



Resonances of Trauma and Memory: Songs as Narrative in Film *Pinjar*

Dr. Meenu Sharma

Assistant professor, Department of English
Ismail National Mahila PG College, Meerut
Email: menusharma009@gmail.com
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8288-0739>

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Abstract

Chandraprakash Dwivedi's *Pinjar* (2003), based on Amrita Pritam's 1951 novel, reflects deeply on the trauma of India's Partition. It dramatizes pain through the story of Puro; a woman stripped of belonging and recognition. This study examines *Pinjar* (2003) through the lens of film musicology, trauma theory, and cultural memory studies. The film's songs, composed by Uttam Singh with lyrics by Gulzar and function as an acoustic memory of gendered violence. Through folk music and mournful refrains, the music represents not only the personal pain of Puro but a collective lament of partition. The study shows that songs of *Pinjar* (2003) not only carry memories of Partition trauma but also give voice to women's experiences that have long been silenced. This paper contributes to partition analysis and musical studies by demonstrating how Bollywood film songs can serve as a cultural archive while successfully highlights the trauma that has been silenced in official narratives.

Keywords: *Pinjar*, Partition, trauma studies, Cultural memory, Gendered violence, Amrita Pritam.

INTRODUCTION

The Partition of India is one of the most devastating events in modern history. It marked not only the displacement of millions but also gendered violence. Women's bodies became contested sites of communal honour. They were subjected to abduction, forced conversion, and sexual violation. Although the traumatic experiences of women were erased from official

archives, yet visible as symbols of fractured identity in various narratives. Chandraprakash Dwivedi's *Pinjar* (2003) emphatically showcase this reality. This film is a tragic journey of Puro, a Hindu woman abducted by Rashid, a Muslim man, and later rejected by her own family. Puro embodies the skeletal metaphor of the novel's title *Pinjar*. She represents an existence stripped of belonging, voice, and recognition. While the

film's visual narrative has been studied quite for its portrayal of Partition trauma, its songs remain an underexplored area.

In recent decades, Partition studies have underlined the hidden narratives surrounded in official chronicles. According to Urvashi Butalia and Ritu Menon, official histories minimize women's experiences with intimate abuse. On the other side, literature and cinema have reconstructed these suppressed testimonies. *Pinjar*(2003) participates in this counter-archival project with its story and visual effects but also uniquely through its songs. As Ghatak observes, music becomes a site of both rootedness and displacement in the context of Partition. (47) Every song contributes significantly to the story's emotional terrain. The film features nine songs, composed by Uttam Singh with a special ghazal contribution by Jagjit Singh. The songs were penned by prominent literary icons such as Amrita Pritam, Gulzar, and Zehra Nigah. Their literary sensibilities bring depth and sincerity to the music. The songs are performed by prominent vocalists and incorporate Punjabi traditional traditions, Sufi qawwali, ghazal, and classical Hindustani components. Furthermore, reflects the cultural and historical milieu of the partition era.

This study situates *Pinjar*(2003) within the interdisciplinary frameworks of film musicology and trauma theory and cultural memory studies. Together, these frameworks shows that songs can function both as psychological resonances and as cultural archives. Trauma, as Cathy Caruth defines it, "is a shocking event that people cannot fully understand. It often comes back as flashbacks, nightmares, or repeated actions. Cinema can mirror this phenomenon effectively". (4) On the other side, Claudia Gorbman's idea of "unheard melodies" shows that film music can connects the audience to the main character's mind. (73). Similarly, Michel Chion's concept emphasizes that sound and image together can create new meaning. When horrific pictures of uprisings are paired with melancholic songs, the result is

a sense of cultural grief (25). He also argues that film sound often extends the viewer's experience beyond what is seen on screen, a process he calls "rendering the space." (25) Dominick LaCapra's trauma theory explains that certain sounds can bring back painful memories. For example, the cry of a Punjabi flute can act as a trigger. Silence or faint background noise, along with single sad notes, can show dissociation. (41).

The significance of this paper lies in its focus on mainstream Bollywood's engagement with Partition trauma through music. While commercial Bollywood songs usually associated with entertainment, have received little recognition as repositories of cultural grief. The paper demonstrates that the songs of *Pinjar* (2003) although lie within the conventions of Bollywood musicality but can powerfully embody themes of memory and displacement. By analysing these songs, the paper contributes to Partition studies and musicology and further affirms that sound in cinema is not a mere supplement but a central medium for transmitting trauma and preserving silenced voices."

ANALYSIS

Folk Traditions as Pre-Traumatic Memory:

The songs begin with Punjabi folk traditions and reflect a stable and cheerful world prior to Partition. Songs like Maar Udari (*Pinjar*, 13:08-16:57), Charkha Chalati Maa (*Pinjar*, 32:06-34:02), Shava Ni Shava (*Pinjar*, 49:00-53:33), and represent the vitality of Punjabi folk traditions and act as cultural anchors to the pre-Partition era. Maar Udari (*Pinjar*, 13:08-16:57) captures Puro's youthful energy and carefree spirit through its joyful tone and folk beat. The song's lively beats and colloquial expressions evoke happiness and situates the audience in Puro's world, untouched by any grief and violence. In the same way, *Shava Ni Shava* (*Pinjar*, 49:00-53:33) reflects Punjabi traditions. It expresses the joy of pre-wedding celebration and also showcase the hopeful future that Puro lost after

her abduction and forced marriage. The happy chorus and rhythm emphasize a sense of belonging. On the other hand, Charkha Chalati Maa (Pinjar, 32:06-34:02) uses the spinning wheel (charkha) as its key metaphor. In Punjabi folklore, the charkha represents maternal love and the weaving of destiny. (Kaur, 42). In the film, Puro's mother sings and thinking of her Bidaai while Puro engaged in domestic activity. This song situates her within a secure familial framework. (Kaur, 42) The gentle cadence of the song, accompanied by instruments like the dholak and flute, creates an environment of protection. As Tanya Jha observes, film's soundtrack "supports the mournful narrative while simultaneously evoking the cultural intimacy of Punjab's domestic spaces" (Jha, 3). The song reappears when Puro escapes her abductors and returns home at midnight, only to be rejected by her family. (Pinjar, 01:11:15-01:12:52) In this moment, the song accentuates her exclusion, and reveal how abduction leave her without belonging. The lyrics and music effectively translate this rejection into an audible expression of loss and displacement. Unlike the solemn and tragic songs that reflect only trauma, these pieces highlight the contrast of pre-partition life. Together, these songs function as cultural memory within the film. Moreover, they recreate the atmosphere of Punjab before its division and emphasize happiness and secure environment.

Partition as a Modern Trial by Fire:

The song "Sita ko dekhe" (Pinjar, 22:04-24:12) references Sita's "Agni Pariksha". It is a striking fusion of myth, music, and historical trauma. The lyrics obviously echo Sita's trial by fire, "Agni usaka darpan" (Pinjar 22:23), in which fire acts as both a mirror and a test. The predicament of Partition's kidnapped women, who, like Sita, were compelled to demonstrate their innocence despite their purity, is reflected in this visual. (Shabnam,12)The song critiques the hypocrisy of a society that abandon women to suffering. Musically, the composition reinforces this tension. The rhythmic refrain

evokes the pace of folk and devotional music and grounded the song in cultural memory. The rhythm reflects the ceremonial mood of Sita's fire suffering while also foreshadowing the gravity of Puro's own trial. The rising intensity of the music echoed the emotional intensity of the lyrics and represent the transit through fire and eventual emerging into resilience. Puro's journey in the film parallels Sita's struggle. Just as Sita crossed the flames to prove her chastity, Puro endures abduction, rejection, and forced transformation into Hamida. "The song's interplay of lyrics and music transforms her suffering into a metaphorical Agni Pariksha. Her survival becomes proof of inner strength rather than societal validation."The song becomes a layered commentary by criticising patriarchal hypocrisy and connecting Partition trauma to epic tradition.

Dual Voices in *Darda Maarya Maahiya*"

Marked by Puro's abduction and the eruption of communal violence, the turning point of *Pinjar*(2003), is accentuated by a clear transformation in the film's soundtrack. Here, celebratory folk songs turned into mourning laments that draw upon the sorrowful Punjabi poetry. The song "Darda Maarya Maahiya" is built around a captivating duality. It carries two distinct voices that represent contrasting positions of Puro. On one side, it showcases reality as lamenting Puro's suffering through refrains like "Darda maarya maahiya, mera dard chhuda" ("Pain has struck me, beloved, release me from my suffering") (01:27:28-01:33:24) This voice embodies the anguish of women caught in the forced marriage and pregnancy, where fate is described as "andhi baawari" ("blind and mad") (01:28:33) stripping women of agency and freedom. It is a cry of helplessness that situates women as victims of destiny and social structures. On the other side, the song simultaneously invokes the joyous rhythms of Baisakhi, at maternal side of Puro. Where her sister and other women are celebrating Baisakhi.(01:28:54-01:29:40) This second voice contrasts sharply with the lament,

presenting an image of possible reality of Puro, if she not abducted. The juxtaposition of Baisakhi's celebratory tone with puro's cry in labour pain creates a layered narrative. (Butalia,84) This duality highlights the contrast position of Puro in cultural memory. If she stayed with her parents, she surely be part of the community's joy but here she abducted forcefully converted and burdened under forceful marriage and pregnancy. (Datta, 195)

Lament for the Homeland in *Vatna Ve* and *Waaris Sha Nu*

The song *Vatna Ve*(2:27:01-02:30:53)sung by Roop Kumar Rathod, is one of the most powerful laments in film, that captures the devastation of Punjab during Partition. Its refrain "*Vatana ve o mereya vatana ve*" (O my homeland, my homeland) becomes a dirge of longing and grief that powerfully express the fractured identity of a land once united. The lyrics vividly portray destruction in lines, "*Bat gaye tere aangan, bujh gaye chulhe saanjhe*" (Your courtyards are divided, your communal hearths extinguished),(02:27:26) evokes the rupture of shared places and traditions. The imagery of Heer and Ranjha in lines "*Loot gayi teri heerein, mar gaye tere raanjhe*"(02:27:34) connects Punjab's cultural icons to the violence of Partition. It furthermore, emphasize that both material and emotional treasures lost due to partition. Musically, the slow tempo and minimal instrumentation intensify the sorrow. Th repetition of the refrain reflects the unending pain of displacement. In contrast, *Waaris Sha Nu* (03:05:35-03:08:50)functions as a cultural reminder of continuity amidst rupture. Rooted in Punjabi folk and Sufi tradition, the song invokes the idea of inheritance. The lyrics highlight future generations' need to preserve heritage, even when physical ties to the motherland are gone.

Leitmotifs and the Internalization of Trauma

While collective trauma is expressed through songs such as *Waris Shah Nu* and *Vatna Ve*, Puro's individual trauma is conveyed

through recurring musical cues and leitmotifs that track her fractured identity. Each time she confronts her tattooed hand, now inscribed with her Muslim name "Hamida" the soundtrack introduces a melancholic flute strain. This technique mirrors the psychological state of PTSD and dissociation, where memory is not erased but buried alive, resurfacing in disruptive fragments.(Caruth,5) The echo effect, in which motifs from her earlier life intrude upon her present, signifies that trauma resists linear time and continuously bleeds into the present. As Cathy Caruth explains, trauma is defined by "the inability to fully assimilate the event into consciousness" (4). The leitmotifs embody this inability by creating a fractured soundscape where identity remains unresolved. The interruptions of silence and sudden musical intrusions dramatize Puro's condition. It further accentuates that her attempts to inhabit her forced reality as Hamida are haunted by aural ghosts of her past as Puro. In this way, the background score becomes a psychological text. It records the internal system of trauma and ensures that her personal suffering resonates alongside the collective grief of Partition.

The Melancholy of Reconciliation in *Haath Chhute Bhi Toh*:

In the film when Puro tries to adjust with her new identity as Hamida, the soundtrack undergoes a significant tonal shift. This shift reflects effectively in the song *Haath Chhute Bhi Toh* (01:47:23-01:55:38) This song is a meditation on separation and the permanence of human relationships. It affirms that physical dislocation cannot sever the connection of love and memory. The lyrics extend this idea by suggesting that time itself cannot fracture moments "*Waqat ki shaakh se lamahe nahin tuta karate*" (01:48:15) This musical structure mirrors the film's narrative rhythm, where Puro's forced separation from her family and fiancé becomes a metaphor for the countless ruptures caused by Partition. In the context, the song resonates Puro's feeling when she visited the village ,she was about to get married before abduction.

Though her physical ties to her past are severed, her emotional connections remain intact, shaping her identity and resilience. The song and its screenplay perfectly align with central ideas of *synchresis* and emphasize the fusion of sound and image that produces a unified cinematic experience. (Chion, 25) The line "Jisane pairon ke nishaan bhi nahi chhode pichhe" (01:49:25) reflect the erasure of countless lives during Partition. As Veena Das insightfully observes, "violence is not an event that ends, but a process that continues to inhabit everyday life" (Das, 67)

End at the Elegiac Voice

The ending of film also give way to mourning laments that draw upon the sorrowful textures of Punjabi poetry. The film ends with song *Waris Shah Nu* (*Pinjar* 03:05:35-03:08:50), written by Amrita Pritam and adapted for the film by Gulzar. In this elegy, Pritam addresses the legendary Sufi poet Waris Shah, author of *Heer Ranjha* and implored him to rise from his grave and witness the tragedy of countless "Heers" (women) violated during Partition. As Urvashi Butalia observes, "women's bodies became the terrain upon which the violence of Partition was inscribed" (187) Gulzar's adaptation of this text into the cinematic score compelled the audience to confront the scale of trauma. The composition blends folk strains with dirge-like strings and amplifies the sense of irretrievable loss. The Wadali Brothers' rendition imbues the song with spiritual depth, and transforms the pain of loss into a call for cultural survival. The song connects the historical event and emotional memory. It resonates as an elegy and as well as a testimony, and ensures that the violence inflicted upon women is not forgotten (Hassan, 47).

CONCLUSION

Taken together, all the songs trace a sonic trajectory from pre-partition continuity to post-traumatic lament. Based on trauma studies and musicology, this analysis confirms that *Pinjar's* songs narrate gendered suffering as effectively

as its visuals. The songs bridge historical event and emotional memory and transform silenced suffering into aesthetic testimony. In doing so, the paper situates *Pinjar*(2003) within broader discourses of Partition studies and musicology and claimed that songs in cinema are central to the transmission of cultural memory. In film, the music embodies the shift from folk rhythms to elegiac testimony and thereby mapping the psychological rupture of Partition. The lyrics embedded gendered trauma within metaphors of broken homes, violated bodies, and lost identities. Furthermore, they bring the silent pain into collective memory. By combining Punjabi folk music and elegiac tone, the songs represent the theme of the film emphatically. Songs like *Maar Udari* (*Pinjar*, 13:08-16:57), *Charkha Chalati Maa* (*Pinjar*, 32:06-34:02), *Shava Ni Shava* (*Pinjar*, 49:00-53:33), keep the rhythm of continuity. They put Puro in a world of love and care before partition tragedy. As Harini and Lizy argue, Puro's early domestic life represents "the fragile sanctuary of womanhood before its violent rupture" (800). Musically, the use of folk instruments and rhythms in these songs makes them cultural memory. Also, they balance out the film's issues of separation and trauma. Together, *Vatna Ve* and *Waaris Sha Nu* reflect Partition as both a rupture and a call to preserve Punjab's cultural spirit. The sound design of *Pinjar* (2003) resonates across generations and represents the trauma of partition effectively. It makes sure that the violence against women in 1947 is not forgotten or silenced. The film stands as a living archive and remind us that memory is sustained through the haunting echoes of song.

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