

Jism: The Female Body in Haseena Atom Bomb

Syeda Nida Hasan

Abstract

This paper examines various depictions of the female body on-screen in *Haseena Atom Bomb* (dir. Saeed Khan, 1990), by a close reading of the picturization of the three main female characters: Haseena, Shabana and Reshma (with an emphasis upon Haseena). The paper explores the physicality of these characters, the various factors that accompany or aid the depiction of their bodies on screen (including the roles of camera, editing, and mise-en-scène), and the broader narrative themes intertwined with the depiction of the female body in a rape-revenge film. It also investigates the female body's various transitions from being recipient of violence to a perpetrator of violence and vice versa, discussing the implications of these various representations alongside each other—and whether they allow for us to observe changing representations of the female body on-screen in Pakistani cinema.

Keywords: The Female Body, Pushto Horror Movie, Rape-revenge Film, Hyper-masculinity, Male Gaze

Introduction

There are certain stereotypical representations of women on screen that have survived through the ages—for instance, the trope of the damsel in distress, who is merely a prop in need of saving to emphasize the hyper-masculinity of the hero. Similarly, the highly sexualized side character in the item song who appears as suddenly as she disappears, lacking any agency over her own body, is also a repetitive character, particularly in South Asian films where the item song has become a popular and common element in cinema. Studying such depictions of the female body on-screen allows for a better understanding of the changing representations of the female characters, the many elements that influence and aid this portrayal, and the effect this can have on the viewers of the movie and the cinema at large.

*Haseena Atom Bomb*²⁷ is a 1990 Pushto horror movie directed by Saeed Khan. The main plot of the movie revolves around the character of Haseena, who seeks to enact revenge on the men who raped her and murdered her husband, by drawing them in through seduction, and then serving them the same fate that they dealt her husband. The film's narrative weaves together the stories of the characters of Haseena, Shabana, Reshma and Khan—all of whom are striving in their individual capacities to bring down the villains present in their own lives.

This paper explores in detail the portrayal of the bodies of the women on-screen in *Haseena Atom Bomb*, along with focusing on the placement of these female characters within the narrative. The

²⁷A more detailed synopsis is included at the end of this paper

movie deals with the subject of the female body in a very complex manner—on one hand, there are scenes of rampant sexualization of the female body, where it is subjugated to the male gaze in item songs and presented as an object in need of a patriarchal figure to save it from ruin. On the other hand, the movie brings out the three major female characters of Haseena, Shabana and Reshma that defy various stereotypes typically associated with female roles in movies. The female body in the film is then also seen as a physically assertive, dominant force that can take revenge when violence is inflicted upon it.

Theoretical Framework

Essential to my analysis of the female body in *Haseena Atom Bomb* is the theory of the “male gaze” in cinema, originated by Laura Mulvey. Through her work, Mulvey explains how film is often the voice of the patriarchal society, by subjecting the representation of the female body (both on-screen and in literature) to the heterosexual male gaze, that manifests itself in three ways: the male behind the lens of the camera, the male character within the movie and the male spectator watching the screen (Mulvey 1991). In her exploration of the male gaze, Mulvey views cinema as an extension of the patriarchal structures that exist in the world, where there is an assertion of male desire that frames the portrayal of the female onscreen, turning her into an object of the male gaze (Mulvey 1991). Hence the male gaze, in the simplest definition, refers to the depiction of women on-screen from the point of view of a heterosexual male—which brings out a highly sexualized, objectivized view of the female body.

In *Haseena Atom Bomb*, Mulvey’s theory of the male gaze is key to understanding the portrayal of the female body as an object of desire, especially during the item songs. The women in the movie are otherwise physically strong, dominating figures that break stereotypes of typically passive, domestic female characterizations in films by taking over roles that are normally associated with men. Despite this, the bodies of the women, throughout the film, are subjected to blatant sexualization and the role of the male gaze can be observed in various places, such as through the leering men present in item songs, who add on to the objectification of the female body, or the camera shots that zoom into typically sexualized areas of the female body, such as the hips or the bosom. This is a very voyeuristic way of depicting the female body, that privileges the perspective of the heterosexual male onlooker.

Notable in *Haseena Atom Bomb* is the way the three main females are presented as characters with a high degree of agency. Their roles encroach upon the typically male domain of film—with Haseena and Reshma as avengers of their own bodies, and Shabana as a dominant policewoman. Elizabeth Hills investigates the “transgressive character” of the new action heroine, and the need to change our understanding of the “active” female figure (Hills 1999). She argues for the understanding of the emergence of strong, female action figures on screen as “transformative, transgressive” women, instead of as “figuratively male” figures, with problematic representations lurking behind their portrayals. Instead of looking at these female characters as simply an extension of male figures, there is a need for them to be given an entirely new space where they are not constantly compared to male heroes.

In the film, Haseena, Shabana and Reshma’s bodies appear on-screen in multiple ways; on one hand, they are transgressive of stereotypical female roles, by appearing as physically aggressive and dominant, but on the other hand they are constantly sexualized, subjected to violence at the

hands of male figures, and their physical strength fails when they are confronted by men. The female body, even though shown as an active force to be reckoned with, still remains limited to boundaries set by gender roles. By looking at these female figures from within “binaristic frameworks”, we restrict our understanding of female bodies by looking at them through pre-conceived notions of “masculinity” and “femininity” (Hills 1999). It is therefore, important to change the way we theorize our understanding of the female-action figure in the movie as “phallic”, “overly masculine” depictions, and instead look at the ways in which they create a shift from previous, stereotypical female roles in movies, crossing certain boundaries and creating new ones altogether (Hills 1999).

The female bodies in *Haseena Atom Bomb* are all deprived of their agency at various points in the film—the biggest example being Haseena’s rape. Haseena’s decision to take revenge on her rapists is her way of reclaiming her agency—an important trope of the rape-revenge film genre, in which the plot follows a female character who is raped at the beginning of the movie, and then seeks revenge against those who committed violence against her body. Jacinda Read looks at the transformation of the female body from the receiver of violence to the perpetrator of violence—and how the genre makes sense of feminism and the female body through this dramatic transformation (Read 2000). This theme is discussed below, with regard to the characters in *Haseena Atom Bomb*, who transform from “victims” to “avengers”—whose bodies take a dramatic turn from being bodies upon which violence is inflicted, to bodies that rebuild themselves to take revenge.

Methodology

This paper presents an analysis of the visual appearance of the bodies of the women in *Haseena Atom Bomb* and the various ways in which the female body is presented onscreen. Since the paper concerns itself with the body, there will be more of a focus on visuals rather than the narrative—however, the narrative is discussed where it affects the depiction of the female body. The primary focus of this paper includes (but does not limit itself to) the physical appearances of these bodies in different scenes, the clothes these bodies are clad in, the various kinds of effects and cinematography that accompanies the female body onscreen. The presence of these female characters in the narrative is also looked at, with an emphasis on scenes that deal extensively with the female body and visual representation. This analysis is accompanied by a theoretical understanding of such portrayals, based on the theories discussed.

These discussions are categorized thematically, each theme dealing with a different portrayal of the body on-screen and the various aspects concerning that depiction. For example, the discussion on the sexualization of the female body through its depiction in the various item songs (that are aplenty in the movie), is a very important theme in itself. Similarly, themes of the female body as a powerful, assertive force, and the female body as a victim of physical violence are also considered—with a detailed focus upon scenes that deal with these themes, the various devices that are employed to bring about certain portrayals of the female body. Although the physical female body remain at the center of discussion, aspects aiding the representation of female body in these songs, such as camera shots, costumes, background dancers and the setting are also discussed in detail.

The three female bodies central to the narrative of the movie in *Haseena Atom Bomb* defy stereotypical female roles usually found in movies. Haseena takes on the role of an avenger, Shabana is a policewoman who frequently deals out punishment to dacoits, and Reshma too, thirsts for revenge against those who aided in her being sold as a child. All three women are placed in exceptional circumstances where their bodies are subjected to violence, and all of them fight back in a manner typical of male characters in action movies.

Of Hips and Lips: The Body and Item Songs

One of the most significant portrayals of the female body in *Haseena Atom Bomb* is through numerous item songs. Haseena, Shabana and Reshma all appear individually in similar songs as the movie progresses. The item number is defined as being a cinesexual concept, usually comprising of a “sensuous dance performance”, where the focus of attention is the item girl, who is usually accompanied by a dancing chorus (Brara 2010). These songs, occurring twice or thrice during a movie, serve to portray the female body as a hyper sexualized object of the male gaze present within the camera, the viewer, and the scene itself, through the appearance of the male characters in the item song.

Haseena’s character is introduced in the movie through an item song, in which she belts out the lyrics “*Mein Hoon Haseena Atom Bomb*,” (I am Haseena Atom Bomb) while alternating between three vastly different costumes, and dancing with a troupe of women around her. At first, she appears clad in a bright orange outfit with bare legs, and an oversized, shimmery headdress that seems to complement the shimmery bodice and tassels that sway with the movement of the body. Later on, she is in a fitted lycra outfit that hugs her body, accompanied by a huge eye mask. Her final outfit for the song is a brown bodysuit with an oversized headdress made of fur, and a shimmery belt that hangs over her groin. All three costumes accentuate certain parts of her body—her bare legs, bosom and posterior are either bare, or garbed in tight fitting clothes. Hence, it can be argued that even the mise-en-scène in the item songs serves to draw attention to the female body in a sexual way, turning it into an object of desire for the men. The dance moves that accompany the costume also focus on Haseena’s legs and her bosom—she sways as she thrusts her hips, and her hands caress her own body at various points throughout the dance.

As Haseena dances along to the music, it becomes increasingly apparent that the movements seem to center around her hips and chest, that she sways and juts out—and even caresses, at different points. There is a very sexualized, pronounced emphasis upon these areas of Haseena’s body, that is made apparent through the use of camera shots that zoom into certain areas of her body. For example, at one point in the song the camera focuses on her lips as she traces a finger over them seductively—a shot that is almost immediately followed up with one of a leering man’s face. The cinematography plays an important role in defining how the female body is presented in these item songs. There are repetitive shots of leering men in between the shots of a dancing Haseena, explicitly framing her body as an object of their desire. The presence of these male characters serves as an example of the male gaze that Laura Mulvey defined, through which film objectifies the female presence on-screen, transforming it into what the male onlooker desires it to be (Mulvey 1991). The behavior of the men in the scene is very predatory, as they circle around the singular female body, which is stripped of its sexual agency, and turned into an object of the men’s lust. The camera shots are point-of-view shots, and the angles and zooming in into certain sexualized

parts of the female body help the male audience identify with his screen “surrogate”—which here are the multiple men staring at Haseena (Mulvey 1991).

Reshma features in two songs in the movie, in both she is with the character of Khan, who turns out to be her cousin later on in the film. The first song occurs right after Reshma rescues Khan from the court, and the dance is set in an open, green ground. Reshma appears in three different costumes in the duration of the song—the first is a shalwar kameez with a bandana tied around her neck, the second is a yellow dress-kameez that is soaked in rain, and the third is a pink shalwar kameez. Although the costumes differ vastly from Haseena’s sexual, body-hugging outfits by appearing to be more modest, the way they are depicted is very similar, with the camera zooming in or focusing on certain parts of Reshma’s body. The song starts off with close-ups of Reshma’s heavy kohl-lined eyes, and a shot of her biting her lip—the camera again, seems to respond the male gaze of both Khan and the viewer. Throughout the song, Reshma dances around Khan—thrusting her hips and extending her arms towards him—while he stands and looks at her. This is a pattern found in various item songs in Pakistani cinema, where the male figure serves as a spectator and a viewer of the sexualized female body that interacts with it when needed but does not himself dance. The female body in turn, prances around the male character onscreen, interacting with him as Reshma does by holding his hand, or wrapping herself around him—becoming the object of his attention. There are repetitive shots of Reshma’s neck being kissed by Khan, or of him slapping her bosom as she sways it to the beat of the song in the first few shots.

The rain in the second scene, and then the swimming in the water in the last scene of the dance serve as an interesting additions to the *mise-en-scène*, as Reshma’s soaked costume hugs her body while she dances and frolics in the water with Khan, adding sensuality to the movements of her body. The dance itself is heavily sexual, as Reshma’s hands caress her own body, and she even slaps her own bosom in beat to the song being played—an important example of how the female body is made to interact with itself for the gratification of the male character and viewer. The cinematography in the songs plays an essential role in determining how the female body is presented to the male viewer. In most item songs, the only close-ups of the male characters involve their faces, focusing more on their expressions—whereas for the female character, it is her body that is constantly zoomed into. Some of the shots focus on Reshma’s hips or posterior, and slowly zoom out to capture her entire body in the frame. Throughout the song, shots of Reshma dancing are followed by shots of Khan’s smiling face—an indication of the enjoyment the male spectator is deriving from the sexualization of the female body. The song attempts to add a degree of “femininity” to Reshma’s character, which otherwise throughout the movie, is one that takes on traditionally masculine roles of weapon wielding, asserting dominance and wanting to seek revenge for the abuse done to her as a child.

Shabana’s first appearance in an item song in the movie is when she is jailed by a police inspector, whom she attempts to seduce while in the jail cell. The dance itself is shown to be a daydream that Shabana has about the inspector, who is her love-interest in the film. This is a key shift, as it is Shabana herself who is imagining the scene, instead of the inspector—which adds a new layer of meaning to the item song, by acknowledging the role of both female as well as male desire. The song starts off with a slow trumpet playing in the background, as Shabana bites her finger seductively, her hair wet and let down—a drastic change from the police uniform she appears in throughout the rest of the movie. There are various shots of Shabana as she flips her wet hair, and the inspector again plays the role of the spectator—to whom the female body responds. Shabana begins dancing by propping her body on her arms, sensually swaying her hips from side to side on

the ground before rolling over on the grass and thrusting her hips again. The camera zooms in and out of her body, which is dressed in a saree with a short blouse that leaves her stomach and back exposed. Shabana's mouth is half-open, and she smiles as she thrusts her body from side to side as the inspector looks on from behind a tree. Her expressions give rise to the idea that the female body too, participates in enjoying its own sexualization—as this is how the male onlooker wants it to be.

Throughout the song, the camera focuses upon certain areas of Shabana's body—like her hips and her waist, as she runs her hands over her own body. The shots alternate with shots of the inspector's face, who looks on, enjoying the scene. Like the men in other item songs in the movie, the inspector is a comparatively motionless figure that the female body has to seduce. Shabana dances against the ledge upon which the inspector perches, caressing her body and moving her hips invitingly towards him, as she flips her hair. He reaches out and touches her posterior before taking her into his arms. Shabana constantly interacts with the space around her, rubbing her body on the ground, a ledge, and even a pole; the female body is subjected entirely to self-pleasure, which in turn pleases the male onlooker. The song itself does not serve as a romantic encounter, or a courting between a man and woman—it is a highly sexual sequence where the female body is continuously objectified using the *mise-en-scène*, the cinematography and the gaze of the male character. Throughout the song, the inspector's eyes and body follow Shabana's in a very predatory way. Near the end of the dance, there is an undressing of sorts—where Shabana's saree is slowly unraveled by the inspector. The undressing is not just an act of taking off clothes, but also symbolic of the male character's intentions, which are entirely to do with sexually pleasing himself with the body of the female character.

The appearance of item songs in a rape-revenge film like *Haseena Atom Bomb*, where women (who are otherwise strong, assertive characters) are sexualized, conflicts our understanding of the shift away from conventional female roles that these movies are attempting to create. The appearance of female characters that dominate the screen and take on assertive roles where they inflict violence upon those who harmed them “refutes the normalizing power of commodification and spectacle” that is common in cinema (Beugnet 2015). It moves away from roles that place the female in a submissive, secondary role where the male hero is her savior. However, the rampant sexualization of these new female heroes in dance sequences where they become but objects of desire, mitigates to some extent their transgressive potential or their agency in the narrative.

Blood and Tears: The Female Body as a Recipient of Violence

After the movie's opening item song, the second scene is of Haseena's first interaction with the men who later rape her. In this scene, they leer at her from behind bushes as she strips off her “western” clothes—a fitted red shirt and tight blue pants, to bathe in a waterfall. As Haseena bathes, completely naked, the camera shifts from her body to the faces of multiple men leering at her—turning the female body into an object of the male gaze again. What follows is a graphic scene of assault, where multiple men grab onto Haseena's clothes and her body, as she struggles and screams to be freed. Haseena's clothes and the placement of this scene of assault after Haseena's seductive item number gesture towards two things: firstly, Haseena does not fall into the typical category of a “morally good”, domesticated Pakistani woman, with “lack of independence”; she is in fact, the opposite—she dances in front of men, she wears fitted, revealing western clothes, and she appears to be in charge of her own sexuality (Ahmad 2016).

Secondly, Haseena's assault seems to be a "punishment" of sorts, for her "transgression" from being a "good woman", to a morally corrupt woman whose "sexuality needs to be controlled". There is a justification if the assault that can be found, when the placement of scenes is analyzed in great detail (Ahmad 2016). Haseena is then saved by a male figure by the name of Khan, who rides in and throws her a *chadar* (piece of cloth) so that she can cover her naked body. This plays into the very familiar stereotype of the damsel in distress, who is saved by a male figure—but in this scene, the man throwing Haseena the *chadar* perhaps also points towards Haseena's morality. A naked woman needs to be covered up first and foremost, before any action against villains is taken, tying into the idea of the woman's honor being closely associated with her clothing in Pakistani society.

Haseena is gang raped on the night of her wedding and is then forced to witness and partake in the murder of her husband at the hands of a bunch of dacoits. The scene of the rape is very detailed as the dacoits bind up Haseena's husband, and then throw her on the bed as she struggles in vain. The scene is highly sexualized, where one of the dacoits holds Haseena's feet and rubs them over his chest, laughing viciously. The camera shifts back and forth between Haseena's perspective and the rapist's perspective, letting the audience see the distress of the victim and the leering face of the rapist. The same bed, decorated for the consummation of love between a man and his wife, is turned into a place of violent assault. Her writhing body is held down by two other villains, as the third one pulls off her clothes and throws them aside.

The act of rape itself is depicted through the shaking of the decorations on the bedposts, and a brief flashing of lights. Immediately after, Haseena is shown standing as the only support under her husband's hanging body, where the villains leave her. As she falls, her husband hangs to death. The female body in this regard is not only tortured through physical assault, but is also left to undergo mental trauma—in Haseena's case, she is "responsible" for her husband's death, as her weak, ravaged body is unable to hold its own and gives way to the weight of his body. Immediately after, Haseena makes the decision to go after the rapists/murderers and avenge herself and her husband, which is a turning point in the film—this is the last scene where Haseena's body appears as a victim of violence.

In the movie, Reshma is shown as a young girl who is almost sold to cocaine-selling criminals by her uncle to fulfil his addiction to drugs—but is saved at the last moment by a kind man, who raises her as his own child. Reshma's body, hence, is presented to the audience first as the body of a young, helpless girl with no power over her own destiny. As her uncle leaves her in the den of the cocaine sellers, Reshma cries out for him to not leave her there. She is then thrown on the floor by one of the drug dealers, as they plan to use her as a prostitute. Reshma is saved by a kind man who buys her off of the villains and takes her under his own wing. Her story of separation from her family also turns into the backstory of a powerful, dominant Reshma that appears later. However, Reshma too is sold by a man, and then saved by one—again giving rise to the familiar stereotype of the female body having to be saved by a male figure.

The shots of an injured Shabana being choked, or with blood trickling down her face are also significant images, as they counter stereotypical closeups of female bodies on screen in movies where the shots are typically of the female character's body as an object of desire. Since Shabana is the only female character who actively occupies a typically male-oriented profession, the scenes that her body is injured in are the ones in which she is fighting off villains like the tall, leering Lambu Dada who she in hand-to-hand combat with. While Lambu Dada and his gang are in a

significant number, Shabana's singular body stands as the only force against them but is eventually injured. While injured, Shabana still attempts to fight back, with blood trickling down her face—yet has to be later saved by the arrival of a male inspector, who ends up defeating the villains.

There are countless scenes of violence in the movie, most of which are of violence upon the female body, which affects not only Haseena, Shabana and Reshma, but also side characters like Reshma and Shabana's aunt, who is abused by her cocaine-addict husband in one of the scenes. In another scene, their sister is almost raped by dacoits who corner her in a field and pin her down. As she struggles, a third dacoit emerges, and separates her legs—intending to rape her. It is only then, that the figure of Khan emerges again, and saves her. It can be argued that the female body being violated serves as a tool to bring in the male characters, who eventually save the female body from its violation. In the case of a rape-revenge film like *Haseena Atom Bomb*, the female agency has to be activated by some sort of past trauma. For Haseena, that trauma is her rape and the murder of her husband. For Reshma, it's when she is sold to cocaine dealing dacoits. The images of female bodies appearing as recipients of violence are significant, as they later on stand as contrasts to the female body as an avenger—reminding the audience of the body's ability to rebuild itself.

Sticks, Punches and Lunges: The Female Body as an Avenger

The rape-revenge film genre started becoming more popular in the early 1970s, as a result of the rise of feminist film critics demanding better female representation in movies (Heller-Nicholas). The rape-revenge film genre is intertwined with the gender politics of the time, and the films that came out under the genre “allowed the ‘body’ story to be told with far greater relish, and the female protagonist's feminist rage pumped new energy into the ‘social’ story” (Clover). In *Haseena Atom Bomb*, the film's narrative focuses upon the female body's quest for revenge in the latter half of the movie, with detailed scenes where the body inflicts violence—overturning the cycle of violence that was perpetuated against it.

Haseena's transformation from the victim into the avenger has taken place when the audience sees her after her rape scene. Haseena uses her body as a tool to lure in the dacoits, and then serves them the same fate they dealt her husband (a death by hanging). In one of the scenes, Haseena's rapist is lured in by seeing her seductively lounging on the bed. The use of the body as a seductive, sexual force—but in this case, a force that is unleashed by the woman instead of the man, enables Haseena to enact revenge upon the villains. The female body is used the way the female wants it to be used, for a specific purpose—which is to inflict injury upon the same people who violated it. The seduction is soon after followed up with Haseena attacking the villains and injuring them before ending their lives the same way they did her husband's.

Not only do these scenes counter the painful violation her body is subjected to during the scene of the rape, but also helps build an entirely new body for Haseena—one that inflicts violence, instead of being subjected to it. In this manner, the body of the woman becomes a powerful tool against the oppressor. The reconstruction of the same body that was shown in a state of helplessness into a body that is physically capable of exerting power, lends agency to Haseena's character, making it appear stronger. There is emphasis placed upon the physical act of injuring the dacoits, with repetitive camera shots of Haseena's legs or hands kicking and hitting out at the male bodies that violated hers. This paves the way for the creation of an entirely new persona for Haseena—as a “figuratively masculine heroine” (Hills).

The kinds of action and violence Haseena performs are generally associated with male heroic figures, according to traditional ideas of masculinity established in cinema worldwide. The association of such traits of physical strength with the female body is a shift from the typically subservient, victimized female character, where the female body is a highly objectified, and physically weak one. However, Elizabeth Hills argues against the use of masculine descriptions for female avengers, pushing for the need for there to be a focus upon how this new character of the female avenger stands in contrast to previous characterizations of females in action films.

Shabana is the only female character on the side of the law in the movie, and her body is shown as being in a position of authority, inhabiting a space and profession typically associated with men. She is primarily seen in her uniform, with either a stick or a gun in her hand, asserting dominance over tall, muscular dacoits who she puts behind bars. The depiction of Shabana as a policewoman, coupled with her introductory scene in which she fights off cocaine-selling criminals while wielding a stick is another example of the depiction of the female body as a force to be reckoned with in *Haseena Atom Bomb*. Shabana strives in her capacity as a policewoman, to bring villains to justice—in the process of which she unknowingly brings her innocent cousin to court for killing a man.

Even though Shabana is injured at the hands of the criminal Lambu Dada later on in the scene and has to be saved by the appearance of the local police inspector, her hand-to-hand combat with the leering, muscular villain and his gang is an assertion of the female body being capable enough to defend itself. Despite being injured and outnumbered, Shabana remains unnerved and stands her ground. However, Shabana's strengths, like those of all other woman in the movie, are restricted. At various points, these strong female characters have to be saved by the appearance of a male character. In many ways, even though characters like Shabana diverge from various stereotypical female characterizations, they also ultimately subscribe to them.

When the viewer is introduced to the adult Reshma for the first time, she barges into a courtroom to claim a dacoit as her own to punish, and then takes him outside to deal him his fate by using her own hands—showing a powerful transformation of the body of the female again. Reshma's body is perhaps the most “masculine” form of a female body present throughout the film, with her short hair cut into a style like male hairstyles and the assertion of her physical strength. Even her verbal jousting with the male figures in the film (especially Khan), where she repeatedly attempts to assert dominance, is significant—as it mirrors the image of the pleading young Reshma when she is sold by her uncle. The numerous scenes in which Reshma grapples with villains with her bare hands adds to her character's transformation, as Jacinda Read puts it, from a victim into an avenger. Reshma's agency is activated by her childhood trauma. She is the only character in the film whose childhood trauma is explored in detail—creating more of a contrast between her as a child, and as an adult. The young, frail female body handed over to drug-selling villains morphs into a physically strong, assertive body, capable of taking revenge from those that wronged her and her loved ones. It is perhaps her backstory, and the sympathy created for her as a child that makes her transformation even more dramatic.

Conclusion

This paper attempts to navigate the various representations of the female body in *Haseena Atom Bomb*, and the nuances present within these representations. There is no singular way of viewing

the appearance of the female body in the movie—even though it transgresses upon typically male-dominated roles and appears as a force to be reckoned with by taking revenge from its violators, it still remains restricted within a certain, objectified boundary, as can be observed through the appearance of the item songs in the film, and the sexual violence committed upon the female body. The female agency appears to be activated only when the female body is violated by a man—and even then, it remains restricted to certain boundaries. However, Haseena, Shabana and Reshma emerge as an entirely new type of female characters in both Pushto and Pakistani cinema, transgressing upon typically male dominated roles of avengers—as weapon wielding women whose lives do not end when violence is inflicted upon them. Instead, by choosing to weaponize their bodies and enact revenge upon those who wronged them, these female characters pave a new path for the rape-revenge film genre in Pakistani cinema.

Film Synopsis

The film follows the story of a young woman called Haseena, who is raped on the night of her wedding by a bunch of dacoits, who then hang her husband—leaving him to die. The remainder of the movie sees Haseena transform from a victim into an avenger, as she pursues and hangs those who killed her husband and violated her body. The movie’s subplot follows the stories of Shabana and Reshma, sisters separated by their cocaine-addict uncle, who sells Reshma when she is at a very young age. Reshma and Shabana both strive in their separate capacities to bring the villains in their lives to justice—and are eventually reunited. Their cousin, Khan, appears periodically throughout the movie, in scenes where he romances Reshma and enacts revenge upon wrongdoers—however, this paper will not be focusing on his character.

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