

THE LAND OF BROKEN IMAGES: CHANGING PERSPECTIVES OF KASHMIR IN THE LENS OF INDIAN CINEMA

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Abstract: The romantic liaison between Indian cinema and Kashmir dates back to the 1960s when the valleys served as the perfect, idyllic backdrop to films like *Junglee* (1961) and *Kashmir ki Kali* (1964). With the beginning of insurgency in Kashmir in mid-1988, with rising militancy and active army forces patrolling the streets and alleys, there was a departure from the clichéd presentation of the beauty of the valleys to using this contested territorial space as the site for disseminating strong sense of nationalism and patriotism. The apple of discord between two neighbouring nations, Kashmir now became the backdrop of militancy and terrorism. The lives of the people inhabiting the land were not a part of the films' narrative until 2005, when films like *Fanaa* (2006) or *Lamhaa* (2010) attempted to cover the 'untold story of Kashmir'. Such shifting perspectives of Indian cinema took a radical turn with the resurfaced violence and unrest in Kashmir in the year 2010.

Kashmir was no longer the backdrop but became the centre of the film's narrative that aimed to excavate the haplessness and horror that characterized the lives of common people. Transcending the status of a setting, the land becomes symbolic of the narrative and the camera pans over the valley, zooming on the uncharted territories. My article tries to trace this journey of the lens of Indian cinema that has captured the myriad moods of Kashmir in diverse ways over decades, reflecting and representing the socio-cultural changes that have shadowed the valley and defined it.

Key words: Kashmir, insurgency, backdrop, narrative, representation

Who has not heard of the Vale of Cashmere,
With its roses the brightest that earth ever gave,
Its temples, and grottos, and fountains as clear
As the love-lighted eyes that hang over their wave?
(Extracts from *Lalla Rookh: The Light of the Haram*)

The snow-capped ridges of the Himalayas, the Jhelum winding its way across the valleys, the *shikaras* in Dal Lake, and beautiful women in colorful clothes- Kashmir had always colored the silver-screen with ideas of romance, beauty and glamour. The valley served as the picture-perfect backdrop to the romance of Amitabh Bachchan and Rakhee singing –“*Kitni khoobsurat yeh tasveer hai...yeh Kashmir hai*” (How beautiful this picture is... this is Kashmir) (Bemisaal, 1982). Numerous other films like *Junglee* (1961), *Kashmir ki Kali* (1964) and *Jab Jab Phool Khile* (1965) painted the mindscape of Indian audience with scenic beauty of the valleys, projecting peace, beauty, serenity and love. Till the 1980s, Hindi cinema presented Kashmir as the perfect setting to a romantic song where the protagonists of a film could sing around the *chinaar* trees, portraying blissful harmony. This onscreen harmony was punctuated, however, by the beginning of Kashmir insurgency in mid-1988. With rising militancy in the valleys, the Indian Army thundering down the bends of roads, sharp fusillade of bullets, men in masks and turbans started constituting Kashmir. The land which was once the paradise on Earth, the site of evergreen romance now stood for fear, terror and bloodshed. A new face of the valleys was revealing itself and Bollywood began zooming in to this ‘new’ Kashmir which was no longer a backdrop to a story, but was a story itself. With changing sociopolitical context, Kashmir became a text; a discourse which was to be scrutinized and analyzed.

Ye haseen vadiyaan/ ye khula aasmaan (The beautiful valleys, this open sky): Roja and the new reality

After the Eastman color was introduced in Indian cinema, during 1960s, Kashmir achieved a new dimension as the film makers captured the color of the valley and explored its scenery. Films like *Kashmir ki Kali* (1964) used the valley to weave the film's narrative, ignoring its historical or topographic significance. One such attempt to present the real 'geography' of the land was *Noorie* (1979) by Yash Chopra. In the dissertation titled *Kashmir through Bollywood Lenses: A Study of Selected Films post 1989*, Tamim Ahmad Baba opined, "The film was more faithful than any previous films about the portrayal of Kashmiri culture and life" (2011). In 1989, the film *Zoonie* by Muzaffar Ali was abruptly stopped- it was a film on the love story of Habba Khatoon, the famed poetess of Kashmir with Sultan Yusuf Shah Chak, the last independent ruler of Kashmir. It was one of the first attempts to probe into the 'history' of the valleys- an attempt that was cut short by the rising militancy and insurgency in Kashmir post 1980s that changed the curve of Bollywood lens and paved the way for a torrent of films created in a strong nationalistic temper, through a period of almost three decades. In the words of Vijay Devadas:

It was a period marked by economic liberalization and accelerated economic growth, increasing communal violence after the implementation of the Mandal Commission Report and the demolition of the Babari mosque intensified violence and tension between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, culminating in the breach of a twenty-eight year peace accord in 1999 with the intrusion into Kargil by Pakistan army and the rise of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party which came into power in May 1996 and championed a fundamentalist Hindu nationalist ideology. (Devadas 224)

In the wake of such radical Hindu nationalism and communal vandalism, there was a torrent of films that attempted to disseminate a strong sense of patriotism, the phenomenon that Amit Rai brands 'cine-patriotism'. Some of them are *Roja* (1992), *Border* (1997), *Dil Se* (1998), *Prahaar* (1991) and *Sarfarosh* (1999). In the year 1992, when *Roja*, by Mani Ratnam was released, the entire nation was grappling with the militancy problem and brewing discontent in the valleys. It was a film that dealt with the subject of terrorism and secessionism in Kashmir and espoused strong nationalistic sentiment. Inspired by the real-life incident of the Doraiswamy kidnapping case (1991), the film opens with the Indian Army chasing and finally capturing the 'dreaded terrorist' Wasim Khan. The scene then shifts to a village in South India where the female protagonist of the film (played by Madhoo) is introduced. As the plot unfolds, we are initiated into the story of Roja and her modern, Madras-based husband Rishi Kumar (played by Arvind Swamy) who works for Indian military intelligence and how soon after his marriage he has to go to Kashmir for a decoding job with the Indian army. It is at this point that the film narrative shifts from love and romance to a patriotic premise. Kashmir, composed of locations from various resorts in the northern states of Himachal Pradesh, (primarily due to a sharp rise in the level of violence in Kashmir during that time with militants targeting the security forces) had served as the backdrop of the Rishi - Roja love story till now, with the couple romancing in the snow covered locales, singing "*Ye haseen vadiyaan/ ye khula aasmaan*" (The beautiful valleys, this open sky). But with the abduction of Rishi Kumar by militants with pro-Pakistan ideology and their demand for the release of Wasim Khan in exchange for Rishi's life lifts the film to a different discourse. On one hand stands Roja, struggling against linguistic barriers, pleading to Royappa, the army man, to save her husband's life and on the other, Rishi's nationalistic determination against extreme military brutality and his attempts to convince Liaquat, the militant leader (played by Pankaj Kapoor) whose only concern is Kashmir's 'aazadi' (freedom) that he believes, will come only if Kashmir becomes a part of Pakistan. While Indian government gives in to Roja's demand of saving the life of Rishi Kumar, the militants do not. Meanwhile, Liaquat has a change of heart, owing to his disillusionment with pro-Pakistan ideologies after the death of his brother in the hands of Pakistani soldiers. Finally, in the end of the film, Rishi Kumar is able to 'reform a militant' (Roja, 1992) and fight his way back to his wife and his nation. The film ends with the celebration of love, romance, and victory of India and most significantly, consolidation of the idea of nationhood.

Post the release of the film, the entire country was seeped in strong nationalistic sentiments with the film running full houses in every theatre. Meenu Gaur notes:

Such was the appeal of the film that the media coined the response to the film as 'The *Roja* phenomenon' (*Sunday Magazine* 1994a: 54-55), claiming that the film resuscitated patriotic fervour amongst the people of India (*Sunday Magazine* 1994b: 52-55), while others saw the film as 'jingoistic propaganda' (Duara 1993). Most importantly, it was one of the first films to depict the 'Kashmir problem' with reference to a Kashmiri separatist movement for aazadi (independence) (69).

Despite receiving the National award (1992) for best film on national integration, a scholarly debate soon ensued regarding the concept of nationhood as projected by the film. Tejaswini Niranjana in her essay "Integrating whose Nation? Tourists and Terrorists in *Roja*" (1994) vehemently argued that the film attempts an integration of diverse people living in the Indian subcontinent into a 'hegemonic Hindu nation' (Gaur 70-71, Niranjana 79-80) thereby questioning the very idea of represented nationhood and nationality,

a reality propagated by the media. She notes how the film *Roja* appropriates the Hindu subject as 'truly Indian' while the "communal Muslim is defined through a process of exclusion" (79-80). While Hindu traditions and religious rituals harmonise with the nation, Islam is "represented as a threat to the secular Indian nation and the Kashmiri Muslim leader is represented as contrary to the ideal citizen subject personified by Rishi" (Gaur 70) Nicholas B. Dirks while talking about the politics of the film *Roja*, notes that in the film, Islam is 'set against the principles of Indian nationalism' (Dirks 161). He points out how the Islam- nation opposition is built up through careful sequencing of scenes showing the Muslim prayer (*namaaz*) being interspersed with scenes of terror, violence or bloodshed. One of the iconic scenes in Indian cinema, the militants setting fire to the Indian flag after hearing the Indian government's rejection of the plea to release Wasim Khan and Rishi Kumar throwing himself on the fire to prevent the flag being burnt is intercut with scenes of Liaquat offering his prayers (*namaaz*). As validated by the song in the background appealing to national integration, it is evident Islam is 'other'-ised from the nation, how while for the national individual, his nation comes first; for a Muslim, his religion is his priority. (Gaur 72) Such a representation recalls how Indian nationalistic films have not only always constructed Muslims as devout and staunch subscribers of their religion and linked to their community but also projected them as a threat to the national harmony and integrity; the nation being India where they suffer "benevolent marginalisation by the majority community" (Gaur 77, Dwyer 276). The trend of presenting Kashmir as the hub of terrorism, inhabited by ruthless, pre-modern Muslims who need the so-called heroic Indian army to get humanized is validated at the end of the film when Liaquat releases Rishi Kumar and says '*ataankwaadi ab aansoo pochhega*' (the terrorist will now wipe tears). This trend of equating Kashmir with the hub of terrorism, Islamic Kashmiris with anti-Indian terrorists more or less begun by *Roja* and continued down the decades when the Kashmir-problem for Bollywood stood for the terrorist demand for a separate state, a presentation that simply glossed the surface without delving deep into the finer points of conflict and concern. While movies like *Border* or *LOC Kargil* focused on the wars fought between India and Pakistan over the landlocked valley of Kashmir, others like *Mission Kashmir* or *Hero: the Love Story of a Spy* dealt with terrorism and militancy in Kashmir, over Kashmir by Islamic Kashmiris backed by Pakistan. Devadas notes in these lines: "Indian cinema's articulation of nationalism and patriotism mutate and shift according to political power, interests and struggles...cinematic expressions...seek to consolidate a sense of pan-Indian nationalism and patriotism alongside Hindu fundamentalist conceptions of nationalism and ethno-nationalist aspirations." (218) This 'reality' of Kashmir propagated by Bollywood filmmakers, presentation of an idea of militancy and terrorism in Kashmir, glossed by strong nationalistic temperament is not only hackneyed but is much distant from the lives of 'real' people dwelling in Kashmir- both Hindus and Muslims; the real-reality.

In the shade of the Fallen Chinaar

Roja glosses the surface of Kashmir insurgency during 1991 but fails to probe the finer aspects of the conflict. It was a time when insurgency and militancy was at its peak, when the streets of Srinagar, Anantanag and Baramulla echoed with explosion and sounds of gunfire coupled with slogans for '*azaadi*' (freedom). The JKLF (Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front), believing in an independent Kashmir- independent both from India and Kashmir was demonstrating their protest around the streets of Kashmir. And on the other hand the AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Protection Act) passed in 1990 that provided unlimited powers to the Indian army. The years that followed are most crucial for discussion since it was a time when insurrection in Kashmir had lost its strength and momentum, hundreds of young men active as insurgents during the first half of the 1990s were switching sides and joining with Indian security forces who in turn were abusing their powers. Writing about the period between 1990- 1994, Agha Shahid Ali, the Kashmiri writer notes:

Srinagar hunches like a wild cat; lonely sentries, wretched in bunkers on the city's bridges, far from their homes in the plains, licensed to kill... while the Jhelum [river] flows under them, sometimes with a dismembered body. On Zero Bridge the jeeps rush by... guns shoot stars into the night, the storm ... rages on ... night after night... son after son taken away, never to return from the night of torture (Bose 181)

None of the Bollywood movies bothered to document this face of Kashmir, where the snow-walls are tainted with blood and posters of freedom, silent sighs of desperation and anger filling up the air. The industry was busy churning out movies like *Mission Kashmir* (2000), *LOC Kargil* (2003), *Hero: the Love Story of a Spy* (2003) and *Fanaa* (2006) that glamorized and glorified the Indian army fighting the Kargil war, protecting the nation from external threats. According to Mc Clintock, "visual media is a potent tool for circulating nationalism" (Banerjee Ch.3) and all these movies, emanating from a collective will, aimed at propagating the dominant idea that Kashmir is a plot of land that legally belongs to the Indian subcontinent and that this plot of land should be treasured and protected, negating any other possibilities or opinions. So, simplistically saying, it is the nation's voice (India) about Kashmir, the land. Jyotika Virdi argued in *The Cinematic Imagination: Indian Popular Films and Social History* how the concept of 'nation' and

nationality was being constructed by the visual media, how “all ethical dilemmas revolve around the nation; good and bad, heroes and villains are divided by their patriotism and anti-patriotism.” (9) Then what about the people of Kashmir? Although films like *Mission Kashmir* and *Fanaa* attempted to dig deep into the politics of Kashmir and the pains and problems of the people, they too succumb to the superstructure of jingoism and patriotism. While *Mission Kashmir* does focus on the sufferings and angst of a Kashmiri youth through the character of Altaaf (played by Hrithik Roshan), it cannot escape the grand-narrative of categorization and stereotypes. While attempting to understand the Kashmir conflict through Bollywood lenses, Julia Szivak rightly notes how Altaaf’s Kashmiri identity is “nevertheless only skin-deep, being mostly confined to his preference for Kashmiri folk costumes, appreciation of the landscape, and readiness to sing folk tunes.” He is, however, motivated to join an insurgent group not by ideology or political goals but rather for personal reasons. “Since he wants to take revenge on a person intricately connected to the establishment of the Indian state, he sees violent resistance against the Indian state – and his embedded enemy within it – as the best means to pursue his personal agenda. We can thus assess that Hindi cinema often solves the question of representing a highly political and volatile struggle by transposing it onto the level of the individual.” (Szivak)

Priya Kumar notes that cinema “is a crucial realm of representation and refraction around the issues of nationalism, religion and minoritarian identities” (178) and the movie *Sheen* (2004) played on such categorized representations as it harped on the plight of the Kashmiri Pundits but failed to accommodate the sufferings of the Muslims who inhabited the same contested land. *Fanaa* contests such binary representations as it speaks about the socio-political fabric of Kashmiris and tries to probe into the insurgency ‘problem’. When Tyagi (played by Tabu) says, “IKF Ki Maang Kashmir Ko Azaad Karna Hai Hindustan Aur Pakistan Se” (IKF’s demand is freedom of Kashmir from both India and Pakistan) or “Kashmir Ko 1947 Mein Referendum Ka Waada Kiya Gaya Tha, Jo Abhi Tak Pura Nahin Kiya Gaya Hai” (Kashmiris were promised right to referendum, but the promise has not been fulfilled till now), we understand that Bollywood was undergoing a shift in perspectives. It was changing its approach by perforating the surface of stereotypes and set-identities aiming at propagating strong nationalistic ideals and teasing issues which were previously left unattended by the silver screen.

“Kashmir is the story of pain, of many bereaved relations”

With the evolution in the way Kashmir colored the viewer’s mindscape, the focus of the lens was no longer on the beauty of the hills and *chinar* trees, but to capture the real life in the valleys that reverberate sounds of boots and bullets, the trauma of the inhabitants in the valley who dwell in perpetual in-betweenness. Films and documentaries like *Yahaan* (2005), *Inshallah, Football* (2010), *Jashn-e-Azadi* (2007), *Lamhaa* (2010) and *Harud* (2010) tried to capture the experience of living in the valleys, present a real ‘slice-of-life’ in Kashmir. Sanjay Kak, in his documentary *Jashn-e-Azadi- How We Celebrate Freedom* explicitly speaks of violence in Kashmir and the act of violence itself. Shot and edited between August 2004-2006, *Jashn-e-Azadi* is not only a rear glance of life in Kashmir that echoes with sharp fusillade of bullets and explosions, but a life, the lives, rather, crouching in fear of death and terror of life. It narrates the stories of a father who looks for his son's grave in a Shaheedi Qabristan (martyr's graveyard), a teenage girl describing the body of a young man in the neighbourhood, killed during an army operation as: “The body is lying in the crossroad amidst the houses, no one is allowed to approach, even the dog did not go near it” (Kak 2006) The coldness and mechanical tenor of her voice says it all. Against it is set the inherent beauty of Kashmir, the colours and patterns, and how they are interlaced with a strong sense of nihilism. Kak's Kashmir, traverses from the sun lit sheen of the white snow valleys to the blood red streets, from the tourists getting clicked in colourful Kashmiri attires to the mounting debris of ash and wood remains, from peace to violence, and from violence to more violence only. In his review of the documentary by Kak, Farah Aziz notes:

The way the film captures self defending attempts by the armed forces to manage for itself, an image of credibility is poignant in sense of negation. The images of the army run schools and orphanages, the donation of portable radio sets by them to the victims, the insistence to sing the national anthem, and an added pinch of "operation successful", as claimed by the forces, give bouts of disillusionment to the boasted claims of peace. Lives put to discord and then mend up with patches of compensations are received as a mockery (Aziz 2007)

The film *Yahaan* (2005) by director Shoojit Sircar recast Kashmir as the backdrop of union of two lovers like that in *Roja*, but Sircar punctuates the flawless romance with realistic portrayal of the problems of blossoming of any romantic affair between a local Kashmiri girl and an officer in the Indian army. When Ada (played by Minissha Lamba) tells Aman (played by Jimmy Shergill), “*Agar ek Kashmiri ladki armywaale se baat karti hai to ya to use rape kiya jaata hai, ya to uske ghar mein bomb phoda jaata hai*” (If a Kashmiri girl talks to an army man, either she is raped or her house is blasted), she is in fact narrating the sad reality that has scarred

the lives of hundreds of Kashmiri women. The terror-fraught valley is summarized by a character in the film who says “Kashmir Ki Baasha Hai Bandoon, Phir Wo Unki Ho Yaa Humari...” (The language of Kashmir is that of gun, be it their or ours). This line equates both the nations, holding them equally responsible for the tainted face of Paradise and such acceptance was definitely a new approach, a new move. It was taken up and expanded and explored in the film *Lamhaa* (2010) that portrayed the dualities in representation, the greyness that exist in individuals as well as the valley they inhabit. When the protagonist Vikram (played by Sanjay Dutt) comes to Kashmir, his superior welcomes him by saying: “Welcome to Kashmir, the most dangerous place in the world”, he replies “sabse khoobsurat bhi” (most beautiful as well) highlighting both the faces of Kashmir that coexist simultaneously- one that is breathtakingly beautiful and the other that is tainted by the blood of innocents. Susan Jose of India Forums aptly noted how the film “has captured the Kashmir state of mind...this is one movie that challenges you to keep up. Even the romantic sequences don’t look out of place and are justified.”

The year 2010 is significant in Kashmir’s history for a number of reasons, primarily because of the violent political unrest in June 2010 triggered by the reported incident of Indian army having seemingly claimed the lives of three Pakistani infiltrators. Although it was later revealed to be a fake encounter, protests and riots continued with rioters shouting slogans of azaadi (Independence) resulting in large-scale death and destruction. In this tense and volatile situation, the film *Harud* (2010) was released. Shot entirely in Srinagar, it captures an everyday Kashmiri urbanity rarely seen on the Indian screen. The common people of the valley don't know which side to go on. They are not safe, neither from the militants nor from the ‘peace keeping forces’. Suffering a strange sense of alienation, they dwell in constant doubt and disillusionment. Reviewing the movie for Firstpost, Trisha, the reviewer wrote: “Bashir shows the subconscious expectations with which a Hindi movie-goer enters a film about Kashmir- and set out very consciously to dismantle them...it refuses us the luxurious otherness of a beautiful landscape in which we might comfortably immerse ourselves” (2012). One of the characters in the film says “Jannat ka raasta kam se kam Pakistan ho ke toh nahi jata hai” (the road to Paradise definitely does not go across Pakistan), that strongly presents a firm sense of negation; a negation that characterizes their lives. At one level, *Harud* documents the unremarkable ordinariness of life in Srinagar: there are autos, there are red Marutis with PRESS signs, there are hawks in the sky at twilight, and young men who loll about in parks talking about imaginary football teams and dreaming of making it big. But it also shows the walls with ‘Azadi’ scrawled in ink on every pillar, the slow-motion violence of identification parades. The film gestures constantly to the crisscrossing registers in which ‘Kashmir’ is pictured, saying a great deal about the politics of images, without spelling it out. A photo studio plays ‘Tareef karoon kya uski’ in the background, but the pretty girl whose pictures have been developed is mourning a lost lover (*Harud* review in ibnlive) There are at least three moments in the film where Rafiq, the protagonist wants to click a picture, but changes his mind because he cannot find anything exciting. The omnipresent army men force him to travel down the memory lane and this generates a sense of defeat which digresses his thought process in a wayward direction. He is engulfed by an ever-widening vacuum, and he is left marooned in a vast wasteland. People are getting killed around him in the most disgusting way; there is absolutely no honour in even dying. *Harud* means autumn in Urdu and the film brilliantly plays with fragments, images, melancholic brush-strokes – all to portray the crumbling picture of Kashmir, life in Kashmir as it is, waiting for finality, a peaceful winter.

And winter comes- not the peaceful one but a long, cold, chilly, bloody winter that colors the film *Haider*.

“Pura kashmir qaid khana hai mere dost”
(*Entire Kashmir is a prison, my friend*)

In the Preface to *Kashmir in Conflict*, Victoria Schofield notes that the Kashmir conflict remains both a struggle for land as well as about the rights of people to determine their future. “In the crossfire of multiple objectives remain the lives, and often the violent deaths of men, women and children who have been caught up in a deadly war of words and weapons, which seems unending. You cannot talk of Kashmir as a dispute between two nations. It is a conflict because we- the Kashmiris- are in the middle” (xv). And *Haider* (played by Shahid Kapoor) voices this anguish, this dilemma out loud and clear: “*Ab na hamein chhode Pakistan, ab na hamein chhode Hindustan, are koi to pooche hum kya chahte!*” (Now Pakistan is not leaving us, Hindustan is also not leaving us; will anybody ask us what we want?)

Decontextualising Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and appropriating *Haider* in the backdrop of the armed insurgency in the Kashmir of the 1990s, Vishal Bharadwaj (the Director) and scriptwriter Basharat Peer has not only problematized the inherent existential anguish of Hamlet/Haider but brought out a different face of Kashmir, a face that was unseen till now in mainstream Bollywood films. The story

is woven around Haider, who is a poet and the film opens with him returning to Kashmir to find that his father has ‘disappeared’ and his mother in a new relationship with his uncle. What begins as a personal journey of a son attempting to find his father either dead or alive transcends to a journey that is universal and firmly political. Critics say that Bharadwaj has succeeded in bringing out the raw emotions of *Hamlet* in the film, while keeping his focus firmly on Kashmir. Deliberately staying away from the rivalry among the neighboring nations, the film focuses on the alleged human rights abuses in the state by the Indian Armed Forces. There are scenes that lay bare the impact of the valley’s socio-political realities on its hapless people. There is a particular scene in the film that depicts a man standing at his own doorstep, clueless, too terrified to go in until and unless somebody searches him and asks for his identity proof. He has apparently grown so used to being frisked at sundry entry points by enforcers of the law that he has developed a mental block about crossing doors without the formality being carried out. The scene lasts for a few seconds yet it has a quiet power in defining the psychological scar that terrorism has left in the mind of the common Kashmiri. The brilliance with which this scene is shot recurs throughout the movie in several other scenes depicting the trauma of common men of Kashmir caught in the violence of the militants on one hand and the Indian army on other.

Jason Burke writes in *The Guardian* that “Haider includes graphic scenes of torture in Indian army camps and other human rights abuses by Indian officials”. Such a portrayal is not only rare but brave as well since for the first time Bollywood dares to step beyond set boundaries, be audacious, commit the ‘chutzpah’ of unmasking the real face of Kashmir, unearthing the real pains and sorrows of the people; the half-widows, who exist unsure of their own identities, the people assumed to be associated with terrorist and militant organizations, people who are scarred by the experience of severe atrocities both physically and mentally, a scar that defines their existence henceforth.

An extremely bold move by an Indian film, an article titled *A Kashmiri Speaks: Why Haider is a must-see film for every Indian* in the First Post says “portraying the uncomfortable political reality of Kashmir” is a great challenge and “more so when the issue lies at the heart of tension between the people of Kashmir and India”. Bharadwaj in an interview with The Indian Express, himself noted that the previous “way of looking at Kashmir has either been cosmetic — only for shooting songs — or rhetoric, where we show a man in a phiran, holding a Kalashnikov... *Haider* is the first film where we see Kashmir from the inside.” But, it is not the last as following the bloody trail of *Haider*, many other films and documentaries were shot on the valley that zoomed the lens further into the lives of the common people – their desires, hopes, expectations, disillusionments, pain and diverse ways of rebellion against injustice and inhumanity. In 2016, a documentary by Fazil Nc and Shawn Sebastian titled *In the Shade of Fallen Chinar* came up which started with a group of modern, educated present day Kashmiri youth from different walks of life (rap singers, guitarists, photo-journalists) who attempt to narrate the predicament of every Kashmiri. The documentary starts with the rap: “But the truth is that they ain’t got no courtesy to address me/ They can barge into my house anytime and arrest me/ Without any warrant or government document” (where ‘they’ represent the Indian army) which basically reiterates several scenes from *Haider* where the common people live in a perpetual state of haplessness, shock and terror. One of the characters in the documentary summarizes the main objective for filming this video which presents art as the preferred tool of resistance in the conflict ridden valley. He says that he picked up the guitar with the same ideology, the same desire to vocalize rebellion against the atrocities and inhumanities on the common people of Kashmir as one would have done by picking up a gun two decades back. The documentary puts together shots of Kashmiri youth – men and women trying to bring about a change, voicing their protest by means of their collective love for culture, literature and art. It shows how the students of Kashmir University paint graffiti and write poems and draw pictures on the barks of the Chinar trees – their art becoming the metaphor for their resistance against conformity. A beautifully edited documentary, it shows the ‘real’ lives of real people inhabiting the blood stained Paradise. Where *Haider* hammered home the brutality and horror and how the only option to escape such brutality is armed resistance, this documentary provides a different picture of resistance altogether. It harps on the futility and disillusionment in such armed resistance and proposes art and culture as new media of resistance. The documentary ends with a note stating that after the death of a young militant on July 8, 2016 the university was shut down, curfew prevailed, and most of the characters shown on screen could not be contacted – validating the perpetuation of terror and trauma that sketched the lives of Kashmiri people.

“Meri awaaz suno, mujhe aazad karo” (Listen to my voice, I want freedom)

Bollywood films and Indian cinema have come a long way from portraying the valley as a beautiful landscape as in *Kashmir ki kali* or hackneyed, overtly nationalistic representation as in *Roja*. Kabir (2010) calls “the new Kashmiri films, which recode the space of Kashmir in terms of the discourse of Islamicization. These films emerged at a time when the Kashmir conflict intensified and the Indian state embarked on a significant militarization of the region”(378-79). From *Harud* and *Haider* to the BBC documentary on

Kashmir by Mark Tully titled *Kashmir: Paradise Lost* or *In the Shade of Fallen Chinar*, silver screen is trying, in every possible way, to present the valley, its people, their desires and disillusionments, people who desire an identity of their own and are disillusioned by the failure of achieving so.

After the 2016 unrest in which over hundred civilians were killed, tourism was badly hit and after some time when the valley was limping back to normalcy, a short promotional film was released by J&K tourism titled *Kashmir: The warmest place on earth* (2017). It was neither simply about the beauty of the valleys nor about the insurgency and blood-stained alleys of Kashmir, it's about the simplicity and hospitality of the common people of Kashmir. It shows how a young couple is taken around Kashmir by an old Kashmiri man who is assumed to be their tour-guide. They visit the Sufi shrines, enjoy the beauty of the land, have a Shikara ride and enjoy a traditional meal. At the end of the beautifully spent day, the couple gets a call from their tour guide who informs them that he had been waiting for them since morning but they were nowhere to be found. When they ask this old man who had made their trip so special, who he was if not the tour-guide, he introduces himself as a local man who was sent by his wife to bring sugar from the market. The man says “*raaste mein aap log dost mil gaye toh socha ki aapko apna ghar dikha doon, Kashmir dikha doon*” (I encountered you, friends on the road and thought of showing you my home, showing you Kashmir). This revelation, accompanied by a mellifluous background score, strikes the right chord. Jaibeer Ahmad, Executive Business Director and Vice-President J. Walter Thompson, a marketing communications company that created the film said: “Everybody knows that Kashmir is a beautiful place and we wanted to go beyond this known fact. The next biggest attraction in Kashmir is its hospitality, so the idea of incorporating traditional hospitality as its central theme was born.” (Bose 2017).

This year is special, since after 2010, this time eight films based on Kashmir have made it to the Mumbai International Film Festival. However, the screening of the documentary *In the Shade of Fallen Chinar* has been put on hold as it was denied certification from the CBFC. All these films have stories to tell- stories that are essentially Kashmiri, stories of people whose lives have been scarred by situations but situations have not been able to take away the essence of their existence, people who collectively dream of freedom- not only from political and territorial occupation and terror but also a dream of a better future, of restored peace and bliss in Kashmir, the ‘lost Paradise’, a dream of a land ‘where the mind is without fear and the head is held high’.

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Kashmir had always been more than a mere geographical space for me and had intrigued me by its breathtaking beauty interspersed with the naked face of terror. So, while writing this article, I have focused on representation of the essence of Kashmir- its binaries, blood and body in Indian visual media. For this article, I am indebted to my partner in work and life, Mr. Tanmoy Putatunda who shared my ideas and took the pains of helping me consolidate the ideas in paper.

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