

Reimagining Kashmir: Cinema, History, and National Narratives in Bollywood

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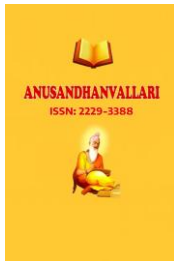
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Abstract

Collective imaginaries of society, history, and nationhood are important products of popular culture. Popular culture is a place, according to Stuart Hall, where “collective communal understandings” are generated, negotiated and disseminated. Cinema holds a special place in the process of nation-building and the shaping of political discourses in this context. Due to its commerciality and mass appeal, the power of cinema has permeated further into the culture than just the movie theater and can be seen in film music, magazines, reviews, celebrity culture and fan communities. Hence, films are considered as cultural texts which audiences read and understand their social and political context. Historical and political films have a unique role in popular culture, both in reconstructing the past and defining new meanings for the present. Their images may be inspired by historical events or the images may be influenced by the selection of narrative, the construction of symbols and the ideological frameworks that may differ from history. This means such movies must be analysed both for the kinds of things that they have represented in the past and for the way they are involved in the construction of public memory. This article takes a look at the portrayal of Kashmir issue in some Bollywood films that have been made from 1992 to 2014. The research is based on theories of nationalism, collective memory, and representation, and it uses qualitative content analysis to examine the representation of Kashmiri, Indian and Pakistani identity and of the Kashmir conflict in film narratives. The results indicate that the earlier films in most instances dealt with the idea of Kashmir in terms of terrorism, national security and territorial integrity, while the later ones are more concerned with the sufferings of the common people, their sense of alienation and the human cost of a long-standing conflict. The article contends that Bollywood is an important cultural phenomenon which not only mirrors the dominant policy discourses on Kashmir but also helps in shaping public perceptions, national narratives and collective understandings of the longest running political dispute in South Asia.

Keywords: Kashmir conflict, Bollywood, nationalism, collective memory, representation, popular culture, national identity, cinema.



Introduction

Not only is historiography a means of making history but it also has the potential to be a powerful instrument of collective memory. The process of remembering and forgetting, as well as emphasizing and de-emphasizing, and interpreting history all shape a society's memory of its experiences in history. The scholars of memory studies have proposed that collective memory is ever and constantly being re-invented in response to the concerns and the political needs of the time (Halbwachs 38-40). It's a way to connect history to generations that will follow, to give them a sense of shared history, a sense of belonging and enlist them in national identity. Historical narratives on this score do not only recall or record the past; rather they do much more. They plan and reinterpret past, present and future (Anderson 204-06).

The function of cinema in the process of historical representation and historical memory formation is special. Fiction can be a great resource for historical information when access to academic historical writing is limited. A film may only consist of a handful of scenes that tell the history, but it still affects public opinion of history. As Robert A. Rosenstone (2017) says,

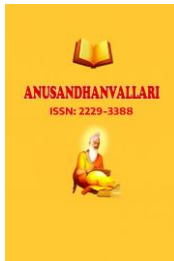
One of the ways in which people in the modern day experience and understand history is through historical films (3-5).

In addition, these representations are still open to critical examination and debate of their "ideological" aspects. Film has an important role in the construction of national memory and social consciousness through its visual images, storylines and emotions. Studies of the cinema and nationalism have been numerous. Film can be a very potent culture carrier, which can be used to imagine a nation and to spread shared values, symbols and experiences. It is an important tool for the creation of a sense of community among people that have never met one another, and this is an important point to keep in mind when reading Benedict Anderson's (2006) book on a "nation" as an "imagined community" (p. 6-7). Films involve in the creation and reproduction of national myths by repeating stories, symbols and images.

Nations and people are often celebrated in a positive light and heroic scale in national myths. Heroes of these types of stories are typically brave, sacrificial, have to come together, need to be ethical, and the external or internal force is antagonistic to the social structure. The characters are generally personifications of the virtues of the nation and they fight their battles through force of arms, cleverness or sacrifice, or through a combination of all these. They are like those Barthes (1972) describes as the work of myth, in which the "historically contingent events" are "seemingly natural and unquestionable truths" (109-12).

In the Indian context, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are classical epics which can be used as the basis of the cultural and moral aspects of the cinematic stories. It has been noted that these epics, particularly the traditional one of good versus bad, are often used in popular Hindi films to explore the ethical dilemmas, archetypal characters, and moral dichotomies of these epics (Vasudevan 14-18). Bollywood does not just tell epic stories, but brings the themes to the social and political issues of the day. Therefore, movies become important as a national identity, historical memory, and political ideology. The Bollywood movies rework the history and are grounded in a narrative of a familiar mythological framework, thereby continuing to build the national consciousness and the collective consciousness of the nation.

In transnational settings, the connection between nationalism and cultural identity is more prominent. Migration can also generate a sense of national identity among the diasporic communities; migrants might have to deal with their feeling of connection to the nation without the frame of a national context. Migration also can reinforce a sense of nation: if people reside in a non-national setting, they may have to grapple with how they feel attached to the nation. In such circumstances, cultural practices, traditions and symbols from the homeland may



have a further meaning. National identities are not disappearing, rather, they are being reframed in the process of cultural expression, memory and representation (Anderson 141-43; Hall 235-37). Cinema thus is an integral part of this process, and stories and images in cinema build one's affiliation to the nation and its culture.

Cinema is a mass media; therefore, it has a strong impact on the perception and attitude of the masses. Movies can also convey values, beliefs and ideologies that can influence the collective consciousness besides entertaining. Cinema has always been known to engage in the process of the making of cultural meaning; it is an arena wherein images, narratives, and symbols are widespread and made sense by the viewers and absorbed by them (Fiske 24-27). Film's audio-visual nature ensures that it is accessible to a wide range of audiences and can be a powerful tool to inform viewers about the past, society and national identity. So cinema has the potential to contribute to public discussion of social change, citizenship and collective identity.

Cinema is a strong medium because it can be used to 'show' and to 'feel'. Films create the immersive experiences and an audience of films asks the audience to identify with characters, events and national causes; whereas, a text story asks the audience to identify with characters, events, and national causes does not create the immersive experience. It is this ability that has made cinema a particularly powerful vehicle for the ideologically embedding of ideologies, and the emotional attachment to the nation. The film itself mirrors social realities, and it also helps to bring them into being by how viewers interpret the world around them, as Pierre Sorlin has pointed out (21-23).

Historical Films

Historical film is a special aspect of this wider culture. Historical films aim to represent the past by means of the documented past, collective memory, legend, and narrative imagination, whereas the genres of fiction are not constrained by the actual history. These films are not a mere reflection of history but are also a re-presentation that gives a new interpretation and meaning to the events that are relevant for today's concerns. Rosenstone (2017)

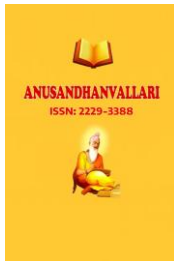
Historical films always "re-imagine" history and give meanings more typical of the period in which the filmmakers made them than of the history period itself (70-72).

History is also key in the Indian context of movies, but must be seen in the light of colonialism and the process of nation-building. Representations of the past became a major battleground of culture and politics in the colonial era. Nationalist intellectuals and cultural producers were trying to claim history as their own by producing history that contradicted the colonial conception of India as passive and non-historical. Early in the 20th century cinema was an extremely popular medium and a powerful vehicle of nationalistic and collective memory (Chakravarty 35-39). Historical films were thus an integral piece to the depiction of India's history and the creation of a sense of nationalism in a wide range of peoples.

Cinema has a different culture than just a representation of historical events. According to Franklin Fearing (1947),

Movies provide the audience with symbolic interpretation of the relationships between people, society and environment. In film stories, they meet with alternative visions, moral quandaries and choices which may not be in their social context (115-17).

Cinema is not just a site for entertainment but a culturally mediated arena for making meaning, valuing, and negotiating identities within society as well. It is among the most powerful cultural phenomena of the modern world, for its capacity to form collective memory and public imagination.



The Kashmir conflict is one of the longest and most complex political conflicts in South Asia and has been a major factor in the foreign policy and political dynamics of India and Pakistan since the partition of the British Indian subcontinent in 1947. Kashmir has also been a significant part of popular Indian cinema for its political, historical and cultural importance. The depiction of the conflict in cinema has spread with the far-reaching influence of Bollywood, and it has much to talk about the other processes of nation-building, identity formation and the public opinion building. Cinema is not just a medium of entertainment; it is a place where political discourses and national imaginaries are created and disseminated. Film has a role in constructing collective understandings, collective identities, and understanding of complex political issues through its depictions of historical events, conflict, and collective identities. The representation of Kashmir in Bollywood is, for this reason, a useful lens to capture evolving state narratives and public discourses about Kashmir.

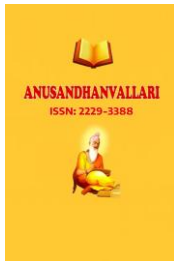
Kashmir Conflicts and Its Initial Connection to Bollywood Films

The analysis of Bollywood films between 1990s to mid-2010s is a content analysis revealing important trends in the portrayal of Kashmir, Kashmiris, Pakistanis and the Indian state in films. It has been observed that most of the films of 1990s and early 2000s were based on dominant security discourses and focused on the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir after 1989 from a terrorism, cross-border militancy and national security perspective (Dwyer 152–55). In these stories, Kashmiri militants were always portrayed as enemies and Indian army soldiers and intelligence officers as the protectors of the nation's integrity.

But more recent films have shown a slow, but uneven, change of heart. The narrative of the conflict has been dominated by security threats and terrorist groups, but some films have started to reflect the lives of ordinary Kashmiris and the human cost of the conflict. But this is not the case in films like *Mission Kashmir* (2000), *Fanaa* (2006), and *Haider* (2014), which are more explicitly dealing with the issues of political violence, militarization, forced disappearances, and civilian atrocities (Kabir 118–21). These depictions, however, are still subject to controversy and frequently capture wider conflicts over the nature of the war and the roles played by the state and other parties.

Political power of cinema is that it is able to create emotions and opinions. Studies on narrative persuasion show that audiences tend to associate themselves with the characters of the movie, which leads to its affecting attitudes, beliefs, and ideology (Igartua 348–50). Cinema has always been used as a tool for persuasion and communication of political ideologies by governments and political movements due to this ability to evoke emotion. The role of film in political mobilization and propaganda has been noted in a variety of contexts such as in the Soviet Union during the 1920s and 1930s, and in Nazi Germany during the 1930s and 1940s (Taylor 45–49). The following examples show how film can more generally be used in the establishment and spread of political narratives.

The relationship between cinema and state ideology has also been examined in regard to the present film industries. Hollywood, for example, has often been studied in relation to governmental institutions in movies about war, national security and foreign policy (Robb 7–12). The same questions apply to Bollywood, which portrays nationalism, security, and territorial integrity in a manner that can be intertwined with the wider political debates in India. Indian cinema today is one of the biggest film industries in the world both in terms of film production and audience reach. The Indian film industry creates films in various languages through several regional centres, reaching both domestic and international market. It is most likely known for the Hindi-language film industry, which is often referred to as 'Bollywood'. The word "Bollywood" refers to the location of Hindi films: "Bombay" (the old name of Mumbai) and "Hollywood". The legacy of Bollywood as a medium for



popularizing understandings of History, Nationalism and political conflict, makes these representations of Kashmir a crucial topic for those working in the field of the study of the intersections of cinema, memory and national identity.

Since the onset of militancy in Kashmir in 1989, the portrayal of Kashmir in Bollywood has changed a lot. The initial movies like *Roja* (1992), *Mission Kashmir* (2000) and *Fanaa* (2006) had mainly presented the issue of the conflict in terms of terrorism, national security and infiltration from across the border. These stories were basically in keeping with the state ideology, which viewed Indian security personnel as the defenders of the unity of the nation-state and militants as the enemies of the nation-state. Thus, political and historical dimensions of Kashmiri grievances were generally ignored from the mainstream film discourses (Kabir 101-05).

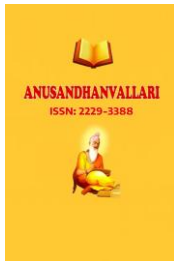
A significant change came with Vishal Bhardwaj's Hamlet adaptation *Haider* (2014), which takes its setting from the insurgency in 1990s Kashmir. As in many of his earlier Bollywood films, Haider's focus here is on the lives of common Kashmiris and the controversial issues like enforced disappearance, military presence and the impact of an ongoing conflict. The film has been discussed by scholars who believe it disrupts the conventional nationalist narratives as it shows multiple aspects of violence and state power and provides room for other understandings of Kashmir in mainstream Hindi films (Gopal and Moorti 275-78). Since 2014, Bollywood has seen the rise of an assertive nationalism in cinema. *Uri: Surgical Strike* (2019) and *Shershaah* (2021) are films which emphasize on military heroism, sacrifice and national security. These movies glorify the Indian Armed Forces and highlight the values of patriotism, territorial integrity and national pride. The tales they tell line up with a larger political context of growing public awareness of national security and the assertion of military power. As a result, cinema serves as a medium of re-establishing and building popular support for the state's actions and reinforcing the national identity (Punathambekar 154-58).

New Perspective of Hollywood Films

The release of *The Kashmir Files* (2022) was another significant breakthrough in the cinema of Kashmir. The movie is set in the late 1980s and early 1990s when Kashmiri Pandits were forced to leave the Valley during the insurgency. The film attracted a wide range of praise from viewers and politicians for its depiction of a forgotten tragedy of history, while others questioned its selective focus on history, and its depiction of inter-community relations. The public controversy of the film serves as an example of cinema as a space of contestation where the competing memories, identities and political narratives are negotiated (Chatterji 63-66).

These changes reflect Bollywood's transition from relatively simple and unambiguous portrayals of terrorism and national security in Kashmir to a more varied and sometimes polarized depiction. However, the predominant attitude is to present Kashmir in the context of Indian nationalism. The portrayal of heroism in the war, the trauma of civilians or the historical trauma, plays a major role in shaping the collective memory and the public perception of the war in Bollywood cinema. The popular culture is an important sphere in which meanings are generated, challenged and disseminated, as Stuart Hall claims (1990). Thus, then, the Bollywood depictions of Kashmir suggest not only evolving film-making techniques, but also greater shifts in the dynamics of nationalism, memory, and political discourse in the present-day India (Hall 468-69).

Film representation is not restricted to the national level. World markets for exchanges of films open the door to other societies and cultures. Cinema, like contemporary media, provides an opportunity to other worlds, other social realities. Such representations however are not necessarily accurate. Rather they are political, culturally inculcated and ideologically motivated creations. Hollywood, for example, has been a major force in the history of projecting images of influential Western modernity, individual freedom, technological development,



and economic prosperity on-screen in Hollywood cinema. Such depictions have helped to develop potent world images of the West, particularly in post-colonial societies (Shohat and Stam 139–43). Such images are received in India, and elicit complex cultural responses. In Hindi cinema the effect of the west and western modern way of life has been felt but at the same time the localised culture and the national identity of the country have been strengthened as well. Bollywood frequently tells tales that support the values of Indian tradition, family and continuity in cultural areas that stretch beyond the national border (Mishra 231-34). Examples of such cultural nationalism and globalization are *Phir Bhi Dil Hai Hindustani* and *I Love My India*.

These film negotiations are in fact an integral piece of the national imagining. Benedict Anderson's (2006) notion of the nation as an "imagined community" is very helpful in analysing the construction of collective identities through the use of common stories, symbols and customs (6–7). There are many more ways to create a nation than political institutions, however, and these are the ways in which a sense of common belonging is created to a population of never-meeting-ones: stories, rituals, songs, monuments, and visualizations.

Anderson (2006) believes that print capitalism was a major factor in the development of national consciousness in the past, but in the modern era, the role of audiovisual media has been acknowledged. Cinema has a special power to combine narrative, emotion and visual symbolism to help strengthen the sense of national identity, particularly cinema. The key to the construction of national identity and collective memory through film is the film's use of national symbols, national music, and historical memories and iconic landscapes (Higson 60–63).

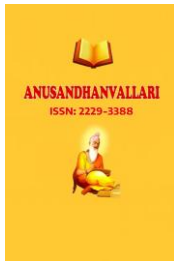
In this broader context of the relation between cinema, nationalism and collective memory, images of Kashmir in Bollywood can be studied. Kashmir has been a prominent issue in the Indian national discourse as one of the most important political and territorial conflicts in post-independence South Asia. In this context, the filmic representation of the conflict becomes a cultural artefact, and a place where the conflicting interpretations of history, identity, sovereignty and nationhood are created and circulated.

Cinema's role in the Kashmir conflict needs to be seen in the larger political context of Kashmir in South Asian geopolitics. Kashmir has been a major political issue within the Indian political sphere as well as in India–Pakistan relations since the partition of British India in 1947. It has been a region of political turmoil and armed conflict, of competing claims of sovereignty, for long, and is one of the world's most politically sensitive regions (Schofield 43-48; Ganguly 11-15). Thus, Kashmir is tightly bound with the issues of nationalism, state legitimacy, collective memory, and political identity that are all deeply embedded in representations of Kashmir in popular culture.

Political Conflicts in Bollywood

The issue of security in Jammu and Kashmir has been extensively discussed by scholars and human rights organisations, especially after the insurgency started in the region in 1989. There have been many analyses of the presence of the military in the area and the discussion of its security policies, political violence and human rights practices (Public Commission on Human Rights 12–18; Navlakha 89–94). These have continued to be important points of contention in political debate in India, Pakistan, and internationally. Hence, the Kashmir issue not only is a state affair but also a cultural phenomenon and a public discourse.

The topic of the media's impact on public perception of political conflicts has been extensively studied in communication and cultural studies. When mainstream media addresses issues of national importance, Herman and Chomsky (1988) explain that they tend to use official channels or sources, which limits the amount of



perspectives audiences can see (1-35). Other scholars have pointed out that media are also agenda-setting institutions that shape policy discussions and public discourse by agenda-setting, that is, setting the issues on the agenda and how they are presented (Livingston 292-95; Gilboa 97-101).

Cinema has a unique place in this process. Film is a potent audiovisual culture that conveys political messages, creates social definitions and plays a role in the development of collective memory. Academics have pointed out that movies often have an impact on the public consensus on foreign policy, national security, and national identity, and can also be part of the creation of that consensus (Weldes 117-20; Biskind 3-5). Therefore, an investigation of Bollywood's Kashmir portrayals offers some interesting clues to the interpretation, narration and dissemination of the conflict to the mass audience.

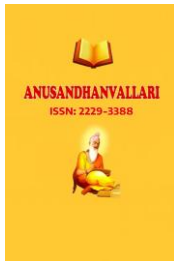
Portrayal of Kashmir in Bollywood

Over the years, the image of Kashmir in Hindi films has undergone a huge change. Kashmir was largely depicted as a romantic, beautiful and nationalistic landscape before the insurgency of 1989. The mountains, lakes and valleys of Kashmir served as the settings for many romantic stories in Hindi films from the late 1940's till the 1980's. In these movies the region was more of a scenic backdrop than a political place (Dwyer 147-49; Akhtar 85-88). The onset of insurgency in J&K in 1989 brought in a major change in the film portrayal. Since the political violence began to increase, Bollywood gradually started to shift away from romance stories about the region and started playing with the themes of militancy, terrorism, national security and cross-border conflict. One such milestone was the film *Roja* (1992) directed by Mani Ratnam, which is considered to be one of the first mainstream Indian films to focus on the Kashmir issue at the centre of the plot. The movie set the tone for a lot of the Kashmir's portrayal in Bollywood films in the future, weaving its way into the concepts of nationalism, territorial integrity, and the danger of terrorism (Kabir 103-07).

In the 1990s and beyond, Kashmir came to feature in Hindi films as a political battleground, beyond being just a romantic setting. This shift was part of the larger shift in Indian public debate and also a testament to the role of cinema in the making of the nation's narratives on conflict, identity, and sovereignty. The changes in these representations is an integral part of the understanding of the role played by Bollywood in popularizing the Kashmir issue in the last 30 years.

The scholarly discussions on Bollywood's portrayal of Kashmir have been mainly about issues of nationalism, political ideology and cultural representation. Mani Ratnam's *Roja* (1992) has been the subject of a large amount of academic research. Academics have pointed out that the film was a refreshing change from the romanticized portrayal of Kashmir that preceded it, and instead of featuring political conflict and militancy in the foreground, the film was the first to feature them as the central theme. *Roja* is, in Dirks' terms, a fundamentally political work, in which Kashmir is seen in terms of national security and terrorism (215-18). The movie had received a lot of laudatory feedback for being patriotic but it has come under scrutiny on its portrayal of the war and its depiction of Kashmiri political issues. Baba argues that *Roja* offers a false history of Kashmir that is based on nationalism to the exclusion of local histories and concerns (Baba 54-57).

Likewise, Niranjana suggests that *Roja* creates a story of unity which is based on binaries of loyalty and betrayal, thus reinforcing dominant political discourses in India (Niranjana 79-82). These sorts of criticism are symptomatic of the larger question of how film affects public opinion about contentious political topics. All cinema is a process of selection, interpretation, and construction of narratives, as Barsam and Monahan note; cinematic representation is never neutral, but a mediated reality in which ideological and aesthetic decisions play a part (42-45).



The connection between nationalism and film representation has been analysed a great deal in the context of Indian war and conflict films. Budha claims the prevailing concerns of the sociopolitical sphere are often reflected in the Hindi-language film on the subject of war and national security, which plays a role in the creation of patriotic narratives (133–36). With the conflict in Kashmir and its significance in the Indian consciousness, the films often get mixed up with the issues of patriotism, territorial integrity and nationhood. As a result, Bollywood's depiction of Kashmir frequently offers window-dressing for larger ideology of the country and its perceived enemies.

The representation of Kashmiri identity in the mainstream Hindi films has also been discussed by a number of scholars. Mir (2008) claims that Bollywood has always made stereotypical images of Kashmiri Muslims such as the one-dimensional political image or the one of them being related to militancy and conflict (91-94). Similarly, Baba (2011) argues that numerous films focus on the state-centred narrative and focus on the heroic efforts of the Indian security forces while depicting Kashmiris through a dichotomy of loyalty and dissent (61-64). The studies bring to the fore the role of movies in shaping the national narratives and collective consciousness of the Kashmir issue.

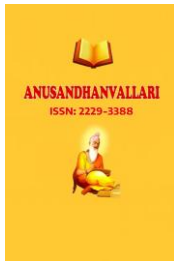
In spite of the ever-expanding scholarship on Bollywood and Kashmir, comparatively not much work has been done so far on the systematic study of the character representation in different films made at different historical moments. Most previous research has been on the ideological analyses of specific movies, especially *Roja* (1992) and *Haider* (2014), or on themes of nationalism and state discourse. So there is a need for research on the Indian, Kashmiri and Pakistani characters in a larger sample of films and the changing nature of these characters over time. This study aims at identifying the changes and continuities in the depiction of the Kashmir conflict in selected Bollywood movies between 1992 and 2015 and how these depictions influence the creation of national identity, collective memory and orientations towards Kashmir.

Analysis

This study examines nine Bollywood films whose narratives are centrally concerned with Kashmir: *Roja* (1992), *Mission Kashmir* (2000), *Sheen* (2004), *Yahaan* (2005), *Fanaa* (2006), *Tahaan* (2008), *Harud* (2010), *Lamhaa* (2010), and *Haider* (2014). *Roja* was created in Tamil but its nationwide Hindi-dubbing and impact on the later cinematic depictions of Kashmir are worthy of it being included in the corpus. The choice of these films is made because Kashmir is not just a geographical location; it also forms a major theme of the film. There was no major Hindi-language film that had a prime theme of the Kashmir conflict in 2015.

The study uses qualitative content analysis to analyse the depiction of the Kashmir issue and the key players in the conflict over the years in Bollywood films. The study is based on three types of characters: Kashmiri, Pakistani and Indian and on the dominant theme of the conflict in each movie. The narrated characters were analyzed based on narrative functions and ideological placement. Texts were categorized as either victim, militant, violent, or neutral, using Kashmiri characters. Kashmiri characters were used to categorize texts as victim, militant, violent, and neutral. The characters of Pakistan were divided into allies, adversaries, or neutral characters, while the characters of India were divided into protectors, oppressors, or neutral participants in the story. The categories were developed not as political labels but to highlight common patterns of cinematic representation.

Apart from its character analysis each movie was graded based on its main theme of Kashmir conflict. The films which emphasised militancy, insurgency, national security etc were under the category of terrorism. Films which highlighted political grievances and state violence as well as local experiences of conflict were



classified as resistance films. Films that cast the conflict as a more general social or humanitarian issue, but which did not favour either type of framework were assigned to the problem-oriented type of film.

In the film *Roja* (1992), Kashmiri militant characters are mostly linked to kidnapping, violence and separatist activities, while the story emphasizes on unity of the nation and territorial unity. The war is projected mostly in terms of terrorism and Kashmiri political issues are given scant coverage. The film helped create a template for the mainstream Hindi cinema to portray Kashmir in the 1990s as several scholars have pointed out (Niranjana 79-82; Kabir 103-07). Likewise, *Mission Kashmir* (2000) portrays a violent, traumatic and militant Kashmir. Despite giving more depth to its protagonist than the previous movies, there are some key Kashmiri characters who are still very intertwined with the concept of insurgency and revenge. However, the story also recognises the individual and societal impacts of sustained warfare, adding some complexity to the more nationalist depictions.

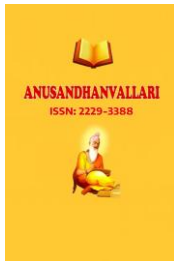
Sheen (2004) is based on the Kashmiri Pandit's displacement and the trauma of migration and exile. The movie is focused on the plight of those who are displaced and shows how militancy can cause some social disruption. *Yahaan* (2005) offers a cross-community love story that refracts the conflict, playing out Kashmiris as victims of violence and members of militant networks. The dual presentation adds a more subtle awareness of the human impact of war. Similarly, *Fanaa* (2006) adds to the usual binary conflict by featuring characters that are impacted by both political violence and personal tragedy. The movie does not tell one single story of nationalism or separatism, but rather a multi-layered story of love, sacrifice and political allegiance. These depictions reflect a progressive move away from earlier depictions that largely condemned Kashmir in the frame of 'terrorism'.

If looked at as a whole, these movies exhibit a progressive shift in the portrayal of Kashmir in Bollywood. The earlier productions focused on militancy, terrorism, and national security, while the later productions had a greater focus on themes of displacement, trauma, identity, and civilian suffering. While nationalist narratives remain as prevalent as ever, the period between *Roja* (1992) and *Haider* (2014) shows a shift towards more diverse and contentious discourses on the Kashmir conflict. The transformation of this is not just a reflection of the changes in public discourse in India but also evidence of the ability of cinema to engage in the continuous discourse on nationalism, memory and political identity.

A study of the films produced from 2006 to 2014 has found that there has been a growing trend in representing Kashmiri characters and Kashmir conflict in the films since then. Prior to that, the narrative of Kashmir was mostly defined as a discourse of terrorism and national security as seen in the earlier films *Roja* (1992) or *Mission Kashmir* (2000), but later films started to present the narrative of victimhood, trauma, displacement and life in the context of conflict.

In *Fanaa* (2006), Kashmiri identity is conveyed in the form of opposing types of characters. The main man character, Rehan, is shown as a militant that is involved in violent activities, whereas Zooni and her father are shown as civilians, caught up in situations out of their control. The film thus encapsulates aspects of both the terrorism and the victimisation paradigms, and is an example of the struggle between security-focused narratives and more personalised depictions of human suffering.

More pronounced is the change in *Tahaan* (2008) and *Harud* (2010). The productions are different from the previous ones in which militancy took the center stage and these productions have been directed towards the experiences of common Kashmiris. The story of *Tahaan* is about a young boy's quest for his donkey in the midst of political unrest. The majority of Kashmiri characters are depicted as civilians trying to deal with the uncertainties of everyday life, and political violence plays a relatively minor role in the story. Militant activity is there but it doesn't define the film's representation of Kashmir. Likewise, *Harud* offers one of the most tolerant



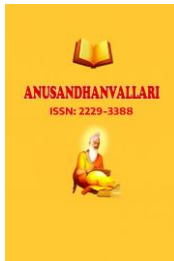
depictions of Kashmiri society in the chosen sample. The movie focuses on the psychological effects of war, and shows the fear, loss, and social chaos that can be caused by war. Instead of emphasizing the issue of terror or of national heroism, *Harud* emphasizes themes of loss, alienation, and survival. The film brings forth the human toll of long conflict and the Kashmiri people are seen largely as people who are caught up in political situations, they have little control over, as in the case of Rafiq and his family. The new approach is a radical change from the previous representations which largely portrayed Kashmiri characters in relation to militancy.

Lamhaa (2010) has a more overtly political story. The movie portrays Kashmir as a place of various political and ideological interests, corruption, and manipulation. Negative portraits of several Kashmiri political figures and ambiguous portrayals of the younger political actors. The story does not solely fault militancy and outside actors for the conflict, but suggests several parties with competing political agendas. However, the Indian intelligence officer remains the main protagonist, indicating the continued presence of state-centred viewpoints in the mainstream Bollywood film industry.

The most significant break with the past is in *Haider* (2014). Based on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the film focuses not on issues of terrorism and national security, but on the social and political repercussions of conflict. Haider and his family are primarily portrayed as victims of violence, loss and political repression. Notably, the main villain isn't a militant, but a morally questionable person driven by his own ambition and betrayal. This is a narrative shift from previous films which have tended to focus solely on militancy or outside intervention as the source of conflict. Moreover, Haider's depictions of state institutions are unique. *Haider* challenges the notion of militant security forces in the Indian context, as many previous Bollywood films saw the security forces as clearly protective or heroic, and poses questions to explore the issue of militarisation, enforced disappearances and the lives of civilians in the midst of conflict. It is an instance of one of the most complex and controversial representations of Kashmir in mainstream Hindi cinema, as several scholars have pointed out (Kabir 118–21, Gopal and Moorti 275–78). It does not present a single nationalist story, but rather highlights the multiple issues and unresolved conflicts.

It also shows that there is a great disparity in the representation of Pakistani characters. In the analyzed movies, Pakistani characters have been rarity in comparison to Kashmiri or Indian characters, who are normally linked to militancy, involvement on the other side of the border or backing of the insurgents. In *Roja*, *Yahaan*, and *Lamhaa*, Pakistani characters have mostly a negative vibe and are connected to militant groups. However, they are only marginally visible in their films and further highlight the broader Bollywood approach to the current conflicts in Kashmir through the prism of national security and external threat. In comparison, Indian character types are more variable in time. In earlier movies like *Roja*, *Yahaan* and *Fanaa*, Indian actors play the role of protectors, moralists or guardians of the national integrity. The characters are often symbolic of patriotism, sacrifice, and civic duty. Later movies, however, feature more nuanced representations. In contrast to the traditional view of the intelligence officer as a hero as propounded by *Lamhaa*, *Harud* and *Haider* show state institutions in a more critical light. In these movies, the military is not just about security but also about fear, uncertainty and the mundane of life in a war zone.

The analysis of selected films as per the theme shows the overall transformation in the attitude of Bollywood towards Kashmir issues. The earlier films primarily dealt with the subject in terms of terror and national security with a focus on militant violence and threats to the sovereignty of the Indian nation. In contrast, later films increasingly recognize civilian suffering, political ambiguity, and social consequences of the extended conflict. While some filmmakers are still working within the framework of nationalism in their films, there has been a gradual shift in the portrayal of Kashmiri experience between *Roja* (1992) and *Haider* (2014). The shift



demonstrates the shift of public discourses on Kashmir and how cinema can be a place of contestation between alternative nationalisms, memories, and identities.

The Bloodshed and Clash of Arms

Political turmoil is still seen in most of the movies being released from Kashmir, only the scene has been changed from time to time. Previous films have the war-facade in the tone of terror or national security, whereas later films start to depict more of the human and political costs of the war having dragged on for so long, and of civilian suffering.

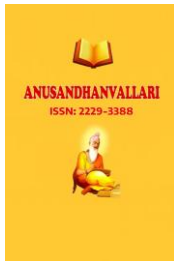
Yahaan (2005) is one of the films that depict the sentiment of duality in many films about Kashmir. Talking about the iconography of Kashmir, image of a beautiful paradise is used to represent the region while at the same time the image of a region dominated by violence, militarism and political uncertainty is used to represent the region. This opposition between paradise and conflict, as is always the case with Bollywood, exists both symbolically, as part of a national imaginary and in a political sense as a reality that is contested.

Likewise, *Fanaa* (2006) follows the same pattern of involving the issue of militancy and national security. The movie portrays a separatist movement which is clamouring for political objectives while resorting to violence, thereby reinforcing the dominant image of Kashmir and terrorism that much of Bollywood cinema has had in the 1990s and early 2000s. While the personal story of a young boy is the centre of interest for *Tahaan* (2008), she also places everyday life in a context influenced by armed conflict. The innocence and childhood are foregrounded in the film, and yet it also conveys how violence is part of the normal social life.

The more substantial shift is seen in *Harud* (2010), who are departing from the traditional notion of terrorism and counterterrorism. The film has nothing to do with the notion of militants or security forces, or geopolitical issues; it's about the psychological and emotional effects of the conflict on the common Kashmiris. The ambiance of uncertainty, loss and distrust in the film reflects the growing interest in film of the lives of civilians. Most importantly, *Harud* does not oppose nationalism to separatism instead he views Kashmir as a social and human issue. *Lamhaa* (2010), is neither as clearly villainous as the ante-previous depiction, nor does it appear as clearly good as the following one. There is also a certain focus on terrorism and political conspiracy in the film, though it does do some good in providing a context for militant activity in terms of more widespread political corruption, manipulateness and injustice. This indicates the evolution of a more nuanced language of conflict, while at the same time the focus on state-centred interpretations of security and order continues.

The most obvious outlier from the above patterns of representation is *Haider* (2014). *Haider* not only connects Kashmir with terrorism and separatist violence, which were the very theme of numerous earlier films but also focuses on issues of disappearance, repression, trauma and moral ambiguity. It is a multi-layered depiction of the conflict and does not simply depict Kashmiri actors as militants or security threats but as actors who have been impacted by the historical and political situation around them. In addition, the film challenges the practice of state power, militarism and human rights, which in turn challenges the dominant conceptualizing of Bollywood mainstream of dealing with Kashmir. In this, *Haider* is a pivotal moment in the history of cinematic depictions of the war.

Moreover, there are interesting trends in character construction in the analysis. A comparison of the number of Kashmiri characters across the films selected, as compared to Indian and Pakistani characters, reveals that the former are even more prominent than the latter in all of the selected films. These characters hold several roles of common narratives: militants, victims, patriots and collaborators. These depictions are likely to

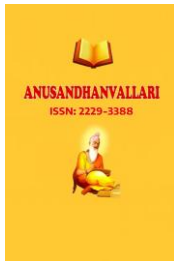


essentialise Kashmiri identities and position them in symbolic spaces of the mainstream narratives. If characters are included, then they are most likely Pakistani militants or political opponents, with Indian characters coming across as security personnel or defenders of the state. Combinedly, these suggest that Bollywood has been involved in the production of the national discourses pertaining to Kashmir in the past. Cinema is viewed as a cultural arena where notions of nationhood, belonging, and territorial integrity are defined and disseminated, as Anderson (2006) argues, that a nation is an “imagined community” (6–7). The repeated scenes, symbols and storylines communicate the popular understanding of Kashmir and its relationship with the Indian nation state.

In parallel, the progress from *Roja* (1992) to *Haider* (2014) suggests a gradual widening of film views. Although the earlier movies were mostly about the phenomenon of terrorism with Kashmiris confined to a particular stereotype, the latter ones have started to give greater credence to the plight of the common Kashmiri and the social ramifications of the conflict. Despite the non-completion and the non-smoothness of the transition, it does reflect the public debates that are evolving and producers' gradually more accommodating attitude towards the human issue in Kashmir. Bollywood's images of Kashmir show the complex dynamics between film, national ideology and the collective memory. Film is not just political, it is also a product of a politics of film making that produces the stories by which audiences understand conflicts, identities and nation. The film's depiction of Kashmir thus offers a prime example of the shifts in Indian nationalism and the influence of popular culture on the public image of one of the most disputed areas in South Asia.

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