

Jessica Scarlata

Towards the end of Harpreet Kaur's *The Widow Colony*, a survivor of Delhi's 1984 anti-Sikh massacre asks that her story be shown only if the interlocutors (the filmmakers and the audience) are prepared to do something to help her. Her voice resonating with anger and conviction, this elderly resident of New Delhi's Tilak Vihar settlement cuts right to the question at the heart of media's relationship to trauma – how to open a space where stories can be heard (and audiences can be moved) without making a spectacle of the victims. In other words: how do you visually tell the stories of thousands of people whose bodies were violated and humiliated while respecting the dignity of the victims? How do you represent historical trauma without repeating the power dynamics of the moment represented? How do you rein in the potential violence of representation itself?

The film answers these questions through Kaur's thoughtful and thought-provoking strategies, including her choice to show only partial views of archival photographs of the slain and her reliance on metonymy. Instead of live photos of people being brutalized, the film offers us glimpses of a painting made in the wake of the violence as a pictorial transcription of eyewitness accounts. Instead of butchered corpses, the camera pans across photos of hair chopped off by marauding mobs as a final act of degradation. Even space becomes an important participant in testimonial, as Kaur's voice-over tells us that the streets where the massacre took place continue to resonate with terror.

But the film does not limit itself to a recounting of history. This is an unresolved past, an open wound, and *The Widow Colony* is determined to address (and dress) it in the present. To that end, the film offers something unusual – practical ways to improve the current living conditions of the widows and other victims of 1984. *The Widow Colony* presents a moving account of unspeakable violence; it does this with sensitivity and compassion towards its subjects and a level of reflexivity about the positions of (relative) power occupied by filmmaker and audience. The film seems ideally suited to screening contexts that allow time and space for discussion afterwards, and this is just one of the many reasons *The Widow Colony* should be made available on DVD as soon as possible.