

The Kashmiri as Muslim in Bollywood's 'New Kashmir films'

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This article examines the depiction of the Kashmiri protagonist in three popular Indian films, *Roja* (1992), *Mission Kashmir* (2000), and ... *Yahaan* (2005), in order to argue for a new emphasis, cumulatively evident through these films, on the Kashmiri as Muslim in the history of Bollywood's long engagement with the Valley of Kashmir. In analysing closely the visual, narrative, cinematic and affective aspects of this development, and in contextualising it against global and local politics of Islam, the article aims to contribute to a better understanding of how Kashmir, and Islam, while topics with separate discursive genealogies within Bollywood, have converged decisively at a certain historical juncture so as to open up new possibilities for the ideological co-optation of the Kashmir conflict, and the place of Muslims in India, by the popular cinematic apparatus.

Keywords: Kashmir; Islam; Bollywood

Introduction

The prominent release in early 2010 of *My Name is Khan*, the Shahrukh Khan film that potently brings together autism, 9/11 and Indian Muslim identity, has prompted several commentators on Indian cinema to return to an old question: the portrayal of the Indian Muslim as a minority subject within Bollywood (Kesavan 2007). Earlier an operation to be delicately executed in step with the Nehruvian consensus on secularism – an emblematic film here being *Amar Akbar Anthony* – the relationship between cinema and Indian Muslim identity (Islam 2007; Kazmi 1994) took on an even more complicated turn after 9/11 and 26/11 (the attack on the Indian Parliament on 26 November, 2008). In the episode entitled 'Hindi Films: Stereotyping Muslims' of her signature television programme *We the People*, journalist Barkha Dutt (2010) can now add the 'ominous terrorist' to the list of stereotyped Muslim characters that the Indian media circulates, such as 'the drunk nawab' or 'the benevolent chacha' (uncle). If, according to the anonymous article 'Indian Muslims' (2010), the average Indian Muslim viewer appreciated *My Name Is Khan* as a film about terrorism 'where the central character that stands out against this does it *not in spite* of his upbringing and religion *but because* of it', this appreciation is all the stronger because of several films prior to its release that attempted to narrativise the implications of the War on Terror for India.

In these films, notably *New York*, *Aamir*, and *Kurbaan*, the protagonists were Indian Muslims caught up in the aftermath of terror; but the filmmakers failed to

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break out of the assumption that for an Indian Muslim to display publicly any relationship or attachment to everyday Islamic tenets was immediately to render him or her susceptible to ‘terrorist’ ideologies. Indeed, for Bollywood, practicing terrorist and practicing Muslim would seem collapsible categories. If, as Arun Venugopal (2010) opines, ‘In Indian movies, the terrorist isn’t some veiled abstraction: He’s your brother (*Fiza*, 2000) or house guest (*Black and White*, 2008) or the woman you couldn’t live without (*Dil Se*, 1998),’ it should be added that in all these ‘terrorist’ films, apart from *Dil Se* (Kabir 2003), the terrorist protagonist is Muslim. If these films show ‘their torment – over Kashmir, or U.S. foreign policy, or killings at the hands of Hindus in Gujarat – writ large’ (Venugopal 2010), also writ large is the assumption that such torment inevitably manifests itself in acts of terror. Popular cinema becomes the space to work out the fantasies and anxieties that characterise mainstream India’s attitudes towards the Indian Muslim.

This essay focuses on a crucial phase in the evolution of Bollywood’s current interest in Indian Muslims as subjects traversed simultaneously by global and local trajectories of ‘the War on Terror’: three films that focused on the Kashmiri as Muslim, caught up in the Kashmir conflict, and in conflict, therefore, with the Indian nation and state. These extremely popular films, *Roja* (Mani Ratnam, 1992) *Mission Kashmir* (Vidhu Vinod Chopra, 2000) and ... *Yahaan* (‘... Here’; Shoojit Sircar, 2005), bring together within the arena of popular cinema two issues, both of extreme cogency during the decade their appearance spans: the escalation of the long-standing Kashmir issue into an armed insurgency that then provoked massive militarisation of the region by the Indian state; and the radicalisation of the Indian public sphere by Hindutva ideologies following the demolition of the Babri Mosque in December 1992. These films, which I collectively term here the ‘new Kashmir films’, thereby participate in Bollywood’s long history of representing the Valley of Kashmir (centrally located within the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir), while intervening decisively within that history. Another prominent recent film about the Kashmir conflict, *Fanaa* (2006) thus falls outside my discussion as, unlike the films focused on here, it does not use the possibilities of narrative (plot, complication, resolution) to stage a dialectic encounter between Islam, the Kashmir conflict, and the Indian nation. Unlike the other films under scrutiny, *Fanaa* does not stage debates between its Muslim protagonists on the nature of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Islam, or on the benefits (or otherwise) of aligning oneself to the Indian State. As Verma (2006) comments:

One cannot help but fault *Fanaa*’s ill-defined patriotism. Take the case of a few other films of this genre. While *Roja* succeeds in representing the Kashmir crisis and *Dil Se*’s projection of terrorism is more detailed, *Fanaa* uses it as ploy but never articulates its impact or urgency. (Verma 2006)

The flamboyant inaugural moment for Bollywood’s Kashmir obsession is the genre of ‘Kashmir’ films in the 1960s. They are memorable for a disarming innocence that pivots on an overt disengagement with the politics of Kashmir even while the space of Kashmir is moulded, through narrative, into a postcolonial playground for metropolitan Indians (Kabir 2005). During the 1970s and 1980s, the Valley was reduced to a visual backdrop for romantic song sequences. From the 1990s onwards, however, Bollywood displayed a resurgent interest in using Kashmir as the setting and motivation for film narratives. While overtly similar to the strong narrative engagement with Kashmir displayed by the 1960s films, this return to Kashmir after

two decades of a cinematic lull is predicated on the deliberate narrative invocation of Kashmiri separatist demands that emerged during the early 1990s, whose genesis and impact have been usefully discussed by, for instance, Bose (2003) and, in a more personalised vein, Qureshi (2005). A visible index of this difference between the 1960s films and the new Kashmir films is the latter's foregrounding of the Kashmiri as Muslim, engaged in a dialectic relationship with both Islam within India and the Indian nation-state.

As suggested above, this foregrounding of religion is over-determined not only by Indian Islam's historical representation within popular cinema, but also the relatively more recent language of Jihad and Pan-Islamism. National identity politics vitiated by the destruction of the Babri Mosque in December 1992 and the Hindutva wave that concurrently swept through the Indian public sphere were thus vitiated by the anxieties unleashed on a global scale post 9/11 and the 'war on terror'. That the 'fraught and contested discourse around jihad' should now inflect popular cinema's long-standing insistence on 'the pluralistic composition of India' is itself, in fact, 'the sign of a historical shift' (A. Rai 2003). Yet, while these convergences register the ways in which the 'globalisation' of Islam and the Muslim now impact the national and the local, what might they reveal when they map, within films that focus on the Kashmir conflict, the Kashmiri as Muslim? I will argue that narrative energies, libidinal economies, gender politics, and affective reinvestment in long-standing symbols of collective identity come together to unveil the subliminal fears and fascinations of the consumer of popular cinema as the nation's dominant self, while cloaking from that gaze the full complexities of Kashmiri grievances against the nation.

Bollywood and Kashmir, Kashmir in Bollywood

Of the three films under scrutiny, it would seem that the term 'Bollywood' is appropriate only for the big-banner, multi-starrer *Mission Kashmir*. *Roja* was initially released in Tamil but its soundtrack generated enough interest in the film for Mani Ratnam to release a version dubbed in Hindi, which went on to become a national hit, while ... *Yahaan* was a low-budget film made by a little-known director of advert films, Shoojit Sircar, with a newcomer, Minissha Lamba, in the female protagonist's role and a well-known but low-key actor, Jimmy Shergill, in the male lead. Despite their divergent production contexts, however, all three films share a cinematic language, answering to corresponding cinematic expectations, which we can label, in a generic fashion, 'Bollywood'. The investment in melodrama (Vasudevan 1995, 2002) and the interruption of narrative by song and dance sequences (Gopal and Moorti 2005; Gopalan 2002) are key features of this shared language, as is their participation within popular cinema's long-established tradition of using the Kashmir Valley as a space for pastoral escape, metropolitan fantasy, and the blossoming of heterosexual romance (Kabir 2005). Thanks to the 1960s films, the Valley had evolved into a visual register for 'modern love'. *Roja* revived and recontextualised this narrative use of Kashmir within a new political framework, without, however, ever forsaking the romance plot. With *Mission Kashmir* and ... *Yahaan*, the trend continued into the next decade.

This recontextualisation includes breaking cinema's earlier rules of self-censorship regarding the Muslimness of its Kashmiri protagonists. While such self-censorship has often been discussed in relation to the increasing communalisation of

the public sphere, its relationship to that other index of national belonging, ethno-linguistic identity, has not often been remarked upon. For instance, when Jyotika Viridi observes that in popular cinema ‘animosities among religious communities, primarily Hindus and Muslims manifest themselves in overt and covert ways’ (2004, 30) – more overt than covert, I would add, ever since the ascendancy of the Hindu Right – she does not link this comment to her earlier observation that (in this cinema) ‘regional markers of costume, dress and culture are either erased or deployed arbitrarily’ (Viridi 2004, 123). Particularly for the Kashmir films, however, the interplay between religious and ethnic identity has always been crucial, and analysis of any one of these issues must consider the ways in which the other is invoked or repressed. Thus, the 1960s Kashmir films airbrushed the Muslim-ness of Kashmiri protagonists through the choice of ‘neutral’ names, and markers of difference devolved on folk ethnicity (Kashmiri dress, for instance) rather than Islam (Kabir 2005, 92–93; Dar 2007). In marked contrast, today’s Kashmir films are far from coy about admitting the possibility of Kashmiri protagonists who are also Muslim. Indeed, their very Muslim-ness becomes the engine of narrative complications.

From a narratological point of view, within the two phases of Kashmir films that we are considering, the function of the Kashmir Valley remains unchanged. In the first phase, non-Kashmiri protagonists (usually male) travel to Kashmir, fall in love with Kashmiris, and let the romance plot do the rest. In films of the second phase, this pattern may recur (as in . . . *Yahaan*), but more frequently romance implodes into the Valley, with the tensions moving the narrative forward being generated by competing world-views of individual Kashmiris who are emotionally entangled with each other as well as with non-Kashmiri characters who travel to the Valley. Furthermore, the family, rather than the nucleated couple, emerges as a space for working out these ideological differences. But importantly, the Valley and its inhabitants continue to provide the catalyst for the romance plot, and the difference between Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri still instigates the libidinal energies (including, in the case of *Mission Kashmir*, oedipal struggles) that have to be resolved in course of the narrative. Nevertheless, there is a shift from foregrounding religion rather than ethnicity as the marker of that difference; around this shift, furthermore, accrue further associative and affective significances in the form of crucial changes in narrative rationale. These changes correspond to changing national preoccupations: if, in the 1960s, these pivoted on the axis of tradition versus modernity (Kabir 2005, 89–91), by the 1990s they had moved to national and global identity politics, the aggression of Hindutva, and Kashmiri demands for *aazadi* (‘freedom’). The emergence of the Kashmiri as Muslim in popular cinema must be read against the aggregate of these changes.

In 1960s films such as *Junglee*, *Jaanwar* and *Jab Jab Phool Khile*, the Kashmir Valley was a destination for the experience of new forms of leisure and pleasure, in a manner that elided all references to the political situation. Metropolitan protagonists, both male and female, were shown as travelling to the Valley to play tennis and golf tournaments, on college excursions, or simply to recover from the stress of urban living. In contrast, the Kashmiris they met were depicted in metonymic contiguity with the landscape the camera showcased. Placed against the panorama of the Valley’s visual splendour, they emerged as representative of a pastoral idyll outside of capitalism and modernity. Being ‘Kashmiri’, signalled particularly through Kashmiri dress, became a signifier of modernity’s other; that

both needed to be jettisoned and retained as a mirror to the postcolonial nation's emergent sense of self. In the changed configuration of the 1990s, however, being 'Kashmiri' means a layering of a Muslim identity on to the inherited presentation of an ethnic Kashmiriness, itself fetishised. The visuality of the Kashmiri as other accrues new signifiers even as new reasons emerge for the narrative movement of non-Kashmiris to Kashmir. Now, what Srinivas (1994) calls 'the law and order state' is why people travel to the Valley: as cryptographers (*Roja*), police officers (*Mission Kashmir*) or army officers (. . . *Yahaan*).

What is additionally significant is the role of Islam within the encounter between Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri that these films stage. The political unrest in Kashmir is shown as being motivated by an ideology grounded firmly in a militant Islam. In other words, the law and order state swings into action because Islam has catalysed aberrant behaviour in Kashmiris. 'Jihad' (Devji 2006), a word that resonates across the films, is shown as the motivation for Kashmiri rejection of the nation-state and its machinery, which the protagonists of course represent and uphold. The ideology of Jihad is conflated with the everyday practice of Islam visually through significant shots of Kashmiris, both male and female, at *namaaz* (Muslim prayer), and aurally through the sound of the *aazaan* (Muslim call to prayer) that floats across scenes of military and militant confrontations. Such scenes occur in all three films as framing devices for the narrative proper, which offer powerful tools for this linking of a violent and militant Islam to the Kashmir conflict, and urge us to read the romance between protagonists in terms of that linkage. Adherence to Islam is shown thereby to be fraught with danger and excess, and is frequently contrasted with a charmingly spontaneous Hinduism, practiced, for instance, by Roja (Niranjana 1994, 80), and by Neelima in *Mission Kashmir*.

Who's afraid of 'Al'? Or, seduced by Jihad

In their collective insistence on – and indeed seduction by – Jihad as the motivation behind the Kashmir conflict, the films perpetrate a gross over-simplification of a very complex situation on the ground in Jammu and Kashmir. Here, a brief recapitulation of that situation from the 1990s onwards is necessary. The territory of Jammu and Kashmir has been disputed between India and Pakistan from 1947 onwards. In late 1989, a popular armed movement emerged from the Kashmir Valley, demanding *aazadi* or freedom for Kashmiris (primarily from the Indian government). Supported emotionally and materially by Kashmiris and others in Pakistani-administered (or 'Azad') Kashmir, across the *de facto* border of the Line of Control (Kabir 2009a), the call for *aazadi* was by no means a clear set of demands for what *aazadi* might entail. Indeed, the confusions around *aazadi* reflect the confusions around a robust sense of Kashmiri identity within which Islamic belonging is but one element (Kabir 2009a, 2009b). Likewise, the popular perception in India that the Kashmiri movement for *aazadi* is *prima facie* a pro-Pakistani position, reflects only one version of what Kashmiris have been demanding *in lieu* of the *status quo*.

Popular cinema's presentation of Pakistan, Islam and Kashmir in a vile nexus of anti-Indian conspirators flattens out a multiply charged battle over Kashmiri identity in Kashmir itself, co-opting it instead to serve Indian anxieties about Islam and Pakistan. *Mission Kashmir's* opening scene depicts a shadowy deal being consolidated between Hilal Kohistani, an Afghan *mujahid*-as-mercenary (dollars, he

insists, must be the currency of his promised reward of 10,000) and thinly disguised Pakistani bureaucrats. Kohistani – a caricature rather than a character – promises to furnish for the cause of anti-Indian Jihad the Kashmiri youth Altaaf (whom we will soon see physically crossing the mountainous border region of the Line of Control, entering Hindustan as an infection in the body politic, as discussed by A. Rai 2003). Hovering in the foreground of the entire scene is the silhouetted figure of a turbaned, bearded man, a visual allusion to Osama bin Laden. While the escalating rhetoric around bin Laden at the time of *Mission Kashmir*'s release makes this allusion explicable, if not excusable, what are we to make of the language of Jihad inserted into the mouths of the Kashmiri 'terrorists' as early as *Roja*? It is true that, as the 1990s unfolded, pan-Islamic groups operating within Kashmir increasingly gained visibility and power (Bose 2003). Yet within the cinematic representations of the Kashmir movement for *aazadi*, it has always already been about Jihad.

The inability to let go of Jihad is apparent even in ... *Yahaan*, which aims, through grittier and more realist cinematography, for a more nuanced presentation of the situation in Kashmir. The director's interest in nuance is evident in the rather different kind of prologue that frames the narrative proper. Neither a chase through forests nor a secret deal between enemies of Hindustan, but a conversation in a printing press is what opens this film. We see Kashmiris joking about political aspirations as well as the *status quo* – 'I'll wear a clean shirt only after we achieve *aazadi*', declares a young man in mock-heroic defence of his personal hygiene, while another finds the antiquated machinery of the press 'as bad as Kashmir'. Into this grimly jovial scenario bursts the Indian army, and in the chase that ensues Shakeel, who we understand runs the printing press, is driven into the arms of those other Kashmiris who believe in the might of the gun rather than the pen. In escaping the army's tentacles, unjustly out to grab him, Shakeel ends up in the coils of an enemy familiar to Bollywood's audiences – a bearded elder called Al-Sami, the leader of an outfit called Al-Jihad, which does not care 'to wait for either Hindustan or the UN to decide what to do with Kashmir'.

While the Arabic prefixes emphasise the pan-Islamic associations of Al-Sami and his henchmen, the conversion of Shakeel to this cause is all the more meaningful because of what he has left behind in order to become Al-Jihad's second in command. Unlike the light-hearted banter in the printing press, Al-Sami's milieu is one of repression of dissent; in fact, his sidekick Majeed shoots point-blank a young questioner within the ranks. The opening section's ominous juxtaposition of pro-*aazadi* pamphlets with graffiti inscribing Allah in Arabic thus sets up an opposition that becomes value-laden through the quickly-established alignment of Al-Sami, Al-Jihad and Allah. Under these circumstances, the 'free speech' that Shakeel has been forced to turn his back on is a potential source of approbation for the Muslim subject, and indeed Shakeel's continuing tendency to question and debate is the sign of a residual and ultimately recuperable goodness. For this reason, the story does not dispose of him – it is Al-Sami and Majeed who fall, fittingly, to a hail of bullets. The narrative's granting Shakeel the chance to live (hopefully, from its perspective, a 'reformed' life) echoes the conclusion of *Mission Kashmir*: here Altaaf finally chooses the good father figure, his foster father Inayat Khan, the Inspector General of Police (also a Muslim), over I.G. Khan's bad counterpart, Hilal Kohistani.

It could be argued that in offering us these choices of recuperable and non-recuperable representatives of Islam, *Mission Kashmir* and ... *Yahaan* steal a march over *Roja*, which pits Kashmiri Muslims against Indian Hindus in a black-and-white

morality play (Niranjana 1994; Bharucha 1994; but note the apologetic take on this issue by Dirks 2000). Granted, *Roja* too had shown Liaqat Khan to be ultimately susceptible to the seductive combination of non-negotiable devotion (to the nation and to the husband), rational argumentation and unassailable willpower that Rishi and Roja collectively present. As he declares while letting Rishi go, 'Even the terrorist will wipe his tears'. Yet, for all we know, Liaqat Khan remains a terrorist, his even more dreaded colleague Wasim Khan's final defiant cry is 'we shall get our *aazadi*', and Wasim's silent sister leaves the narrative without having spoken a word. Where *Mission Kashmir* presents a relatively more complicated presentation of the Kashmiri as Muslim, and the Muslim as anti-national, is in offering to viewers a diversified spectrum of Muslim characters, which articulates and enacts a range of allegiances to the nation-state and its apparatuses (including the cinematic). In the case of ... *Yahaan*, through the romance between Aman, a Rashtriya Rifles commander, and a Kashmiri woman, Ada, who happens to be Shakeel's sister, this spectrum shifts to the domestic sphere, where it replicates through visual signifiers the drama surrounding Shakeel's defection and ultimate return to the fold.

Indian Muslims/Kashmiri Muslims/good Muslims/bad Muslims

Let us first examine how this spectrum of Muslimness operates in *Mission Kashmir*. I.G. Khan's ethnicity is hinted at as Lucknowi, but far more crucial to the film is his Muslimness, evident in his name, which is selectively but carefully emphasised according to the needs of the cinematic moment. On the one hand, he prays the *namaaz* (more on which below); on the other, he ventriloquises soothing statements about the loyalty of Muslims to the nation, particularly those in government employ. He is, in short, a model police officer and a model Indian Muslim, right down to his unconverted Hindu wife Neelima. Sufi, Altaaf's childhood sweetheart, is a female (and Kashmiri) version of I.G. Khan: she pleads humanism, works for Door-darshan's Srinagar office, foils Kohistani's plans, and brings Altaaf back to goodness. Both Khan and Sufi present comforting, reassuring examples of Muslims, motivated not by Jihad but by the memory (if not practice) of South Asian Sufism – a reminder constantly given to us by the homology of Sufi's name itself. Thus, the oedipal battle enacted in *Mission Kashmir* is not merely one where the family is a trope for the nation, where 'through the process of isolating and eliminating the terrorist monster from the national imaginary, the normalized Muslim citizen performs her identity-in-difference as her duty to the national family' (A. Rai 2003); rather, this battle itself becomes a trope for the struggle between competing versions of Islam.

Through this struggle, moreover, Kashmir's concerns are effectively subsumed within India's. The cinematic battle staged between Sufi-based understandings of Islam and Arabic-style refashioning of Muslim identity superficially mimics local contestations over the meaning and praxis of Islam not merely in Kashmir but all over South Asia; but the resemblance is, at best, inadequately presented, at worst, inadvertent. The films are devoid of any reference to the dynamics of class and history that determine and complicate those Kashmiri contestations (M. Rai 2004; Zutshi 2003). Secondly, they dance completely to the tune of a benevolent Indian discourse of 'good Islam', which retreats to a fetishised alternative pantheon of syncretic, Sufi saints and preachers (Stewart 2001; Alam 2001; Sila-Khan 2004, 8–29) as an ostrich would to sand; this strategy is their way of countering the *perceived*

evolution of Kashmir from ‘soft Sufism to radical Islam’ (Khazanchi 1998). Within this pantheon, Kashmiri Sufi poets (Lal Ded, Habba Khatoon) are prominent, but their inclusion appropriates rather than acknowledges the distinctiveness of and local contestations over Kashmiri Islam (Khan 2002). Thus both I.G. Khan and Sufi are ‘good Muslims’ because of the same reason: their investment in the Indian nation – a concrete instance of how popular cinema presses Kashmiri Islam into its ‘insistence that the Indian nation is a plural, necessarily heterogenous space’ (A. Rai 2003). This strategy reappears in ... *Yahaan*, with Shakeel’s roll call of Sufi figures dear to secular Indian discourse, including the Kashmiri representative Lal Ded. The film’s desire to probe the reasons for Shakeel’s change of heart is thus coloured by its inability to see his earlier self as anything but a mirror for a gentler version of Indian Islam.

In ... *Yahaan*, furthermore, specific visual signifiers calibrating the spectrum of Muslimness convey new alliances that the ‘good Muslim’ is encouraged to make within the Indian public sphere. These signifiers are what I term conspicuous praying and conspicuous veiling. The former derives from an Indian cinematic convention whereby the Muslim on the prayer mat represents a moment of spectacular and lapidary otherness. Shots of Ada’s father and Ada herself at *namaaz* participate within this convention, which is simultaneously reinserted within a newer signifier – conspicuous veiling. Varied veiling practices signal the impact of global Islam within the family. Why else is Ada’s prepubescent cousin, otherwise devoid of narrative function, shown wearing a tent-like *hijab* (Muslim head-covering), whose pan-Islamic affect contrasts with the loose *dupatta* (South Asian shoulder scarf) on Ada’s grandmother’s head? Ada’s wearing of the *dupatta* on her shoulders, while sporting tumbled locks, represents a visual compromise between these contrasting symbols of vernacular and international Muslimness. These, furthermore, are aligned with parallel symbols of vernacular and international modernity – *kashmiri patton ki beedi* (‘Beedi rolled with Kashmiri leaves’), which Ada’s grandmother is partial to, and the jeans that Ada brings home, in wearing which she enacts a wish-fulfilment song. The film suggests that while jeans and veils are mutually exclusive, those predisposed towards jeans are those predisposed towards romance.

My analysis might appear unnecessarily trenchant and joyless: what can be so wrong in depicting a *beedi* (indigenous hand-rolled cigarette)-puffing grandmother and a jeans-loving Ada? Nevertheless, I find problematic the trajectory the film traces from an inherited open-mindedness to an aspirational modernity, while foregrounding always visually-recognisable signifiers of Islam. The already reductionist subliminal message, that the Muslim today has to choose between religion (veiling) and modernity (jeans), when transposed on to the terrain of Kashmir, is in danger of trivialising Kashmiri aspirations as to do with dress rather than democracy. Add to this mix the dimension of gender and romance, and the problems amplify: Ada, the Kashmiri Muslim, rails against her fellow Kashmiris who ‘have forgotten how to love’ while her romance with Aman, the noble representative of the Rashtriya Rifles, is the transcendent act that will redeem Kashmir. Although the film painstakingly represses information that would confirm Aman’s Hindu identity, the discourse about Islam interpellates him into the position of the Muslim’s religious other in order for the film to make full emotional sense. This interpellation is further augmented through the film’s sentimentalising of the relationship between Hindus and Muslims via the figure of Shree, the orphaned Kashmiri Pandit girl who is adopted by Ada’s family.

While Shree is ostensibly a victim and a survivor of the Pandit exodus from the Valley (Evans 2001), she is made to embody both the violence perpetrated by some Muslims ('Jihadis') on a composite Kashmiri culture, and the continuing preservation of that culture by others (the 'good' members of Ada's family). Her semiotic multivalence contrasts with her inability to speak; is she then the film's acknowledgement of the way the cinematic apparatus itself silences a painful and controversial issue to facilitate another set of identity politics to which it is allied, but with which it is by no means interchangeable? Another silent figure, Wasim Khan's sister in *Roja*, can be seen in a similar light. It has been suggested that her silence conveys an inexpressible attraction for Rishi's devotion to his nation (Dirks 2000, 172). But since Rishi's position within that nation is guaranteed because of his normative Hindu identity, neither that devotion nor the attraction it is seen to generate can be prised away from religious difference. In *Mission Kashmir*, a discussion between a Sikh and a Kashmiri Pandit soldier similarly unleashes spectres of sectarian violence. Underlying all these references is the original trauma of Partition: which, for instance, in *Roja*, Rishi overtly recalls when he tells Liaquat Khan that 'India will not be partitioned again.'

Longing, loss, melancholia: Kashmir and the (Indian) viewer

This persistence of the memory of Partition has been often enough noticed, including in the context of *Roja* and *Mission Kashmir* itself (A. Rai 2003; Dirks 2000, 171 and 174). But how does 'Kashmir' as a live issue interact with 'Partition' as a memory? In all three films, the baseline remains the 'unity and integrity of India', an assertion that finds echo in the slogan for India's stand that 'Kashmir is an integral part of India'. But this echo itself mimics the way public discourse in India has tended to suck all issues into the vortex of Hindu-Muslim tension. As with the struggle over competing versions of Islam, the Kashmir Pandit exodus must be viewed as a product of class antagonisms with a pre-1947 history (Sender 1988) that overlaps with, but is not reducible to, the history of communal tension in the rest of India. From *Roja*, when the Kashmiri as Muslim is the ultimate outsider, to *Mission Kashmir*, where the Kashmiri as Muslim must be re-assimilated into the Indian fold, and to ... *Yahaan*, where the good Kashmiri Muslim romances the army officer of unspecified religion: clearly, underlying these divergent narratives is the same desire for a congruence of the relationship between Hindus and Muslims in Kashmir and that between Hindus and Muslims in India.

What, if any, then, remains the specific role of Kashmir in these films? Here, we return to the established role of the Valley as the space for romance and for the construction of a modern subjectivity through romance. Embedding in a time of overt violence the Valley as the nation's eroticised space endows the interlocking of affect between Hindus and Muslims in these films with added meta-cinematic resonance. Critiques of recent Kashmir films have tended to take as the starting point of analysis this cinematic function of the Valley, rather than subject it to scrutiny, but how might we move forward from simplistically mourning the erosion of this space of paradisiacal fantasy (Niranjana 1994, 80; Chakravarty 1993, 209)? Perhaps we need to mobilise critical, historicist scrutiny without dismissing what Ranjana Khanna (2003) calls the critical potential of melancholia, and that, as I have argued elsewhere, is inherent in our continued immersion – as readers, viewers and scholars – in the history of cinematic affect that devolves around Kashmir

(Kabir 2009b). We certainly must probe the affective statements made when *Mission Kashmir* opens with a scene of a *shikara* blowing up on the placid surface of the Dal Lake, or when ... *Yahaan*, despite its visual focus on downtown Srinagar, chooses to shift to the Lake for staging the evolving romance between Ada and Aman, or when Mani Ratnam reconstructs Kashmir, totally unavailable for filming in the turbulent early 1990s, in Dalhousie. Such visual attempts to cling on to an older imagining of the Valley must be interrogated while focusing on the new cinematic emergence of the Kashmiri as Muslim, but without dismissing the reparative possibilities (Rosello 2010) inherent in affective engagement.

By drawing on the intertextuality of the Valley's cinematic representation, these films suggest that violence in Kashmir, unleashed in the name of Jihad, menaces the nation's basic building block: the heterosexual couple. As Srinivas says succinctly in his article 'Law and Order State' (1994, 1225): 'Fight terrorism or *your* family will go to the dogs'. The transparency with which this message is proclaimed in *Roja* mutates into a subtler oedipal drama in *Mission Kashmir*, while in ... *Yahaan* the love between Ada and Aman the army officer plays out yet another means of assimilating the couple to the national family and its apparatuses of security and protection. Here, the films' collective mission to exonerate the nation-state of its share of blame for the conflict in Kashmir is also telling. Thus, the Kashmiri is typically shown in the grip of militant Islam, while the state's structures of administration, security and policing tend to be shown in a benevolent light. Narrative energies are cathected on to the strengthening of this binary, so that comedic plot structure serves to confirm, through closure and reconciliation, that the Kashmiri's ultimate affiliations are with those who embody, benefit from, and serve the benevolent state. Those who resist reconciliation, typically the die-hard Jihadis, are cast out of the happy ending through bullets, audience censure, or, increasingly, the murky networks of global terrorism, all the more menacing because of their fuzzy relationship to standard nationalist allegiances. Indeed, one can see this evolution in the protagonist of *Fanaa*, delineated as the global terrorist who happens to be Kashmiri, and whose antagonism to both India and Pakistan can be interpreted in terms of the rhizomatic movements of such non-state actors on the global stage; as Alpana Sharma (2008) has argued, the global is increasingly usurping the primacy of the local in such films. In general, these heavy teleological pressures overwhelm any counter-examples of army brutality that represent the films' conscious attempts at 'fairness'.

In this respect, I do not find ... *Yahaan* as advancing significantly beyond the parameters set up by *Roja*, which so clearly lacked 'a critical edge' (Dirks 2000, 163), although I would concede that *Mission Kashmir* remains the most psychologically complex of these three films, in part because of the use of visual effects that replicate trauma and that consistently slice against the narrative flow: I am thinking, here, of the repetitions of dream sequences, for instance, which give an insight into the mindset of Altaaf (Kabir 2009b). However, where *Mission Kashmir* does concur with *Roja* and ... *Yahaan* is in the glowingly feel-good depiction of the Indian public sphere, particularly as manifested in the slick new cultures of conspicuous consumption that have emerged out of economic liberalisation. While these are alluded to rather than overtly engaged with in *Roja*, they are already apparent as its deepest allegiances. More than one critic has observed that 'the deepest influence on Mani Ratnam is advertising, which provides him with the craft and the ideology of his filmmaking' (Dirks 2000, 176). If 'the pleasure of [*Roja*'s] text is analogous to all

the other pleasures promised (and in part delivered) by the contemporary spiral of liberalization and middle-class consumption' (Dirks 2000, 163), these pleasures gain further prominence in the Kashmir films that follow it.

Thus it is no accident that Sufi in *Mission Kashmir* works for Doordarshan's Srinagar office, and seems primarily in charge of arranging MTV-style music videos and Hard Talk-style chat shows. Her ebullient personality is shown to thrive in the milieu of her office, and it is, in fact, used to convey the gap between Altaaf's traumatised psyche and her own assimilated self – a gap that the narrative emphatically seeks to close by bringing Altaaf, would-be destroyer of none other than Srinagar's television tower – closer to her vision of life. This redemption promised by television is powerfully delivered in ... *Yahaan*, itself a product of an advert film director's imagination; here, it is a private news television channel and its programme, *Seedhe Sawaal* ('Straight Questions'), that enable Ada to broadcast her love for Aman, facilitate the army's victory over the militants, and also chastise the entire Valley, shown spellbound by her voice over the airwaves, for 'forgetting how to love'. Not at all coincidentally, Ada's broadcast takes place at the same time as the Army's storming of a Srinagar mosque where the Jihadis have taken civilians hostage. With Shakeel at the Jihadi vanguard, his father as one of the hostages, and Aman (future son-in-law) directing Army operations, the family returns as the centre-stage for wider contestations, although now firmly located within the space of public Islam.

At the frontline of diverse wars

In a meta-cinematic moment in *Mission Kashmir*, one of Altaaf's fellow militants comments that 'battles are not won by guns, Altaaf – they are won by cameras'. It is remarkable how the new Kashmir films celebrated rather than critiqued or mourned the omnipotence of the camera lens that has framed Kashmir from the advent of colonial modernity itself, to the present day (Kabir 2009b). In the context of how Bollywood represents Muslims and Islam, it is important to note that this celebration found new energy and relevance through fixing the gaze on the Kashmiri as Muslim. It is one of the medium's ironies that this gaze also enabled, for the first time, cinematic acknowledgement that the Valley today is far from Paradise on earth. Nevertheless, what remains persistent from the heydays of the 1960s Kashmir films is the use of the Kashmiri as the other to the nation's dominant self, an other that is sought to be both assimilated to annihilate its perceived threat, but also kept teetering on the brink of belonging in order to assert the self's perceived centrality. This unstable equilibrium may well translate into new modes of self-assertion by Kashmiris themselves, and indeed the sustained and innovative uses of social networking sites and YouTube by young Kashmiris in the current 'stone-throwing' phase of Kashmiri resistance to Indian militarisation suggests that such a shift is occurring right now. As the climactic confrontation between the television studio and the mosque in ... *Yahaan* powerfully conveys, in its interest in the Kashmiri as Muslim, cinema has successfully cannibalised the Kashmir conflict, and regurgitated it as a convenient foil to the nation's new paradigms of economic liberalisation.

One of the legacies of this cannibalisation, furthermore, has been to bequeath to later films ever more interested in probing the 'Muslim question' a precedent in portraying the Muslim as terrorist, both through distilled images of Muslimness as

well as dialectic engagements with reasonable characters whose ideologies are aligned to those of the State. In conflating two issues with separate genealogies – the Kashmir issue and the position of Indian Muslims – these films have, unfortunately, served well the cause of both Hindutva ideologies and the neo-liberal *status quo*. At the same time, their engagements with nascent narratives of global terrorism have opened out an extra-national discursive space where undesirable Kashmiri Muslims may be jettisoned, and the national body thereby cleansed. This new mode of scape-goating the Kashmir Muslim thus also offers a valuable foil to Bollywood's subsequent co-optations (such as in *My Name is Khan*) of the Indian Muslim as an earnest partner rather than front-line enemy in diverse neo-liberal discourses, including the ideologically ever-useful 'war on terror'.

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