

**Feminist Preconference: Gender, Sexuality, and Militarization in South Asia  
(Invited presentation for Critical Kashmir Studies)**

**Chup kareke kareen guzaare nu: Witnessing violence and staying silent**

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This reflective essay takes its cue from Bulleh Shah's eternal words, *chup kareke kareen guzaare nu* – stay silent to survive – which many progressive academics and activists have come to embody in recent years in Pakistan due to the sheer brutality of violent intimidation, “missing people” disappearances and extra-judicial killings. It starts with activist Sabeen Mahmud's murder in Karachi on April 24<sup>th</sup> 2015, and the wiping out of the “Baloch” question from public discourse after it. By sharing hitherto unwritten experiences of what gendered harassment of women, activists, and indigenous people looks like in contemporary Pakistan, and how these experiences are negotiated and resisted, the chapter offers a form of testimony to the continuing struggles of people against state and state-backed violence in Pakistan. At the same time, it discusses the challenges of everyday living and being that the life of feminist activism entails, attacked as it is both by state actors as well as “progressive misogynists” within “civil society” itself. It ends with a solidarity letter for Irom Sharmila that the author wrote on Sharmila's electoral defeat, but did not publish for fear of state backlash at a time of heightened Indo-Pak hostility and already severe surveillance. Through writing it now, the author seeks to unwrite her own silence in the face of shared state violence in India and Pakistan, acknowledging how often – how very often in the minutest ways - people stay powerless in the face of state power.