

# Cinematic Memories of Partition: Visualizing Trauma, Otherness, and Reconciliation in South Asian Cinema

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## Abstract

The Partition of India in 1947 remains an unresolved trauma whose reverberations continue to shape South Asian identities and intercommunal relations. This paper explores how Partition cinema engages with the politics of memory, trauma, and reconciliation through three films: Deepa Mehta's *Earth* (1947), Vijay Raaz's *Kya Dilli Kya Lahore*, and Sabiha Sumar's *Khamosh Pani*. Drawing upon Michael J. Shapiro's theory of the cinematic gaze and aesthetic politics, E. Ann Kaplan and Joshua Hirsch's trauma cinema, and Marianne Hirsch's concept of post memory, this study examines how filmmakers employ visual form—mise-en-scène, camera movement, sound design, and symbolic imagery to transform historical pain into acts of remembrance and critique. The analysis reveals how *Earth* visualizes communal violence through destabilized framing and sensory dissonance; how *Kya Dilli Kya Lahore* negotiates psychological othering within confined spaces; and how *Khamosh Pani* contrasts rural tranquility with gendered trauma and Islamization. Collectively, these films challenge habitual viewing expectations and nationalist historiographies, reimagining Partition not as a closed event but as an ongoing affective and political process.

**Keywords:** Partition Cinema, Cinematic Gaze, Trauma, Post memory, Gender, South Asian Film, Memory Politics

## Introduction

**T**he Partition of India in 1947 remains one of the most traumatic events in South Asian history, a rupture from which the subcontinent has yet to fully recover. The ethno-religious violence accompanying Partition continues to haunt collective memory, as millions were displaced or killed on account of their ethnicity and religion. This catastrophic episode, which forced countless individuals to abandon

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ancestral homes for newly drawn borders, not only redefined national identities but also perpetuated cycles of conflict within and between the successor states. A renowned historian Ayesha Jalal depicted partition as the most intense and significant event of twentieth century in south Asia. She calls it:

*“A defining moment that is neither beginning nor end, partition continues to influence how the peoples and states of postcolonial South Asia envisage their past, present and future. There can be no real understanding of India, Pakistan and Bangladesh without a full grasp of lasting impact of partition on their self-imaginings, political contestation and national projections” (Jalal,2013,1).*

In India people used to identify themselves with their traditions, languages and cultures rather than through their religions. A Bengali Muslim had more common and familiar outlook, language and his love for fish with his native Hindu fellow than with Muslims of Karachi or Pashtuns of North-West Frontier. (Dalrymple, 2015) However, it is the British rulers who are often regarded responsible for eroding these peaceful traditions. The British divided Indians into 'communities' based on religious and ethnical differences. These differences insinuated natives in such a way that they started developing their political representation on religion and ethnical identities. They rejected the diversity of their thoughts and began searching themselves in these divided boxes. (Tunzelmann,2007) The famous scholar Yasmin Khan contemplates Indian partition as 'testament to the follies of empire, which ruptures community evolution, distorts historical trajectories and forces violent state formation from societies that would otherwise have taken different—and unknowable—paths.' (Khan, 2007, 210) It is more than chronicle event as it has been the pervasive theme of writings in every genre of expression. (Roy, 2010, 13) The historical trauma has profoundly influenced creative expression, inspiring writers and filmmakers to engage with the human suffering and socio-political consequences of Partition. Scholars across disciplines have examined its political, cultural, and psychological dimensions, emphasizing the continuing resonance of Partition as a site of trauma, memory, and identity formation. Historians such as Butalia (1998), Pandey (2001), and Zamindar (2007) argue that Partition cannot be understood merely as a geopolitical event but as a deeply human catastrophe that fractured communities and reshaped personal and collective identities. The resulting narratives of displacement, violence, and nostalgia have provided fertile ground for cultural production, particularly in literature and cinema.

Cinema, more than other narrative forms, engages directly with the sensory and emotional registers of trauma. Its visual and auditory immediacy, as Alison Landsberg (2004) observes, generates “prosthetic memory”—an empathetic engagement with histories one has not personally lived. South Asian Partition films, in this sense, not only document history but also perform it, embodying the wounds of collective experience through framing, editing, and sound.

In the South Asian context, film scholars (Rajadhyaksha, 2009; Gopal & Moorti, 2008) have argued that cinematic depictions of Partition move beyond nationalist rhetoric to emphasize human vulnerability and shared suffering. By doing so, Partition films contribute to collective healing and to rethinking political identities rooted in ethno-religious difference. Recent scholarship situates Partition cinema within broader discussions of identity politics and reconciliation. Nayar (2019) argues that filmic narratives can act as “ethical spaces” where empathy transcends political borders. By challenging homogenizing versions of history, Partition films invite spectators to engage in critical reflection on contemporary ethno-religious tensions. Visual narratives thus function as counter-discourses that resist hatred and envision alternative futures grounded in coexistence and shared humanity.

History and Pakistan studies provide information about struggle of independence, the greatness of two nation theory, the reason of demanding separate homeland but it is only the fictional genre (visual and literary) which introduces to the phenomena of partition and give a human and social dimension to the whole saga of independence. Partition films foreground the personal, emotional, and moral dimensions of the event, offering counter-histories that humanize the political process. This grievous saga and its disastrous effects are better sketched by sensitive artists. These creative writers and film makers such as Manto (1955) in his short stories and Ritwik Ghatak (1976) in his films portrayed partition in a more realistic and humanistic way than historians. (Bose, Jalal, 2001, 198) The assimilation of popular culture in films has challenged the set narratives and influential political identities. Its visual and emotional power enables it to reshape and revisit the claimed facts. (Caso, Hamilton, 2015,4). The whole world has transformed into a visually conciliated society. People now give more importance to images for understanding a thing than words. (Lester, 2006) Michael Joseph Shapiro opines that cinematic narratives can challenge the official narratives of big political happenings in order to redefine them. (Shapiro, 1999)

The affective power of visual imagery often surpasses that of text, enabling a more immediate and visceral engagement with historical trauma and collective memory. Through these visual narratives, cinema plays a crucial role in reconstructing cultural memory, interrogating nationalist ideologies, and challenging entrenched ethno-religious divisions. Michael J. Shapiro elaborates the same concept in essay 'Film and World Politics'

*"It does so through its temporal rhythms – the way it composes images, words, and sounds – and through the way it disables viewers ordinary modes of perception, in some cases with an aesthetic of shock that disrupts habitual viewing expectations, and in some cases by restoring what perception tends to evacuate" (Caso, Hamilton, 2015, pg. 84)*

Michael J. Shapiro's (2008) formulation of film as a "site of political theory" offers a foundational lens for this analysis. Shapiro argues that cinema possesses the capacity to defamiliarize—to break the viewer's habitual perception of reality by presenting political experiences through disorienting visual and affective structures. Films that disturb linear time, moral certainty, or conventional framing force viewers to encounter history not as narrative closure but as a field of ethical uncertainty.

While Shapiro's work elucidates the political mechanics of cinematic disruption, the emotional and ethical dimensions of representing trauma demand a parallel engagement with trauma theory. E. Ann Kaplan's (2005) concept of "trauma cinema" and Joshua Hirsch's (2004) notion of "post-traumatic cinema" provide crucial frameworks. Both theorists argue that trauma defies traditional narrative representation; it is not experienced fully in the moment and thus returns belatedly through images, gaps, and repetitions. Kaplan notes that trauma cinema operates through disjunction and affect temporal fractures, visual repetition, and sound distortion that approximate the fragmented logic of traumatic memory.

Cultural memory studies have offered critical tools for understanding how the trauma of Partition is remembered and represented. Marianne Hirsch (2008) notes in her concept of post memory, the children of survivors inherit the emotional residues of trauma through stories, images, and cultural artifacts rather than direct experience. Partition films, therefore, act as post memorial sites—they visualize memories of loss and violence that have been silenced or distorted in dominant

political narratives. These films participate in what Bhalla (2011) calls “the affective archive,” preserving marginalized stories of refugees, women, and minorities.

Early cinematic treatments of Partition often reflected nationalist ideologies, as seen in films from the 1950s and 1960s that portrayed migration as an inevitable part of nation-building. However, post-1990s films—such as Deepa Mehta’s *1947: Earth* (1998), Sabiha Sumar’s *Khamosh Pani* (2003), and Vijay Raaz’s *Kya Dilli Kya Lahore* (2014)—marked a critical shift. These films foreground individual suffering and moral ambiguity. Scholars such as Datta (2012) and Kabir (2005) emphasize that these cinematic narratives ‘humanize history’ by highlighting the everyday realities of communal violence, displacement, and loss.

The selection of *Earth* (1947), *Kya Dilli Kya Lahore*, and *Khamosh Pani* is deliberate, reflecting the diversity of Partition’s cinematic articulations across time, nation, and gender. *Earth* (1947) visualizes the eruption of communal violence and the shattering of everyday coexistence. Its fragmented narrative structure and oscillating gaze exemplify how filmic techniques can mirror the instability of memory and moral vision. *Kya Dilli Kya Lahore* represents a psychological reorientation, using confined space and silence to foreground the absurdity of divided identities and the lingering trauma of displacement.

Together, these films map a trajectory from the visible spectacle of violence to its invisible psychic and intergenerational echoes. They offer a comparative framework for exploring how cinematic form itself becomes a mode of historical inquiry a way of seeing that contests hegemonic narratives and reclaims marginalized voices.

This paper explores how Partition films contribute to shaping new political identities and fostering shared narratives that resist hatred and exclusion. Focusing on *1947: Earth*, *Khamosh Pani*, and *Kya Dilli Kya Lahore*, among others, the study examines how cinematic portrayals of Partition not only revisit the lingering wounds of the past but also imagine possibilities for reconciliation in contemporary South Asia. This research aims to explore how Partition films construct visual and emotional vocabularies that challenge ethno-religious divisions and reframe collective memory. By applying theoretical insights from Shapiro’s politics of aesthetics, Hirsch’s post memory, Kaplan’s trauma cinema, the study demonstrates how film mediates between history and affects politics and ethics. It argues that Partition cinema functions as a counter-archive a space where the unspeakable

becomes visible, where silence becomes a language of resistance, and where the cinematic gaze reclaims the human amidst the political.

The analysis of *Earth* (1947), *Kya Dilli Kya Lahore*, and *Khamosh Pani* not only contributes to the growing body of scholarship on Partition cinema but also offers a model for understanding how visual storytelling can transform historical trauma into collective empathy. In an era when ethno-religious nationalism once again threatens the plural fabric of South Asia, these films invite audiences to confront the past not as closed history but as an ongoing ethical question. Following analysis of these films with the lens of these theorists answers this question.

### **Cinematic Gaze and Communal Violence in *Earth* (1947): A Close Textual Analysis**

Deepa Mehta's *Earth* (1947) adapted from Bapsi Sidhwa's novel *Cracking India* stands as one of the most compelling cinematic representations of the Partition of India. The film explores how a community once bound by friendship and affection descends into communal hatred. Mehta's gaze is neither that of a historian nor a political commentator, it is a humanist cinematic gaze that foregrounds emotional devastation over ideological rhetoric. Through carefully crafted *mise-en-scène*, cinematography, and recurring visual motifs, Mehta exposes the mechanics of communal violence how ordinary affection turns monstrous under the pressures of political division.

#### **❖ The Feminine and the Child's Gaze**

The narrative is framed through the innocent perspective of Lenny, a young Parsi girl whose polio-affected body becomes a metaphor for a fractured nation. The use of a child's gaze allows Mehta to construct a cinematic distance from the political spectacle of Partition, redirecting attention toward the personal and domestic. The child's naïveté contrasts with the viewer's historical awareness, creating an ironic tension that underscores the horror of what unfolds.

Simultaneously, the film's feminine gaze embodied through Shanta offers a counterpoint to the masculine violence of Partition. Shanta's body becomes a contested site of desire and communal possession. The camera's lingering close-ups on her face, her colorful dupatta, and the tactile gestures of her interactions with the men (Dil Nawaz, Hasan, and others) visually encode both intimacy and

impending violation. This gaze is neither voyeuristic nor objectifying; rather, it emphasizes Shanta's vulnerability as a woman and as a symbol of the violated homeland.

#### ❖ **Cinematic Techniques: Framing, Color, and Sound**

Mehta's framing choices are crucial in articulating the breakdown of community. Early scenes are shot with wide, open compositions parks, tea stalls, courtyards where Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh friends share space harmoniously. As tensions escalate, Mehta progressively narrows the frame. Interiors become claustrophobic, bodies crowd the edges of the screen, the visual space mirrors the psychological compression of fear and mistrust. The film's color palette evolves from earthy warmth to muted desaturation. The initial amber and ochre tones suggest Lahore's cultural richness and human warmth. As violence spreads, these hues fade into greys and sepias, signifying moral decay and emotional desolation. This chromatic transformation visualizes the corruption of once-vibrant relationships under the weight of communal hatred.

Sound design functions as both diegetic and psychological commentary. The recurring street sounds for example vendors' calls, azaan, temple bells initially form a polyphonic harmony, symbolizing coexistence. Later, these same sounds clash discordantly, transformed into auditory reminders of division. Mehta also employs silence strategically, the absence of sound during key violent sequences amplifies the viewer's affective response, forcing an internal confrontation rather than external spectacle.

#### ❖ **Motifs and Symbolic Visuals**

One of the film's central motifs is the garden, initially presented as a locus of childhood innocence and communal unity. The garden scenes are shot in soft natural light, emphasizing openness and possibility. However, as Partition violence intensifies, this same space becomes the setting of suspicion and betrayal, an Eden lost to political sin. The garden thus symbolizes the fall from innocence to fragmentation. The mirror functions as another recurring visual motif. Lenny frequently observes events through mirrors or reflective surfaces, emphasizing mediation and distance. This device foregrounds the act of 'looking' itself, aligning with Laura Mulvey's notion of the cinematic gaze (1975) as an instrument of power and knowledge. Yet in *Earth*, the gaze is reflexive rather than dominating. It implicates the viewer in witnessing violence without granting mastery over it.

The scene in which a peaceful picnic turns into a violent confrontation is intercut with shots of the setting sun, an emblem of fading harmony and the end of a moral epoch. Later, the image of Shanta's torn dupatta fluttering in the wind becomes an elegy for the dismembered subcontinent. The dupatta, once a sign of beauty and protection, transforms into a haunting symbol of dishonor and loss.

#### ❖ **The Communal Gaze and Masculine Violence**

A central feature of Mehta's representation of communal violence is the transformation of the gaze itself from affection to aggression. Early scenes depict men looking at Shanta with romantic admiration, their glances tender and human. As Partition approaches, these same gazes become marked by suspicion and possessiveness. The shift from erotic to ethnonational desire exposes how women's bodies become symbolic terrain in communal conflict.

The climactic sequence Shanta's abduction by a mob led by Dil Nawaz epitomizes the collapse of human empathy. The camera does not sensationalize her assault; instead, Mehta frames the scene through Lenny's horrified perspective, withholding explicit violence. This strategic elision aligns with trauma theory (Caruth, 1996), which suggests that certain experiences defy direct representation. By showing the aftermath rather than the act, Mehta transforms the spectator's gaze from voyeuristic to ethical, inviting mourning instead of consumption.

#### ❖ **Memory, Trauma, and the Ethics of Seeing**

The film's concluding narration, where an adult Lenny reflects on her complicity in revealing Shanta's hiding place, anchors the film in trauma and guilt. The camera lingers on her face in close-up, dissolving between past and present. This technique of temporal blurring visualizes the persistence of trauma across generations echoing Hirsch's (2008) concept of post memory. Mehta's gaze is not accusatory but contemplative, compelling the viewer to recognize the fragility of moral certainties in times of political upheaval.

Earth thus constructs a layered cinematic gaze that oscillates between empathy and exposure, intimacy and distance. It rejects both nationalist triumphalism and voyeuristic spectacle, instead positioning the viewer as a witness to the moral and emotional costs of communal violence. Through its symbolic imagery, chromatic

transitions, and restrained camera work, Mehta's film transforms historical trauma into a cinematic meditation on memory, loss, and the ethics of looking.

### **Psychological Aftermath and the "Othering" of Immigrants in *Kya Dilli Kya Lahore***

Vijay Raaz's *Kya Dilli Kya Lahore* (2014) presents an intimate exploration of Partition's lingering psychological and ideological wounds through the confined, war-torn landscape of the Indo-Pak border. Unlike grand historical retellings, Raaz's film is minimalist, focusing on two soldiers, Samarth an Indian soldier of Pakistani origin and Rehmat a Pakistani soldier of Indian origin who confront each other in a desolate no-man's land. Their confrontation becomes an allegory for the divided psyche of post-Partition South Asia: the internalized 'othering' that perpetuates suspicion, guilt, and fractured belonging.

The film's sparse setting, a ruined border post functions as both psychological space and political metaphor. Its emptiness is not absence but saturation: it is crowded with the ghosts of history, displacement, and ideological contradiction. The barrenness externalizes the inner desolation of both men, establishing the tone for a film that scrutinizes Partition's aftermath not through spectacle, but through introspection.

#### **❖ Opening Sequence: The Border as Psychological Ruin**

The opening long shot establishes a landscape stripped of vitality, dust, broken walls and scorched earth dominate the frame. The soundscape is minimal, the faint hum of wind, distant gunfire, and an almost palpable silence. The effect is twofold cinematically, Raaz constructs the border not as a line of defense but as a wound in the landscape. Psychologically, this emptiness mirrors the vacuum of identity both soldiers inhabit each uprooted from his homeland, now guarding the ideological boundaries that severed his sense of self. The long take forces the viewer to dwell in discomfort, resisting narrative closure or patriotic certainty. The camera's stillness underscores stasis: The Partition, though decades past, remains emotionally unresolved. Raaz thereby redefines the border from a geopolitical artifact into a psychic scar that refuses to heal.

### ❖ **Mirroring and Inversion: The Other as the Self**

When Samarth and Rehmat first encounter each other, the camera alternates between close-ups that emphasize suspicion and mid-shots that reveal their mirrored positions literally facing each other across the rubble. The visual symmetry is deliberate both are the ‘enemy’ and the ‘mirror image.’ The symmetrical framing exposes the absurdity of national division. The soldiers’ identities are inverted Samarth born in Lahore, fights for India; Rehmat born in Delhi, fights for Pakistan. The camera’s mirroring acts as visual irony, challenging the viewer to question how easily belonging can be redefined by political boundaries. As the film progresses, handheld shots replace the static compositions of their first meeting. The trembling frame mirrors the destabilization of ideological certainty. This transition from rigidity to movement symbolizes the psychological unlearning that accompanies empathy when the ‘enemy’ becomes human.

### ❖ **Motifs of Food and Fire: Reclaiming Shared Humanity**

Midway through the film, a pivotal scene unfolds as the two men share food. The exchange of roti becomes an understated yet profound act of communion. Cinematically, the scene is shot in soft, low-key lighting, with a close focus on the breaking and passing of bread. The sound of chewing replaces dialogue, emphasizing the sensual immediacy of shared sustenance. This visual economy transforms a mundane act into a sacrament of reconciliation. Food is often used in Partition cinema as a symbol of cultural difference but here it becomes a bridge across estrangement.

### ❖ **Language and the Politics of Voice**

One of the film’s most incisive techniques is its use of dialogue and accent. Both soldiers speak in Urdu-Hindi hybrids, their speech peppered with cultural idioms from “the other” side. The linguistic hybridity unsettles the illusion of pure national identity. Each man hears his ‘enemy’ speak in a tongue that echoes his own mother’s language forcing confrontation with cultural continuity that Partition sought to erase. In several exchanges, pauses and silences replace words altogether, functioning as aural punctuation that reveals emotional exhaustion. The film’s refusal to over-explain these moments reflects Raaz’s trust in silence as a mode of historical testimony. Sound thus becomes a political instrument: by collapsing linguistic distinction, Raaz exposes the artificiality of otherness in postcolonial nationhood.

❖ **Symbolic Visuals: The No-Man's Land as Moral Mirror**

The desolate border post is littered with remnants such as rusted helmets, torn flags, and empty ammunition shells. Raaz's camera lingers on these objects in static close-up, often with shallow depth of field that isolates them from the surrounding space. These objects operate as mnemonic residues, embodying the psychological debris of Partition. Each artifact speaks of human absence, yet their accumulation becomes overwhelming suggesting that history itself is buried beneath detritus. The border becomes a moral mirror, reflecting the futility of violence that has produced only ruins, literal and emotional.

❖ **The Final Embrace: Undoing Otherness**

In the climactic sequence, Samarth saves Rehmat from being shot by his own compatriots, leading to a quiet, tragic understanding between them. The camera circles slowly around the two men as they face each other no longer adversaries but fellow victims of inherited hatred.

The circular camera movement breaks from the film's earlier static compositions, visually enacting reconciliation. The motion signifies release from rigidity, from ideology, from "otherness." Raaz uses this choreography to craft a cinematic grammar of empathy, where movement itself becomes a form of moral liberation. The final fade to white (not black) defies the expected closure of death or defeat. White signifies blankness and potential the possibility of reimagining national identity without the stains of animosity.

❖ **The Psychological Border Within**

*Kya Dilli Kya Lahore* transforms the geopolitical border into a psychological geography, a space where memory, guilt, and empathy collide. Through minimal setting, visual symmetry, and symbolic objects, Raaz constructs a meditation on the futility of "othering." Each cinematic choice camera stillness, silence, and recurring motifs of food and fire deepens the film's exploration of shared humanity. By the film's end, the viewer recognizes that the real Partition persists not on maps but in the human psyche. Raaz's minimalist war zone thus becomes a moral laboratory where the self confronts its mirror image, and where the imagined enemy becomes the vehicle of self-discovery.

## **The Long Shadow: Gender, Islamization, and the Persistence of Trauma in Khamosh Pani**

Sabiha Sumar's *Khamosh Pani* (Silent Waters, 2003) unfolds in a small Punjabi village during the late 1970s, under General Zia-ul-Haq's regime. Set decades after the Partition, the film explores how the ideological violence of 1947 lingers through gendered trauma and resurfaces under the politics of religious nationalism. The story of Ayesha, a widowed mother becomes a microcosm of the nation's suppressed wounds. Through its restrained visual language and deeply symbolic imagery, the film constructs a cinematic meditation on the persistence of trauma beneath apparent serenity.

### **❖ Mise-en-Scène and the Illusion of Peace**

At first glance, *Khamosh Pani* presents a tranquil, pastoral village bathed in soft, natural light. The mise-en-scène emphasizes open courtyards, green fields, and community gatherings, spaces associated with domestic harmony and rural simplicity. This surface calm is deliberately deceptive. Sumar's composition contrasts the aesthetic stillness of the village with the unseen turbulence of memory. The uncluttered frames and balanced compositions evoke order, yet the recurring positioning of Ayesha at the frame's edges signals her emotional displacement. She inhabits the village but never fully belongs to it. The mise-en-scène thus becomes a political device, it visualizes the repression of history under Zia's Islamization, where peace is maintained through erasure and conformity. The domestic space that once symbolized safety becomes complicit in silencing women's histories.

### **❖ Cinematography: The Serene Surface and Its Fractures**

Sumar's cinematographer employs soft lighting and slow camera movements to create an atmosphere of deceptive calm. The warm, sunlit tones of early scenes convey the illusion of normalcy in a post-Partition Pakistan trying to stabilize under moral authority. As the narrative progresses, the cinematography subtly shifts. The camera begins to adopt tighter frames, shallow depth of field, and static compositions that trap Ayesha within architectural boundaries, doorways, lattice windows, or the mouth of the well. This visual containment mirrors the encroaching ideological control of the Islamization period. The more the village embraces "purity" and patriarchal piety, the more Ayesha's world contracts. The camera's narrowing gaze enacts the suffocation of personal identity under communal

surveillance. The shift from open to closed visual space therefore marks the psychological and political transition from freedom to coercion.

The contrast between surface serenity and subterranean tension is also reinforced through light and shadow. In outdoor scenes, sunlight floods the screen, while interiors grow progressively dimmer, shadowed by suspicion and moral policing.

#### ❖ **Sound Design: The Disquiet Beneath Silence**

The title *Khamosh Pani* (“Silent Waters”) underscores Sumar’s use of sound or its absence as a narrative strategy. Early scenes feature the ambient sounds of village life, birds, rustling leaves, the rhythmic chatter of women fetching water. These auditory textures create a sense of harmony between humans and environment. Gradually, the soundscape transforms. The serenity is pierced by the harsh sounds of loudspeakers and religious sermons that accompany the rise of Islamic fundamentalism. This sonic intrusion marks the entry of ideology into everyday life. The loudspeaker becomes a metaphor for patriarchal authority a voice that commands, dictates, and overwrites personal truth. The quiet of the village is no longer peaceful, it becomes oppressive. In key emotional moments, Sumar employs near silence, stripping away background noise so that the weight of unspoken memory fills the void. The silences are not passive they are the sound of repression. The final scenes are almost eerily quiet; the absence of dialogue amplifies the viewer’s confrontation with loss and guilt. The film’s ‘silence’ thus becomes both an aesthetic and political gesture, a refusal to let noise overwrite trauma.

#### ❖ **Editing and Temporal Flow**

Sumar’s editing rhythm is deliberately unhurried, allowing scenes to breathe and emotions to accumulate. The pacing mirrors the slow seepage of trauma into the present. The few instances of abrupt cuts occur during moments of ideological rupture such as the burning of books or the violent sermonizing of young men which visually shock the viewer out of complacency. This contrast in pacing functions as historical commentary while trauma moves silently, ideology strikes suddenly. The editing rhythm reflects the coexistence of trauma’s persistence and its political reactivation. Flashback sequences are sparse and fragmented, emphasizing the impossibility of full recollection. The past appears as fleeting images glimpses of a young Sikh woman fleeing violence, which dissolve into the tranquil present. The lack of transition signals the collapse of temporal boundaries in trauma’s experience the past is not gone; it lives beneath the skin of the present.

### ❖ Symbolism of the Well: Depth, Memory, and the Feminine Body

Cinematically, Sumar repeatedly frames the well in long shots, often from Ayesha's point of view. Its surface reflects the sky tranquil, blue, infinite yet the camera lingers long enough for the audience to sense the darkness beneath. The well's deceptive calm parallels the film's central metaphor the quiet surface concealing unfathomable depth. It embodies the repression of women's suffering in nationalist memory. Each time Ayesha approaches the well, the camera angle subtly shifts from level to high-angle shots, suggesting both her powerlessness and the well's magnetic pull as the repository of unacknowledged history.

In the climactic sequence, when Ayesha ultimately throws herself into the well, the act collapses temporal distance she becomes one of the women of 1947. The circular framing of the well's mouth becomes a visual echo of history repeating itself. This final descent signifies not only individual suicide but the return of historical trauma. The film closes the circle of silence, what could not be spoken is reenacted. The well, then, is not merely a site of death but a symbol of memory reclaiming the body. It transforms personal tragedy into a collective indictment of a nation that has buried its women, literally and figuratively, in its quest for purity.

### Comparative Synthesis: Cinematic Memory and the Ethics of Reconciliation

Across *Earth*, *Kya Dilli Kya Lahore*, and *Khamosh Pani*, Partition functions less as a historical endpoint than as an affective continuum—a wound that reopens across bodies, generations, and ideologies. Yet each film constructs a distinct cinematic grammar to articulate trauma:

#### Cinematic Analysis of Partition Films

Film	Primary Theme	Cinematic Strategy	Symbolic Motif	So What? (Analytical Insight)
<i>Earth</i> (1947)	Communal Violence & Loss of Innocence	Color contrast, handheld camera, fragmented editing	Cracked earth, broken doll	Exposes complicity of gaze; visual chaos as moral indictment
<i>Kya Dilli Kya Lahore</i>	Psychological Aftermath, Othering	Minimalist mise-en-scène, long	Torn letters, barbed wire	Deconstructs border as psychological

		takes, spatial symmetry		fiction; humanizes the Other
Khamosh Pani	Gendered Trauma, Islamization	Static framing, muted sound, symbolic well	The well, silence, shadow	Reveals institutionalized repression; silence as historical echo

Mehta’s dynamic camera implicates the viewer in violence; Raaz’s still camera invites reflection; Sumar’s restrained lens demands mourning. Together, they articulate a cinematic ethics of empathy a mode of seeing that resists the dehumanization central to Partition’s ideology.

Thematically, the films trace a continuum from physical violence (Earth) to psychological alienation (Kya Dilli Kya Lahore) to ideological silencing (Khamosh Pani). This progression mirrors South Asia’s historical trajectory the visible brutality of 1947 evolves into subtler forms of exclusion and moral control. What binds them is the shared insistence that reconciliation requires confronting, not erasing the past.

## Conclusion

Through diverse visual languages, these films perform acts of remembrance that challenge the ethno-religious and gendered hierarchies entrenched by Partition and its aftermath. Their recurring motifs—earth, border, water—mark the geography of trauma but also the possibility of renewal. By framing violence through empathy rather than spectacle, these filmmakers transform cinema into a counter-archive, a site where the silenced speak and the excluded are seen. The cinematic gaze, once a tool of domination, becomes an ethics of recognition. In revisiting Partition, Earth, Kya Dilli Kya Lahore, and Khamosh Pani do not merely reconstruct history, they reimagine the moral imagination of South Asia itself. They insist that the path to healing begins not with forgetting, but with looking quietly, ethically, and together into the silent waters of the past. Film can lessen the hatred and distrust by presenting the reality to people on both sides. The spectacle always dominates over narration which is core to cinematic art. Cinema can change the perception of society due to its massive approach to common man. It offers a platform to communicate beyond the economic, social, religious and national limitations. It is actually a phenomenon to understand each other’s views, perceptions and culture. Film, as a visual and affective medium, holds the power to reimagine and reconcile traumatic histories. The cinematic representations of Partition in Earth (1947), Kya

Dilli Kya Lahore, and Khamosh Pani reveal not only the enduring wounds of displacement and division but also the shared humanity that transcends borders. By transforming collective trauma into a language of empathy and remembrance, these films invite both India and Pakistan to confront their intertwined pasts not with resentment, but with reflection. Seventy-eight years after Partition, both nations stand as proud and resilient countries, each contributing vibrantly to global culture and progress. Yet, the lessons offered by Partition cinema remind us that hatred begets hatred, while peace and empathy beget harmony and growth. True strength lies not in sustaining old hostilities, but in nurturing mutual respect and understanding. By focusing on the common struggles of ordinary people, poverty, education, and social justice rather than political rivalry, both nations can transform remembrance into renewal. Ultimately, these films do more than recount history; they urge a moral reawakening. Learning from the past rather than living within it allows the subcontinent to imagine a future defined by coexistence and collective prosperity. Through art, memory, and shared compassion, cinema continues to remind us that the path to healing lies not in division, but in dialogue, empathy, and peace.

This research unlocks new vistas for researchers to further intersect partition and its post memory effects in South Asia. By applying same framework of trauma studies, film theory, and post memory they can demonstrate how cinematic narratives can serve as critical repositories of collective memory and alternative historiography. Future researchers may build this inquiry by exploring how transnational and diasporic film directors reconstruct partition through post memory. In doing so, scholars can continue to build on the dialogue between art, politics, and remembrance—illuminating how visual culture can sustain empathy, cross-border understanding, and a more humane engagement with history.

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