Chapter 3

Sita’s Progeny: Revisiting 1947 Through Earth and Pinjar

To sons are given homes and palaces

Daughters are exiled to foreign lands

Pinjar

Broad views about life have shrunk into religions, and we have been turned into their symbols. They regard us as empty symbols. Symbols of a religion, a nation

Ambai

The chapter deals with the filmic adaptation of novels written by two women – Amrita Pritam and Bapsi Sidhwa – who themselves witnessed partition. The films, Deepa Mehta’s Earth (1998) adapted from Bapsi Sidhwa’s Ice Candy Man and Chandraprakash Dwivedi’s Pinjar, adapted from Amrita Pritam’s novel of the same man, focus on the simmering religious tensions but also show how the violence against women is not peculiar to 1947 but can be linked to the nineteenth century reimagining of the nation as mother and also the gender bias encoded in society and in Pinjar it goes as far as to trace it to the Ramayana. The analysis will highlight how the films connect the subjugation of women to broader contexts of nation formation, patriarchy and religion. Rashmi Doraiswamy writes that in Partition narratives, the panoramic “view from above” is not sufficient to encompass the experience of the victims of Partition violence (Doraiswamy 2009: 75) Citing Michel de Certeau’s idea that “History begins
at ground level,” she proposes a view from “height in proximity”, in other words the view of the common people which would not “shield the eye from enactment of violence” (Doraiswamy 2009: 75). Earth and Pinjar are the best ‘height in proximity view’ that we can get about partition keeping in mind the fact that both Pritam and Sidhwa themselves experienced partition trauma

The power of films to initiate a kind of collective mourning and healing has already been discussed earlier. Films like Earth and Pinjar can serve as, using David Cook’s term, “second hand testimonies” (Cool 2004: 2). Keeping in mind the fact that memories can be manipulated, Cook writes that:

Even though memory is tinged with subjectivity, it can still be regarded as authentic. The fact that eyewitness was actually present at the time invests their recollection with authority and emotional power. This helps produce a kind of second hand testimony that includes the audience as witnesses to reconstructed events and brings spectators closer to the past. (Cook 2004: 2)

Thus the aim of the analysis is not to look at the truth vs falsehood debate but how the narratives of the films represent the histories of those whose voices have been silenced by the official documents.

I

Deepa Mehta’s personal connection with partition stems from the fact that she grew up in post-partition Amritsar very close to the Pakistani border. As she says, “Even when I was growing up in Amritsar, we used to go to every weekend to Lahore, so I just grew up around people who talked about it incessantly and felt it was one of the
most horrific sectarian wars they knew of” (Qureshi 2017: 67-82). People like Deepa Mehta form, using Marianne Hirsh’s term, the “second generation” or the “generation after” of Partition (Hirsch 2012: 3). They are the “descendants of victim, survivors as well as of perpetrators and of bystanders who witnessed massive traumatic events” and they connect so strongly to the earlier generation’s memory of the past that the memory is percolated to them even though they have not witnessed it themselves (Hirsch 2012: 3). Hirsh terms it postmemory and it describes:

The relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they “remember” on by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory’s connection to the past is actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own life stories, even evacuated, by our ancestors. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic fragments of events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present. (Hirsch 2012: 40)

In the case of Mehta, it is this interaction with first generation survivors that prompted her, by her own admission, to make a movie in order to highlight how sectarian violence leads to cracks in a multicultural society and to decipher the logic behind friends and
neighbours turning foes (Qureshi 2017: 67-82). In yet another interview, Mehta comments, “My father and his brothers were brought up in Lahore and they faced tremendous difficulties. They had to leave their family home. They never saw their friends again and my father never saw his Muslim friends again” (Philips 1999: n pag). And it is this division among friends which drives the narrative of the film forward.

*Earth* depicts the lives of a group of people belonging to different religions whose lives take a dramatic turn with the announcement that the subcontinent was going to be partitioned. The story is narrated mostly from the perspective of an eight year old girl Lenny, which is replaced by an adult Lenny towards the end, and it chronicles the fate of her Hindu Ayah, Shanta and her motley group of admirers, culminating with the abduction of the Ayah by a mob led by one of her admirers, Dil Nawaz. Mehta depicts not only the fate of women but also people belonging to the lower strata of society. The tragedy of the group then represents the fate of the people of the subcontinent. The primary focus will however be only on Lenny’s Hindu Ayah, Shanta and how the political changes transforms her state – from the centre of her group to one who suffers physical violence at the hands of her own friends. The chapter will draw from the works of feminists mentioned in the beginning to investigate the representation of Shanta’s oppression with respects to nationalism and patriarchy. In conclusion, through the director’s representation of Shanta, the problem of the silencing of women in the history of Partition will be examined. The chapter will only look at how the politics of representation shift as the text is adapted from one medium to another, in this case from to Sidhwa to Mehta.
Unlike in the novel, the film begins when Lenny is eight and encompasses events immediately in and around partition, with a voice over from an older Lenny stating the same:

I was eight years old, living in Lahore in March of 1947, when the British Empire in India started to collapse. Along with talks of India’s independence from Britain came rumblings about its division into two countries, Pakistan and India. Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs who had lived together for centuries suddenly started to clamour for pieces of India for themselves. The arbitrary line of division that the British would draw to carve up India in August of 1947 would scar the subcontinent forever. (1: 20)

As the older Lenny begins her narration, the visuals begin with a child colouring a map of undivided India. The camera rotates around a warmly lit room accompanied by a soothing music. The tranquillity of the establishing shot is in sharp contrast to its succeeding scene where Lenny breaks a plate to understand how it was possible to break a plate. The establishing scene attempts to capture the pre-partition memory of an older Lenny as being one which is happy and content. In the “Introduction” of this thesis, there is a reference to Ashis Nandy and his notion of “utopian existence” or how people in pre-partition India thought of life as beautiful and without any conflict. This idea gets reflected in the first scene of the film. The shattering of that utopian existence is immediately reflected in the innocent act of Lenny breaking the plate. Lenny’s breaking of the plate is one of the many instances where the film is critical of the divisive politics of the leaders. Another instance is the scene when the train arrives in Lahore with dead bodies. The scene is immediately followed by a scene where Lenny along with Shanta’s
friends are huddling around the radio, listening to Nehru’s “Tryst with destiny” speech. The scene begins with the entry of a friend who informs them, “A train has just arrived from Gurdaspur filled with dead bodies and four sacks full of women’s breast (52:55). Just as that moment Nehru’s speech begins. For the viewers, the content of the speech contrasts to the ground reality. What seems more jarring is the fact that none of the people in the shot can comprehend the words as it is in English forcing Hari, one of their friends to comment, “These politicians speak with twisted tongues. Some independence they gave us, soaked in our brother’s blood” (54:04). The “twisted tongue” is not only a reference to the speech in English but also the language of politics which is beyond the comprehension of the common people.

Apart from the interventions of the nationalist discourse, Mehta also examines the daily violence against women. In the film this is shown when Lenny takes her cousin to see the refugee women near her house. When she uses the term fallen women, her cousin corrects her by saying that the word is raped. When Lenny asks the meaning of the word rape, he replies, “I will show it to you one day” (1:10:51). Mehta highlights the everyday violence, sanctioned by patriarchal discourses, to which women are subjected to everyday which transforms into extreme sexual violence during partition. As Menon and Bhasin argue:

The dramatic episodes of violence against women during communal riots bring to the surface, savagely an explicitly, familiar forms of sexual violence—now charged with a symbolic meaning that serve as an indicator of the place that women’s sexuality occupies in an all-male, patriarchal arrangement of gender relations, between and within religious or ethnic communities. (Menon and Bhasin 1998: 41)
Mehta goes on to examine the symbolic construction of women’s bodies in the nationalist discourses. There are many instances through which Mehta traces the ways in which religious, patriarchal and nationalistic discourses infuse the female body with special symbolism. The first instance is the marriage of Pappo, the daughter of the sweeper and Lenny’s friend. Even before the actual marriage takes place, the viewers are given a context to the wedding through a conversation between Lenny, her mother and father. As Lenny informs her father about Pappo’s marriage, her mother comments, “Her father is arranging her marriage to a Christian, for her protection he says. Good God, it shouldn’t be allowed ... and even he has decided to convert” (29:24). There are two aspects which come to light. The first is the gender hierarchy inherent in the notion of the man as the protector of the women and secondly the symbolic value attached to women’s body in the growing conflict among the Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs whereby Pappu’s marriage to a Christian will supposedly safeguard her body from being a site of contest between the two communities. Shanta’s explanation regarding Pappo’s marriage to a much older Christian man validates the point, “Fear is making people do crazy things these days” (35: 04). Both Lenny and Shanta are squatting on the ground looking up at the place where the bride and bridegroom are sitting. The bride and bridegroom are shot from a low angle thereby indicating that it is the point of view of Lenny and Shanta. Just as the bridegroom unveils his face, the camera cuts to a medium shot of both Lenny and Shanta as they register the shock. The realization of the growing communal division by both Lenny and Shanta and how women’s bodies become very important to nationalistic ideologies is captured in that shot.
The next sequence where the importance of women’s bodies is highlighted is in the train sequence. Commenting on the importance of trains in partition narratives, Prabhjot Parmar writes that:

Trains became contested sites where existing and new identities were negotiated and where nationalism supplanted local identities and regional politics ... Trains and railway stations were the quintessential embodiments of the socio-economic schematisation where first, second and third class recreated the socio-economic hierarchy within the railway bogies and the station waiting rooms. However amidst the sectarian violence and the frenzied rush to escape slaughter, people from all sections of society travelled by trains with little regard for class or distinctions. (Parmar 2007: n pag)

In *Earth*, the train scene begins with a close up shot of pigeons fluttering on the platform of the station and then inches towards the figure of a Dil Nawaz. The camera moves towards his face for a close up as the birds flutter around him. The fluttering of the birds reflects the state of Dil Nawaz and those around him. His action of continuously wiping his face and looking in the direction from which the train is supposed to come, captures his anxiousness. To add to the gravity of the situation, a haunting song plays in the “background whose lyrics serve as a textual musical parallel to reveal not only emotions of people but also as a portend” (Parmar 2007: n pag). The use of the song can be analysed using Eisenstein’s theory of the relation between sound and image. As he writes, “only the ... use of sound vis-a-vis the visual fragment of montage will open up new possibilities for the development ... of montage” (Eisenstein 1988: 113-114). As the train approaches the station, there is a flurry of activity as the
people rush towards the train. The camera cuts to a shot of Dil Nawaz stopping at the compartment door of the train and even before he sees the bodies, the blood on the floor of the train, the wailing and cries of “ye allah” inform the viewers about the horrific sight. The camera zooms to a close up of Dil Nawaz’s face as he looks around. The camera, adopting the point of view of Dil Nawaz, zooms around the compartment which is littered with dead bodies piled on top of one another. It is difficult to distinguish the men from women. However in the next scene, when the news about the train from Gurdaspur is shared, the fact that the train contained four sacks of women’s breasts, is highlighted. The bodies of women were not only “texts” (Das 1996: 67) or envelopes (Bahri 218) which was symbolically used by the members of one community for another to narrate their stories of victory but at the same time the cutting of the breasts was a way of rendering the women unfit to reproduce for the community/nation. The train from Gurdaspur acts as a catalyst in fuelling the tension between the communities.

Another aspect which Mehta highlights is the way, society treats the raped women. Lenny takes Adi to look at the refugee women next to their house, while informing Adi that the cook has told her that they are “giri huwi aurat” or fallen women. As they walk on the balcony to find a space so as to look at the women below, the camera pans downwards and gives the audience a glimpse of the way these women were put in a ghetto and marked for life.

The final instance when Earth shows the use of women’s bodies in the nationalist discourse is through Shanta’s abduction and rape. All the other instances in the film, when both Lenny and Shanta come to realize the value attached to women’s bodies in the communal conflict, lead up to the climax where Shanta is dragged away by the Muslims. Shanta then becomes the site over which India’s and Pakistan’s
communal, religious and nationalistic identities are fought. As she belongs to the Hindu community and also lives in Lahore, her body is a site of conflict between India’s and Pakistan’s national and cultural identities. The violence against the female body forces us to think about the daily violence which women are subjected to in the subcontinent. After the train incident, Shanta’s life is in danger because of her Hindu identity.

As against Shanta, the other prominent woman in the film, Lenny’s mother does not face the same trepidation regarding her safety. This is put down to the neutral position taken up by the Parsis and they are ready to abide by whoever gets power. Though they are still able to continue the same lifestyle they enjoyed before the riots, they are not presented as callous and indifferent to the turmoil around them. In a moment of self doubt, when Lenny’s mother asks her husband whether they were betraying their neighbours by taking a neutral position, he replies and places the predicament of the Parsis, “Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs – who do we not betray? ... If the Swiss can do it, so can we Parsis. We must all think Swiss” (1: 06: 44). It is because of the neutrality that they unlike the women of other communities, that the Parsi women did not live under the threat of being physically violated. There are two scenes which highlight this aspect. In the first scene, the entire family is seen moving through the streets of Lahore in their car. They are caught in the middle of a procession and the cries of “Pakistan Zindabad” and “Hindustan Murdabad” fill the air. But apart from breaking the class of the car, the procession passes by them almost as if they are invisible. The incident is a symbolic reference to the way the Parsis chose to live their lives and the way people perceived them – as invisible entities. The second scene where the contrast between the condition of a Parsi woman and women of other communities is brought out, is in the scene when Shanta is abducted. The scene begins with the Muslim mob
entering the Sethi household and Lenny’s mother commanding Shanta to go inside. Shanta’s flight inside the house is in sharp contrast to the way Lenny’s mother faces the mob in the absence of her husband. As the mob surrounds her, she boldly tells them, “The police will be here soon” (1: 30: 43). Even as the crowds start dragging Shanta away, Lenny’s mother runs after Shanta without any concern for her own safety. The scene yet again highlights the difference in the circumstances of the Parsi women and the women of other communities.

The gradual marginalization of Shanta can be observed in the film through her spatial representation among her group of admirers (Vardika 2011: 53). Their meeting place changes from the park to the restaurant and then to the house of one of their friends. In the pre-Partition period, Shanta is the centre of fascination and is surrounded by her friends in the park. As soon as the talk veers towards communal conflict and division, she leaves and threatens that she will stop meeting them if they continue talking about it. Shanta’s resistance to the communal talks also influences Lenny who realises that religion can break up their group as she cautions Dil nawaz, “Again Hindu Muslim talk. We will stop coming to the park” (13: 02). Even when divisive sentiments increase, Shanta’s group is still intact. As Hasan comments, “The park has really changed. Hindu, Muslims and Sikhs are keeping to themselves. Only the group around you remains the same” (25: 42). Another person chips in, “Yes Shanta, Hindu, Muslim, Sikhs – we all hover around you like moths around a lamp” (25: 55). Through her group, Shanta resists the physical and psychological borders which the national leaders have created. The actions of Shanta are very important to understand how a section of the common people resisted the received political narratives of division. However as partition approaches, in the representation of their meeting in the restaurant, Shanta is
no longer the centre of her circle of friends. When they continue talking about political and religious issues, Shanta does not have the power to silence them. As they begin arguing against each other’s religion, Shanta who used to be quite vocal in her disdain of such a topic, silently eats and listens instead of interrupting them. Shanta’s central position and influence start to be destabilised. On the day when the partition of the subcontinent is announced on the radio, Shanta is represented as even more marginal. In the scene when they get together in the house listening to the radio about the news of India’s independence and Partition, Shanta is seen sitting at a distance with Lenny on her lap, paid scant attention and taking no part in the discussion. Thus through Mehta’s representation of the shift of her position in their meeting, Shanta seems to be slowly marginalized. She is no longer influential in her group as she was before independence. Eventually Shanta receives the utmost violence of communal division as her plans of marrying Hassan are crashed when she is abducted and raped by the Muslim mobs. Commenting on the movement of the people from the outer to inner spaces, Vardika writes that:

Mehta’s camera follows the course of events from the outer spaces to the domestic and then to the private. There is, thus, this centripetal movement, a zooming in of energies which only leads to a final explosion in the catastrophe, an irreversible tide of events that cannot be contained or explained. (Vardika 2011: 53)

The sexual violence against women and the religious values attached to women’s bodies are especially portrayed through Shanta’s rape and abduction. By depicting Shanta’s abduction by some of her own friends, Mehta shows how Partition transformed friends into enemies. In the scene of Shanta’s abduction, the mob drags Shanta and pulls her on
the truck by shouting slogans like, for example, ‘Pakistan Zindabad’. These communal slogans in the context of Shanta’s abduction suggest the ways in which physical and sexual violence reduces women’s identities to markers or symbols of national identities. Also by associating any religion or nation with women’s bodies, the idea is to make it difficult to recall and memorialize the dastardly violence against women. As Menon and Bhasin point out, that marking the body with communal slogans ensures that the women and their families never forget the horror they experienced (Menon and Bhasin 43). The physical and sexual violence of women by the rival religious group was taken as the inability on the part of men to safeguard their women and was taken as a sign of their effeminacy (Butalia 2004: 109). In Shanta’s case, her abduction and rape indicates the failure of the Hindu/India.

Shanta’s rape and abduction by the Muslim mob is not simply because of her Hindu identity. The narrative of the film drives the point that Dil Nawaz’s desire for vengeance against Shanta is not borne simply because of the fate of his sisters but because she rejects his proposal for marriage. After the killings of his sisters, though his hatred for Hindus had amplified yet his behaviour towards Shanta had not changed. The scene of his proposal is preceded by a scene where Shanta, Lenny, Dil Nawaz and Hasan witness the burning of Lahore from the rooftop of Dil Nawaz’s house. The rooftop scene is in contrast to another rooftop scene, right at the beginning where people are taking part in the kite flying festival. The unidentified free view of the camera, which Deluze terms as camera consciousness (Deluze 1986: 74), rotates on the different rooftops which are filled with people of different religion. The Muslims with their caps, the Sikhs with their turban and the Hindus are all playing together (18: 22). This is in contrast to the scene of the riot where Dil Nawaz can pinpoint the different places where
the Hindus, Muslims and Sikh communities live. His gleeful expression, as the Muslim, mob burns Hindu homes, is in sharp contrast to the looks of horror on the faces of Shanta and Hasan. Dil Nawaz’s glee quickly subsides as he registers their looks. A medium close up captures his realisation of Shanta and Hasan’s horror. Soon after Hasan leaves to help the people, he proposes to Shanta. The entire sequence can be explained through Deluze’s notion of perception and affection image which are all types of movement images (Deluze 1986:71-87). In movement image, the characters perceive things (perception image) and they react (affection image) accordingly. In case of Dil Nawaz, his perception of Shanta and Hasan’s horror leads to his realisation (a medium close up shot captures his change) of the man he has become leading him to propose to her. In Dil Nawaz’s proposal lies the answer to Mehta’s query about what prompts friends to turn foes. Using the metaphor of the caged lion, Dil Nawaz tells Shanta:

this is not only about Hindus and Muslims. It’s about what’s inside us. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs – we are all bastards, all animals. Like the lion in the zoo that Lenny baby is so scared of. He just waits there waiting for the cage to open. And when it does, then God help us all. Shanta please marry me. If you are with me then, the animal that’s within me will be controlled. (1: 02:58).

It is with the metaphor of the animal within us, that Mehta not only tries to explain the rationale behind people turning in their own friends but also takes the narrative from a local to a universal situation. Shanta’s rejection also signifies the beginning of the end of the friendship of Dil Nawaz, Shanta and Hasan. From the scene of the proposal to the rape of Shanta, the narrative focuses on the three of them unlike in the novel which tends to veer more towards how the impact of partition on a child and how she tries to
make sense of the changes around her. Shanta’s rape and abduction is just one of the many events affecting her. In the film however, all the other episodes are all build ups to the final event of abduction. Shanta’s rejection is felt more acutely by Dil Nawaz when he sees Shanta and Hasan making love to one another. Dil Nawaz’s perception of the event is perceived by Lenny who is herself watching Shanta and Dil Nawaz. Shanta’s rape then is not simply because of her religion but because she exercises her agency in rejecting one man for another. It has been mentioned in earlier chapters about how partition violence was used by many to settle their own personal scores. In Shanta’s case, patriarchy took on the shroud of religion in the violence against her. As Claudia Preckel writes:

Whereas Shanta was free to choose Hasan as her consort and even had premarital sexual relationship with him before Partition, her abduction and (by implication) rape spelled the end of her control of her own body and her sexuality ... The motif of sexual violence ... is rooted ... in the patriarchal system and deeply entrenched notions of manhood and the male will to enforce power over women. (Preckel 2008: 74)

Mehta’s film does not represent what happens to Shanta after she is abducted. Soon after her abduction there is only “darkness”, in the sense that there is suspension of representation on the screen for about one or two seconds without any sound. As Shanta is being led away by the mob, there is a close up shot on Lenny’s face which fades to a black screen and a haunting music closes the scene. After this suspension, the film’s final scene opens with images of British statues in the park. The camera scans several statues of British figures positioned around the otherwise deserted park, coming to rest
finally on an older Lenny sitting at the base of a stone pedestal and saying that she has never seen her Ayah again:

Two hundred and fifty years of the British Empire had ended in 1947. What’s there to show for it except a country divided? The massacre and kidnapping, vendetta and more violence, was it all worth it? Fifty years have gone by since I betrayed my Ayah. Some say she married Ice Candy Man. Some say they saw her in a brothel in Lahore, others that they say her in Amritsar. But I never set eyes on her again. And that day in 1947 when I lost my Ayah, I lost a large part of myself. (1: 20: 02)

As Mehta says, “For me the Film was dramatically over after Ayah gets kidnapped” (Vardika 2011: 82). In the novel, Ayah is found in a red light area living under the strict control of Ice Candy Man. She is then rescued by the police at the behest of Lenny’s godmother, a character missing from the film. Later on Ayah is send back to her family. Moreover, in the novel Lenny’s mother and aunt are shown to be engaged in rehabilitation measures. In the film however, by choosing to end Shanta’s story with her abduction, Mehta not only reinforces the divisions created by Partition but also suggests that there is no closure or easy recovery from it.

In their work on the efforts on the parts of the Indian and Pakistani governments to find abducted women and return them to their families, Menon and Bhasin argue that the so called recoveries of women in the aftermath of the riots had much to do with an attempt to maintain the honour of the state. The raison de etre of the recovery efforts was that, “if the body of the Nation could not be recovered than that of its women could and once recovered the women had to be relocated within the fold of the family, the
After the riots ended, the symbolic value attached to women’s bodies continued, as the governments of India and Pakistan began efforts to recover abducted women, with or without their consent and also whether their families wanted them or not. By leaving Shanta’s fate unresolved, the film is pointing to the fact that the physical and psychological wounds created by partition runs deeper than those allowed by state efforts. There were women who had settled into new lives with their families and for them the recovery was like a second displacement. Yet there were still others who were not welcomed by the families and were killed in the name of preserving the honour of the family. In the novel, the involvement of the ladies, like Lenny’s mother and aunt, in the rescue efforts are also implied. Mehta’s abrupt suspension from representing Shanta’s fate after her abduction seems to be also suggestive of Mehta’s intention of highlighting the silencing of women during partition. Shanta’s silence then signifies the silence of the women in the history of the Partition. Feminist scholars like Butalia, Menon, Bhasin have written about how the stories of women were paid little attention in the official histories of partition.

What is also important in the voice over at the end of the film is the highlighting of the fact that fifty years have passed. The portrayal is in sharp contrast to the various events organised to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of independence by both India and Pakistan. As Kundaisya and Tai writes:

In the autumn of 1997 ... commemorative events are underway in the Indian subcontinent to mark the fiftieth anniversary of independence and partition. Celebrations have been marked with exuberance, enthusiasm and fervour even in remote parts of Pakistan and India and elaborate programmes have been drawn up in both the countries to celebrate the
Golden Jubilee year ... As the tinsels and ribbons of the inaugural Golden Jubilee are being cleared away in India and Pakistan, a sense of deep introspection and stock taking has gripped both the nations. (Kundaisya and Tai 1-6)

Mehta’s film belongs to the category of works which intervene in the celebratory narratives. To look into the kind of adaptation, Deepa Mehta achieves in *Earth*, it would be fruitful to turn to Julie Sander’s categories of adaptation. In her book *Adaptation and Appropriation* (2006), Julie Sanders uses Deobrah Cartmell’s classification of adaptations to define the various types of adaptations. The classifications are: transposition, commentary and analogue. Deepa Mehta’s *Earth* belongs to the second category called commentary where the adaptation “moves away from simple proximation towards something more culturally loaded” by addressing the “absence or gaps” in the narratives (Sanders 2006: 20-22). In *Earth*, through the silence regarding Ayah’s fate, Mehta leaves a powerful gap at the end of the film for the audience to think about the unaccounted women and the silence of women in general in the history of the Partition.

Mehta also resists from taking any sides. For Mehta, the appeal of taking an eight year old Parsi girl as a narrator lay in the fact that it merits an unbiased view. As she comments, “I felt that through Lenny’s eyes we experience the innocence of childhood. The Parsis didn’t take the side of the Hindus or the Muslims. I felt it was really balanced” (Qureshi 2016: 66). According to scholars like Meenakshi Bharat, Sidhwa however does not shy away from expressing where her loyalties lay. In chapter 20, the author’s voice breaks into the narrative of the eight year old Lenny to present Nehru as a cunning statesman who used his charm to wrest away major portions of the
British territory for the Indian state. She raises the ‘Kashmir issue’ by questioning the logic of granting Kashmir to India and laments the caricaturing of Jinnah in Indian and British scholarship (Sidhwa 159-169) As Bharat writes:

Sidhwa, Pakistani in her allegiance and nationality, clearly shows a nationalist tilt in her novel. Jinnah is our ‘our Jinnah Sahib’ but India is othered by ‘your precious Gandhijee’. Gandhi and Nehru are caricatured into sex maniacs and enema-fixated individuals ... Deepa Mehta waters down the political affiliations of her author. She becomes a disinterested documenter of religious and cultural difference ... She stresses this difference as the reality of the times, a perennial, continuing, identifying condition of the inhabitants of the subcontinent, of humanity, of earth, her chosen metaphor. (Bharat 2008: 67)

Scholars like Bharat have added that this neutrality is due to her diasporic status which however has been discounted by Mehta herselfvi. However the fact cannot be discounted that she uses the metaphor of 1947 to talk about the human condition in general. Though her subject is rooted in India, the concern is universal. Earth is part of a trilogy of films: Fire, Water and Earth. As Mehta says, “The trilogy is about elements. Fire is about the politics of sexuality, Earth is about the politics of nationalism and Water is about the politics of religion” (Churi 1999: n pag). In classical Hindu philosophy, there are five essential elements: fire, water, earth, sky and ether and disturbance to their balance ensures, a breakdown of harmony. Against this context, Mehta’s trilogy is an indication of the chaos in nature when women are suppressed, dominated and subjugated. The effort to transcend the local has earned her the tag of being a transnational filmmaker. Transnational filmmaking, exists “in constant negotiation
between the global and local” and Mehta’s films can not only be “read ... as individual texts produced by authorial vision and generic conventions but also as sites for intertextual, cross-cultural and transnational struggles over meanings and identities” (Levitin 2012: 271). In the same vein, Vardika writes:

While being cultural specific in the sense that Deepa Mehta’s trilogy chooses to focus on India, her attempt is to relate these issues to wider concerns of international and global significance. Time and again Mehta, has been described as a transnational filmmaker. This is another way of saying that although her films are about India, her concerns do not begin and end with India; they reach out to the world beyond, making connections, building bridges, exposing to the world facets of India that were not revealed earlier. (Vardika 2011: 20)\textsuperscript{vii}

In *Earth*, the use of the woman’s body by the triumvirate of patriarchy, religion and nation, led to a breakdown of society from which there was no turning back. It is like a wound which never heals. And this is shown through the use of colours red and terracotta. As Mehta says, “With *Earth*, I saw terra-cotta, I saw blood, I saw red ... I told my director of photography and my production designer that I did not want to see blue in the film at all. I didn’t want anything that was cold. It had to be a throbbing wound” (Qureshi 2017: 66-82). The attempt to portray partition as a throbbing wound highlights her attempt to talk of its continuation in the present. The desire to transcend from the particular to the universal is never more explicitly implied than in the title. *Earth* is subtitled as 1947 which is just one instance when the politics of division can lead to the breakdown of societies. In Mehta’s own words then:
The enemy really divided and ruled then left. There is no nostalgia for British raj in this film. The reason I wanted to do a film about the partition of India into India and Pakistan was that. Also it is an exploration about what happens when sectarian war, whether it’s Rwanda or Kosovo or whichever country has been colonized and where the colonizers left, the way the French left Vietnam, they’ve always left a country that’s divided. 52 years later, for us, we are still struggling with the same boundary issues. As is Ireland or Kosovo. (Churi 1999: n pag)

However by investigating the story of the Hindu ayah in the film and the symbolic construction of women’s bodies, the aim of the chapter was not to present a final or authentic version of the partition but that there can be multiple realities and meanings and thus resists a generalized construction of the history of 1947.

II

*Pinjar* is the work of a woman who was caught right in the middle of Partition violence when she had to flee Lahore with her husband as she was pregnant with a child and needed immediate attention which was not possible in riot hit Lahore (Nonica Dutt 5). Making the historic train journey like thousands of other refugees, she penned an invocation to the legendary Sufi Poet Waris Shah, believing that it was the religion of love preached by the Sufi saints that could quell the flames of religious hatred.

The film too begins with the same invocation to Waris Shah, written by Amrita Pritam, in the form of a song. The song is accompanied by a succession of graphic drawings of various important scenes in the film. Waris Shah is implored to narrate the tale of suffering endured by millions of daughters of Punjab just as he had sung about
the legend of Heer. The song firmly places the focus of the film on the women’s histories of partition unlike the novel which deals with the condition of women in general. Commenting on the issue of transference from novel to films, Brian McFarlene writes in his book, *Novel to Film*, that, “Novel and film can share the same story, the same raw materials but are distinguished by means of different plot strategies which alter sequence, highlights different emphases, which in a word, defamiliarize the story” (McFarlene 1996: 23). The song sets the ideological tone of the film – the need for tolerance and inclusiveness in the midst of growing sectarian violence. The song is succeeded by a voiceover by noted Hindi and Urdu poet, Gulzar, who himself was a victim of Partition. Gulzar functions as the *sutradhar* who gives us the context and time frame of the film. The year is 1946 and running parallel to the voiceover we see scenes portraying the shift from a peaceful serene atmosphere of people singing the glories of one God to people killing in the name of different gods. The voiceover ends with Gulzar stating that apart from the names of the characters which are fictitious, the film portrays “the naked truth”. The invocation to Waris Shah, the use of a partition survivor like Gulzar and the emphasis on events of the film as “naked truth”- all highlight the importance of ‘her/story’ in the overall understanding of a nation’s history. Women have always been the silent and neglected witnesses of events. *Pinjar* then is not a challenge to official history but an attempt to fill up the gaps left by such his/stories.

The film proper opens in pre-partition Amritsar and unlike the novel mostly follows a linear progression of time. In a study conducted by Ashis Nandy through the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, he puts forward a notion of utopianism. This utopian world is shown in the first part of the film with the protagonist of the film,
Pooro, living a happy life with her family in Amritsar. Talking about the linearity of novels and spatiality in films, Brain McFarlene writes:

We construct meaning from a novel by taking in words and groups of words sequentially as they appear on the page. In order to say, grasp a scene, a physical setting, we have no choice but to follow the linearity the arrangement of arbitrary symbols set out, for the most part, in horizontal rows which enjoin the linearity of the experience ... however frame following frame is not analogous to the word following word experience of the novel ... the frame instantly and at any given moment provides information of at least visual complexity ... beyond that of any given word because of the spatial impact of the frame ... The fact that we are always being exposed to the multiplicity of signifiers contained within the space of a frame or series of frame has implications for the adaptation of verbal material: for example as it relates to the representation of characters and settings. (McFarlene 1996: 27)

The film begins with Pooro’s brother Trilok, running through the streets of Amritsar in order to meet his family in a studio where their picture is to be taken. Talks of partition are floating about but people aren’t threatened by it. When Pooro’s father goes to her fiancé, Ramchand’s house to fix her marriage, his father remarks, “No matter how bad the situation is, the country cannot be divided so easily. A handful of people cannot divide two communities so easily” (24: 09). In the same scene, the audience is informed that Ramchand had already translated Kalidas’s Shakuntala into Urdu and was already in the process of translating the Valmiki Ramayana into Urdu and would also translate Ghalib into Sanskrit. When someone jokes and tells him not to change the religion of
the poets in the process of changing the language of their works, Ramchand replies, “For me, Valmiki, Kalidas and Ghalib have the same religion. Only their language is different. In every age, they have expressed the truth of their own age” (25: 07). Through Ramchand’s act of translating in both Sanskrit and Urdu, Dwivedi highlights how there was respect for each other’s language and culture in harmony in the pre-partition era. The scene also brings to light Pritam’s own view about partition and the role of writers in propagating the theme of harmony. The fact that people did not believe about the possibility of partition has been expressed by Pritam herself in her memoir. Like Mehta, Dwivedi was not born during Partition, but unlike Mehta he had no one in the family who could pass on information to him about Partition and he had to turn to partition literature. As he comments, “To obtain the knowledge of the society of that time, stories written in that period are of great help. I read a lot of literature of that era” (Verma 2003: n pag). The impossibility of partition and the influence of poets in propagating unity, two ideas which are expressed in the scene, are direct reflection of Pritam’s own words as expressed in her memoir. Nonica Datta while analysing her memoir writes:

Amrita Pritam refused to posit a casual connection between the violence that rocked Lahore and Punjab’s partition. In fact at the height of violence, Hindu women continued to frequent the dargahs (shrines) of murshids (preceptors), pirs (saints) and faqirs (mendicants), she says. While the city was swept up in flames and the news of women being abducted, raped and burnt alive in thousands reached her husband’s home on Dhani Ram Road, Amrita Pritam thought it was a temporary madness ... for her Punjab was not communalized in its day to day life ... she
repeatedly expresses her intimate attachment to Punjab’s metaphorical and physical presence devoid of religious acrimony. (Datta 2008: 5)

In the film, Ramchand’s father echoes her faith that the shared culture of Punjabi society would transcend the language of communal hatred. In her autobiography, *Aksharon Ke Saye (In the Shadow of Words)*, she writes, “Writers are the conscience of the people. Can the conscience be Hindu, Muslim Sikhs” (Datta 2008: 14). This idea seems to be invoked by Ramchand, when he talks about the writings of Ghalib, Kalidas, and Valmiki. Though not included in the novel, in the film Dwivedi brings out Pritam’s ideas as expressed in her works in an attempt to bring to us what the film calls, “the naked truth” of the time. This inclusion of the myriad views of Pritam, makes this adaptation what Linda Hutcheon, quoting Roland Barthes’, calls “a stereophony of echoes, citations and references” (Hutcheon 2006: n pag).

In the film, the harmonious existence led by the people in the first part of the film, is relayed through the songs and the bright colours. The happy ambience in the first part, evoked through song and dance is in sharp contrast to the bleakness of the next part which itself is an indication of changing times. Since films are a visual medium, one way to indicate the change in time is to utilise the space. Thus in films, movement of clouds, change in seasons, are some classic example of utilisation of space to show the movement of time. In *Pinjar*, the change from a pre partition utopian world to that of a violent surrounding is gradually depicted through the use of bright colours, song and dance, low lighting, shots at night and the silence that encompass the household of Pooro after her abduction. Given that along with being a visual medium, films are an audio medium and given the prominence of songs in Indian films, the song at the beginning of the film plays an important role. As against Lalitha Gopalan’s
analysis of songs as a “delaying device” (Gopalan 2002: 17), the wedding song at the beginning of the film is important to show the difference between the pre-partition world and the world that one was going to inherit.

Along with these factors, costume too has played an important part in bringing the contrast between the first part of the film and the second, especially in the clothes of Pooro. Before her abduction, she is mostly in green, red and yellow but after her abduction, the colour of her attire is mostly black, white, blue and brown. According to Eisenstein, colour is an important way of expressing behaviour and emotions of people. While illustrating this point, Arun Khopikar quotes:

No matter how surprising it sounds, it is replica of human behaviour. Not only of human behaviour but also the expressive aspects of the strongest emotions ... Each colour is a symptom, has a significance ... of state of a character, be it an emotional affective state or in a narrow sense a physiological state. (Khopikar 1991: 103-112)

The central event in the film around which the narrative revolves is the abduction of Pooro by Rashid. The physical assault of the women of one community by another is a common signature of partition violence - the roots of which can be traced in part to the anti colonial movement in the nineteenth century. It has been discussed in chapter 1, how in order to combat the influence of the coloniser, the nation was re-imagined as the ‘Mother’. But this was not done for any real progress of women but was embroiled in a contest between the colonisers and native over gaining power (Leonard and Bhattacharya 2017: 17). Thus during partition, violence against women was considered as defiling ‘Bharat Mata’.
Coming back to Pinjar, Pooro’s abduction by Rashid could easily have been interpreted as simply a vengeance of one community against another. However we are informed that Pooro’s abduction is the consequence of an old family feud carried out to avenge the abduction of a woman belonging to Rashid’s family. This throws light on other aspects of partition. It has been mentioned in the “Introduction”, about the findings made by Ashis Nandy about how people used the opportunity of the violent atmosphere of partition to settle old scores and fights (Mohsin 2009: 34). The notion has been brought up in Earth, when Dil Nawaz is instrumental in the abduction of Shanta after she rejects him. In Pinjar too, Pooro’s abduction, more than being a crime fuelled by religion, is a crime pushed by a family feud. What is significant is the use of the womenfolk in this game of power. Violence against women is not something peculiar to partition but was prevalent and a notoriously familiar phenomenon in the pre-partition Punjabi society in which the film is set. Partition violence is a continuation of centuries of violence condoned by patriarchy under a new rationale provided by religion. In his book, The Colours of Violence (1995), Sudhir Kakar while commenting on the violence against women and the legitimacy attributed to it by society, writes that:

The chief reason for the preponderance of specifically sexual violence in the Partition riots in the north is that, as compared to many other parts of the country, the undivided Punjab was (and continues to be) a rather violent society. Its high murder rate is only one indication of a cultural endorsement of the use of physical force to attain socially approved ends such as the defence of one’s land or of personal or family honour. There is now empirical evidence to suggest that the greater the legitimation of violence in some approved areas of life, the more is the likelihood that
force will also be used in other spheres where it may not be approved. In this so-called cultural spill over effect there is a strong association between the level of nonsexual violence and rape, rape being partly a spill over from cultural norms condoning violent behaviour on other areas of life. (Kakar 1995: 38)

Kakar depicts a world in which sexual violence against women is accepted as normal. The abduction of a female member of Rashid’s family by Pooro’s family and the revenge abduction of Pooro by Rashid is a classic example of this phenomenon.

What is significant is the intra-community violence faced by Pooro after her abduction. On hearing that Pooro’s abduction is a result of their ancestral feud, Pooro’s father comes back home and tells his wife that Pooro is as good as dead for him. Even Pooro’s abductor, Rashid tells her that no one would accept her back home as she had become ‘tainted’. But the cruellest cut is reserved for the scene when Pooro manages to come back home to her parents and she is told to go back on two counts: firstly as she had become tainted, no one from her own community would ever accept her and secondly her return would endanger the lives of the other members of her family as the Muslims, enraged by her escape, would surely come looking for her, amidst the growing Hindu-Muslim conflict. From this incident, Pooro realises “the disposability of the female in patriarchal circles of kinship” (Subramaniam 160). As Pooro returns to Rashid and begins her life as Hamida, time and again she has flashbacks and fantasies of her life as Pooro. These refer to the split in the unified self. The first fantasy occurs when is about to be married to Rashid and she imagines him to be Ramchand. The next instance is when she goes to Rattoval along with a relative of Rashid. She imagines herself as a young bride carried in a palanquin to Ramchand’s house in Rattoval. Her
fantasy is interspersed with flashbacks of her time with her family and her preparations to be a bride. For Pooro, the trauma of partition is exhibited through her repeated musings and flashbacks of her past life. These instances highlight “the hallucinatory quality of psychic displacement and the impossibility of a simple return” (Sarkar 2010: 195). Bhaskar Sarkar talks about the condition of melancholy which ails the victims of partition. Drawing on Freud’s definition of melancholy, Sarkar writes that melancholy “is the loss of reaction to an object that is loved not as an entity distinct and separate from oneself but as a reflection of one’s self worth ... When loss occurs there is a debilitating sense of self impoverishment” (Sarkar 2010: 35). Through her continuous flashbacks and fantasies, Pooro then exhibits signs of a melancholic as she grieves about her lost past.

The intra-community violence faced by Pooro raise two significant aspects. The first aspect is the similarity between Pooro’s rejection by her family and Sita’s rejection by Ram and the people of Ayodha. The build up to drawing a parallel between Sita and Pooro is drawn early in the film when Pooro’s fiancé, Ramchand is shown singing, “Sitako dekhe saare gaon”, a song about the hardships faced by Sita on her return to Ayodha. A few scenes later, Ramchand playfully warns the friends of Pooro about the separation that was fated for Ram and Sita. Theorists like Christian Metz has analysed cinema as a system of signs and codes. Thus for its signification and meaning, the codes of Hindi cinema are rooted in its socio-cultural, political and economic practices. Commenting on the impact of Ramayana on the Indian psyche, A. K. Ramanujan writes that the Ramayana has become almost “a second language of a whole cultural area” (Richman 1991: 14). Thus when Pooro is rejected, the comparison to the Sita legend is immediately highlighted and how since the time of the epics, control of female sexuality
and male honour has been linked and has percolated into society down the ages. It has given society the legitimate license to inflict violence on women in the name of honour. Another aspect which is highlighted by Pooro’s abduction is the result of “The Collapse of the Moral Universe” which Nandy and his team of researchers have highlighted (Ghosh 1997: n pag). Nandy talks of the story of a woman who was left behind by her family in the hands of her captors to ensure a safe passage for her family members. In the film, Pooro’s own mother implores her to go back, citing how her return from captivity would endanger the lives of her family. As against the bright lights used in the beginning to highlight the happy life of Pooro, the next part is shot at night and by using less lights, which is an indication of the change in her circumstances. Thus right from having to prove her chastity in order to uphold her husband’s honour as depicted in the Ramayana to the present used by her family for safety, it is apparent that women are the prisoners of the whims their husband/family/communities’. It is in this context that the name Pinjar can be translated as cage, and is relevant to highlight the trapped existence of women.

Apart from the explicit intertextual reference to the Sita legend, the narratives of Hindi films have drawn inspiration from the epics. In this regard Saibal Chatterjee writes that:

Episodes from the two Indian mythological epics Ramayana and Mahabharata ... were the principal source of inspiration for filmmakers ... it is in these plots and the narrative conventions thy employed that mainstream Hindi cinema is still rooted ... the central concept of good over evil and the triumph of the former over the latter, for instance can be
traced back to the mythological face-off between Rama and Ravana.

(Chatterjee 2003: 6)

Read against the backdrop of such studies, the central characters in Pinjar – Pooro, Ramchand and Rashid - could be easily seen as reconfiguration of Sita, Rama and Ravana respectively. However Pinjar resists such good and evil, white and black dichotomy through the revision of Rashid/Ravana’s character. This revision is in keeping with the retellings of Ramayana as told in the south. As Ashis Nandy writes:

In south India, an alternative tradition of Ramayana ... had off and on been a source of social conflict ... In any case, Rama, however godlike was traditionally not the final repository of all good. Ravana, too, had never been traditionally all bad. He was seen as having a record of genuine spiritual achievements. (Nandy 1983: 19-20)

In the film, not only does the narrative portray Rashid’s crime as an act triggered by circumstance but all throughout the film, he is seen grovelling in the mire of guilt and shame. It is his need for repenting that makes him overlook Pooro’s brother, Trilok’s act of setting fire to his fields. Not only that, he goes against his own community and saves Ramchand’s sister, Lajjo from the clutches of her Muslim abductors. Lajjo’s abduction is triggered by the communal riots and through her, Dwivedi highlights the condition of women who become the property of the abductors and were ill treated by them. Unlike Pooro, she is reduced to the role of a servant in her ancestral home which has been taken over by her abductor.

The narrative of people from the opposite community saving each other is another aspect of the findings of the Partition project by Ashis Nandy. Though the riots
were incited in the name of religion, “neighbours protected and sheltered each other … Hindu victims pointed out that they were saved by the Maulvi sahib (Muslim religious preacher) of the village” (Mohsin 2009: 34). As such instead of presenting characters in black and white shades, the film:

Explores the background to violence and the humanity of the people who engage in it – including their own combination of benevolent and malevolent impulses, admirable and objectionable traits. Indeed, the film indicates that admirable and objectionable traits are often inseparable from one another. In any case it complicates our sense of the history. Perhaps more importantly, this work systematically revises the Ramayana as well … it leaves viewers with potential re-imaginations of both Partition and Ramayana, re-imaginations that restores some of the contradictions … of the historical event but without surrendering comprehensibility. (Hogan 2014: 122)

Rashid’s act of saving Lajjo and returning her to her family in India highlights another aspect of the partition narrative, the Central Recovery Act - the act of recovering or finding women who were abducted or were missing during partition(Butalia 2004: 109).

Thus, even after partition the violence against women continued under a new logic for the choice of choosing their own country had been conveniently taken from women, their homes would now be defined by their religion. Moreover the execution of the recovery plan was not as smooth as the conceptualisation. For one thing, the notion of becoming tainted after abduction was a deterrent in welcoming the women with open arms. This led to political leaders to make passionate appeals to the public to accept the
women (Mookerjea-Leonard 4). The appeals though made on humanitarian grounds, also manifests the anxiety of the political leaders of losing their women to the other nation which was akin to losing their manhood. As Ritu Menon writes:

As abducted women, they were sexual property but also upholders of honour, symbols of sacred mother, definers of community and national identity ... Belonging for women is also – uniquely – linked to sexuality, honor, chastity: family, community and country must agree on both their acceptability and legitimacy and their membership within the community ... in the post-partition period, the state itself was a complex confluence: redefining itself as a secular, democratic and socialist but ... incorporating a benign paternalism (or mai-baapism) while simultaneously upholding patriarchal codes and practices. (Menon 2004: 53-56)

In the film, though Lajjo is rescued from her abductors, the fear of rejection makes Lajjo plead with Pooro to not send her back. If Pooro’s abductor does not ill treat her, then it is through the character of Lajjo, that Dwivedi highlights the condition of women who suffered at the hands of their abductors. Through the contrasting conditions of Lajjo and Pooro, Dwivedi portrays multiple realities about the situation in and around partition. Pooro tries to subdue her fear by saying that the situation has changed. The changed situation is a reference to the recovery efforts by the governments of both the countries. There are scenes of people discussing about the government efforts of sending the abducted women back to their original ‘homes’. To make it more authentic, names of women who actually took part in the recovery mission like Mrinalini Sarabhai, are mentioned. Pooro however refuses to return to India with her brother.
Pooro exemplifies the situation of abducted women who had built up new lives and were reluctant to break the newly formed bond. Menon writes that “the resistance by abducted women themselves further demonstrates the attempt to realize citizenship by acting independently and autonomously – of community, state and family” (Menon 2004: 54).

Pooro’s rejection is then a rejection of choosing one’s home on the basis of religion. Jyotika Virdi writes that “the family is the most important trope which the Hindi films mobilize to build the idea of nation” (Virdi 2003: 11). Pooro’s refusal to go back to her family is then a refusal to tow the official line and be marked as a symbol of a community or state. She resists being part of a “nation wherein she would be welcomed as a disenfranchised secondary citizen who is in need of institutional rescue” (Subramaniam 2013: 155). In the novel, Pooro’s child is alive and Ramchand is already married. So Pooro’s decision may be pinned down to these factors rather than her changed emotions for Rashid. Moreover as mentioned earlier, the novel is more about the condition of women in a patriarchal society and hence as Sreerekha Subramaniam writes about her in the novel:

Pooro becomes more interested in forming alternative forms of community with the vulnerable, mostly women. The communities she forms are beyond borders in that the women she rescues are from all sides of the shifting paradigms of the new nations ... Thereby Pritam’s text is a critique of the ills of patriarchy ... makes room for the oppressed to rise, resist and form their own imagined women’s community of solace and self identification. (Subramanian 2013: 171)
However in the film, Pooro does not have an obligation towards a child and Ramchand is still unmarried. So her decision can be summarized as her way of overcoming her past and her feelings for Ramchand. As Preckel writes, “Only the woman’s acceptance of another faith arising from love for her husband and as a result of free will can be the basis of a healthy nation (Preckel 2008: 84) Pooro’s acceptance of Rashid, is also in keeping with the vision of Amrita Pritam as to how love can transgress the boundaries of religious identities. Her recourse to the Sufi poets as the upholders of communal harmony is a testament to the fact. As Nonica Datta writes:

By invoking Waris Shah, the eighteenth century Sufi poet, Amrita Pritam draws upon the literary culture of Punjab. More specifically, she uses the qissa tradition of which Waris Shah was one of the chief components ... Central to the qissa tradition, is the theme of love between a Hindu and Muslim. (Datta 2008: 8)

The message of the film draws from the long line of Sufi poets, who upheld the religion of humanity above all else. The message is also in keeping with the political atmosphere of the time. As Meenakshi Bharat writes:

The political goodwill of the moment, 2003, a crest in the see-saw motion of Indo-Pak relations apparently discourages the use of anti-Pakistani sloganeering and pro-Indian jingoism, which was present in many films dealing with cross border relations. The release of the film at the Wagah border enunciated the stand ... The patriotic strains of the song, ‘Vatna ve o mera Vatne we’ ... too refers to the original homeland and to the emergent India or Pakistan. (Bharat 2008: 67)
In India too, the Godhra carnage had yet again shaken the foundations of secularism in India. In the previous chapter, it has been mentioned, how producers like Ramananda Sagar and B. R. Chopra, who had witnessed the carnage of partition, were reluctant to make movies on the topic for fearing of inciting more violence. In the film, Dwivedi’s nostalgic desire for the unity between the two communities seems to be the outcome of the fragile political conditions of the time. However the desire for union is portrayed in the film, it does not minimise the condition of women who were abducted and then returned to their families. As Lajjo prepares to go back with Ramchand and Trilok, Pooro repeatedly tells them to never let her feel uncomfortable about her ordeal, thereby highlighting the complexities in the recovery mission. In this regard Nandy writes that:

There is a split in the Hindi film between the slogans of the nation state, to which they seem to give uncritical and total allegiance on the one hand and on the other hand is the simultaneous existence of very subtle criticism of the ideology of the state which they project into the same films. (Nandy 2000: 21-93)

In the novel, Pritam not only focuses on the women victims of Partition but also on women who endured different types of violence in society. So, there is the character of the motherless girl, Kammo who is treated badly by her aunt. Then there is Tara, whose husband brings another woman to their house and forces Tara to become a prostitute. Meenakshi Bharat pins this down to Amrita’s concerns with social issues. She states about the novel:

Its ultimate appeal is more as a novel that voices social and feminist concerns ... specifically at that point in time, Pritam’s main concern was
to document the plight of women in Punjabi society, which was ridden with social schisms and tensions. Written close on the heels of Partition, she naturally grounds her novel in the troubled scenario ... she was making no political statement , only uttering a humanitarian lament for the unfortunate turn of events. (Bharat 2008: 65-66)

*Pinjar*, the film strictly focuses on events in and around partition and the timeline in the film i.e from 1946 to 1948 while in the novel it stretches from 1935 till partition. Apart from reducing the timeline of the film, and the voiceover from Gulzar at the beginning, another way in which the film’s focus on 1947 is increased is through the character of Pooro’s brother Trilok. He is presented as being actively involved in the freedom struggle. He is seen actively participating in political rallies and taking money from his father to fund his party. He is shown to be a disciple of Gandhi and hence is portrayed as someone with a liberal outlook. That is why, as against his father who refuses to accept Pooro, citing the tainted honour of the family, Trilok keeps searching for his sister.

By focussing exclusively on events around Partition, *Pinjar* places itself in the group of revisionist films about partition like Deepa Mehta’s *Earth* (1998) which garnered critical acclaim and box office success by tracing the lives of ordinary people affected by partition. Box office success is a major factor that drives the story of a film. In this regard, Asish Rajadhyaksha writes that in Indian main stream cinema:

The story - or what is written down in advance by people like screenplay and dialogue writers – is crucial, both to producers and distributors. For what they have invested in the film’s launch is, apart from stars and
music director, precisely the story (‘the property’ as Hollywood and even some Hindi cinema calls it). The story is crucial as well to the audience, whose cinephiliac dissection of what they have seen, concentrates overwhelmingly on this component, not as exclusive from but somehow containing the entire film-going experience. (Rajadhyaksha 2000: 277)

Thus focussing on and advertising Pinjar as a ‘partition story’ can be taken as a marketing ploy aimed at garnering box office success in the likes of films like Earth. Huge sum of money is at stake as it is also a commercial media and the changes in the economy of the country had also changed the rules of filmmaking. The boom in the television industry, saw the cinematic medium competing with it for drawing audience. Film marketing became an important part of the filmmaking process itself. As Shyam Benegal puts it:

> Almost thirty years after I made my first film that it dawned on me that marketing is not just a buzzword. It has now to be seen as a creative extension of filmmaking. Gone are the days when word of mouth could be relied upon to extend the size of audience for one’s film. With mass media growing the way it is, goodness knows how many new information avenues and markets will open up in the present century. In this Tower of Babel, one has to find a way to be seen and heard with the kind of films one makes. (Benegal 2002: 199)

Economic liberalisation in the 1990s in India saw the merging of “parallel cinema aesthetics” with popular mainstream cinema with an aim to not only tell the story but also to make the film commercially viable (Dutta 2002: 45). These films can be termed
according to Ashis Nandy as ‘middlebrow cinema’ which is a sort of compromise between commercial and art films (Nandy 1995: 226-227). Commenting on the difference between a film like Gadar and Pinjar, Dwiwedi opines that:

\[\text{Gadar} \text{ and } \text{Pinjar} \text{ share the same background but don’t speak the same language ... you cannot expect Pinjar to portray hatred, sloganeering or any other kind of provocation. Our approach is very realistic. Pinjar has the format of successful Hindi films but does not emulate commercial films.} \] 

(Verma n. pag)

Pinjar then can be placed in the category of ‘middlebrow cinema’ as it takes elements of popular cinema (song and dance) to revisit 1947 to focus on her/stories of partition. By doing so, it not only unearths how women were victims not only from the ‘other’ community but from their own community and state. Both Pinjar and Earth highlight the importance of revisiting 1947 to ensure that the same mistakes are not repeated. It is not only about Pakistan-India enmity, because the silencing can and has complicated relationships between communities in India itself. Pinjar and Earth reveal that 1947 was not only about the conflict between Hindus and Muslims. The film resists the equating of nation with women and is thus critical of patriarchal and territorial borders. As adaptations, both are – using Linda Hutcheon’s term – “(re-)creations” (Hutcheon 2006) which encompasses the concerns of their times and the medium in which they have been adapted. There are many narratives and meanings which emerge and the missing pieces can only be found by looking at the private dimension of partition or the stories from down below.
End Notes

i Spoken by Pooro’s mother in the novel Pinjar

ii Quoted in the short story “A Movement, a folder, some Tears” by Ambai.

iii Dismissing the notion that songs were only used to target the box office, Mehta in an interview to Manju Vardika comments that, “Music, songs help push the narrative forward. They are an intrinsic part of Indian culture” (Vardika 2011: 82). In fact, she “reverses it as background support for the drama as in Western film models” (Levitin 279)

iv Commenting on the other two types of adaptations, Sanders writes that all “novels are transpositions in the sense” that they transpose a novel from one genre to another (Sanders 2006: 24). But novels and plays go through other levels of transposition where there may be complete relocation in terms of time and place. She gives the example of Baz Luhrmann’s movie William Shakespeare’s Romeo+Juliet (1996) where the Shakespearean tragedy is transported to modern settings. In the third type of adaptation, there is a deepening of “our understanding of the new cultural product” when its relation to the source text is revealed (Sanders 2006: 23). She gives the example of Francis Coppola’s Apocalypse Now (1979) which is a variation of Joseph Conrad’s Heart of darkness

v In Sidhwa’s words, “the hindus are being favoured over the Muslims by the remnants of the Raj. Now that its objective to divide India is achieved, the British favour Nehru over Jinnah. Nehru is Kashmiri; they grant him Kashmir. Spurning logic, defying rationale ignoring the consequence of bequeathing a Muslim state to the Hindus ... They grant Nehru Gurdaspur and Pathankot, without which Muslim Kashmir cannot secured
... Nehru wears red carnations in the buttonholes of his ivory jackets. He bandies words with Lady Mountbatten and is presumed to be her lover. He is charming, too, to Lord Mountbatten ... Jinnah is incapable of compliments ... And today, forty years later, in films of Gandhi’s and Mountbatten’s lives, in books by British and Indian scholars, Jinnah who for a decade was known as ‘Ambassador of Hindu-Muslim Unity’ is caricatured, and portrayed a monster” (Sidhwa 158-160). Sidhwa also highlights the Parsee connection of Jinnah by writing about his Parsi wife and how she defied odds to marry outside her family. In this way, Sidhwa seems to subtly put forward the fact as to where her loyalties lay.

“...In an interview to Manju Vardika, “I don’t think being a non-resident Indian makes me see India better ... I was born, went to school, University in India. When I left India I wasn’t a kid. My interests, concerns were pretty much formed by then.” (Vardika 80)

As regards to her filmmaking practices, Mehta’s father was a film distributor so she grew up on a diet of popular Hindi films and even before she went to Canada and started making films along with her husband Saltzman, she had already dabbled in the craft of making documentaries (Levitin 282)

Analysing Deepa Mehta as a transnational filmmaker, Jacquelin Levitin also talks about her film crew, “Her crew is a United Nations of film. Her director of photography is usually Giles Nuttgens, who is British. His first assistant is French and his third assistant, Italian; Mehta’s first assistant director is Hungarian” (Levitin 276)

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**Filmography**

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