāmāyan* (1986-88) see Pauwels, 389-390, 391, 393.

⁴⁵ P. Sukumaran Nair, *Indo-Bangladesh Relations*, (New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2008), vii. The divide and rule policy endorsed religio-national autonomy between Hindus and

Muslims. The argument was that India consisted of two nations that were identified according to religion (Hindustan and Pakistan), and “genuine independence” depended upon the sovereignty of Hindus as well as Muslims. According to Jyotika Viridi (film studies theorist), Hindu-Muslim tensions were “played up by the British,” which “culminated in the worst holocaust of the subcontinent.” Yasmin Saikia (Partition scholar and theorist) elaborates upon Viridi’s angle of colonial intervention, and argues that the idea of Hindu “as an ‘enemy’ of Muslims” was encouraged by the colonials, and became the political rationale for an independent Pakistan. If colonial intervention exacerbated communal tensions then so did diverse religio-nationalist groups that ranged from espousing Hinduist ideologies to vouching for Islamic self-determination (one such group being the Muslim League). See Jyotika Viridi, *The Cinematic Imagination: Indian Popular Films as Social History*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 67; Yasmin Saikia, *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 31; Gyanendra Pandey, *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 21.

⁴⁶ Chandra Prakash Dwivedi, *Pinjar*, Film, Twentieth Century Fox, 2003.

⁴⁷ Pauwels, *Goddess*, 52-54.

⁴⁸ Dimitrova, *Gender*, 26. The nineteenth-century playwright, Bharatendu Harishchandra, portrayed his Muslim characters as conquerors who are considered lecherous with “base motives.”

⁴⁹ Pauwels, *Goddess*, 495.

⁵⁰ Sukumari Bhattacharji, *Legends of Devi*, (Hyderabad: Disha Books, 1995), 91.

⁵¹ Kishwar, “Yes,” 292.

⁵² As theorist and historian Partha Chatterjee argues, the material/spiritual, outer/inner, home/external concept was endorsed by cultural nationalists and reformers of the anti-colonial era. Chatterjee, *The Nation*, 128. My paper expands Chatterjee’s concepts of the internal and external by framing it within the time-space of the Partition period.

⁵³ Butalia, “Community,” 182.

⁵⁴ Lalita Pandit Hogan. “Representing Partition: Poetics of Emotion in *Pinjar*,” in *The Indian Partition in Literature and Films: History, Politics, and Aesthetics*, ed. Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Debali Mookerjea-Leonard, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015), 156.

⁵⁵ Pauwels, *Goddess*, 399.

⁵⁶ Menon and Bhasin, “Borders,” 32.

⁵⁷ See endnote 2.

⁵⁸ Patrick Hogan, “Toward,” 137.

⁵⁹ Sara Ahmed and Jackie Stacey, *Thinking Through the Skin*, (New York: Routledge, 2001), 4.

-
- ⁶⁰ Menon and Bhasin, "Borders," 43.
- ⁶¹ Patrick Hogan, "Toward," 139.
- ⁶² Daiya, *Violent*, 177-178.
- ⁶³ Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 188.
- ⁶⁴ Daiya, *Violent*, 178.
- ⁶⁵ Lalita P. Hogan, "Representing," 157.
- ⁶⁶ Daiya, *Violent*, 150.
- ⁶⁷ Shulman, "Fire," 105.
- ⁶⁸ Kishwar, "Yes," 285.

References

- Ahmed, Sara, and Jackie Stacey. *Thinking Through the Skin*. New York: Routledge, 2001.
- Bhattacharji, Sukumari. *Legends of Devi*. Hyderabad: Disha Books, 1995.
- Brah, Avtar. *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities*. London; New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Brown, C. Mackenzie, and Nupur D. Agrawal. "The Rape that Woke up India: Hindu Imagination and the Rape of Jyoti Singh Pandey." *Journal of Religion and Violence* 2, no. 2 (2014): 234-280.
- Butalia, Urvashi. "Community, State and Gender: Some Reflections on the Partition of India." In *Inventing Boundaries: Gender, Politics and the Partition of India*, edited by Mushirul Hasan, 178-207. New Delhi; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Canning, Kathleen. "The Body as Method?: Reflections on the Place of the Body in Gender History." *Gender & History* 11, no. 3 (November 1999): 499-513.
- Chakrabarty, Dipesh. *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, c2000.
- Chatterjee, Partha. *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Daiya, Kavita. *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender, and National Culture in Postcolonial India*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008.
- Dimitrova, Diana. *Gender, Religion, and Modern Hindi Drama*. Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2008.
- Dwivedi, Chandra Prakash. *Pinjar*, Film. Twentieth Century Fox, 2003.

-
- Goldman, Robert P. "Rāvaṇa's Kitchen: A Testimony of Desire and the Other." In *Questioning Rāmāyaṇas*, edited by Paula Richman, 105-116. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Guhathakurta, Meghna. "Amidst the Winds of Change: the Hindu Minority in Bangladesh." In *Minority Nationalisms in South Asia: South Asian History and Culture*, edited by Tanweer Fazal, 126-139. London and New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Hogan, Lalita Pandit. "Representing Partition: Poetics of Emotion in *Pinjar*." In *The Indian Partition in Literature and Films: History, Politics, and Aesthetics*, edited by Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Debali Mookerjea-Leonard, 146-166. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015.
- Hogan, Patrick. "Toward a Cognitive Poetics of History: *Pinjar*, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and Partition." In *The Indian Partition in Literature and Films: History, Politics, and Aesthetics*, edited by Rini Bhattacharya Mehta and Debali Mookerjea-Leonard, 121-145. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2015.
- Kabir, Ananya Jahanara. *Partition's Post-Amnesias: 1947, 1971 and Modern South Asia*. New Delhi: Women Unlimited, 2013.
- Kishwar, Madhu. "Yes to Sītā, No to Ram: The Continuing Hold of Sītā on Popular Imagination in India." In *Questioning Rāmāyaṇas*, edited by Paula Richman, 285-308. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Lele, Jayant. "The Two Faces of Nationalism: On the Revolutionary Potential of Tradition." In *National and Ethnic Movements*, edited by Jacques Dofny and Akinsola Akiwowo, 201-216. Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1980.
- Menon, Ritu, and Kamla Bhasin. *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*. New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998.
- Nair, P. Sukumaran. *Indo-Bangladesh Relations*. New Delhi: A.P.H. Publishing Corporation, 2008.
- Pandey, Gyanendra. *Remembering Partition: Violence, Nationalism and History in India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Paula Richman, Paula. "Introduction: The Diversity of the *Rāmāyaṇa* Tradition." In *Many Rāmāyaṇas*, edited by Paula Richman, 3-21. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.
- Pauwels, Heidi R.M. *The Goddess as Role Model: Sītā and Rādhā in Scripture and on Screen*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- Pritam, Amrita. *The Skeleton and that Man*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers, 1987.
- Saikia, Yasmin. *Women, War, and the Making of Bangladesh: Remembering 1971*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011.
- Sarkar, Tanika. *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation: Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*. New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2001.
- Shulman, David. "Fire and Flood: The Testing of Sītā in Kampan's *Irāmāvatāram*." In *Many Rāmāyaṇas*, edited by Paula Richman, 89-113. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Can the Subaltern Speak?." In *Reflections on the History of an Idea: Can the Subaltern Speak*, edited by Rosalind C. Morris, 21-78. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.

Virdi, Jyotika. *The Cinematic Imagination: Indian Popular Films as Social History*. New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2003.

Young, Katherine K. "Women in Hinduism." In *Today's Woman in World Religions*, edited by Arvind Sharma, 75-135. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.