

KASHMIR 2.0
CONTEMPORARY FILM AND MEDIA PRACTICES
IN KASHMIR SINCE 2000

Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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INDIA

2018



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Declaration

I declare that this dissertation titled “**Kashmir 2.0: Contemporary Film and Media Practices in Kashmir since 2000**” submitted by me at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy in Cinema Studies**, is an original work and has not been submitted by me so far, in part or full for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university or institution.

Niyati
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Certificate

This is to certify that dissertation titled “Kashmir 2.0: Contemporary Film and Media Practices in Kashmir since 2000” submitted by Niyati at the School of Arts and Aesthetics, Jawaharlal Nehru University for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy in Cinema Studies** is her work and has not been submitted so far, in part or full for any other degree or diploma of this or any other university or institution. We recommend that this dissertation be placed before examiners for evaluation.

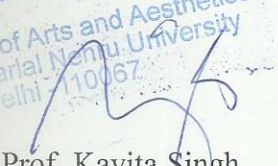


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To Papaji, my grandfather, the finest teacher in Kashmir and in exile

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	i
List of figures	viii
Introduction	1
Chapter 1	
How to encapsulate decades of mourning? Cinema in Kashmir	17
Section I – Fiction film and Kashmir	18
a.) Do we know the Kashmiri dancing in the background? Will he speak? The Representation of Kashmir in the cinemas of India	18
b.) <i>Kashmiri</i> is both the poison and the cure: Kashmir's Mother tongue on the cinematic screen	25
c.) The Path to a Kashmiri film is through the new Intifada	27
Section II: Documentary film in Kashmir	44
a.) Documenting and witnessing losses	45
b.) Between border and fence	53
c.) You may not sing of the women from Kashmir	54
d.) Life, elsewhere: The Kashmiri Pandit in exile	60
e.) The summer of 2016: from stones to songs	63
Chapter 2	
Acts of Witnessing in a Digital Kashmir	71
Section I: The Path to a Video Testimony is also through the new Kashmiri <i>Intifada</i>	72
a.) The Testimony Model	73
b.) <i>Kashmir Unheard</i> : The Community Journalism Project	76
c.) The Kashmiri in Video format: Man Tied to the Jeep	80

Section II: Excavating truth: Video documentation of the conflict in Kashmir	85
a.) <i>Structures of Violence: 2000-2010</i>	85
b.) <i>Kashmir Unheard's</i> coverage of the 2016-17 protests	92
c.) <i>Live From Kashmir: Breaking barriers and laws of looking in at Kashmir</i>	95
Chapter 3	
Hip Hop, Kashmiri Folk and the new Kashmiri Musician	106
Section I: Reinvention of the Ladishah: Hip Hop Music and the Songs of Dissent	109
Section II: The Music Video and the New Kashmiri Musician	118
a) Revival and Transformation of Kashmiri folk songs and poems	119
b) Gyawun: A Curated Music Website	124
c) <i>Sufi</i> Rock Music: Reimagining a poetic and visual Kashmir	126
d) Perpetually Homesick: The Kashmiri Pandit Musicians in Exile	134
Section III: Music against state oppression	139
Conclusion	145
List of References	148
Bibliography	148
Web Resources	155
Interviews conducted	160
Films cited	161
Video works cited	163
Musical works cited	164

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, thank you Prof. Ira Bhaskar – for your supervision, timely guidance, wisdom and patience. This project which was initially a sentence in my mind turned into a fully fledged thesis because of your involvement. Your academic work and classes during the course of my Master’s degree at the university opened up new ways for me to look at Kashmir and cinema. I am grateful to you for always pushing me to work to the best of my abilities. Thank you for paying attention to the minute details and for listening to my issues and worries during the proposal writing despite going through a great personal crisis. Thank you for taking care of all your students, for the warmth, chai, snacks and comforting advice from Pune to the finish line. I will always be grateful to you.

Thank you, Jawaharlal Nehru University and School of Arts and Aesthetics – for taking me in and filling me with inspiration and courage in the face of adversity. Stay strong. I am grateful to the professors who taught me during the MA and M.Phil for guiding me into the world of cinema studies, arts and aesthetics. Thank you, Prof. Ranjani Mazumdar for your Film Theory and Aesthetics course – for noticing the sound studies fanatic in me and for insisting that I keep working on music and sound studies – Chapter 3 exists because of you. Thank you, Prof. Kaushik Bhaumik for your engaging classes on cinema and dissertation seminar – your insights and advice during proposal presentations has been instrumental in my writing. Thank you, Prof. Veena Hariharan for the discussions during the Transnational cinema and Documentary cinema course – for letting me go on talking about Kashmir in every other class. Thank you, Prof. Shikha Jhingan for your work on Lata Mangeshkar’s voice, it changed the way I looked at sound

in cinema and has nurtured my love for sound studies. Thank you, Prof. Brahma Prakash for the course on Living Traditions, engaging discussions during the 9 a. m. classes and for always asking, “Did you write any new poems?” – you reminded me that academic work is important but so is poetry. Thank you, Ashish Rajadhyakshya for teaching the course on Asian cinemas. Thank you, Prof. Kavita Singh for your insightful questions and guidance during the proposal presentations. Thank you, Prof. Bishnupriya Dutt for the engaging classes on theatre and performance and a memorable evening in Old Delhi. Thank you, Prof. Y. S. Alone – for your calming presence and the field trip to Rakhigarhi. Thank you, Samik Bandyopadhyay for the discussions on Antonio Gramsci. Thank you Prof. Parul Dave Mukherji and Prof. Naman Ahuja for teaching the Visual Studies: Theory and Aesthetics course. Thank you, Prof. Rakesh Batabyal and Prof. Sujith Parayil at Center for Media Studies. Thank you, Prof. Sada Niang and Sebastian T. Cherian. Thank you Vinayak, Savita and Rahul for all your hard work, warm smiles and *kaise ho* conversation starters. Thank you, Dilip and Ghulam sir at SAA Library for always locating the books I needed. Thank you Diwan ji and Poonam mam. Thank you, Harsh for helping me through every step of paperwork since 2014 – I aspire to the kind of patience and efficiency you have in your work. Thank you Rajesh bhaiya – what would we do without the tea you make during the winter months or the Nimbu pani during the sweltering heat?

They say that it takes a village to raise a child. I am grateful for the guidance, kindness and love of the people around me over the years. Thank you, Najafgarh a small town at the outskirts of New Delhi where I learnt what it means to be raised by a village of Kashmiris. Vetesta Enclave, more than a geographical location, is a testament to the

courage and survival of the Kashmiri Pandit community. Thank you to wonderful teachers from my formative years - Patwari Sir, Anita Mam, Bharti Mam, Jyoti Mam, Pooja Mam, Kamlesh Mam, Renu Kadian mam and Meenakshi Mam who have always been a source of encouragement. Thank you, lecturers, professors and staff at BMMMC, Indraprastha College for Women. Thank you Nitoo Das for the enriching classes on Film Appreciation – I discovered cinema studies because of those classes and film screenings. Thank you, Amitabha Bhattacharya - for classes on photography, the field trip and the typewriter. Thank you, Simulacra, the Film and Photography Society of Indraprastha College for Women. Thank you, Ritika Popli for leading the way to JNU. I would never have discovered SAA if it weren't for you. Thank you, Arunava Sinha for guiding me towards JNU, the world of translation, and of course, for the life changing books.

Thank you, family for making sure that I do not starve through the course of this thesis. Thank you, Maa for being my first teacher and guide. Thank you, Dad for everything you do every day. Thank you for cooking great food and taking care of a grown adult and saving the day by being the printing machine whisperer and the best companion in Sarojini Nagar. It has been an adventure. Both of you created a new life for yourselves and this family in exile and yet again, you left the comfort of friends, and familiarity of home and embarking on a new life in the city with your daughter, for this I am eternally grateful. Thank you for having faith in my instincts and supporting me on this quest. None of this would have been possible if you both hadn't torn up the societal conventions and said in unison, "To hell with what others think. You should write and go to the university for as long as it pleases you." Maa and Dad, it is your unwavering faith that gives me wings. Thank you to the wise cracking, personal counselor, sister, friend

and confidante, the one and only legend that is Umika Bhat. Thank you for cheering me up since 1997. You taught me irrational faith and reminded me of my purpose during the bleak phases of research writing. Your jokes, antics and dance moves are the antidote to every curveball. You truly are the best thing that happened to me. Thank you, Nikhil Saraf for uploading a collection of Tom Hanks films on my computer many, many years ago, for handholding me through the school years to always booking the tickets and for being my favorite Jammu guide and the virtual Srinagar guide. I do think about what a nice brother you are when you are not around to annoy me. Thank you, Indrani Bhat *Benji*, Gasha bhaiya and Bhat & Kaul *parivaar*. Thank you, Tulsi Raina *Nani* and C.L. Raina. Thank you, Raina, Saraf & Pandita family. Thank you Bakshi family for taking me in when the commute from Najafgarh to JNU had broken my spirit. How does one repay the love, kindness and generosity that you have shown me?

Thank you, Sukanyaa Gupta for sitting next to me at school one fine day in 2009, or was it I who came and sat next to you? Who can remember anymore? Thank you for being my first partner to the movie theatre at an embarrassingly late age of 17. Yours is the only phone number that has ever been dialed during panic attacks and it works like a charm each time. Words are not enough to express the gratitude I feel for the blessed day we met. Thank you, Nachiketa Yadav, my brother, for being the nicest human in Najafgarh. Thank you, Vidit Sangar – for being the Chicago teen from *Footloose* and of course, the silly jokes. Thank you Amir Suhail Wani, my Koshur brother and spiritual guide. Thank you, Revati Kulkarni for taking me to my first Parvaaz concert, for lending me your CDs, and gifting me the beautiful 2018 calender by Kanchana – looking at the dates passing by in that thesis calendar became less daunting. Thank you, Zoya Seth for

being a friend, confidante, roommate, for introducing me to Eminem's music. Thank you, Palak Bhambri for being a force of nature, a creative inspiration and for writing amazing literary emails. Thank you Aman Mann for the everyday car rides after classes and for always being just a call away – your Lemon Iced tea deserves a revolution of its own. Thank you Pujita for being there to answer every question and doubt, for lovely conversations on Instagram and generally, filling me up with confidence. Thank you, Prateek Rawat for being friends with a weirdo from Day 1 of MA – Your precious wisdom and devil-may-care attitude arrived in my life at the right time. Thank you, Tirna, Ishan, Apeksha and Sayantani for the memorable after class hangout sessions. Thank you, Catherine for being the best roommate in Pune and Daljit Ami for the amazing chicken curry and conversations. Thank you, Ankush Bhuyan for the academic books and train conversations. Thank you, Abhishek Ranjan Datta for the cautionary tales, waffles and wisdom. Thank you Sonal Vij for guiding me through what seemed like, at the time, complete chaos. Thank you Sudipto Basu for being a heaven sent savior during the panic days – I will always be grateful to you. Thank you, Srishhty Gairola for all the music and magic. Thank you Shubham Satti for being the computer and internet expert along with being the best neighbor one could ever ask for. Thank you Satti family for your overwhelming love and for making every festival a grand celebration. Thank you Lakshay Malhotra, and all the kids at the badminton court whose names I will memorize right after the thesis submission. Thank you Salinah Salleh, family friends and well wishers in Kashmiri Colony, Sorabh Rao, Nikhil Malankar, Ashwath Komath, Saumya Sahni, Ruchika Pandita, Suchitra Pandita, Sheetal Bakshi, Tashi Dolma, Aditi Dubey, Akhil Verma, Sreshti Verma, Reyazul Haque, Ajanta Das, Divya Gauri, Pradipta, Meera

Chatterji, Mini Dixit, Ananaya Banerjee, Swati Verma Mitali Sengupta, Nisha Meledath, Tenzing Wangdak, Arushi Sahai, Kaushambi Bagchi and Amrita Biswas. Thank you, servers at Qahwa cafe, my refuge for the last two years.

Thank you, Naseem Shafaie and family in Srinagar who welcomed me into their home and life – I arrived to translate Naseem ji’s poems but left as a daughter. Thank you Qurratulain *khala* for your anecdotes about going to the movies in Kashmir – It is the way your eyes sparkled when you spoke of those days that made me realize what Kashmir has lost. Thank you Nirmala Raina *mami* for graciously offering me residence at your home in Srinagar, feeding me great food, eating the pasta I made without showing any reluctance and celebrating my birthday with almond cake from *Ahdoos*. Remembering – *Swing Time* for making me cry on the birthday morning in Kashmir, attendants at Gulshan book store at Dal Lake who let me sit in for hours and hours to read through numerous books on Kashmir, Nidhi Suresh, Aamir Wani, Astha Gaur, and Gourav Mohanty for a memorable evening in Srinagar.

Thank you Tushar Madhav, Sarvnik Kaur, Ruman Hamdani, Ali Saiffudin, Azaan Shah, Arshie Qureshi, Bilal A Jan, Hrishikesh Arvikar, Huzaiifa Pandit and his poems, Khalid Shah, Neelofar Hamid, Adil, Sumit, Leo, Inder Salim, Nighat Sahiba and her poems, Dr. Jyotsna Singh and Dara Shikoh Center, Anish Gawande, Siddhartha Gigoo, Rajesh S. Jala, Rayan Naqash, Ajay Raina, Rahul Pandita, Khurram Parvez, Irfan Mehraj, Danish Renzu, Sanjay Kak, Suvir Kaul, Tenzin Tsundue, Bhuchung D. Sonam, Shaunak Sen, Sahil Ali, Khalid Baig, Narinder Safaya, Salik Shah, Ajapa Sharma and Waheed Jeelani. Thank you, Shahid Shabir at the Doordarshan Kendra in Srinagar, and the library staff at National Film Archive of India (NFAI, Pune). Thank you everyone at the

Kashmir Unheard office – especially Sajad Rasool and Nadiya Shafi for your time and hospitality.

Thank you Sahana Udupa, Shriram Venkatraman, Sarah Zia, Aasim Khan, Krishanu Bhargav, Lion Koenig, Raphael Susewind, Shiva Thorat, Gabriel Dattatreyan, Suneet and Apala at *Digital Politics in Millennial India: International Symposium 2018*. Thank you, Payam Yousefi, Giulia Accornero and Ingrid Monson at the *Harvard Graduate Music Forum 2018*.

Thank you Hannah Gadsby for *Nanette*, the Wachowskis for *Sense 8*, Elizabeth Klett for reading *Jane Eyre* and Charlotte Bronte for writing it, Armie Hammer for reading *Call Me By Your Name* and Andre Aciman for writing it, *Mozart in the Jungle*, Joe Sacco, Edward Said, Madeleine Thien, Clean Bandit for *Rather be*, 4 Non-Blondes for *What's Up*, Eminem for *Not Afraid*, Swet Shop Boys for *Cashmere*, Mehdi Hassan and Ali Sethi for singing *Ranjish Hi Sahi* and Ahmed Faraz for writing it, Chandrakanta for *The Saga of Satisar*, E. M. Forster, Trevor Noah, Detective Amy Santiago, Jessica Day, *Frasier & Niles Crane*, and Sam Seaborn.

Lastly Kashmir, you are the torment and you are the cure.

To Kashmir, Kashmiris and *Koshur* – Thank you.

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 1.1 *Megha and Rubina in I AM*
- Figure 1.2 Still from *Jashn-e-Azadi*
- Figure 1.3 Still from *Jashn-e-Azadi*: Indian Independence Day celebration
- Figure 1.4 Still from *Jashn-e-Azadi*: *Lal Chowk*
- Figure 1.5 Still in *Ocean of Tears*: Victim showing her scar to the camera
- Figure 1.6 Stills from *Ocean of Tears*: River Stream
- Figure 1.7 Still from *Kashmir: Inside a Friday Protest*
- Figure 1.8 Still from *Soz: A Ballad of Maladies*.
-
- Figure 2.1 Farooq Dar tied to an Army jeep
- Figure 2.2 Still from video on Mushtaq Ahmad Dar
-
- Figure 3.1 Logo of the Gyawun Website
- Figure 3.2 New Age Kashmiri Songs on Gyawun
- Figure 3.3 Still from *Roumut Daiwanaie*
- Figure 3.4 Still from *Jhelumas*
- Figure 3.5 Still from *Aalay: The Calling*
- Figure 3.6 Still from *Aalay: The Calling*
- Figure 3.7 *Haqeeqat-e- Kashmir Concert*

INTRODUCTION

Abstract

Kashmir has long been imagined as the locus and space of desire in Bombay Cinema and has continued to be depicted in the Indian imagination as ‘heaven on earth’. However, increasing conflict between the Indian and Pakistani states, the demands for Azadi by the local population, and heightened militancy and violence from the 1990s onward has changed this imagination from lauding the stunning beauty of Kashmir to seeing the landscape being stained by Kashmiri blood, the “sheer rubies on the Himalayan snow” (Kabir, 2009: 21). This dissertation responds to this changed and charged contemporary situation in Kashmir with a focus on the years 2000-2017, through the perspective of Kashmiris who are now responding to their context, imagined homeland, and the devastating contours of the everyday through cinema, other audio-visual media, the internet and music.

In the new century, Kashmir awakened to a new vigilance that used film, video and the internet as the means to discuss the valley. The Kashmiri picked up the camera to destabilize popular narratives about the region which earlier either exoticized or which projected Kashmir as a place infested with terrorism. The time period chosen for the study is important because video and the internet emerged as crucial media in 2000 after decades of turmoil in Kashmir and simultaneously, the advent of globalisation in India facilitated the circulation of video, photographs and writings from the valley through the internet.

This project addresses three different media: digital film, the video on the internet and music to explore the new networked and mediatized Kashmir where the response to the terrible conflict with its representations and discourses has also been taken up in virtual space. In this project then, contemporary mainstream Indian cinema, Kashmiri language cinema – both fiction and non-fiction, YouTube films and audio-visual material on the internet, and Kashmiri music and rap songs have been examined in three distinct chapters in order to explore the articulations of conflict, identity, struggle and protest in Kashmir today. The purpose of this research is to address the critical juncture in Kashmir's new media history where the audio visual has become the medium to rupture state narratives. Here the state and the local Kashmiris respond to each other through an array of audio visual material that questions subject positions and truth dispensing mechanisms. These new media expose the ways in which the Indian state and Kashmir get entangled in the conflict. The dissertation thus explores the conflict in Kashmir as questions of identity, political choices, the violent textures of everyday life and counter narratives get articulated in the contemporary moment through different expressive forms that Kashmiris are deploying to make their voices heard.

Context and the Critical Debates

Kashmir's history is filled with complex and multiple narratives which consist of debates on state repression, voices for self-determination and Azadi, critiques of heavy militarization, cross-border terrorism, human rights violations, and historical narratives about the accession and journalistic accounts of the post 1986 turbulence. Several works

of political writing address different aspects of Kashmir's history and its present scenario. These include writings by Sumantra Bose (1997), A.G. Noorani (2013, 2015), Victoria Schofield (2010), Sumit Ganguly (2013), A.S. Daulat (2015), Nandita Haksar (2015), and Jagmohan Malhotra (2014) among others.

The year 2000 emerged as a watershed moment in this scenario because of the governance, technology and development initiatives ICT4D¹ which led to the inclusion of India into the ranks of countries proceeding towards the 'knowledge revolution' (Mazzarella, 2010: 790). As India moved towards globalisation, the EMMRC² (Mass Communication) centre set up by the UGC at the University of Kashmir also churned out a new generation of photojournalists, TV producers, filmmakers and news reporters who had grown up during the turbulence of the 1990s. Information and Communication technologies that were used by the nation state to decrease the distance between the urban middle class and underdeveloped rural India (Mazzarella, 2010: 783) aimed at curbing the "digital divide" in the country. As the digital divide grew smaller, the local Kashmiri found a way to utilize the internet as well. Thus, to look at the contemporary moment of Kashmir, one has to go back to the year 2000 to understand how the slowly bubbling unrest in Kashmir moved towards virtual space.

The Kashmir unrest that has its roots in the history of the Partition of British India into two nations was placed on the side-lines in Bombay's cinematic imagination until the 1990s. Eventually, films like *Roja* (1992) and *Mission Kashmir* (2000) addressed the catastrophic violence and the violent politics of the region. To research films made by

¹An e-governance tool introduced to expand Information Technology mechanisms to rural areas through Panchayats.

²22 regional Mass Communication centers were introduced in different Indian Universities.

independent filmmakers on Kashmir, one has to address the long standing relationship between Bollywood and Kashmir. Philip Lutgendorf draws attention to the Himalayas as the site of the erotic as a majority of love songs in 1960s cinema were shot in Kashmir creating the 'Himalayas' love song topos' (Lutgendorf, 2005: 3). However, work that has followed on the cinema of the later period foregrounds the fraught political questions that have plagued the region. Tejaswini Niranjana critiques the nationalist narrative on Kashmir in her work on *Roja* where the middle class imagination of the nation state is deployed to assert India's claim on Kashmir in complete rejection of the local Kashmiri demand for independence (Niranjana, 1994: 1). Meenu Gaur's work on Indian cinema's romantic engagement with the scenic locations of Kashmir, its tourism, the narratives of terrorism and the narrow perspective of Indian secularism is remarkable for introducing the concept of Kashmiriyat and the contestations over the possibility of its presence in Indian cinema and the attempt to foreground its own regional space (Gaur, 2010). Tamim Ahmed Baba's thesis on similar grounds focuses on Kashmir as seen through the lens of Bollywood in post 1989 (during insurgency) cinema. He talks about the silence of the Kashmiri narrator in Bollywood films made after 1989. The Kashmiri is either a perpetrator or a victim. For Baba, gross misrepresentation of Kashmiris (Baba, 2011: 75) in Bollywood only seeks to further alienate the valley from entering mainstream narratives.

My aim in this dissertation has been to mark the shift in the representation of the Kashmiri figure through the use of the Kashmiri language by various independent filmmakers like Musa Syeed and Aamir Bashir among others in their films on Kashmir which further led to a shift in the mainstream representation of the Kashmiri figure in

Haider (2014). Naficy has established that language shapes not only individual identity but regional and political identity as well (Naficy, 2001: 24). I have drawn upon his insights in my analyses of the films made after 2000. Furthermore, my intervention is to look at the contemporary moment of a mediatized Kashmir. While a lot of work exists on Kashmir and cinema, there hasn't been any work on the mobilization of the internet in the valley. The thesis raises questions regarding the mediation of politics and aesthetics through the different mediums of film, music video, amateur and propaganda videos on You Tube. The Kashmiri language is a prominent form of expression for the films (*Valley of Saints*, *Goodbye Mayfly* etc) that I pick up in my first chapter. For this, I look at various critical texts that talk about language and cinema. In her essay "Speaking in Tongues", Zadie Smith talks about inter-generational conflict in communities that suffer through turmoil and writes that a dominant feature which emerges in this situation is that "The idea that one should speak their cultural allegiance first and truth second (and that is a sign of authenticity) is precisely a deformation" (2009: 141). This work explores the purposes (political and cultural) behind the use of Kashmiri language in the films to talk about dysfunctional communities torn apart by conflict. Furthermore, I draw from studies on historical trauma specifically by Cathy Caruth (1996) and Ira Bhaskar (2013) which weave together history, trauma and memory and focus on trauma, mourning work and historical affect to pave the way for an understanding of a Kashmiri's relationship with his traumatic history which keeps shifting its shape throughout contemporary occurrences. Apart from this, there are unpublished research projects by Shohini Ghosh and Anuradha Reddy. While Ghosh traces the spectre of the Kashmiri Muslim in Bombay

Cinema, Reddy's work focuses on the changing landscape of Kashmir under the impact of traumatic violence and memory as represented in different Indian cinemas.

The production of video materials adds to the coverage of news events, presenting raw footage of moments that counter the state controlled or private media narratives. In these media texts Kashmir gets framed from the perspectives of state repression. Education in journalism arrived in the valley from 2000 onwards, but it took mobile phone services another three years to be launched in the valley. Furthermore, the use of the internet in the hands of a local Kashmiri is a fairly recent phenomenon as some Kashmiris recall going to cyber cafes to use the internet till 2012-13. The first Kashmiri death recorded on a mobile phone can be traced back to 2010 when the local journalists would collect civilian videos and use them in their news reports or become facilitators to send them to whichever news media organisation requested it. Towards 2014-15, cheaper smart phones, data packages allowed Kashmiris to connect to the wider world from the device in their hands. This smart phone thus became a medium of documentation of the conflict from the eyes of Kashmiris. The year 2016 which emerged as the summer of pellet guns, blinded many Kashmiris. The news reports carrying information of Kashmir's 'outburst' at Burhan Wani's death, failed to cover the situation from the civilian's perspective, many of whom became victims of stray pellets. *Kashmir Unheard*, an organisation covering video documentation through community correspondents then stepped in to cover the protests and their aftermath and the video produced during this period covered not only what was happening during the protests but also followed up on what happened to the pellet victims, the medical procedures and the helplessness of the civilians who are unable to afford medical care and many youngsters whose future

became uncertain due to pellet injuries. Thus, the camera in the hands of the Kashmiri results in a hyper-engagement which provides cathartic release and testimonial recordings. The medium of video and Kashmir's engagement with it has also allowed them to create art and music and upload it directly on the internet. The distribution of this audio-visual material is mostly timed with the ongoing protests where several recordings of the protests and confrontations between the security forces and locals find their way to the internet. As issues of propaganda and counter narratives get foregrounded, internet censorship also becomes an essential part of the picture, which I briefly examine.

The face of Kashmiri Music changed with the new intifada in the valley when MC Kash's rap song *I Protest* appeared as a YouTube video which featured visuals and news reports on the human rights violations in the valley. Contemporary Kashmiri music which is directly released on the internet speaks of Azadi, oppression, protest, disappearance and remembrances. Kashmiri Folklore and poetry too get transformed through this music as it is increasingly becoming a powerful tool of protest. To discuss this phenomenon, I have looked at Kashmiri music videos and live performances as cinematic texts that surpass the logics of mainstream filmmaking while asserting a strong Kashmiri identity that carries certain political weight. I have also referred to Harshita Bathwal's unpublished thesis on art as resistance in Kashmir (2017).

Since, there hasn't been much work done on Kashmiri films with a focus on how the Kashmiri language leads to a transformation in representation of the Kashmiri figure, the mobilization of the internet and contemporary political music in Kashmir; these are aspects that I have focused on and hope would add to the debates around the new media

engagement with Kashmir. In virtual space, through this audio visual material, a new media discourse is produced which is elaborated upon in Chapters 2 and 3.

Research and Methodological Directions and Forms

In the “Introduction” to the book, *Documentary Testimonies: Global Archives of Suffering*, Bhaskar Sarkar talks about the construction of a new media technologies archive from unedited raw footage to documentary films as testimonials. He suggests that there is a migration of the testimonial scene – a staple of advocacy and historical filmmaking – from documentary film, where it has been, since the coming of sound, to the humanitarian digital video archive – and back again (Sarkar, 2010: 1-2). I have drawn significantly on the theorizations of the documentary format as testimony from this book. For language and trauma, I have engaged with Ananya Jahanara Kabir’s work on the changing dimensions of Kashmiri poetry through the years of conflict (2009), Suvir Kaul’s essay on the role of contemporary Kashmiri poetry as witness in “The Witness of Poetry: Political Feeling in Kashmiri Poems” (2018) and Kaushik Bhaumik’s conversations with the Desire Machine Collective on the relationship between Bombay Cinema, Nation and Kashmir (2014) that explores loss and trauma through abandoned spaces of the valley and Hamid Naficy’s *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (2009).

To delve into the video life of the valley, I have drawn significantly from the research reports on human rights violations in the valley such as *Structures of Violence* by Jammu Kashmir Coalition for Civil Society (JKCCS) (2015) and interviews

conducted with several community correspondents at *Kashmir Unheard* and volunteers at JKCCS during the field work in Srinagar. In order to explicate the significances of the use of the music video in the midst of conflict, I have engaged with Michel Chion's "Modes of Listening" (1990), and Jacques Attali's *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1977) for themes of representation in music.

Apart from these theoretical engagements which enabled me to critically position my insights and arguments, my main task in this dissertation has been the construction of an archive of my own for my research since the state archives provided little or no direction to research the contemporary digital moment.³ As opposed to the state controlled public narratives and archives, the internet allows anyone to upload material which in the case of Kashmir, allows the oppressed to have a voice to present alternative opinions. Digital Kashmir is not interested in narrativization or synchronization with larger debates because it is busy recording the immediate and putting it out in the internet's universe. The Internet then presents itself as the alternative archive for the voices on the margins. The films and other audio visual material produced by Kashmiris are largely located on the internet. The tools provided by the internet have not assisted me in my search, and I have had to unearth the materials based on my instinct rather than simply relying on the 'search tools'.

For Kashmiris, the Internet emerged as a space where one could post uncensored content, and the smart phone has further enabled amateur and unedited videos to surface on the internet. The result of this process is a humongous collection of audio visual

³ State archives such as Doordarshan Kendra office in Srinagar lost a lot of their archive material stored in ground floor rooms during the flood in 2014. They too are turning towards digitization of the remaining material and have started uploading their daily shows on their YouTube channel.

material which is spread across the internet from the turn of the new century. Accessibility to computers, the internet and technological material like camera equipment along with education in journalism and a general awareness has allowed Kashmiris to not only document narratives, but internet resources like YouTube and Vimeo and other social networking sites have allowed an easy transmission of these materials to a larger public in Kashmir, India and all over the world. Since the internet emerges as a primary mode of transmission of this audio-visual material, it is here that my search for the digital Kashmir truly began. In her work on the archive, Carolyn Steedman quotes Jean Laplanche and suggests that the very search for an object alters it and as a result, the historian does not find the lost object but a new one constructed by his search (1998: 62). I explored similar analogies and transformative processes in my research. Hilderbrand (2005: 76) emphasizes a haptic melancholic empathy that one establishes with the film/screen/video, an insight that has impacted the textual analyses that I have engaged in with the audio-visual and musical material that I found on the worldwide web.

What Carolyn Steedman has called an archive of dreams and memory (1998: 65) becomes possible in this new digital archive of Kashmir. It is an archive of longing, aspirations and dignity. All this material does is that it conveys one simple truth: the need to be heard and acknowledged without interruption from any state medium. The state recognizes the power of technology in Kashmiri hands and that is the reason why the internet is the first thing to be banned during a protest in the valley. As the primary work of archiving the material required to study mediatized, digital Kashmir goes on, I have only been able to discuss what is available at the moment. Meanwhile, I have focused on the textual analysis of the films mentioned in Chapter 1.

I have also consulted extra filmic materials like different articles, op-ed and long form pieces that discuss the viral audio visual material and photographs from Kashmir. Using the above mentioned theoretical frameworks and methods, I have attempted to establish a discourse about the political charge of these different mediums (Kashmiri language film, audio visual material on the internet and music videos) that rupture the mainstream imagination of Kashmir paving the way for an ounce of reality to seep into the virtual world. The contemporary moment of Kashmir is being live recorded and if we do not tune in, we will be blind and deaf to today's Kashmir.

Chapter summaries

Chapter 1: How to encapsulate decades of grief? Cinema in Kashmir

This chapter addresses the representation of the Kashmiri figure in Indian cinemas and how this representation is challenged through fiction films (both mainstream and indie features) made from 2010 onwards by both Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri filmmakers. The first section covers how Kashmir is featured in Indian cinema, and how this stereotypical representation prevalent from *Junglee* (1961) to *Rockstar* (2011) is challenged by the various films produced from 2010 onwards like *I Am* (2010), *Harud* (2012) and the *Valley of Saints* (2012) which create a depiction of the Kashmiri figure on the cinematic screen that is closer to reality. These indie films lead to *Haider* (2014), which marks a shift in the mainstream representation of the Kashmiri figure proving that post 2012, Bollywood is no longer shying away from honest depictions of the Kashmiri either.

The second section goes into details of the documentary works produced by Kashmiris from 2000-2016 which has created a documentation of decades of violence that Kashmiris have suffered. The Kashmiri identity functions through two different registers and spaces. The first is that of the Kashmiri Muslim who continues to live through the turmoil in Kashmir and the other is the exiled Kashmiri Pandit who makes visits to Kashmir at every chance that presents itself. The third perspective on Kashmir is that of the non-Kashmiri who bears witness to the events and turbulences in Kashmir. When these three different identities use the documentary format to talk about Kashmir using the same language, the issues of state oppression, violence, the demand for Azadi, exile, the longing for home, memory, nostalgia acquire a common language which brings together the trauma of Muslim and Hindu communities and enables a new understanding and interpretation of the trauma of Kashmir. Films by Kashmiri directors like Rajesh Jala, Iffat Fatima, and Ajay Raina reflect their personal aspirations of Kashmir but they are also invested in establishing an understanding of the politics of the valley. How are trauma, memory and nostalgia played out in their films? How does self-representation and representation of the valley function in the hands of the exiled filmmaker? On the other hand, when the Kashmiri Muslim filmmaker decides to make a film on the valley, subjects such as the suffering of Kashmiri women come to the fore in Iffat Fatima and Bilal A. Jan's documentaries. The non-Kashmiri filmmaker looks at Kashmir differently from the Kashmiri filmmakers and acts as a witness to the ongoing situation in Kashmir. This filmmaker turns towards the dominating sound of music in Shawn Sebastian and Fazil NC's *In the Shade of Fallen Chinar* (2016) and Tushar Madhav and Sarvnik Kaur's *Soz: A Ballad of Maladies* (2016). Thus, this chapter brings together different generations

of filmmakers post 2000, the Kashmiri Muslims who stayed back and lived through the violence of the 1990s onwards, the Kashmiri Pandits and the non-Kashmiri filmmakers who grew up outside Kashmir but pointed their camera towards the region in an attempt to reflect on the turmoil and bear witness to it.

Chapter 2: Acts of Witnessing in a Digital Kashmir

This chapter has focused on the production of videos in Kashmir from 2010 onwards when video became the medium to record personal and public testimonies for Kashmiris. Kashmiris record the present moment of the valley and upload it on the internet. These videos cover what is happening in the valley, ranging from protests, violent clashes to funerals. For Kashmiris, the frequent use of videos and the internet has resulted in the creation of a community journalism project in the form of *Kashmir Unheard* whose correspondents are from ‘media dark’ villages of Kashmir. They aim to bring the everyday issues concerning the civilian population to the surface through their own camera’s perspective. These community correspondents also create videos which challenge the mainstream media narratives that cling to a singular perspective. Video documentation allows Kashmiris to create testimonies of their ordeal. Furthermore, *Kashmir Unheard* in collaboration with JKCCS has created short documentaries on the human rights report *Structures of Violence* which covers the violence perpetrated on the Kashmiri population from 1989 onwards. Video, here, becomes a form of excavating the truth of Kashmir’s past and present. The summer of 2016 was also recorded first and foremost by Kashmiri videographers, civilians and photojournalists during which images and videos were transmitted through Facebook and YouTube but internet services were suspended. Kashmir, caught up in protests, hartals and curfews, found itself in a

suspended limbo. Mumbai residents and filmmakers, Sumit and Leo who found themselves stuck in the valley during this time, decided to document it in their cameras. The series created as a result *Live from Kashmir* was uploaded after the internet services resumed in the valley. It presented an outsider's perspective on being stuck in the scenario where Kashmiris find themselves every summer. Through an analysis of such videos and documentaries, this chapter has established the relationship between the Kashmiris and the state in conflict where video becomes the medium to produce counter-narratives.

Chapter 3: Hip-Hop, Kashmiri Folk and the new Kashmiri Musician

“In the dark times
Will there also be singing?
Yes, there will also be singing.
About the dark times.”⁴
(Bertolt Brecht)

Kashmir awakened to a new vigilance using video and the internet and alongside, a new Kashmiri Musician also emerged with the music videos released directly on the internet. Echoing Brecht's words on singing about dark times, Roushan Illahi (stage name: MC Kash) who grew up listening to American rap songs by Tupac Shakur⁵ and Eminem⁶ found an outlet in Hip Hop music to express his anger about growing up in Kashmir. Having grown up through the most turbulent years in Kashmir's history, MC Kash's breakout song and music video, *I Protest* attracted the attention of everyone from

⁴ <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/46223-in-the-dark-times-will-there-also-be-singing-yes>

Accessed on July 18, 2018

⁵ Tupac Shakur was an American rap musician whose breakthrough music talked about racism and unjust social policies in America.

⁶ Eminem (Marshall Bruce Mathers III) is an influential American rap artist who uses an alter ego persona *Slim Shady* to talk about issues that make him angry.

the youngsters in Kashmir to the state authorities who took down the music video and raided his studio. By that time, MC Kash's song had spread like wildfire and had been downloaded multiple times and uploaded on different YouTube accounts as well.

Apart from MC Kash, this chapter focuses on other musicians like EmceeAme and Mosam who rap in English-Kashmiri, Ali Saiffudin and Mohammad Muneem who sing in Kashmiri and Urdu and the all-female rock band Pragaash which was banned after a fatwa was issued by Grant Mufti in 2012. When Zubin Mehta performed at a highly publicized concert in Srinagar in 2013, a counter protest-concert was held at a closer location organized by a civil rights group headed by Khurram Parvez titled: 'Haqeeqat-e-Kashmir.' At this concert, the songs sung in Urdu and Kashmiri articulated the themes of oppression, violence and trauma inflicted on the Kashmiri population. *Wande Magazine* carried a few songs from that concert under the title *A Tribute to Shahid Afzal*. Kashmiri Pandit musicians, who have also grown up on a staple diet of Kashmiri music have revived Kashmiri folk songs and poetry that expresses the pain of living in exile through their music videos. Thus in this chapter, I have looked at how the Kashmiri music scene is rapidly changing, using Kashmiri language and adopting other languages and forms to talk about oppression, exile, human rights violations and a call to arms for a free Kashmir.

Through the medium of film, video documentation and the music videos, this thesis hopes to bring a new Kashmiri figure to the surface, one that has been cast to the shadows in the political and media narratives for too long. The technological mediums of the smart phone, and the internet, today, enable the Kashmiri to produce a new

mediatised history of contemporary Kashmir which I have attempted to explore further in the chapters.

CHAPTER 1

HOW TO ENCAPSULATE DECADES OF MOURNING?

CINEMA IN KASHMIR

In Kashmiri films like *Harud* (2012), *Valley of Saints* (2012) and the documentary, *Floating Lamp of the Shadow Valley* (2007), we see a Kashmiri trapped in his circumstances, physically and psychologically. The Kashmiri filmmaker attempts to bring this entrapment to the surface through his work. Unlike earlier depictions of the Kashmiri figure in Indian cinematic depictions of Kashmir, where the Kashmiri was either absent or a figure in the background whose integrity was not engaged with, these films aim towards self representation to highlight the everyday Kashmiri, the ordinary Kashmiri, a Kashmiri who lives and dies amidst the everyday violence of Kashmir, and a Kashmiri who returns *home* as a filmmaker (Rajesh Jala) or as both the filmmaker and the subject (Siddhartha Gigoo in *The Last Day*, 2013), and sometimes, as a tourist and filmmaker (Musa Syeed, *Valley of Saints*) who finds himself trapped in the valley during unrest, has his preconceived notions challenged, and experiences what every Kashmiri goes through every day. Through their films, Kashmiri filmmakers are not just creating a truth excavating narrative, but they also seek to dismantle the apparatus that casts the people as stereotypes long associated with the presence of the Kashmiri on the silver screen. During the decade of 2000-2009, a period of filmmaking appeared in the valley in the form of documentaries, fiction films and short-fiction films which reflected on the violence of the previous decade. These films have different purposes: to witness, to reflect, to excavate and importantly, through this process of excavation and exploration,

arrive at the moment of representing the Kashmiri through his living language (Raina, 2002: 9) and lived experiences. There is a shift in the depictions of the Kashmiri and the valley in both mainstream and indie films after the 2010 unrest. In the films made after 2010, both Kashmiri and non-Kashmiri filmmakers address the identity assertions of the Kashmiri people, attempt at de-cluttering political rhetoric to depict the reality of the devastation of life in Kashmir caused by structural and systematic violence. Questions of representation and self representation of the Kashmiri figure in the cinemas of India over the decades are also discussed in this chapter. The chapter also engages with the importance and role of the Kashmiri language as a factor which provides an outlet for Kashmiris to talk about the pain of living through conflict in films made from 2010 onwards where Koshur, the language of the ordinary Kashmiri surfaces in both mainstream and indie films.

Section I – Fiction Film and Kashmir

a.) Do we know the Kashmiri dancing in the background? Will he speak? The Representation of Kashmir in the cinemas of India

The region of Kashmir and the Kashmiri has been depicted in the Indian cinematic imagination in myriad ways. The average Indian viewer is not a stranger to the cinematic Kashmiri but the ordinary Kashmiri does not identify with this cinematic representation of themselves. Ananya Jahanara Kabir writes that the Indian nation at the brink of modernity with the advent of Eastmancolor in cinema projected that modernity and sometimes an escape from metropolitan modernity to the pleasing and agrarian

landscape of Kashmir (2009). While Shammi Kapoor's *Junglee* (1961) brought this on with "the body and the yell" (Kabir, 2009: 38) onslaught, it was the song from the film, *Kashmir ki kali hoon mai* (I am the bud of Kashmir) which made the "announcement of the valley as the locus for novel modes of leisure and pleasure...thus intimately tied to the novelty of cinema in color" (ibid.). This formulaic production of films with similar tropes paved the way for the film *Kashmir ki Kali* (1964) and the song, "*Taarif Karoon Kya Uski (Ye chand sa roshan chehra)*" [What praise shall I shower on the one who created you (Face as bright as the moon)], once again with Shammi Kapoor at the helm. The distinctive nature of this particular song and its subsequent appeal consolidated the landscape of Kashmir within the motif of an image of a shikara in the Dal Lake projecting "a nation in love with Kashmir" (Kabir, 2009: 40) in the guise of a "camouflage for the staging of love in Kashmir" (41). Desire and pleasure were consequentially projected onto the landscape in the song *Taarif Karoon*, even though it is later revealed in the film that the female protagonist though having grown up in Kashmir and unknown to herself, is originally not from Kashmir. In his show, *The Golden Years:1950-1975*¹, Javed Akhtar makes the revelation that the song, *Yahoo, Chahe Koi Mujhe Junglee Kahe* ("Yahoo, even if everyone calls me wild") was originally shot in Kufri, Himachal Pradesh² and not in Kashmir due to the lack of snow in the valley during the duration of the shoot. Hence the "body and the yell"³ which is attributed to the arrival of color in Indian cinema and leisure and pleasure in Kashmir originally did not begin in the valley of Kashmir itself. I propose that these depictions or rather ill-

¹ The show aired on Zee Classic in 2016 and is now available on Netflix India.

² Manwani, Akshay. "Junglee' and Hindi cinema's romance with the outdoors!" *DNA*, 24 May 2016, dnaindia.com/entertainment/report-junglee-and-hindi-cinema-s-romance-with-the-outdoors-2216213. Accessed 30 June 2018.

³ Kabir, 2009.

depictions of the Kashmiri in Indian cinema beginning with the song, *Kashmir ki kali hoon mai* (from *Junglee*, 1961), the terrorist in *Roja* (1992) to the vibrant Kashmiri girl in *Yahaan..* (2005) continue to have a residual impact on the current depictions of the Kashmiri and the valley in the Indian cinematic imagination even though they have morphed from the desire for the valley to the attempt to discipline the valley and its people into synchronized formations (as extras in songs shot in the valley) and rule abiding bodies, creating binaries of the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Kashmiri through cinematic narratives.

Kabir writes about the films shot in the valley throughout the 1960s up to the 2000 decade wherein the Kashmiri features as the object of desire for the outsider establishing a relationship between India and Kashmir as that of desire for its landscape. Romance between Shammi Kapoor’s character, the man from the big city and Sharmila Tagore’s young Kashmiri girl clad in ethnic wear as depicted in the song, *Taarif Karoon* presented a new palate for the cinema goers making Kashmir not just a beautiful place to be savored on-screen, but with the helping hand of the tourism industry also establishing Kashmir as a paradise for honeymooners among the Indian middle-class. The Himalayas also presented themselves as the locations for shooting love songs in films like *Bobby* (dir. Raj Kapoor, 1973), as pointed out by Philip Lutgendorf, which use the mountains as the site of the erotic where the city dwellers can shed inhibitions and break all barriers (2005: 8). When Mani Ratnam created *Roja*, he had to shoot the film in Himachal Pradesh to replicate the valley’s topography (Kabir, 2009: 45). But the film not only expressed the inability of the filmmaker and his camera to enter the valley during the peak of the valley’s turbulent years, but through the plot of the film, he presented the

crumbling of Kashmir as the holiday destination and a romantic landscape, a status which it had acquired in the previous forty years since *Junglee*. The confident new Indian middle-class as created by Mani Ratnam found itself in the middle of the Kashmir conflict (Niranjana, 1994), while lines were drawn between the “good Kashmiri and the bad Kashmiri” (Kabir, 2009: 46). Tamim Ahmed Baba suggests that “Bollywood has always been open about the Kashmir conflict” (80), but it is this very *gospel* that has added to the confusion instead of establishing an understanding of the region (ibid). It is this complicated background of the political situation in the valley from the 1960s onwards that filmmakers shied away from, and instead portrayed a deceptive image of the valley as calm and quaint (Kabir, 2009: 43). From this, they dove head straight into the conflict in *Roja* articulating mainstream nationalistic rhetoric about Kashmir through the figure of the middle class Indian, and split the Kashmiri into binaries as in *Mission Kashmir* (2000), a film whose plot worked precisely because of the inscription of the binaries of the good Muslim as the Kashmiri policeman and the bad Muslim as the armed insurgent.

Bollywood found a new formula in Kashmir- a new topography of terror which was created in the guise of patriotic films like *Maa Tujhe Salaam*⁴ (dir. Tinu Verma 2002) and *Lakshya* (dir. Farhan Akhtar, 2004), but the ordinary Kashmiri continued to remain invisible in this cinematic conflict between India and Pakistan, and these films feature the Indian soldier fighting the figure of a Pakistani sponsored terrorist. The figure of the Kashmiri gained prominence in *Yahaan* (dir. Shoojit Sircar, 2005) but only as a woman subjugated by the conflict and the situation in the valley – as a woman who is

⁴ The film’s information on the internet establishes its genre as action/patriotic.

looking for a different kind of freedom than the *azaadi* (freedom) that Kashmir seeks by rejoicing at wearing a pair of jeans at the beginning of the film. From 2000 onwards, a different treatment of the Kashmiri figure also came to the fore in narratives which attempted to control and discipline the Kashmiri body. Since, the Kashmiri has been established as a volatile figure, (an ambiguity created by misrepresentations) – never presenting what the Kashmiri wants or how they can get what they want; the figure of the army man/ police man appears as the one creating this discipline of the body, carving a new method of navigation in this topography of terror as in the case of Inayat Khan (Sanjay Dutt) in *Mission Kashmir* who constantly keeps trying to bring Altaaf (Hritik Roshan) back from his chosen path of violence. This attempt to discipline again occurs in a scene in *Yahaan* where the protagonist, the Indian army officer, Captain Aman (Jimmy Shergill), constantly keeps telling the Kashmiri girl Ada that he doesn't like her outfit in the song *Mere Chaliyan* ("My Beloved") and indicates that she should change it (which she does). These attempts to control the Kashmiri figure's mobility and decisions find their root in the extensive presence of the Indian army in the valley at the onset of insurgency and tensions beginning in the late 1980s. In these films, the constant presence of the army is justified as a necessity for the security of the region, but constantly their attempts to maintain peace and 'normalcy' are depicted as foiled by the terrorist.

This nationalistic ideology of the Indian right over the region has been painted as such from *Roja* to *Raazi* (2018). Meghna Gulzar's *Raazi* attempts to locate yet again, the good Kashmiri in the face of the degrading situation in the valley since 2016 through the figure of a patriotic Kashmiri family in the 1970s who sacrificed everything for India by training their daughter to be a spy. By locating this Indian patriotism in the Kashmiri

figure, a new appropriation of the Kashmiri and the conflict emerges, as opposed to the colorful spring season and wealthy Kashmiris we see in Imtiaz Ali's *Rockstar* (2011), where Heer Kaul, a Kashmiri girl studying at the University of Delhi is ogled at and described as a "heartbreaking machine" prompting the Haryanvi boy Janardhan to attempt to fall in love with her and get his heart broken to become a true artist. Here, no mention is made of Heer's ethnicity as a Kashmiri Pandit, and her identity is evident only through her name and later, during her wedding, through her attire of the traditional Kashmiri Pandit bride.⁵ Although, Imtiaz Ali's Heer was a Kashmiri Pandit girl studying in Delhi, living and moving from Delhi to Kashmir to Prague, her identity, her political stance, her existence as a displaced Kashmiri was not explored in the film. Instead, she appears in a scene on Dal Lake dressed as Sharmila Tagore from the song, *Taarif Karun* with Ranbir Kapoor's Janardhan dressed as Shammi Kapoor with the song playing in the background and both imitating the original actors from the song with identical body thrusting gestures like Shammi Kapoor's which comes easily to Ranbir, evoking Shammi Kapoor's legacy in Bombay cinema. However, this moment is complicated by the tone of

⁵ In August 2011, Abhishek Roy Sanyal, Imtiaz Ali's assistant director, arrived at the outskirts of Kashmiri Colony, a Kashmiri Pandit locality in Najafgarh, Delhi. He was scouting for Kashmiris for voice over roles in their upcoming film. An audition scout from Delhi brought him to the locality because of his acquaintance with some Kashmiris who lived there. I had just started my undergraduate degree and was invited to a family friend's house and introduced to Sanyal and his crew. They selected some children, teenagers, men and women who could speak Kashmiri and a few days later, we were invited to an audio recording studio in Safdarjung Enclave. This experience, for the elders accompanying us, spelled a recap of the past when they would gather around film shoots and sometimes stand in as *extras* on the banks of the Lidder River near their village in Pahalgam. We dubbed minimal dialogues for scenes depicting a Kashmiri Pandit wedding somewhere in the valley. In groups, the children, young boys, young girls, women and men would be escorted into the sound proof room and asked to engage in conversations, light banter or laughter while looking at the scenes of the film shot in Kashmir. Then the girls and women were asked to sing a traditional Kashmiri *Wanwun* song which is sung at Kashmiri weddings to welcome the groom. At the end of the day, we met the director Imtiaz Ali who along with his crew was still reeling from their exhilarating experience of shooting the film in the valley. Eventually, on seeing the film, we managed to pick bits of our voice over in the scenes we had dubbed and the *Wanwun* too appears in the wedding scenes. It is during this time that discussions arose around the first ever depiction of a Kashmiri Pandit bride on-screen as Heer Kaul (the discussions did not take into account the depiction of the Kashmiri Pandit woman in films like *Sheen* and 'Megha' in *I Am* but focused on the Kashmiri bride). But this event, for me, originally sparked an interest to further detect the depictions of Kashmiris in Indian cinema.

parody due to the presence of Heer's younger sister with a video camera. This mimetic imitation by Fakhri's Heer becomes doubly problematic as she is performing the Kashmiri woman depicted as an object of desire in the original song – and again, the Indian cinematic lens (in *Rockstar*) is not only trying to evoke a past desire for Kashmir projected onto the exotic Kashmiri woman, it is also recasting Heer, a Kashmiri Pandit woman in the same mold. Moreover, through the location shoot and news reports around Ali's decision to shoot the film right after the summer unrest in 2010, a deceptive image of the valley as safe haven was forged. Furthermore, looking at the Kashmiri serving as an extra in almost every frame of the films shot in Kashmir, one can notice a patterned presence – synchronized *shikaras* and synchronized dance steps – the Kashmiri body in complete control of the film crew which invokes the attempt to discipline the native Kashmiri's body in its own surroundings and appropriate it for the Indian cinematic audiences. This is evident quite clearly in Yash Chopra's *Jab Tak Hai Jaan* (2012) in which an Indian army Major Samar Anand (Shah Rukh Khan), an expert in diffusing bombs meets a Discovery channel filmmaker Akira Rai (Anushka Sharma), but as Bollywood does, Akira's unrequited romance with Samar is spread all over the valley's scenic locations. During the song *Jiya Re* at one point she dances on a boat in the middle of the Dal Lake surrounded by shikaras in a floral synchronization with Kashmiri boatmen playing extras and matching Anushka Sharma's steps. Her dance moves appear quite bold for the fragile shikara which survives on the water with a fragile balance. In another scene from the same song, Akira dances through apple orchards with Kashmiri women dressed in ethnic wear dancing in synchronization in the background. We see glances of their faces, they lip sync a few words from the song but their presence only

adds to the exotic appeal of the valley, diminishing any chance of it being anything other than creating contrasts between the shy rural, native woman and the free modern Indian woman. The narrative does not lend anything to Kashmir except that there are too many bombs to be diffused in the valley. At the same time, the older tropes of the desirable landscape of Kashmir are still in place.

b.) Kashmiri is both the poison and the cure: Kashmir's Mother tongue on the cinematic screen

As opposed to the films discussed above small budget films like *Tahaan – A Boy with a Grenade* (dir. Santosh Sivan, 2008) or *Tamaash* have attempted an understanding of everyday life in the zone of conflict that Kashmir is, and the gross neglect of the valley's children. In between political debates and nationalistic assertions, it is these two films which highlight and to a certain degree come one step closer to a real depiction of a child's life in a conflict area where he is contextualized in a situation of absent parents, meager economic means, and a harsh weather. *Tamaash* is a short film made by the brothers Satyanshu and Devanshu Singh, which has two songs and a short trailer on YouTube. The film won a Special Jury mention at the 61st National Film Awards in 2013, but it never saw a wider screening. From what I can gather from these two songs and the trailer, the film is shot entirely in the Kashmiri language depicting the lives of two school going brothers who live with their father and yearn for something more than a meager existence. This film, like the section *Megha* in *I Am* (Onir, 2010) not only explores the conflict in Kashmir through the figure of the ordinary Kashmiri, but also foregrounds the Kashmiri language as the language of the film. Bollywood has long borrowed phrases and words from the Kashmiri language and incorporated them into the Hindi songs like

Urzu Dur Kut in *Yahaan*, *Madhno* in *Lamhaa* (2010) and the translation of entire Kashmiri folk songs like *Bhumbro* and *Rind Posh Maal* into Hindi for *Mission Kashmir*. The practice continues with the song *Dilbaro* in *Raazi* which carries a stanza in Kashmiri language sung by Vibha Saraf. But the Kashmiri speaking the language barely talks about his traumatic life in the valley's conflict in these films.

Onir's anthology film *I Am* which carries a section titled *Megha* about the return of a Kashmiri Pandit woman to the valley to sell her ancestral house explores the tensions between herself and her estranged Kashmiri Muslim friend through the Kashmiri language. The section is remarkable for not only honest depictions of Kashmiris but also for making the ordinary Kashmiri's narrative central to the story. Moreover, dialogues uttered in Kashmiri by the characters create a first ever exploration of Kashmiris in mainstream cinema who are unable to cope with their past or with each other and move on in life.

Mick Broderick says that trauma may be caused by a one-time 'shock' incident that shell shocks the one affected, but what prolonged violence causes is not momentary- it keeps sending ripples through the lives of everyday survivors and even after the survivors are gone, the trauma lives on (2010: 221). This is evident in Kashmir that has lived with trauma for years that is now being articulated through digital testimonies (in this case, the films made in Kashmiri) when the language (Kashmiri) becomes the language of the shared trauma. Kashmir language cinema has grown out of the necessity to represent the Kashmiri in his own language and narrate his stories in the face of previous constructions of the Kashmiri figure in Indian cinema. The language Kashmiri, or *Koshur* has been demoted "to the status of a domesticated vernacular" (Kabir, 2009:

136), and has been neglected in the face of the official Urdu language. During my field work, poet Naseem Shafaie remarked that she has observed that Kashmiris who grew up outside the valley have a much stronger command on the language than the Kashmiris belonging to the same generation in the valley. This stark difference grows from the school curriculum that demands better proficiency in Urdu and English (for future prospects of students), and a general adage attached to the Kashmiri language which views it as a lesser language even though it is a prominent marker of Kashmiri identity. Kabir notes that in Kashmir, language is both poison and cure (139). Languages spoken in Kashmir are also sites of contestations since the spoken language tells us whether the account is official or unofficial, whether it is the state speaking apparatus or the voice of the people. It is however difficult to mark two languages on the opposite sides of these fences for the Kashmiri is multilingual and so is the voice of resistance. The Kashmiri is also accented. While the cinematic depictions of the Kashmiri create a division between the Indian and their Kashmiri counterpart using this accent as in the militant hiding in Altaf's house in *Mission Kashmir* (2000), they also create the problematic syntax of stereotypes.

c.) The Path to a Kashmiri film is through the new *Intifada*

The first Kashmiri *Intifada*⁶ ended in the valley in 1995⁷ even though the pervasive violence or its after effects never faded. The Kashmiri uprisings which can be traced back to as early as the 1930s, returned in the summers of a new century after years

⁶ The word Intifada comes from the Arabic word *nafada* which means “to shake”. The word first appeared in the Palestinian struggle against Israel and was subsequently adopted by the Kashmiri armed struggle.

⁷ Jha, Prem Shankar. “The Rise of Kashmir's Second 'Intifada'.” *The Wire*, 23 August 2016, thewire.in/politics/kashmir-uprising. Accessed 5 July 2018.

of passivity and loss seen by Kashmir. Kak writes that after the Amarnath land controversy in 2008, *kani jang* - war with stones (2011: xi) expressed the anger and frustrations of the Kashmiri youth. This, followed by the investigation of mass graves and the *Machil* fake encounters further erupted protests in the valley in the summer of 2010, creating the new *intifada*, the shaking of chains of occupation (2011: xiv). The figure of the stone throwing *sang-baz* (stone-pelters)(ibid) appeared in Kashmir's geography at this time and has changed the way Kashmiris have begun to respond to years of injustice and loss. This is also the moment that has created new images, new paradigms of struggle and modes of articulation in the cinematic history of Kashmir. How the camera, the filmmaker, the witness now enter Kashmir and its geography, how they approach the Kashmiri subject and what these films tell us about the valley gets transformed in the face of this *intifada*. As Naficy points out, identities are constantly being refashioned at different historical moments that have a long term psychological impact:

However, these journeys are not just physical or territorial, but are also deeply psychological and philosophical. Among the most important are journeys of identity, in the course of which old identities are sometimes shed and new ones refashioned. ... identity is not a fixed essence but a process of becoming, even a performance of identity (Naficy, 2001:6).

Kashmiri then becomes the language of shared trauma among Kashmiris and also the cinematic language which articulates the journeys of Kashmiri identity and its transformations as remarked by Naficy. This Kashmiri identity, which has remained fixed in Hindi cinema and in other Indian cinemas where the Kashmiri speaks a heavily accented Hindi is performing a stereotype of the cinematic Kashmiri figure. It is in their own language that Kashmiris are able to perform their identity and its several

transformations through documentary and fiction cinema produced by them. In the film, *I Am*, Onir has taken a step closer to the performance of the different Kashmiri identities. Here, when the Kashmiri Pandit Megha (Juhi Chawla) returns to her ancestral home in Srinagar, she talks to the residents of the house in Kashmiri. The family residing here is a Kashmiri Muslim family who was close to Megha's family before the migration. Their daughter Rubina (Manisha Koirala) was Megha's friend. The story revolves around the conversations between these two estranged friends. Both have grown into individuals whose present existence has been carved by Kashmir's turbulent past – Megha is bitter about letting go her last ties to the valley as represented by her house, and Rubina is resentful about the “punishment” of living in this supposed paradise. The conversations are carried out in Kashmiri with a mix of Urdu and occasionally Hindi. Megha has a few difficult conversations ahead of her during this journey with local Kashmiris while Rubina is mostly a silent spectator in those scenes. Towards the end of the story, when Megha is leaving for the airport, Rubina and her brother are accompanying her in the van; Rubina asks her brother, a surrendered militant who suffers from post traumatic stress disorder, “*Tschey chuyi basaan, yaem wariy yin khatij pandhhaymi zaroor?*” (Do you think *Katij/Ababeel* birds⁸ will return to the valley on 15th?). The brother responds, “*Vyen yin na zanh.*” (They will never return).

Meenu Gaur talks about the nationalistic and secular assertions of the Hindi cinema about Kashmir in her unpublished thesis on the relationship between Kashmir and Hindi cinema. She discusses the efforts of Balraj Sahni to establish a Kashmiri film industry and his early attempt to do so began with the film *Shayar-e- Kashmir Mahjoor*

⁸ Swallow Bird is a species that visits Kashmir every year during summer but leaves at the onset of winter. In the film, *I Am*, this bird is a metaphor for the Kashmiri Pandits who have left the valley.

(dir. Prabhat Mukherjee, 1972) based on the life of the Kashmiri poet Mahjoor. Gaur mentions this film because it not only deals with the struggle against Dogra rule in the 1930s (Gaur, 135) through Mahjoor's life and poetry, but it also portrays the valley as a site of not just regional and religious contestations but also as a site of contestations over language. Mahjoor was hardly accepted by Urdu literary circles (136) in the valley, and it is his return to the Kashmiri language that made him a people's poet initiating a progressive movement in Kashmiri poetry. Sahni's legacy as a member of IPTA and his interest in recreating Mahjoor's life also stems from a desire to tell the stories of real life Kashmiris. According to Parikshit Sahni, Balraj Sahni wanted to "project the true image of Kashmir" (and Kashmiris) as more than the character of a "labourer or a boatman" (Gaur, 138).

Sanjay Suri, who is the primary producer of *I Am* belongs to a Kashmiri Pandit family. Megha's story is inspired from the experiences of Suri's mother and his own return to the valley.⁹ The story carries conversations between the two ends of the spectrum of the Kashmir conflict wherein the idea of the nationalistic assertion of Kashmir as integral to India which is continuously projected by Indian cinema never appears. Instead, we look at the Kashmiris who have suffered throughout this conflict and who are now surfacing as protagonists in a film whose primary issue is an unresolved past and how it has created estrangement. The root of the conflict between Megha and Rubina is the shell shock trauma (Megha's Uncle's murder and Rubina's brother's traumatic experiences) which changed them, and now, the prolonged violence in the

⁹ Bollywood Trade News Network. "Juhi Chawla to play Sanjay Suri's mother." *Glamsham.com*, 18 June 2010, www.glamsham.com/movies/news/10/jun/18-juhi-chawla-to-play-sanjay-suris-mother-061003.asp. Accessed 5 July 2018.

valley and the state of exile has again transformed these childhood friends into figures performing the stripped down identities of a Kashmiri Pandit and a Kashmiri Muslim. A documentary filmmaker Abhimanyu (Sanjay Suri) from Bengaluru is doing research on Kashmir and requests to speak to Megha at Rubina's house. However, the filmmaker is shut out of the conflict, and instead, we see Rubina and Megha attempting to close the distance that has appeared between them by revisiting Megha's abandoned house. Reconciliation, however, is rendered impossible as they stand in the house where Megha's uncle was killed. The bullet holes on the walls of the house remind them of how this distance first appeared between them. They both look out of the window, equally trapped in Kashmir's violent past represented by the dilapidated house ridden with bullets. Even though they attempt reconciliation through Kashmiri, the landscape of the valley makes it impossible for them to do so.



Figure 1.1: Megha and Rubina in *I AM*

The constant presence of the security forces which began in 1947 and increased in the 1980s, also entered the space of the cinema hall. Today, Kashmiris get nostalgic when

remembering their regular visits to cinema halls which screened films ranging from *Sholay* (Ramesh Sippy, 1975) to Hollywood films. Artist Inder Salim recalls keeping a notebook of films he watched and their songs as a young boy. According to him, “the rebellion” started inside the cinema hall with slogans and chants in 1985 when cinema halls screened Moustapha Akkad’s film *Lion of the Desert* (1981). He says that viewing the film, for him, was bearing witness to the first uprising inside a cinema hall in Kashmir.¹⁰ Dr. Kamran Khan writes that the reason for such a response from Kashmiri audiences was symptomatic of politics at home as comparisons were drawn between Omar Mukhtar (Lion of Libya) and the deceased Sheikh Abdullah (also known as *Sher-e-Kashmir*: Lion of Kashmir). Kashmiris were angry over Sheikh Abdullah’s collaborative politics with India and after Abdullah’s death and the death of the dream of a people’s Kashmir with him, crowds erupted with slogans during screenings of the film portraying Omar Mukhtar’s rebellion in Libya against the Royal Italian Army.¹¹ Salim also adds that even though Kashmiris faced years of turmoil and cinema as a public viewing practice was withdrawn from the valley, Kashmiris never stopped watching films at home¹² as they were constantly screened on cable TV channels and pirated CD and DVDs were in circulation (Khan, 2015). With the advent of the internet, the practice shifted from buying DVDs to simply downloading pirated copies of films. The CD circulation practices are demonstrated by the local Kashmiri studios which created one hour tele-films that ranged from drama to comedy and were screened on local TV channels like DD Kashmir or sold as CDs. One such film was the 2007 remake of *Sholay* (Ramesh Sippy, 1975) into

¹⁰ Salim, Inder. Personal interview (online chat). 9 August 2016.

¹¹ Khan, Kamran. “The Lost Cinematic Entertainment.” *Rising Kashmir*, 12 Dec. 2015, risingkashmir.com/news/the-lost-cinematic-entertainment. Accessed 5 July 2018.

¹² Salim, Inder. Personal interview (online chat). 9 August 2016.

Kashmiri as *New Sholay* (dir. Hameed Khan, 2007). The film, featuring local Kashmiri actors as the cast, was shot in Kashmir. It had songs and dialogues translated into Kashmiri, frame by frame.

GABBAR SINGH is back...this time not in Chambal but in Kashmir valley - not to terrorize the children through their mothers but to provide them entertainment, even at midnight within their cozy homes!¹³

According to media reports, the film was in such high demand that the video stores were continuously running out of stock and reordering more copies. Another difference between the original film and the remake was also that it had a low production budget rendering the impact of the film as a comedy rather than action-drama which was nevertheless, thoroughly enjoyed by Kashmiris. The film's prominent quality was depicting the Kashmiri villages terrified by the outlaw *Gabbar* and while it was an attempt at creating escapism for Kashmiris, its symbolic connotation of Kashmiris terrorized by *Gabbar* and the eventual win of the local Kashmiris over him was not lost on the viewers who "have seen worse than Gabbar during the 18 years of turmoil" (Bhat, 2007). The scenes featuring a train were also shot in the valley during the trial run of trains between Kakapora in South Kashmir to Budgam which also began in 2007¹⁴ thus turning this train into a symbol of modernity *for* Kashmiris as opposed to symbols of modernity like Gulmarg's gondolas (cable car) or skiing and golf courses, which are aimed at tourists visiting Kashmir.

¹³ Bhat, Rajesh. "Sholay is Back! Kashmiri Style." *merinews*, 28 December 2007, merinews.com/article/sholay-is-backkashmiri-style/128856.shtml. Accessed 5 July 2018.

¹⁴ "Sholay in Kashmiri now." *OneIndia*, 18 Dec. 2007, oneindia.com/2007/12/18/sholay-in-kashmiri-now-1197972160.html. Accessed 5 July 2018.

DMC (Desire Machine Collective) who have created an audio-video installation called *Nishan I* in which they recorded the sounds of abandoned spaces in Kashmir, say in an interview that the voyeuristic gaze of the filmmaker onto the valley has not changed from *Kashmir ki Kali* to *Roja*; however, the only difference between the two has been that the gaze cannot penetrate the valley so easily anymore (Bhaumik, 2014: 4). Even when a filmmaker like Vishal Bhardwaj attempts to recount Kashmir's violent past, he is able to do so only with the aid of Kashmiri writer and journalist Basharat Peer who adapted Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, setting it in the violent landscape of Kashmir. Cinema halls in Kashmir closed down owing to Islamic doctrines which imposed a ban on Bollywood and foreign films (Bhaumik, 2014) and these empty halls were then turned into interrogation centers. Agha Shahid Ali (2009: 241) describes the scene inside such interrogation centers in his poem *After the August Wedding in Lahore, Pakistan*, "A brigadier says, *The boys of Kashmir break so quickly, we make their bodies sing on the rack, till no song is left to sing.*" And again, this conversion of cinema halls into interrogation centers appears in Arundhati Roy's work:

Faded posters of old films (*Chandni, Maine Pyaar Kiya, Parinda* and *Lion of the Desert*) – from the time before films were banned and the cinema halls shut down by Allah Tigers – were still up on the wall, some of them spattered with red betel juice. Rows of young men, bound and handcuffed, squatted on the floor like chickens, some so badly beaten that they had keeled over, barely alive, still in squatting position, their wrists secured to their ankles. Soldiers milled around, bringing prisoners in, taking others away for interrogation. (Roy, 2017: 331)

The cinema halls which were re-territorialized, not by Indian cinema, but this time by the Indian army, were reconstructed as the site of pleasure and torture (Devasundaram, 2016: 258) which is also echoed in Roy's descriptions of cinema halls as detention

centers. It is after 2010 that we also witness cinematic depictions of these cinema halls as torture centers lending visuals to whispers. *Haider* which drags us through the peak years of the conflict becomes the first mainstream film to address Kashmir's changing topography by visually depicting the cinema hall as the interrogation center. As the projection featuring a song from a 90s Bollywood film is being played, Kashmiri men are lined up in front of the screen to be interrogated by army men sitting in the audience seats of the cinema hall. The cinematic Kashmir has been long turned off and the vibrant culture long forgotten, only the Kashmiri tied up at the mercy of Indian officers remains in this frame. While *Haider* visually insinuates the practices conducted at the interrogation centers in the scene described above, the short film *Rizwan* depicts the psychological entrapment faced by a Kashmiri while being tortured during interrogation.

Deepti Khurana's *Rizwan* (2012), an FTII (Film and Television Institute of India) production was adapted from a stage play by Abhishek Majumdar. Majumdar had adapted the story from Agha Shahid Ali's poems in *The Country without a Post Office*. *Rizwan* visually addresses the song of tortured bodies which Ali wrote about in his poem. The film charts out Rizwan's fading memories as he fluctuates between being conscious while being tortured in an interrogation room and in his subconscious where he attempts to hold onto his family's memories. His mother, grandfather and sister keep asking him to let go of them: *Humein azad karo, Rizwan!* (Free us Rizwan!). In this version of the paradise, the only freedom for a Kashmiri arrives in the form of death. Even then, Rizwan wonders and hopes that the lake should not die. The lake will continue to witness the torment of its surroundings. As Rizwan carries his dead family in a boat across the lake, he screams to the phantom figure of the postman, "Tell them that Rizwan is guarding the

gates of heaven.” Rizwan is now a ferryman carrying people across worlds, but he himself is stuck between here and there. He cannot move on or let go of the valley even after dying. There is no freedom or peace even in death for a Kashmiri. His life, remains in suspended animation and he haunts the landscape with his memories of Kashmir.

Devasundaram writes that *Harud* (dir. Aamir Bashir, 2010) carries many instances of Kashmir’s suspension in limbo (2016:253) both in terms of security and the region’s socio-economic detachment from the rest of India (ibid). The young boy Rafiq (Shahnawaz Bhat) is haunted by his brother’s memory and we are shown that he is stuck physically and psychologically in Kashmir. The Kashmiri’s movement is restricted due to constant security checks as we see at the beginning of the film when an entire bus-full of people are asked to step out and frisked. The film begins like a documentary, recording the charged situation of the valley. *Harud* is set in the year 2003 when the valley was filled with tensions after the Nadimarg massacres of 24 Kashmiri Pandits¹⁵ and protests against the U.S. government policies in the aftermath of 9/11 (Staniland, 2013: 940)¹⁶. Kashmiris were about to receive their first cell phone service on the day of *Eid* in 2003 which is also central to the premise of *Harud*. In 2010, there was a change towards mass mobilization (ibid: 948) in the valley, and a shift in the methods of resistance from violent militancy to “contentious politics” (ibid). *Harud*, made after this shift, created space for a Kashmiri feature film which narrates how the ghosts of Kashmir’s past still haunt the valley’s residents. Even though militancy had significantly reduced after 1990s (Staniland), military forces remained in the valley and the Kashmiri still lived at the

¹⁵ Swami, Praveen. “The Nadimarg outrage.” *Frontline* Vol. 20, Issue 8, April 12-25, 2003, frontline.in/static/html/fl2008/stories/20030425002903800.htm. Accessed 10 July 2018.

¹⁶ “Protests turn violent in Kashmir.” *CNN.com*, 21 March 2003, edition.cnn.com/2003/WORLD/asiapcf/south/03/21/sprj.irq.kashmir.protest/. Accessed 10 July 2018.

receiving end of their bullets. *Harud*, an Urdu feature film, became the first film to reflect on the reality of life in Kashmir after the continual violence since 1990. A policeman father played by the iconic Iranian actor Reza Naji, suffers from severe depression and mental instability; his wife goes for the APDP meetings held at Pratap Park on the 10th of each month, carrying a photo of her disappeared son who worked as a tourist photographer, and their younger son Rafiq, haunted by his brother's figure, attempts to cross the border to join the militant ranks but fails. Aamir Bashir creates a different landscape of Kashmir. He does not show us the scenic locations but the real streets of Srinagar. Every frame is filled with unending gloom which embodies the life of a Kashmiri. But Kashmiris are not just stuck in their past, they also dream. Rafiq's friend, Ishaq (Mudessir Khan), a singer, dreams of becoming famous through the music reality show *Indian Idol*, then a new rage in the country. However, the Kashmiri song he sings is filled with melancholy, "O, world of regret. How can one ever find happiness here?" (Devasundaram, 2016: 253) and much like the song, even though Ishaq does well for himself outside the valley, when he returns to meet his friend on *Eid*, he finds him lying in a pool of blood outside his house. He sees Rafiq's mother screaming and crying in the arms of women from the neighborhood while Rafiq's father dips his fingers in his son's blood and spreads that blood over his own face. Urdu, the language of officialdom in Kashmir, no longer serves the Kashmiri mother or the Kashmiri father. The father, who has lost the ability to use words to mourn, puts his son's blood on his face, depicting how one death creates ripples of loss and trauma through multiple lives in Kashmir. Urdu, the language spoken throughout the film fails the mother who breaks into wailings in Kashmiri towards the end of *Harud*, "*Hato Khudayo, yi kusu taavan khudayo! Hata ayis*

kya gov khudayo! Haye Rafika! Hayo Rafiko!” (Oh God, what calamity is this! What have you done to us, God?! Oh Rafiq! Oh Rafiq!). She screams out in her mother tongue, the dying language and the language of the ones dying in Kashmir. Kashmiri language, a marker of Kashmiri identity, comes to the fore towards the end of *Harud* when the wailing takes over the cinematic screen. The mother’s catastrophic experience is marked by her use of “language that defies, even as it claims our understanding” (Caruth, 1996:5). Bashir’s narrative oscillates between official accounts of “progress” like the Indian journalist showing a queue of Kashmiris outside BSNL offices to register for SIM cards and the sound of cell phones ringing in the valley just after Rafiq is shot dead outside his house. Technology does not make a Kashmiri’s life better in 2003.

Valley of Saints (Musa Syeed, 2012) opens with the statement that whichever saints resided in the valley, they have left a long time ago, they don’t live here anymore indicating the loss of Kashmiri Sufism as well as peace. Both films indicate that neither religion nor technology can make a Kashmiri’s life any better until the heavy surveillance of the armed forces is lifted from a Kashmiri’s life. The Kashmiri is unable to find any respite in Kashmir’s *Sufi* past in the *Valley of Saints*, or in religion on the day of *Eid*, nor he is able to live in the present moment through modern technology as seen in *Harud* where the arrival of cell phones coincides with an innocent Kashmiri’s death. Musa Syeed, a non-resident Kashmiri who returned to his father’s roots in Kashmir to make a film was taken aback by the constant curfews, and that he was restricted to his houseboat. He changed his script, hired a few actors and non-actors and made *Valley of Saints* about the life of a boatman Gulzar who dreams of escaping the confines of Dal’s waters. The

film follows Gulzar and his friend during heavy curfews when only the lake is safe for navigation.

In the mainstream film *Haider*, we see a Kashmir consumed by violence in 1995. Here, no Kashmiri can trust another and we are caught in the vicious cycle of mistrust and violence propagated from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The Kashmiri figure is a poet turned madman (Haider Meer), or is a ghost (*Roohdaar*), a victim (Arshie) or a collaborator (Arshie's father Parvez Lone and Haider's uncle Khurram Meer and a widow (Ghazala Meer). Bhardwaj adapts the Shakespearean dialogue "To be or not to be" into a speech on the paradox of *azadi* in Kashmir. The public meltdown experienced by Haider is a spectacle that would not be possible for a Kashmiri to perform in either *Harud* or the *Valley of Saints* where the Kashmiri walking the street, like Rafiq's father who is walking towards a bunker to inform the army man stationed there that there is a militant in his house, or Gulzar trying to get to the bus stand amidst curfew hours, are both met with suspicion and chased down the street without even being heard. The Kashmiri filmmaker, who himself feels restricted while shooting in the valley like Musa Syeed, translates that suffocation of the Kashmiri voice through his film. The Kashmiri filmmaker's camera depicts the suffocation of the Kashmiri trapped in his circumstances. However, a Kashmiri fighting this frustration in the mainstream film like *Haider* while being similarly chased away manages to retaliate against his perpetrator. Salman and Salman who are told to take Haider to a secluded location to be murdered are killed by Haider in self-defense. These imitators of the Bollywood actor Salman Khan are killed with stones, instead of a gun. This violent retaliation using a stone, addressed in *Haider*, indicating the *kani-jang* is unexplored in the fiction film made by Kashmiris where the

Kashmiri is continuously subjugated and suppressed physically and psychologically, incapable of such a retaliation. The deaths of Salman and Salman by stones and not guns indicate that the Bollywood figure is dead to Kashmiris - you can no longer sing or dance in Kashmir's landscape- these Salmans as well as Bollywood images of Kashmir are both dubious and untrustworthy figures.

A similar analogy indicating the impossibility of romance in the Kashmiri landscape is explored in *Valley of Saints* which carries a short sequence of a television set playing at a shop but the Kashmiri no longer turns to cinema. The film begins as a romance between Gulzar, the boatman and Asifa (Neelofar Hamid), the scientist. They both sing songs in seclusion. Together, their adventures take them to polluted corners of Dal Lake. Syeed shows us that the valley however beautiful is marred with pollution. Romance, eventually, is not possible in this Kashmir as Asifa goes back to her hometown after falling sick due to drainage water in Downtown Srinagar leaving Gulzar to do what he did before she arrived, row his boat and take care of his uncle. Gulzar's friend, angry at Asifa's notes on decreasing water pollution, throws them at her saying, "Do you think this is what we need?" Indeed, he is asking the filmmaker as well, an insider-outsider like Asifa, the scientist, is film, a romantic film what Kashmir needs?

The paralyzed state of disconnection in the victim is a state in which one remarkable symptom is the loss of language (Felman and Laub, quoted in White, 1996: 4) as experienced by Rafiq's father towards the end of *Harud*. Basharat Peer plays a similar Kashmiri character in a cameo in *Haider* who does not speak and stands frozen outside his home for hours, unable to move despite being coaxed to enter. Roohdaar appears, frisks him and says that Kashmiris have become so habitual that they are afraid to enter

their own homes unless they are frisked. Here, the continual violence, trauma and the subjugation of the Kashmiri body through constant frisking results in a loss of language and comprehension experienced by the Kashmiri victim. In *Harud*, Rafiq also goes through a similarly paralyzed state as he is unable to articulate his trauma. He turns to his brother's camera when words fail him in expressing his state of mind. The camera becomes his friend, but eventually, Rafiq dies minutes after his photograph is taken from the same camera by his friend. All that remains of Rafiq is his image trapped in the film of his brother's camera. Unlike *Haider*'s grand ending in the graveyard where the snow white landscape turns red with blood, in the Kashmiri film, towards the end, the wounds inflicted are either turned into wailings as in *Harud* or a dirge sung at the end of Siddhartha Gigoo's *Goodbye, Mayfly* (2015).

Siddhartha Gigoo, a Kashmiri Pandit author and filmmaker, returned to Kashmir to shoot scenes for his short film, *The Last Day* (2013) inspired by events from his experiences of living in refugee camps in Jammu after the forced migration of the 1990s using sections from his book, *The Garden of Solitude* (2011). The short film is a soliloquy on the idea of loss: the loss of desire, home, comfort, and identity. The film begins with the illness and death of a Pandit family's patriarch in a refugee camp, the suffocation of living within the confines of a tent, the struggle for rations and water, and a yearning for better days which are all expressed through the life of this family. In a different sequence, Gigoo appears as a man taking his son through the streets of Srinagar, showing him his *home*. The landscape has changed from the black and white refugee tents (indicating a past memory) to a Srinagar shot in color, but this time, there is no dialogue. The silence accompanying these visuals portrays mourning for the past and the

inability of the exiled figure to move on – the return marked by a silent march through the streets of Kashmir. Lowenstein writes that representation creates a promise that trauma can be communicated by establishing a link between art and history (2005:5), and through the process of film, the Kashmiri filmmaker attempts to do the same by translating Kashmiri trauma from his psyche to the cinematic screen. The Kashmiri Pandit in *Haider* appears as an aural footnote and an abandoned house. He has long passed on from the cycle of violence burning the valley. When he returns in Bashir's *Harud* or Onir's *I Am*, it is to sell the ancestral land. As discussed before, *I Am* opens a window of dialogue between Kashmiris but *Harud* dealing with the events of 2003, is unable to imagine a resolution – showing us an uncomfortable conversation between the Pandit and the Kashmiri Muslim as Rafiq (having grown up in the 1990s after the Pandit migration) has never seen or met a Kashmiri Pandit before; without any past to connect the two, there is no conversation or understanding that can bridge any gaps. As Caruth writes, “To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image of an event” (quoted in White, 1996: 5), and the Kashmiri Pandit filmmaker, in fiction and documentary returns to the abandoned home in his documentary work and the refugee camps in fiction. The trauma of the loss of home is constantly depicted through these two symbols and the structures of *home* neither of which constitute a real *home* for the Pandit anymore.

Gigoo's films are attempts at creating catharsis for the trauma inflicted on the valley's population whether Pandits (*The Last Day*) or Muslims (*Goodbye, Mayfly*). *Goodbye, Mayfly* shows us how Kashmiri children embroiled in the conflict are unable to escape their circumstances and become victims of political agendas. The film is a sister's search for her lost brother who has been killed. The magnificent beauty of Kashmir's

landscape as explored by Gigoo's lens, fails to live up to its initial promise of pleasure when the boy loses his life owing to a bomb he is carrying. The CGI (Computer Generated Imagery) of an Indian army soldier and the Kashmiri child turning to flames in that beautiful landscape because of the blast becomes an allegory for death and destruction in the valley which claims lives, no matter whose it is. *Haider* similarly contains an extended sequence of the protagonist searching for his father's corpse which lends a visual aspect to the Kashmiri body after failed attempts at disciplining it through torture result in death.

After *Haider*, the Kashmiri filmmaker is more interested in recording the present moment in fiction films and reflecting on the past through the prism of that present moment. Danish Renzu's film *Half Widow* (2017, unreleased) which he wrote in collaboration with Sunayana Kachroo, a Kashmiri Pandit writer and poet, is the third feature film from the valley after *Harud* and *Valley of Saints* but is the first film to create the narrative around the life of a Kashmiri woman. The film shot in Urdu, contains different songs in Kashmiri which narrate the inner life of the protagonist (Neelofar Hamid) whose husband has disappeared. Unlike *Haider* where the only respite for the Kashmiri woman is death, *Half Widow*, inspired from the life of Parveena Ahanger presents a different perspective on the life of the Kashmiri woman – showing us that it is possible for a Kashmiri woman to find a purpose and dedicate her life to it¹⁷.

¹⁷ Bhat, Niyati. "In Kashmiri film 'Half Widow', the journey from disappearance to death to hope." *Scroll.in*, 27 August 2017, scroll.in/reel/848155/in-kashmiri-film-half-widow-the-journey-from-disappearance-to-death-to-hope. Accessed 10 July 2018.

Section II: Documentary film in Kashmir

While Indian cinema's association with the conflict in Kashmir began with *Roja* (1992), the Kashmiri's camera first returned to the valley post the year 2000 in the form of documentary filmmaking to document how the years of turmoil had changed the valley. Taking cues from documentaries like *Ocean of Tears* (2012) made by Bilal A. Jan on the rape of women in the villages of Kunan Poshpora in 1991 which was banned from screening in the valley, *23 Winters* (2014) by Rajesh Jala in which an unlikely companion in exile becomes the subject of the film, and the role of the "filmmaker as witness"¹⁸ as Iffat Fatima mentions of her work, this section will talk about the camera and the filmmaker bearing witness to the valley's conflict. In the last decade of the twentieth century, Kashmir was embroiled in violence directed against its people by militant outfits and Indian security forces. It is after the Kargil War that the idea of 'normalcy' was again projected onto the valley for tourism purposes aided by films like *Mission Kashmir* (2002) which helped popularize this image. In the last eighteen years, a period of filmmaking has appeared in the valley in the form of documentaries which have responded to the continual violence in Kashmir from 1989 and mourning the loss of the valley shown in the works of Rajesh Jala, Shabnam Ara, Atul Gupta and Iffat Fatima among others.

¹⁸ Ramnath, Nandini. "Film on Kashmir disappearances reminds us of the cruelty of forgetting, the power of memory." *Scroll.in*, 12 October 2015, scroll.in/article/760147/film-on-kashmir-disappearances-reminds-us-of-the-cruelty-of-forgetting-the-power-of-memory. Accessed 5 July 2018.

a.) Documenting and witnessing losses

The invention of the DV camera has had a massive influence on documentary. So too has the development of digital video editing, sound- recording and post production.. Because of lightweight, relatively inexpensive digital equipment, more and more people are funding their own films. (Baker, 2006: x-xi)

The advent of DV cameras definitely aided the filmmaker on a quest for excavation of the past in the valley. In 2001, Ajay Raina returned to the valley and made a documentary *Tell Them the Tree They Had Planted, Has Now Grown*. The film shot like a visual diary, and is an exercise in the confrontation of the filmmaker's fears. As a Kashmiri Pandit, Raina left the valley during the forced migration of the 1990s caused by increasing violence against his community. His anxious return is not met with open arms due to the fear of retaliation, even rejection by the Kashmiri Muslims who live in an environment where they fear for their lives. Few return his phone calls with an affirmation of a meeting. Raina, even though admittedly scared, travels through the city with his film crew and even visits the JKLF (Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front)¹⁹ office to meet the members. This form of confrontation appears in Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Look of Silence* (2014) as well where the protagonist Adi, aided by Oppenheimer's crew, confronts his brother's murderers. However, it also differs from that confrontation, because here the filmmaker himself is confronting the perpetrators of his community. The absence of Kashmiri Pandits is marked towards the end of the film when Raina visits his old house, now empty, and wonders what happened to their possessions. He says that his parents had planted saplings in the compound of the house when it was built so that the future generations could enjoy their fruits. However, Raina leaves Srinagar and the film's

¹⁹ A militant outfit that was known for targeting Kashmiri Pandits but its members, led by Yasin Malik surrendered their armed resistance in 1994 and became a non violent political organization in 1995.

viewers with the unsettling reality that the trees they had planted have been uprooted, both literally and metaphorically. The return does not provide any solace to the filmmaker who again returns to the valley to bear witness to its marginalized rural communities living near the border after a decade when Kashmir confronts a new chapter in its history and wakes from passivity during the unrest in 2010.

Film, like the courtroom, calls upon a *witnessing by seeing* (Felman, 1992: 207). Felman calls the different testimonies in a documentary “the characters of history.” Sanjay Kak’s documentary, *Jashn-e-Azadi: How We Celebrate Freedom* (2007), like Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (1985) is born from the idea of witnessing to testify as the film’s different sections are based on the characters of Kashmir’s history and its present. Archival footage from the 1990s aids the documentary in its quest to make the invisible, visible. Through the paradoxical nature of filmmaking and the position of the filmmaker as he exists somewhere between the inside and the outside, it becomes possible for him to testify through the testimonial nature of film (Felman and Laub, quoted in Agamben, 1999: 35). Hence, Sanjay Kak, the filmmaker who exists paradoxically both inside and outside through the nature of this documentary as testimony, makes us participants in Kashmir’s performance of history:

What does testimony mean if it is not simply (as we commonly perceive it) the observing, the recording, the remembering of an event, but an utterly unique and irreplaceable topographical *position* with respect to an occurrence? What does testimony mean, if it is the uniqueness of the *performance of a story* which is constituted by the fact that, like the oath, it cannot be carried out by anybody else? (Felman, 1992: 206)

Using Felman’s point about the power of film as testimony, we can see how *Jashn-e-Azadi* is an exercise in witnessing and creating testimony by observing, recording and remembering the past events of the valley through the visual nature of film. The film explores the complexity of the demand for Azadi by Kashmiris and the Indian nationalistic assertions exercised through militarization, the tourism industry and the Amarnath pilgrimage. It is a work of mourning in the sense that it takes its camera into 21st century Kashmir to visually capture the fallout of the anger, rebellion, insurgency and militarization of the valley. What is left after this fallout is the *residue of loss* in the hands of the mourner in the form of photographs of the disappeared and the dead.



Figure 1.2: Still from *Jashn-e-Azadi*

Kak (2018b: 63) writes, “What is missing is often as telling as what exists.” *Jashn-e-Azadi*, which revolves around the 60th Indian Independence Day celebrations in Srinagar, questions and explores what constitutes freedom under the Indian national flag when it is unfurled at *Lal Chowk* in the absence of Kashmiris. Under heavy curfew, the Jammu and Kashmir police and security forces carry out the celebratory proceedings. The

streets are deserted except for the occasional army man looming in the foreground or background. The civilians are rounded up and frisked by the men in uniform. In Kashmir, celebrating *freedom* is a paradoxical act to which the filmmaker – a similarly paradoxical figure – becomes a witness.



Figure 1.3: Still from *Jashn-e-Azadi*: Indian Independence Day celebration

On this day, as seen in the image, the Indian Tricolor is unfurled at Lal Chowk, Srinagar in the heavy presence of army and media persons on 15 August, 2005. But this is not where the story begins. The film begins with Kashmiris running in the opposite direction of the sound of gunfire. The quest is to explore *how we celebrate freedom*. The shikara on the Dal Lake appears unappealing in Kak's frames with the voice over narrating the story of freedom of the Muslim peasant from the Hindu king's subjugation. We are introduced to the paradoxical nature of freedom in Kashmir. Questions arise with each frame: Was the freedom attained by India from the British the same freedom attained by Kashmiris? If yes, then what is this *azadi* that they still demand? This uncomfortable question posed by a Kashmiri himself, leads him to small villages of the

valley between the years of 2004-05 when this documentary was shot in the valley. We are introduced to the conflict in Kashmir with this question and the absence of the Kashmiri from the celebration of *freedom* in Lal Chowk (Red Square).



Figure 1.4: Still from *Jashn-e-Azadi*

The filmmaker journeys to look for Kashmiris, first in graves, then outside their burned down houses destroyed during crossfire, in the villages, in the storytelling form of the *Bhand Pather*.²⁰ Slowly, the characters of Kashmir's history emerge. These characters are not people in the history of Kashmir. These characters are the symptoms and residue of years of violence. Kashmiris suffer from experiences such as crackdowns, cordon and search, crossfire, violence from unknown gunmen, encounters, while tourists, tourism infrastructure, pilgrims, exiles, conflict resolution attempts, surrender, relief and compensation – are all consuming symptoms that make us question the very idea of freedom. The idea of freedom projected onto the valley appears in the form of Kashmiri children singing Sir Mohammad Iqbal's *Saare Jahan Se Acha Hindustan Humara*

²⁰ Traditional folk entertainers.

(“Better than the whole world, this *Hindustan* of ours”) on the Indian Independence day celebration at their school, while these shots are in juxtaposition with visuals of the army man’s gun looming over the men rounded up on the day of celebration for frisking.

The proliferation of documentary cinema about the valley aimed at documenting the lived experiences of Kashmiris, as Sanjay Kak explored in his film. Similarly, *Waiting* (Shabnam Ara and Atul Gupta, 2005) is the story of Kashmiri women like Shafika, Afroza and their children who continue to wait for their loved ones who were picked up from their houses and never found again. The film also follows the founder of the Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons, Parveena Ahanger. Human rights activist and lawyer Parvez Imroz defines the disappeared in the film as: “Disappeared is a person arrested by the law enforcing agencies then they deny the arrest and the fate of the person is not known.” Seema Kazi writes that Kashmir has turned into a *landscape of the missing or ‘disappeared’* (2009: xxvi). While the authorities who carry maximum power in the valley deny the charges of disappearances, they claim that unknown to their families, most of these men have crossed the border into Pakistan. The missing become disputed numbers between the narratives of the people and those of the state authorities. The families of these young men who bear witness to their capture at the hands of security forces have no concrete proof except their sharp memories of the day of disappearance. It is their word against the might of the gun. The landscape of the missing or the disappeared is dotted with women, children, old parents as the mourners creating a new landscape of widows and half widows (Kazi, 2009: xxvii). Kazi further suggests that *women* cannot be a generalized category in Kashmir as every woman’s experience, suffering and narrative differs. Clubbing them together under the roof of a singular label

does more harm than good to their individual struggle. The Kashmiri woman dealing with the loss of a loved one by disappearance and death is left to do two things: mourning and remembrance. On the 10th of each month, these women and their families come together to remember and mourn their disappeared under the banner of the APDP in Pratap Park, Srinagar. The documentary ends with a question posed to Shafika, a young half-widow whose husband, an auto rickshaw driver was picked up in the year 2000. She is asked if she would remarry. The subtitle of her response says, “I am still waiting for him. He may come back..” but what Shafika says in Kashmiri is posed as a question, “I am waiting. I wonder, “what if he comes back?” The film ends with Shafika’s question, a non closure, symptomatic of her life as a half widow wherein the future depends on the *hope* for someone’s return. The takeaway is not whether any of those men will ever return; it is that for countless women like Shafika, living in suspended animation, replaying memories like her husband’s Hindi song cassettes, *hope* for the news of their loved ones is all they have.

In the documentary, *Floating Lamp of the Shadow Valley* (2007), through a family’s ordeal, the filmmakers Harry Bal and Rajesh Jala explore the tangible relationships in Kashmiri society, its socio-economic structure, the ignored and deplorable condition of the valley’s inhabitants where many women and children suffer domestic abuse, hunger and pain every day, and are ignored in the face of the conflict in the valley. The film follows the daily life of a nine years old boy named Arif who rows a *shikara* to earn a living for his family. The narration of the film is in English, reminiscent of Films Division productions that carried similar voice over narrations. However, Arif and his family speak to the filmmakers in Kashmiri. Jala, who himself is an exiled

Kashmiri Pandit, is known for documentaries like *Children of Pyre* (2008) that focuses on the plight of young lives struggling on the margins of society. This family in the *Floating Lamp...* appears as a symbol of Kashmir's helplessness in the face of the state machinery, which akin to Arif's father, is unwilling to improve the lives of its own people and constantly terrorizes them. The narrator says, "Seasons are perhaps the only certainty that move smoothly in present day Kashmir," and yet, Arif, the ordinary Kashmiri is in constant struggle with the seasons as well. The film opens in the winter season when Arif tries to break through the ice that has submerged his small boat under a thick layer of the frozen water of Dal Lake. The landscape is not his ally, but throughout the film, we begin to see that Arif has no allies at all except a carpenter who repairs his boat so he can continue providing for his family.

Iffat Fatima's documentary, *Where Have You Hidden My New Moon Crescent?* (2009) shot in the duration of a day in April, 2009, documents the Kashmiri mothers whose children disappeared in the early 1990s. Iffat spent a day with Mughal Mase, a woman who lost her son during the peak of insurgency in the valley and met Parveena Ahanger during the early days of the APDP. The camera follows Mughal Mase through the narrow lanes of her locality and takes us to her house where she is the only resident. Her struggle to locate her son and stand up for others like herself has lasted 18 years in 2009. She says that her memory evades her and she hardly remembers any songs but she sings a lullaby remembering her son towards the end and wishes to leave the world. She passed away in October, five months after meeting Fatima and her camera. The secluded and quiet moments at Mase's house where she discusses her life with the filmmaker are intercut with charging crowds shouting "*Azadi! Azadi! Hum kya chahte? Azadi!*"

(“Freedom! Freedom! What do we want? Freedom!”) and security personnel stopping Kashmiri men in the middle of the streets for frisking. This serves as a constant reminder that Mughal Mase’s loss is the loss of the entire *aawam* (population) of Kashmir. Fatima returned to the women of the APDP in her documentary *Khoon Diy Baarav* (2015) which took her two years to film and edit. Recording the disappearances in Kashmir is never a finished project. Each documentary made on this subject becomes a link in the chain of disappearances but a resolution is never in sight.

b.) Between border and fence

Ajay Raina explores the ‘anonymity of the marginalized’ in *Apour ti Yapour. Na Jang Na Aman. Yeti Chu Talukpeth (Between border and the fence. On the edge of a map, 2011)* which is announced in the template at the beginning of the documentary: “some places and persons featured in this film will not be identified”. It is a stark remark on the idea of anonymity in the valley after the discovery of unmarked graves. Raina, however, diverges from the events of 2010 and instead explores the lives of villagers living in borderland areas between India (Yapour: This side) and Pakistan (Apour: That side). The documentary’s subjects are people who have been separated due to the Line of Control that divided Kashmir into the Indian territory and Azad Kashmir (Pakistan controlled Kashmir). The film traces this border which is a barbed wire fence in some places; while in some villages, a river stream divides the countries. In the popular discourse around Kashmir, these people have been marginalized and pushed out of the discussions, debates and even the representations of popular culture surrounding Indo-Pak relations or the Kashmir issue. In this documentary, a papier mache artist, Masood Hussain, comments that the regular crackdowns in Srinagar and other villages which

would begin as early as 6 a.m. and go on till evening made him feel humiliated. He says, “I used to feel, perhaps, I don’t belong to this place.” Anuradha Reddy’s ongoing research on the landscape of Kashmir in cinema touches upon how films made in Kashmir project the valley and how the landscape in return contributes to the film. In *Apour ti Yapour*, the now divided landscape of Kashmir is the protagonist as Raina takes us back to the crucial aspect of the Kashmir issue which is the impact of the division of the valley and its people between India and Pakistan. It is something that poet Zareef Ahmed Zareef also laments upon in the documentary *Soz: A Ballad of Maladies* (2016) in which he suggests that the crux of solving the Kashmir issue has to be the unification of Kashmir which has been divided by war and politics. The marginalization of Kashmiris within their own landscape, and furthermore, their marginalization from the discussion about Kashmir is brought to light through this documentary. Through the film, Raina attempts to understand the conflict from the perspective of the people who continue to live through it in the margins and “how the constant presence of security forces for the last 20 years can only mean occupation” (Raina, quoted in Chatterji, 2015: 170).

c.) You may not sing of the women from Kashmir

Bilal A. Jan’s *Ocean of Tears* (2012) produced by PSBT India²¹ is a documentary about the crimes committed against women in Kashmir. The first section of the film is about the Kunan Poshpora incident (1991). The people from the Kunan and Poshpora villages in Kupwara district filed a report that 32²² women of the village were allegedly

²¹ Established through a tripartite partnership with the Ford Foundation and Prasar Bharati in 2000, the Public Service Broadcast Trust (PSBT) are a significant stakeholder in the independent documentary movement in India, producing over 52 independent documentaries a year.

²² The number of victims fluctuates between different reports. In the documentary, the number stated is 32 women.

raped by the units of the Indian army sent for a search operation on 23rd February, 1991. Subsequent investigation into the matter was continuously delayed and a failure to follow proper and timely procedure by the government was recorded by the Human Rights Watch report.²³ Eventually, the investigation report into the matter termed the entire incident as a hoax, and refused any evidence in the matter including the medical reports which were also discarded due to delayed examinations. Almost 20 years after the incident, Bilal A. Jan²⁴ met with the victims of the incident and after a while, managed to persuade them to let him record their testimonies. The enquiry into the matter which was closed a long time ago due to insufficient evidence remains a traumatic event for the villagers who since then have been unable to cope with the after effects of the violence. Neighboring villages shunned them and their children dropped out of schools due to constantly being teased, bullied and ostracized about what had happened to their mothers. This incident impacted the generation born after the incident due to the lack of educational opportunities to improve their lives, constant surveillance by security and intelligence forces and the social stigma suffered by the affected families. The film is shot in two different houses of the village. Men gather to talk about the incident in one house and in another, the women sit together to narrate what happened to them. The women, with their faces covered, are unable to hide their tears or the anguish in their voice. They bring out the medical reports and documents of their ill reproductive health following the day of the incident. Many of the victims have had to get their uterus removed over the years. Some have died because of health complications caused by their

²³ “India: Human Rights Developments.” *Human Rights Watch*, 1992, hrw.org/reports/1992/WR92/ASW-07.htm. Accessed 10 July 2018.

²⁴ A veteran documentary filmmaker known for his documentaries on the children and women affected by the conflict, Jan had previously worked as an assistant director with Vidhu Vinod Chopra on *Mission Kashmir* (2002) and Shyam Benegal on *Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose: The Forgotten Hero* (2005).

damaged reproductive system. The men, in another house, also break into tears while recounting the night when the old men were made to stand in the snow throughout the night and the young men were taken to detention centers. They show the registered FIR and case documents to the filmmaker throughout the conversations. The victims find it difficult and humiliating to repeatedly narrate their story. They show their scars instead. When words and documents fail them, they show the trauma left in the form of scars on their bodies. Through the film, Jan reveals that justice was never served to the victims of Kunan Poshpora but he also presents the possibility of testimony by recording these scars on camera.

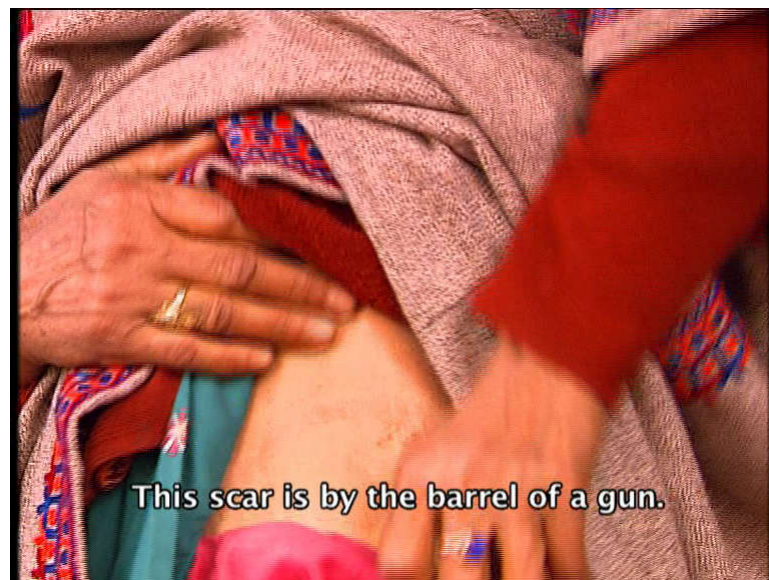


Figure 1.5: Still from *Ocean of Tears*: Victim showing her scar to the camera

Jan then moves to the section of the documentary that opens with dramatic images of vultures and apples. We are introduced to the incident of the rape and murder of Asiya and Neelofar Jan of Shopian who went missing while returning from their orchard on 29th May, 2009. Their bodies were found the next day near a local water stream when the SHO of Police brought it to the attention of Asiya's brother and Neelofar's husband

Shakeel Ahmed Ahanger while talking to him on the bridge near the stream. S. M. Sahai, Inspector General of Police, Kashmir refutes the claims that Asiya and Neelofar were raped or murdered and says that the post mortem report clearly states death by drowning. The FIR citing rape and murder was filed only after days of protests and *hartals* by the local population. Despite two investigations in the case, namely the Jan investigation²⁵ and the SIT (Special Investigation Team) investigation, the case was prematurely handed over to the CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) who declared death by drowning. Shakeel takes the filmmaker to the site where the victims' bodies were discovered. It is a small stream under a bridge.



Figure 1.6: Stills from *Ocean of Tears*

The camera explores the site where the bodies were discovered. The landscape stands in as evidentiary material when Shakeel's voice over tells us that the CBI report wants him to believe that two grown adults drowned in the stream, which visibly is nowhere close to deep waters (Figure 1.6). Jan then moves onto another case like many others which did not catch the media's attention. On 20th April, 2002, a woman named Ashmali was raped

²⁵ The investigation was headed by Justice Muzaffar Jan (retired). Not to be confused with the filmmaker's name.

when she was working in the fields while her daughter managed to escape on hearing her mother's screams. She was declared dead on arrival by the hospital. The daughter says that her mother was raped and killed by men in uniform but her testimony was thrown out on the basis that she was a child. The other cases explored in the documentary are the rape and murder of Akhtara and Asifa of Sopore and Mymoona Bano who suffered domestic violence at the hands of her in-laws after her husband disappeared. The film ends with a note about the number of Kashmiris who have disappeared over the years and the half-widows who cannot move on in life until their husbands are declared dead by the clergy.

Jan retraces these cases of violence against Kashmiri women through the scars on their bodies and the landscape where the crimes were committed against them. He reconstructs the incidents through the process of filmmaking, creating a new graph of the Kashmiri landscape, tainted by the blood of Kashmiri women. As Rabinowitz has pointed out,

Documentary is usually a reconstruction – a reenactment of another time or place for a different audience – a graphing of history in and through the cinematic image and taped sound, onto the present (Rabinowitz, 1993: 120).

This is the process that we see at work in Bilal Jan's *Ocean of Tears* (2012) that responds to a series of episodes of violence committed against women from 1991 onwards. In popular discourse, one sees the violence committed against men, but in the aftermath of the violent protests of 2009 against the Shopian rape and murder case, Jan uncovers a pattern of abuse against the women who are rendered vulnerable in Kashmir from all sides. Through the medium of film and testimony, Jan has created a new topography of

the Kashmiri village which, however beautiful, has seen countless incidents of violence committed in its natural landscape: in the fields, in the orchards, and even inside homes, indicating that there is no safe haven for a Kashmiri woman.

The 26 minute long documentary which travelled to various international film festivals and was screened in several countries, however, hit a roadblock when its screening was cancelled at the last minute at the University of Kashmir in December 2012 and afterwards at Aligarh Muslim University. Frustrated by the hushed bans twice despite having a CBFC certificate, Jan wrote to the United Nations.²⁶ The response he received from the UNHRC (United Nations Human Rights Commission) was that his complaint has been registered but he should resolve the issue with the government of India in New Delhi. Jan tells me with a laugh, “They told me follow the same procedure that they keep repeating on the entire Kashmir issue – to resolve it with the government in New Delhi.”²⁷ Later in February 2014, the film was selected for screening at the VIBGYOR Film Festival in Thissur, where the theme was ‘Gender Justice’. The festival was asked by BJP workers to not screen the film which was reported widely in the media. The BJP cell coordinator, B. Gopalakrishnan released a letter stating that the film was based on a “rumor” and carried “propaganda against *Bhartiya* army”. In 2016, during a personal interview, Jan shared several newspaper clippings from national newspapers and vernacular newspapers of Thissur that carried the news. The filmmaker says that while he has faced difficulties before in travelling to film festivals, he managed to go to this, but the violent retaliations against the film scared him and he had to pull it down from

²⁶ Yasir, Sameer. “Film on Kashmir human rights abuse blocked, director writes to UN.” *Firstpost*, 16 October 2013, firstpost.com/india/film-on-kashmir-human-rights-abuse-blocked-director-writes-to-un-1174911.html. Accessed 10 July 2018.

²⁷ Jan, Bilal. Personal interview. Srinagar. 8 June 2017.

YouTube as well. The film was eventually screened after the protesters were removed from the venue by the police.²⁸ Despite such disruptions, Jan continues his work but says that the lack of screening halls or the problem that Kashmiri filmmakers don't have a distribution mechanism through which revenue can be generated which could allow them to make more films are areas where work needs to be done.²⁹

d.) Life, elsewhere: The Kashmiri Pandit in exile

The subject of Rajesh Jala's documentary *23 Winters* (2014) is his long time friend Sushil Kumar Kaul 'Bota' whom he got acquainted with in the refugee camp set up in Delhi in the early 90s. Bota's family later moved to the Kashmiri colony in the outskirts of Delhi where I first met him. He was known as an aloof *uncle* who hung around his neighborhood and was always seen smoking. I saw the documentary which travelled as a part of the film festival *Kashmir Before Our Eyes* co-curated by Ajay Raina during its Delhi screening at Jawaharlal Nehru University. The film about Bota's life at Jala's residence and his return to the valley to visit his ancestral home in 2013 resonated with all the Kashmiris in the audience alike. When I asked the director about his choice of protagonist, his answer was simply that he was shooting the life of a friend. It is only after years that I have understood the complexity of that simple statement. Jala, as a filmmaker, behind the camera, was bearing witness to his friend's life in exile. Kashmiri Pandits who left the valley during the violence and forced migrations in 1989-90, settled in various refugee camps near Jammu and later moved to different parts of the country in search of livelihood. Bota, who was apparently in trauma, suffered from an undisclosed

²⁸ "BJP protest at Vibgyor film festival." *The Hindu*, 15 February 2014 (updated 18 May 2016), thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-kerala/bjp-protest-at-vibgyor-film-festival/article5691918.ece. Accessed 10 July 2018.

²⁹ Jan, Bilal. Personal interview. Srinagar. 8 June 2017.

mental illness and became a burden to his family but found a supportive friend in Rajesh Jala. The film begins with news on Radio Kashmir that the popular *sufi* shrine of Peer Dastageer Sahib was gutted in a fire in Srinagar. The shrine, popular among both Muslims and Pandits, becomes a symbol of *Kashmiriyat* as Bota looks at his reflection in a shattered glass on the floor. The film follows Bota's journey to the valley in 2013 after spending 23 years in exile. The filmmaker here acquires a double responsibility of being a survivor and listener, repossessing the act of witnessing, and in turn acquiring an interchangeable position with the subject of his documentary as described by Laub:

To a certain extent, the interviewer-listener takes on the responsibility for bearing witness that previously the narrator felt he bore alone, and therefore could not carry out. It is the encounter and the coming together between the survivor and the listener, which makes possible something like a repossession of the act of witnessing. This joint responsibility is the source of the emerging truth (Laub, 1995: 69).

Jala's role as a filmmaker is expanded not just by journeying with his subject but also because as a Kashmiri and filmmaker, he is bearing witness to his own life, which Laub calls "a repossession of the act of witnessing" (Laub, 1995: 69). Ira Bhaskar remarks that with the aid of cinematic expression, "historical and cultural memory are given a palpable, accessible form circulating through the public sphere as the collective and remembered experience of the past" (2013:342). Similarly, accounts of exile, when narrated through the form of documentary result in collective remembrance. Naficy argues that "the filmmakers' relationship to their film is not just of parentage but also one of performance" (2001:4); similarly, a Kashmiri filmmaker in exile such as Jala is not just weaving a collective historical experience of Kashmiri Pandits, but he is also a part of the narrative, performing the same exercise of *going home* as his subject, after decades

in exile. The news on Radio Kashmir turns to the information regarding the disputed claims over the discovery of mass graves in the valley and the Amarnath land row. After the new *Intifada* in Kashmir between the summers of 2008-2010, we see that these incidents reach the docile figure of the Kashmiri in exile, listening in to the news of the valley, caught between political narratives, and yet, an elusive, invisible figure who only appears in political debates for leverage. The camera then pans from one end of the secluded room where Bota is sitting by the door to the other end. The sound captures the entirety of the culmination of this Kashmiri's exile from temple bells – soldier boots clamping down – the sounds of *azadi* and *Kashmir banega Pakistan* (Kashmir will become Pakistan) – a recording of Hizbul Mujahideen from 14 April, 1990 blaring from microphones, “Kashmiri Pandits responsible for duress of Muslims should leave the valley within two days” – and the pan shot ends with the sound of running horse carriages and bullets. All that the Kashmiri is left with is his *mother tongue*, a song which Bota listens to on the same radio channel.

With the protagonist suffering from mental illness and idleness in exile, it is the soundtrack of the film which takes the narrative forward. The song playing in the background is a *Habba Khatoon* song³⁰ sung by Shameem Azad. The melancholic song, narrating the pain of loss and estrangement says, “I remember the days spent in my parents' house. I was bathed in milk then. No one should experience the loss of childhood.” A phone call connects *Bota* to his journey back home. He is constantly coaxed to take his medication which he ignores. After three months in the valley, he takes

³⁰ “Tule Naar Chum.” Song from the film *Habba Khatoon* (1978) sung by the prominent Kashmiri singer Shameema Dev Azad. *Youtube*, uploaded by Kashmiri Songs, 18 February 2013, youtu.be/t9eM9ShnWFw. Accessed 10 July 2018.

the camera to visit his ancestral home which lies in shambles, abandoned since *Bota's* family left the valley. This becomes a culmination point for the subject because he attempts to enter into his own house using a stone to break open the wood panels covering the window. He simply *has* to enter his house. We eventually find him leaving the house with some rags, presumably all he could find of his remaining belongings from 23 years ago. The soundtrack takes over a blank screen. The exiled figure is in a psychiatric facility in Srinagar. He keeps saying that he is not sick, and will not go back to Delhi. Kashmir is where he will reside. But there is no place for him in the landscape of Kashmir. The film is an exercise in remembering the past, but the paradox remains for the subject and the filmmaker, both Kashmiris living in exile who discover that there really is no *return* to the Kashmir they once knew. The landscape of the valley, for an exiled Kashmiri, is an uninhabitable dilapidated house.

e.) The summer of 2016: from stones to songs

Kashmir: Inside a Friday Protest directed by Sahil Ali and Avalok Langer and produced by Scoopwhoop was uploaded on Scoopwhoop's YouTube channel on 14th July, 2016 on the 10th day of the lockdown in Kashmir in the wake of Burhan Wani's death.³¹ The documentary takes us into the routine procedure of a Friday protest in downtown Srinagar where stone pelting takes place. The filmmakers follow the security forces surrounding the parameters of the downtown area, and also inside the downtown lanes from where the stone pelting commences. Since 2008, when the *sang baz* appeared in Kashmir's geography, this is the first documentary that interviews the Kashmiri

³¹ Burhan Wani was a Hizbul Mujahideen commander who was killed in crossfire in July 2016 leading to protests that resulted in injury and death of many civilians.

youngsters who show up for stone pelting every Friday after prayers. The subjects of the film remain anonymous as Mr. G, Mr. O among others, with faces covered so they can't be identified. These Kashmiris are wary of filmmakers showing up with a camera on their side of the fence as the security forces sometimes deploy their own men with cameras who later identify them from the footage and arrest them. These protests first happened in 2008 and have continued every week since then. The young boys, caught up in the vicious cycle of stone pelting, say that there is no turning back from this because once they are charged with FIRs and PSAs (Public Safety Act), even if they give up stone pelting, they can be picked up and arrested for any reason because now they are in the files. Because of multiple FIRs, they spend many days in jail and courts, rendering it impossible for them to go back to jobs and education. The police administration and security forces refused to speak to the filmmakers, but a Kashmiri policeman injured during stone pelting wishes that these men would return to a peaceful life. We are introduced to the paradox of protesting in Kashmir where once you throw a stone in protest, there is no turning back. Through the interviews, these young men reveal that probably, picking up a gun and *shahadat* (martyrdom) remains their only option now. They question why there is no space for protest in Kashmir when spaces like Jantar Mantar in Delhi exist as spaces of protest for the citizens. While numerous media reports and news debates claim that the stone pelters are paid for this "job", they respond by saying, "Why would anyone pay us to do something when we are ready to do it for free, when we have been doing it for free?" Downtown Kashmir has unceremoniously become a space of conflict, protest, resistance and retaliation since the summer of 2008. The film explores the situation from the angle of downtown residents, the local police, human

rights activists and the stone pelters, but one constant answer remains that the response to a stone is always a bullet. The film was also an ominous premonition on the use of pellet guns as hundreds were blinded because of pellet guns during protests in 2016 after Wani's death. Here again, the scars left by pellets on the bodies of those targeted refute the state's claims that pellet guns are non-lethal weapons when in fact they cause severe damage to eyesight and in many cases, result in death.



Figure 1.7: Still from *Kashmir: Inside a Friday Protest*

While the downtown residents remain engulfed in the vicious cycle of violence caused by stone pelting and the retaliation by security forces, a new form of protest has also emerged in the last four years owing to MC Kash's rap music which appeared during the protests of 2010 and marked a shift from stones to songs. Kashmiris realized that a song can be equally powerful to express their anger against the state. Films like *In the Shade of Fallen Chinar* (2016) and *Soz: A Ballad of Maladies* (2016) foreground a new topography of Kashmir through the works of Kashmiri poets, musicians, cartoonists and photojournalists.

The short documentary film titled *In the Shade of Fallen Chinar* was released directly on YouTube by the filmmakers Shawn Sebastian and Fazil NC. The 16 minute documentary portrays young Kashmiri artists creating a safe space in the University of Kashmir to speak their minds through painting, writing and music. A small area near a fallen Chinar tree in the campus is used by these students to gather and work on writing songs and creating paintings.³² The film garnered positive responses for presenting the views of the Kashmiri youth who have chosen the path of non-violent protest to speak about the atrocities committed on their population. A year after its release, it came to national attention when it was banned from the Kerala Film Festival and later Mumbai Film Festival after being denied the censorship exemption certificate.³³ In spite of the festival ban, the film continues to exist on the internet and can be easily viewed. Here, several questions emerge when it comes to fiction or documentary films made on Kashmir on the issue of censorship, which are similar to Bilal A. Jan's *Ocean of Tears*. In the film, *In the Shade of Fallen Chinar*, the title and the landscape of the university where Bilal A Jan's film was banned from screening; the fallen Chinar tree turns into a canvas for art students. Kashmiris are writing and painting their truth on the natural landscape of Kashmir by painting on the bark of the Chinar tree. The motif of the Chinar tree leaf has been painted on paper mache products, woven into shawls and carpets and visually captured in cinema as well, but here, the act of painting *on* the Chinar tree became a subversive act about how Kashmiris want to express themselves. One of the musicians,

³² See Harshita Bathwal's unpublished thesis (2017: 117) for a detailed description of the 'Fallen Chinar Art Installation' in University of Kashmir campus as seen in the documentary.

³³ Joshi, Namrata. "In the Shade of the Fallen Chinar' denied screening at Mumbai film fest." *The Hindu*, 2 February 2018, thehindu.com/entertainment/movies/in-the-shade-of-the-fallen-chinar-denied-screening-at-mumbai-film-fest/article22631458.ece. Accessed 7 May 2018.

Owais says, “We cannot pick up a gun and ask for results. The youth these days is into escapism. We are not escaping the reality. We are escaping the harshness that conflict has put on us.” Photojournalist Syed Shariyar, musician Ali Saffudin and a few other artists who visit the campus belong to downtown Srinagar. They escape the area which is known for its Friday protests and suffocating narrow lanes to sit in the campus and practice their art. The conflict fuels their creations and instead of rendering it difficult to exist in the conflict zone, it turns their work into forms of resistance against the conflict itself. Here, unlike a stone pelted, the songwriter, painter and photojournalist document and witness the situation in the valley. While the stone pelted has to hide behind a mask in fear of retaliation, the Kashmiri artist becomes the face of resistance. This is further explored by Sarvnik Kaur and Tushar Madhav in their documentary *Soz: A Ballad of Maladies* (2016), a PSBT production which was first screened in September, 2016 at the Open Frame Film Festival organised by PSBT India.

Soz is a distant echo in the sea of meddled voices. You won't even realize how it hit you until it does; not with violent images from a violence-ridden state but with music. It begins like all stories must: with a conflict at heart. The frame captures guitars and guns in a single sequence. It begins to tell the accounts of a landscape in paradox through art.³⁴

The documentary begins when Tushar Madhav shot some footage during his visit to Kashmir in 2013. When he returned home, he showed the footage to his friend, Sarvnik Kaur. The footage contained an annual music event titled the ‘Battle of Bands’ where two figures of Kashmir’s new landscape emerge on camera in a single frame: the army man carrying a gun and a Kashmiri musician carrying a guitar. For the directors,

³⁴ Bhat, Niyati. “Soz Brings You The Kashmiris Who Picked Up Pens Instead of Guns.” *Bollywooddirect*, 2016, bollywooddirect.com/soz-a-ballad-of-maladies/. Accessed 10 July 2018.

this turned into a quest to find Kashmiris who have been using different art forms to express themselves throughout Kashmir's history. The Ladishah,³⁵ poet, satirist, musician, cartoonist and journalist emerge as the figures through which the film maps an alternate history of Kashmir – through the spoken word. Among the subjects, we have Rashid Bhat (a taxi driver and poet), Mir Suhail (Political Cartoonist), MC Kash (Hip Hop artist), Showkat Katju (Visual artist), a Bhaand Pather group, Journalist Anees Zargar, vocalist and guitarist of the band Parvaaz with satirist and poet Zareef Ahmed Zareef (ibid). The film also opens up the *occupied* space of the Sher-e-Kashmir stadium which has become a space for Kashmiri self expression after the security forces vacated its premises after more than a decade.



Figure 1.8: Still from *Soz*

Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hillard, in their work on globalization, not only address the unmaking of nationalist ideology under the forces of globalization, but their work also opens up ways for us to look at Kashmiri cultural production through the *domain of difference* which appears with the arrival of a digitally accessible and a networked Kashmir. They say,

³⁵ Traditionally, Ladishah is known as a travelling minstrel who sings songs filled with sarcasm about the socio-economic conditions of Kashmir.

One of the paradoxes of globalization is the *difference* becomes increasingly normative ...Globalization decisively unmakes the coherence that the modernist project of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century nation-state promised to deliver – the neat fit between territory, language and identity (Suarez-Orozco and Sommer, quoted in Suarez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard, 2004: 3).

This is clear in the case of Kashmir where young people have begun to use the digital medium to voice their feelings, and do not see their identities as limited only to their region. The young Kashmiris who were born in the 1990s and have seen nothing but violence take to different paths of self expression in the claustrophobic landscape of Kashmir: they vent their anger by flinging stones on security forces and some pick up the pen and write about it. The young Kashmiris through the summers of unrest since 2008 have found a new form of venting this anger through art because of the rap artist MC Kash (Roushan Illahi). Many have modeled themselves after MC Kash while some have diverged and found new meaning in old folk songs. Cinema, as a form of expression and witnessing has sprouted further into different art forms now being used by young Kashmiris to express themselves. The arrival of the documentaries *In the Shade of Fallen Chinar* and *Soz* just around the third massive uprising in the valley in 2016 marks a shift in Kashmiri cultural production where cinema does not remain the sole voice of resistance.

Through this chapter, I have attempted to establish an understanding of a cinematic Kashmiri voice, aided by Kashmiri language and lived experiences through the years of Kashmir's conflict. These years have produced a generation of filmmakers who wish to change the narrative around the image of the cinematic Kashmiri by creating narratives from firsthand accounts of the endured trauma. The Kashmiri has not only

embraced the cinematic medium but that of music and art as well for similar purposes. Their work echoes the Algerian poet Tahar Djaout's words, "Silence is death and you, if you talk, you die, and if you remain silent, you die. So speak out, and die."³⁶ The work produced by the new generation of Kashmiri filmmakers, journalists, videographers and musicians who have grown up during the years of conflict, and picked up the camera to depict their reality and bring an end to the prolonged *silence* of the Kashmiri voice will be explored in the next two chapters.

³⁶ "Tahar Djaout Quotes." *Goodreads.com*, [goodreads.com/quotes/7180547-silence-is-death-and-you-if-you-talk-you-die](https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/7180547-silence-is-death-and-you-if-you-talk-you-die). Accessed 10 July 2018.

CHAPTER 2

ACTS OF WITNESSING IN A DIGITAL KASHMIR

This chapter addresses the creation of a ‘digital Kashmir’ at a crucial moment in Kashmir’s history when Kashmir acquires the medium of phone camera and the internet. This chapter explores the new methods of the Kashmiris’ response in the face of conflict to state constructed narratives through the videos uploaded on the internet. The conflict acquires a mediatised language in the virtual world where questions of Kashmiri identity, politics, quest for justice, and the every-day violence come forth as counter narratives through citizen journalism in the contemporary moment.

As indicated earlier, from the year 2000 onwards, the Mass Communication centre set up at the University of Kashmir produced a whole new generation of photojournalists, videographers, journalists and filmmakers equipped with the technology and the techniques for recording the everyday in a conflict torn Kashmir. From 2010 onwards the access to the internet through cyber cafes and later from 2013 onwards, through smart phones also provided Kashmiris with an outlet for the work that they had been producing. The production of video materials added to the coverage of news events, presenting raw footage of moments that countered the state controlled or private media narratives. This engagement with the camera and the internet has created tonnes of audio visual material like the short YouTube film *In the Shade of the Fallen Chinar* discussed in Chapter 1. The distribution of this audio-visual material is mostly timed with the ongoing protests where several recordings of the protests and confrontations between the security forces and locals find their way to the internet.

Section I: The Path to a Video Testimony is also through the new Kashmiri Intifada

As discussed in the previous chapter, the new Kashmiri Intifada emerged during the 2010 during mass protests by Kashmiris against the Machil fake encounters. One of the first few deaths recorded on the mobile phone camera was of a fifteen year old Kashmiri boy named Ishtiyaaq Khande who had gone out to buy bread was killed by a bullet amidst clashes between the locals and the security forces in Anantnag. Documentary filmmaker and former video editor at Tehelka, Shaunak Sen says that during the 2010 unrest, Kashmiri journalists like Baba Tamim would source videos recorded by locals and share them with national media organizations.¹ One such video showed someone running towards a crowd and finding Khande's body lying in a pool of blood. The teenager had been shot in the neck and instantly killed. In the video, his family and neighbors had gathered around his body and were checking to see if he was still alive. This video was not uploaded on the internet directly as internet services were scarce in the valley but this video was shared with Tehelka who used it as 'Third party footage' in the first episode of the documentary series titled, *The Killings – Kashmir Uncut – Anantnag – Chapter 1*² which they created on Khande's death. Thus, the citizen video made its first appearance during these protests - until then cell phones had been used in 2008 and 2010 to disseminate information about protests but then the use of phone camera to record events starts with the new intifada. Since 2010, the Kashmiri smart phone camera has recorded numerous summers of protests, clashes and funerals.

¹ Sen, Shaunak. Personal interview on phone. New Delhi, 17 July 2018.

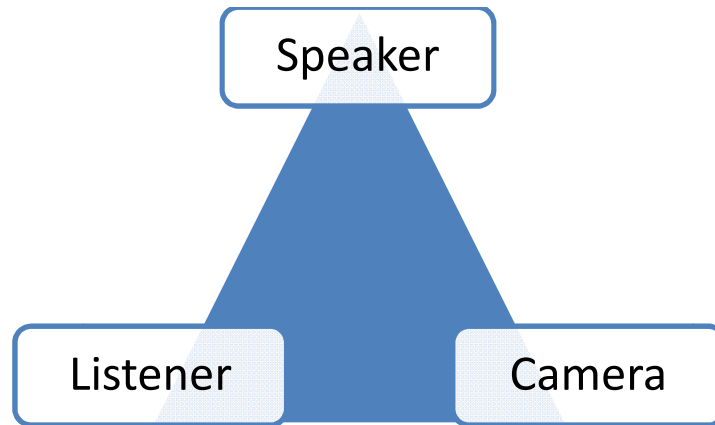
² Tehelka Kashmir. "The Killings - Kashmir Uncut - Anantnag - Chapter 1." *Youtube*, uploaded by TehelkaKashmir, 24 Dec. 2010, youtu.be/dZrK9aVqrIo. Accessed 16 July 2018.

Furthermore, the citizen journalism project started by *Video Volunteers* in different Indian states to document and report civilian issues took a different turn in Kashmir where the civilian issues also comprised of enforced disappearances, civilian deaths by stray bullets and the fate of the ordinary Kashmiri as well as the militant figure. In 2014, as internet services became more accessible in Kashmir, this citizen journalism project transformed into *Kashmir Unheard*. The project records the neglect to the everyday needs of the citizen in the face of growing conflict along with the structural and systematic violence curbed from mainstream media narratives. The attention by mainstream media is completely centered on the violence of the valley as perpetrated by insurgency, taking away any agency that Kashmiris can have in the functioning of their own state. *Kashmir Unheard's* videos expose these state discrepancies and open up a way to look at the different aspects of the violence caused by the state, insurgents and *Ikhwan* renegades³ on the civilian population. Before discussing *Kashmir Unheard*, I would like to introduce the testimony model and how it adapts in the face of the Kashmiri Intifada.

a) The Testimony Model

The following is a model introduced by Bhaskar Sarkar and Janet Walker (2010) to depict the process of a testimonial act through the documentary format.

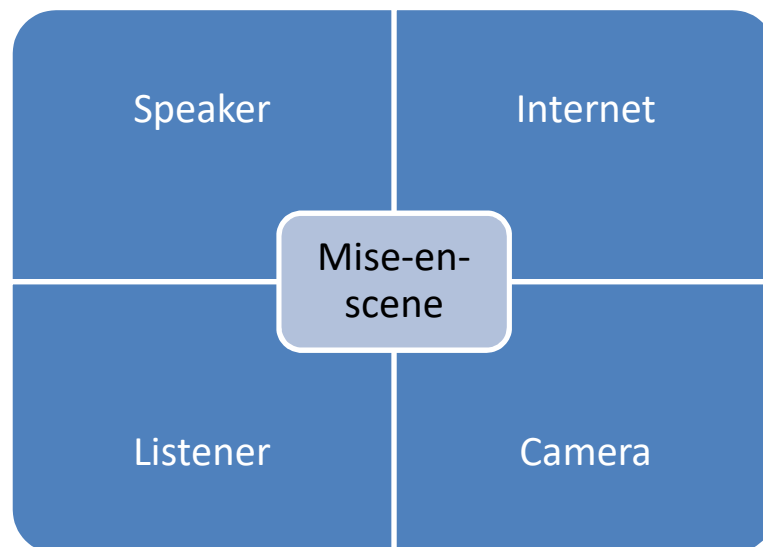
³ State sponsored militia consisting of former Kashmiri insurgents known as *Ikhwan-e-Muslimeen* created by Mohammad Yusuf Parray, also known as *Kuka Parray* in 1994.



Model 1

According to this model, the triangle represents the mise-en-scene in which the camera and the speaker interact during a testimonial confession, as in the case of holocaust documentary work. The listener is an integral part of this model because without a listener or an audience to watch the documentary, the process of testimony is incomplete.

I propose a change to this model as follows:



Model 2

I propose that post-2000, with the increase in information technology and the boom in globalisation, and the subsequent Intifada in Kashmir that recorded the first civilian death on a citizen's phone camera, the act of documentary filmmaking and the process of testimony acquire the new and essential component of the 'Internet'. The Internet facilitates the process of testimony when there is resistance from the state in releasing the said video or film to the masses through different public broadcast systems like television, cinema halls, or film festivals. As discussed in Chapter 1, in the case of a ban on certain documentaries from public viewing, YouTube allows the filmmaker to reach the masses as for example *In the Shade of Fallen Chinar*. If it weren't for the free access to the internet, the film would not have seen the light of day. It becomes important to note that despite not being screened at any public events, the film has 24,000 views on YouTube. It also points to direct state clampdown on any cinematic or video work created on the Kashmir valley. Similarly, in certain cases, mainstream media presents a one dimensional image of the conflict and the struggle of this ordinary Kashmiri gets suppressed and it is here, that the figure of the citizen journalist appears and is important to fill in the gaps of the narrative.

It is important to note that any video work done on Kashmir carries the burden of the valley's turbulent 20th century history and politics. The technological mechanisms used in the 21st century including the internet which are used to relay and communicate information and descriptions of life in present day Kashmir also carry this burden. Any material filmed on the Kashmiri or by the Kashmiri, hence, carries the politics and history of the state along with it. One must ask then, is this modern technological mechanism fully trustworthy? Is the person (Kashmiri or non-Kashmiri) using this technology

responsibly when there is minimum accountability? Cyberspace might not be a fully trustworthy part of the testimony model but what about the video format? What happens to the Kashmiri when he/she is represented through the video format and what happens when the camera is in the hands of the Kashmiri? These are some of the pressing questions that will be discussed further in the chapter.

b) Kashmir Unheard: The Community Journalism Project

Kashmir Unheard is a part of *Video Volunteers* (henceforth, VV) which is a human rights and community media organization based in Goa. *Kashmir Unheard* (henceforth KU) has a small office in Hyderpora, Srinagar where a team consisting of a former full time journalist, a video editor, a young social worker and a blogger teach different men and women interested in volunteering for the organization to use the phone camera and DSLR cameras and document various happenings in their local areas and villages⁴. The volunteers pitch ideas regarding issues like electricity, poor maintenance of schools, and violence in the area. They record civilian casualties and bring the footage to the office where they are helped in editing the footage to give it proper shape and then the video is uploaded onto YouTube and the Facebook page of the organization. In case of municipal issues, the same videos are taken to concerned authorities where a complaint is made to the concerned government official and they are shown the video (as in case of water shortage or drainage issue in a village). The official is also recorded on camera while the complaint is made thus creating a further evidentiary chain of responsibility.

⁴ In the *Kashmir Unheard* office, there are four people: Sajad Rasool, Nadiya Shafi, Nusrat Ali and Zuhaib Ashraf but in the field, they have fourteen people in different districts. Nadiya Shafi is a Community Correspondent for Srinagar City, she manages the Gender project and is also a video editor, Nusrat Ali works on social media, publishing videos and blogs for the website kashmirunheard.org, Zuhaib accompanies Nadiya for different reporting assignments and is also the main video editor while Sajad Rasool handles the production and functioning of the entire project in Kashmir.

When the issue is resolved, the same volunteer records the resolution and submits the entire report to the municipality and the Kashmir Unheard office. This organizational method of testimonial recording creates proper functioning of certain districts and villages through the camera of the citizens. The same volunteers were the first ones during the 2016 unrest in Srinagar when Nadiya Shafi and other correspondents were out in the streets, braving the tense situations, recording on the ground the reality of pellet injuries and going to victim's families to show the after effect of civilian casualties. A citizen's report was later released on the use and impact of pellet guns in the valley, but it is KU and the local population that recorded every moment of the clashes between civilians and the army in which hundreds lost their eyesight. In recent years, Video Volunteers have established a network of community correspondents in different states of the country, but it is in Kashmir that they are most visible due to their proximity to everyday conflict in the valley. This segment will cover KU's role in the Kashmiri civil society and their involvement in creating testimonies of local Kashmiris which challenge the everyday news reported from the valley.

Sajad Rasool, interested in social activism, started volunteering for Video Volunteers in 2011 as a correspondent from Budgam district. In 2014, he brought together a team of ten individuals to be trained as community correspondents⁵ (henceforth, CC) in Srinagar. Immediately after the training, they were faced with the Kashmir floods of 2014. Since then, several videos on the floods have been made by CCs

⁵ There is a residential training program: one is of eight days and another of fourteen days. VV usually has a fourteen days workshop in rural areas wherein the correspondents have to be taught how to use a mobile phone and how to copy footage to the computer among other basics as well. The people who have never held a camera in their hands have a fourteen day workshop while the ones who know how to use a camera have an eight days workshop. In this residential workshop, they are taught everything from the process of filmmaking to journalism and ethics.

from first-hand accounts of the aftermath of the floods to the present day when one ‘Impact⁶’ video has been created by Rayees Ahmad. Because of Ahmad’s intervention in the issue, several shopkeepers who were previously not compensated due to ‘lack of funds’, were provided proper compensation in 2018 for the loss and damage that occurred to their shops during the floods. Since 2014, the organization has made more than 175 videos, many of them ‘Impact’ videos. Sajad Rasool says that KU prefers to hire people who come from “media-dark” areas⁷ as these areas become the target areas to improve the situation using the video form while the audience for these videos remains global through the internet. The community correspondents working with KU belong to a mix of social science courses such as journalism and social work and people from different educational backgrounds who are interested in social activism.⁸ Everyday videos made by KU are akin to the ones created by VV correspondents in different Indian states which consist of the following categories: featured, arts and culture⁹, corruption, development¹⁰,

⁶ Impact videos consist of a series of videos created on several stages of reporting one particular issue. First, the community correspondent pitches an idea for a video from their district to their producer. On approval, the producer prepares a series of questions with the CC. Afterwards, the CC goes back to his/her district and records interviews and visuals as required. For example, CC Basharat Amin recorded the bad condition of roads in a Shopian town. He spoke to the residents on camera and also recorded the condition of the roads. He edited this video at KU office and it was uploaded on social media channels. A graphic plate also ran with the video that urged viewers to make calls to the authorities to file their complaints regarding the issue. Then he took this video to Mr. Intiyaz, Executive Officer, Municipal Committee, Shopian to file a complaint. This entire process of confronting the authority is also recorded on camera. If and when the authorities take action on the matter, as in this case, construction of roads in that town, this process is also recorded in another video by the CC. In the end, a short video on the final impact of this series of videos is also created to show the change initiated and followed up by the community correspondent. This final video is called an IMPACT video. Whenever an impact video is successful, the CC gets paid around 6,000 INR by VV.

⁷ Rasool, Sajad and Nadiya Shafi. Personal interview. VV Office, Srinagar. 7 June 2017.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ This section covers community reporting on the dying arts in small towns and villages of Kashmir. The internet used by the younger generation leaves the traditional artists, musicians and craftsmen in the media dark regions with no exposure. Community correspondents reach out to these artists and craftsmen and women and bring their skills and hard work to light. These videos not only highlight the dying arts but also pose questions and present the views of the artists’ themselves on ways in which their condition can be improved and the kind of support that they need from the society and the government. These include videos on ‘Bachcha Kout’, the male dancers who dress as women in Kashmiri weddings, a Rabab instrument

education¹¹, environment¹² and health.¹³ Apart from covering all the above mentioned sections, *Kashmir Unheard* has come forward to cover minute details and reports on the ground in the cases of human rights violations in the valley. They pay attention to the aspects of the issue left blank by the mainstream media. I would now like to discuss a particular case, the video of which went viral on the internet in 2017.

maker, decline in the business of handmade carpets, aspiring musicians and the art of making a Kangri among others.

¹⁰ Corruption and Development sections cover the issues which are important for the local Kashmiri populace but are largely ignored by mainstream media channels and even regional media channels. These include issues of infrastructure, food and social security, electricity, sanitation, livelihood and the corruption plaguing these issues on various levels of governance.

¹¹ Education covers the infrastructure, school supplies, problems faced by educators or students in different village schools. It highlights the lack of basic amenities, struggles of students with disabilities, creative learning methods adopted by educators and inventions like a tree cutting machine made by a seventeen years old boy. This section puts emphasis on the youngsters of the valley who are talented and intelligent and wish to utilize their skills with a proper education rather than remain in an undeveloped village with no future prospects. The videos through this method, also bring forth several ways in which such students can improve their prospects within their respective villages if the government pays even minimum attention to the issues of better classrooms and supplies, more teachers and the use of technological equipments demanded by disabled students.

¹² Environment covers all issues related to the environment in Jammu and Kashmir. Amidst the development projects, conflict and the tourism industry, environmental issues in the valley continuously get ignored and swept under the rug. Kashmir Unheard brings a local perspective on the environmental issues bothering Kashmiris because river and lake pollution not only create sanitation hazards, tourism decline but also severely damage the health of Kashmiris who largely depend on local sources of water bodies.

¹³ The section Health covers some very important problems like the Public Health Centres (PHC) in the state of J&K. In a video made on the condition of such centers, a CC found out that one PHC in Banpat, Poonch hadn't received electricity since its establishment in 1985 and hence was unable to store any vaccines. This section also covers the health issues and inaccessibility of proper treatment faced by many pellet victims.

c) The Kashmiri in Video format: Man Tied to the Jeep



Figure 2.1: Farooq Dar tied to an Army jeep

On April 14 2017, a video of a Kashmiri man tied to an army jeep went viral (Figure 2.1). The army vehicle's loudspeaker system shouted warnings that anyone creating hindrance in the Army's work would meet the same fate. This created an uproar with headlines claiming that amidst stone pelting on army men on election duty in Budgam and the surrounding areas, the Army unit of 53 Rashtriya Rifles caught hold of an instigator and tied him to the jeep to clear the path for the army unit in Chill, Brass. For the next few days, Indian news channels showcased the circus around the video. Day one: stone pelted used to create an example, Day two: Army praised for the heroic effort, Day three: Kashmiris express shock and anger over the man tied to the jeep, Day four: Separatist leaders come forward with speeches on the incident suggesting that these are the methods of the oppressor, Day four: Army awards Major Gogoi, the army officer who caught the Kashmiri man and tied him to the jeep, Day five: J&K Police submits report that the man was not a stone pelted but a responsible citizen who had gone out to cast his

vote, Day six: Who is Farooq Ahmad Dar? Video Volunteers record his testimony after no one bothered to identify “the man tied to the army jeep”.

On April 9 2017, shawl weaver Farooq Ahmad Dar left his house in Budgam to cast his vote in the Srinagar by-elections. On his way to an acquaintance’s funeral, he was picked up by an army unit of 53 Rashtriya Rifles in Chill, Brass and tied in front of a jeep to escort the army unit safely out of a tense situation. *New York Times* described Dar’s predicament and quoted H.S. Pang’s (a retired lieutenant) twitter comment that this image will forever haunt the Indian army and the nation:

“The man looks dazed and miserable, his knees splayed and one of his pants legs pulled up. Tied to his chest is a piece of paper, on which his name is scrawled. “Look at the fate of the stone-pelter,” a soldier announced over a loudspeaker”.¹⁴

Mainstream Indian media reports describing the image and the incident did not appear to be interested in finding out if the “dazed and miserable man” tied to the jeep was indeed the culprit. A video made by the community correspondent of *Kashmir Unheard*, the local unit of *Video Volunteers*, identified Dar and refuted the public claim made by the Army and other media organizations that he was involved in stone pelting that day. He said in the KU video, “I have never been involved in stone pelting. I went out to vote for India’s elections but look what they did to me.”¹⁵ Dar’s confession in the video is a visually charged moment wherein, we see his injured arm as the proof of an attempt to discipline and control the Kashmiri body. The afterlife of a Kashmiri body in a viral video is never explored by mainstream narratives. No one seems to be interested in

¹⁴ Yasir, Sameer and Ellen Barry. “Indian Army Ties Kashmiri Man to Jeep and Parades Him Through Villages.” *The New York Times*, 16 April 2017, [nyti.ms/2ogrX7G](https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/16/india/kashmiri-man-tied-to-jeep.html). Accessed 10 March 2018.

¹⁵ Bano, Rafiq. “Tied to an Army Jeep: A Kashmiri Voter’s Tryst with Democracy.” *Youtube*, uploaded by VideoVolunteers, 25 April 2017, [youtu.be/QhVed092Nrs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QhVed092Nrs). Accessed 10 March 2018.

knowing whether Dar survived the ordeal. Instead, he is simply referred to as the ‘stone-pelter’ in accusatory tones on several Indian news channels. Even months later, when Dar was denied any compensation by the government for this incident, Zee News among others reported this news and continued to refer to him as the stone pelter. Video then becomes the source of retribution for the Kashmiri figure – an unfiltered medium to express his thoughts. Sarkar and Walker, in the introduction to their book, *Documentary Testimonies*, talk about the humanitarian digital video archive (2010: 2) and the role of testimony which is made accessible due to video making and archiving by the people themselves.

Video is a “powerful, accessible and affordable medium that...will become more and more vital as a form of witnessing current events and therefore of future historical evidence,” writes Roxana Waterson... As the group WITNESS explains, the strength of human rights defenders is enhanced when “the power of visual images and the reach of emerging communications technologies” are united “to transform personal stories of abuse into powerful tools for justice.” (Sarkar and Walker, 2010: 5)

In the context of the power of video as testimony, it is important to address the materiality of the said video, how it was made, how it was found, how it was seen but more importantly, what it conveyed and represented. As explained above, we have two videos at hand: one is a video of a man tied to the jeep and another is the video made by Kashmir Unheard. KU enables Farooq Ahmed Dar’s story to transform into an act of witnessing the abuse of power by the armed forces. Elsaesser and Deleuze have addressed virtual space in their writings wherein Elsaesser has established a connection between (surrounding) space, (confined) subject and (external) technology (Elsaesser and Hagener, 2010: 132). Deleuze has pointed out that actual and virtual images are

constituted around the splitting of time, and their indiscernibility, the inability to designate either as the true image, constitutes the powers of the false (Marks, 2010: 65). The repressed mobility of the individuals in Kashmir and their hyper engagement with the internet are bound to be engaged in a similar tussle between narratives rendering it impossible to situate either the state narrative or the found footage as the true image.

However, using Elsaesser's connections between the space, subject and technology, the second video can be analyzed as a testimonial. But using Deleuze's contradictions to Elsaesser's theory, either of the videos can be rendered as images that constitute the powers of the false as both contain first person accounts and hear say. Who is to say that Dar didn't actually participate in stone pelting? There is no (visual) evidence that he didn't. Who is to say that the army major picked him up from the crowd and tied him to the jeep, not to "save lives" by avoiding a violent confrontation with civilians but just because he could? Grey areas exist where there is no visual evidence. These grey areas are what the mainstream media channels exploit to construct propagandist narratives to support a theory favoring the military narrative and colouring the picture in a nationalistic fervor. As long as the man remained unidentified and unnamed, he was the bad Kashmiri/the instigator/the stone pelter. When the J&K police report became public and the Kashmir Unheard video was released, the media constructed narrative took a hit due to the valor of the correspondents and their heroic documentation through which the incident could now be represented as a human rights violation. The counter narrative was produced by a community correspondent Rafiq Bano equipped with a small digital camera and trained at the *Video Volunteers (Kashmir Unheard)* office in Srinagar. As a human rights organization, KU took interest in Dar's

story. Bano, the community correspondent, belonged to the same area as Dar and went to interview him. Sajad Rasool says, “We look at it and see if there is another angle, another side to this story as well which could bring a farer picture to light”.¹⁶ Dar’s testimony recorded by KU becomes the tool to rupture the mainstream narrative built around the incident and brings his truth to the fore.

The hyper-engagement with the video format and the internet reflects that Kashmiris marred by trauma are finding a cathartic release through the circulation of these internet videos. Here, it becomes imperative to note that in cases like Farooq Ahmad Dar’s, the Kashmiri turns into a victim and the label of victimhood stands to snatch away the agency of the survivor. It is important to note that rather than giving into the idea of victimhood, Kashmiris are facilitating testimonies for each other through the medium of video recording, taking agency into their own hands. Sarkar and Walker propose an addition to Michael Chanan’s statement that “the vocation of documentary is testimonial, the vocation of testimony is archival, and, jointly, the vocation of the archive is ethical” (2010: 5). Owing to this statement, the creation of this archive of testimony results in the foregrounding of counter narrative which brings the marginalized truth to the surface. The intersectional texture of this video material and the body-politic involved shows us that the marginalized figure of the Kashmiri is tied up, at the mercy of the powerful military but through a single recording, this power structure comes crumbling down as it did in case of the “man tied to the jeep” when, Major Gogoi had to come forth in a press conference with a written statement clarifying his actions. He stood by the narrative that pointed to Dar as the instigator of violence in Brass and patted himself on

¹⁶ Rasool, Sajad and Nadiya Shafi. Personal interview. VV Office, Srinagar. 7 June 2017.

the back for “saving civilian lives” that might have resulted in casualties had the Major not intervened by tying Dar to the jeep which led to a pacification of the crowd. The crowd, if stone pelting, was not seen in the video where Dar is being paraded through the surrounding villages but the Kashmiri’s ever present phone camera captures what cannot be denied: that a man was tied to the jeep to make an example out of Kashmiris involved in stone-pelting and that it didn’t matter whether that man was a stone-pelter himself. He was a Kashmiri and that was all that was needed to tie him up. Paraphrasing Agamben, it is possible to see the modern Indian state in a permanent state of exception. The citizens of Kashmir are given rights only with the understanding that they can be taken away. Citizens do not have the right to those rights, they are merely ‘allowed’ the rights. These are given and hence, can be taken away in a state of exception. Even if one is a citizen, the state sees itself as possessing a biological nature which when threatened, can exclude a subject, and kill without the reprimands of law (Agamben 1995: 13-14). Here, Dar constitutes what Agamben called *Homo Sacer*, the man who was stripped down to his bare life in a state of exception; his rights are given to him, only to be taken away at the state apparatus’ convenience. This case study forms what Jammu Kashmir Coalition for Civil Society (JKCCS) terms ‘Structures of Violence’ based on the systematic and structural human rights violations in the valley since the 1990s.

Section II: Excavating truth: Video documentation of the conflict in Kashmir

a) Structures of Violence: 2000-2010

According to their website, the *Jammu Kashmir Coalition for Civil Society* (henceforth JKCCS) is an amalgam of various non-funded, non-profit, campaign,

research and advocacy organizations based in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir.¹⁷ It consists of individuals from different backgrounds like law, journalism, history, sociology who work together to research and record various issues marring life in Kashmir. The organization came into being in 2000. Since then, they have worked with the *Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons* (APDP) and the *Public Commission on Human Rights* (PCHR) to create records of disappearances and deaths in custody. In September, 2015, JKCCS, along with the *Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons* (APDP) and the *International People's Tribunal on Human Rights and Justice in Indian-Administered Kashmir* (IPTK) released an 800 page report titled *Structures of Violence: The Indian State in Jammu and Kashmir* (Henceforth, SOV) based on two years of documentation work on several hundred cases of enforced disappearances, tortures, extra judicial killings, sexual violence and spectacles of mass violence¹⁸ committed by the state on the Kashmiri population since 1989. Along with the report, they also released a DVD containing nine documentaries and one interview (of JKCCS founder and lawyer Parvez Imroz) made by *Kashmir Unheard* on cases taken from the report in which they had recorded the video testimonies of the families of those who had disappeared or died after being forcibly taken from their homes. These documentaries were also uploaded on YouTube by *Video Volunteers* under the playlist titled *Structures of Violence*.¹⁹ This was a first tie up for both the organizations who were working separately before this with JKCCS creating no audio visual material on their research. The purpose of this

¹⁷ "About." *Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS)*, jkccs.wordpress.com/about/. Accessed 20 May 2018.

¹⁸ JKCCS. *Structures of Violence: The Indian State in Jammu and Kashmir*, IPTK and APDP, September 2015, jkccs.files.wordpress.com/2017/05/structures-of-violence-e28093-main-report.pdf, p. 15. Accessed 11 July 2018.

organization has been to create documentation of human rights violations and filing litigations on behalf of victims. This segment will cover the organizational method of these testimonial videos and their impact in creating awareness about citizens' rights in Kashmir.

Irfan Mehraj, journalist and researcher at JKCCS believes that not even 30% of what has happened in Kashmir over the last twenty seven years has been documented properly.²⁰ JKCCS does field work on different cases, new and old, does day to day documentation on them and when field work doesn't suffice, they file Right to Information (RTI) requests to gather further data in the case. Then, they file litigations and fight the cases in court. Adding to this, he says that they seek to bring some kind of justice but it has never happened.²¹ On being asked about the purpose of the extensive process of litigation when the desired results have never been achieved by them, he says,

They expose the state. They expose the structural injustices that are present in the occupational structure of Kashmir. That is more important than normally saying that Kashmir is under occupation and Kashmir has lots of human rights abuses but taking it to court has exposed state's role at every level whether it is at court, or police stations, high court or even Supreme court.²²

The nine documentaries produced by Kashmir Unheard based on the case studies in the *Structures of Violence* report are between two to eight minutes long. It is important to note that the number of DVDs released with the report was limited but people across the globe have access to both the report and the documentaries through the JKCCS

¹⁹ Kashmir Unheard. "Structures of Violence in Jammu & Kashmir." *Youtube* playlist, maintained by VideoVolunteers, [youtube.com/playlist?list=PL60GANFL6tn2chSh3cu50xcVRQxIFkcId](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL60GANFL6tn2chSh3cu50xcVRQxIFkcId). Accessed 10 June 2017.

²⁰ Irfan, Mehraj and Khurram Parvez. Personal interview. JKCCS office, Srinagar. 1 June 2017.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

website and the YouTube playlist made by VV. According to the website maryscullyreports.com, the user ‘babakjoy2014’ has accessed the JKCCS website for this report often, but on May 29, 2017, they found that the website had become inaccessible with the possibility of having been hacked.²³ Thus, in spite of the free access to the information and reports created by JKCCS, and without any other distribution outlet for their material, they are also prone to the hacking practices of the internet along with physical restrictions put on the JKCCS members in the past.²⁴

The documentaries produced by *Kashmir Unheard* and *Video Volunteers* are divided into two categories of enforced disappearances and deaths and the recorded testimonies of victims’ families as well survivors and bystanders. *Structures of Violence* as a report and documentary series aims to expose the repeated cycles of violence which follow similar patterns that indicate towards the mandated and state protected abuse of citizens’ rights. Furthermore, these documentaries created by the community correspondents of *Kashmir Unheard* allow a smooth facilitation of the testimonies. As community members, the families of the victims feel comfortable in sharing information with the correspondents as is evident in the documentaries.

²³ babakjoy2014. “Jammu Kashmir Coalition Of Civil Society (JKCCS) Website Under Attack.” *Mary Scully Reports*, 29 May 2017. maryscullyreports.com/jammu-kashmir-coalition-of-civil-society-jkccs-website-under-attack/. Accessed 25 May 2018.

²⁴ Monitor News Bureau. “JKCCS stopped from visiting grave of man who buried 230 unidentified bodies.” *The Kashmir Monitor*, 5 February 2018. www.thekashmirmonitor.net/jkccs-stopped-visiting-grave-man-buried-230-unidentified-bodies/. Accessed on 25 May 2018.

Enforced Disappearances: Mushtaq Ahmad Dar (Srinagar, 13-14 April 1997) and Mohammad Ashraf Koka (Verinag, South Kashmir, picked up by ITBP (Indo-Tibetan Border Police) personnel 27 October, 2007).²⁵



Figure 2.2: Still from video on Mushtaq Ahmad Dar

In the documentary on the disappearance of Mushtaq Ahmad Dar (Figure 2.2), KU community correspondents met with Dar's ageing mother who recalls the night of 13 April, 1997 when security personnel belonging to the '20 Grenadiers' regiment of the Indian army barged into her home and beat up her son while the rest of the family was locked in another room. Her son was taken away by the army men and never returned. She carries his photograph and documents with her and has been fighting the case in the Jammu and Kashmir High Court since then. In 2002, the High Court confirmed that her son had indeed been abducted by that regiment but no charges were imposed since there was no confirmation of the names of army personnel who were involved in the abduction and disappearance. The video shows the procedures followed by Dar's mother which involved filing a habeas corpus petition in 2000, the High Court's ruling on the case, the Right to Information report filed in 2012 to seek out the First Information Report (FIR)

²⁵ Each documentary is named after the victim whose case is explored in the said documentary.

from the local police in which the SHO confirmed the High Court's judgment, but the procedures have remained fruitless in bringing Dar's perpetrators to court.

The second case of disappearance filmed by KU for *Structures of Violence* is the disappearance of Mohammad Ashraf Koka of Verinag, South Kashmir who was picked up by ITBP (Indo-Tibetan Border Police) personnel on 27 October, 2007. This video follows the case filed by Koka's father in the district court and exposes the systematic cover up that follows a police report on his disappearance. Koka's father identified the army personnel who had taken Koka from their home on the evening of 27th October. He says in the video that he recognized the army personnel and offered apples to them but he immediately knew of their intentions when they refused any hospitality. The community correspondent talked to the witnesses who signed the document of the identification parade multiple times during which Koka's father identified the perpetrators. Those papers were never given to him to use in court and subsequently, the Assistant Superintendent of Police who had facilitated the identification parade was transferred and the new ASP brought in from outside Kashmir got the case sent to the Supreme Court of India where the case remained pending due to insufficient evidence. This case remains particularly important among the many testimonies of the families of victims because it not only records a personal testimony from the day of perpetration but also shows how the state and the judiciary fail the Kashmiri citizen through cover up.

Deaths: Forest Ranger Gulam Mohammad (Kangan, 1991) picked up from home and murdered by the infamous renegade Nazir Goora, the Custodial killing of Gowher A Bahadur and Javed Ahmed (Batamaloo, Srinagar, 20 January 1995), the Saderkote massacres by Ikhwan Renegades (Bandipora, 1996), the Custodial killing of Gulzar A

Bhat (Saderkoot Massacres) (Bandipora, 22 January 1999), Abdul Rehman Paddar (Kokernag, 8 December, 2006), Farooq Rather (Stray bullet, Budgam, 25 June, 2008), and the Custodial killing of Omar Qayoom Bhat (Srinagar, 20 August, 2010),

The opening shots in these videos show us the location- a village or township to which the victim belonged. Next, the community correspondent interviews the family members, neighbors, friends and in some cases, local officials related to the case such as the magistrate who presided over a particular case. In their testimonies, the family members recount their last moments with the victims before they were picked up from their house at night or fell prey to a stray bullet when looking out of the window of their house. The family members also bring all the case documents they have gathered over the years of fighting their cases in court. These documentaries end with a graphic plate mentioning the progress or the stagnation of the case. Aesthetically similar, these documentaries differ from each other on the basis of the case that they are pursuing, and in the course of this pursuit, it is revealed how the violence plaguing Kashmir has become systematic over the years. The power structures, namely, the government, state police, district courts, and the army deployed in the region along with the local Kashmiris known as Ikhwan are all culpable in their failure to either protect or deliver justice to the victims of the Kashmir conflict.

b) Kashmir Unheard's coverage of the 2016-17 protests

Another series created by *Kashmir Unheard* is a YouTube playlist titled *Kashmir Unrest 2016-17*.²⁶ *Kashmir Unheard* which is a widely documented series on the unrest in the valley following the death of the Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani at the hands of Indian security forces on July 8, 2016. Massive protests and *hartals* erupted in the valley and people from far off villages headed to Tral (Wani's home town) to attend his funeral. These groups of people were stopped by security forces using shelling and pellet guns. Since day one, *Video Volunteer* correspondents recorded the on ground situation in the valley which became the worst unrest that the valley has faced since 2010. These videos document the curfew situations, the clashes between civilians and security forces, on ground injuries and medical care in hospitals, pellet injuries which led to partial or full blindness in many cases, and the aftermath of these protests in which the correspondents documented funerals, testimonies of the families and friends of victims, and the slow return to everyday life by those injured and now blind. Since July 8, 15000 civilians have been injured, one-third of whom were shot at with pellets. More than 1000 people have lost their vision, partially or fully.²⁷ A Citizen's Report on the unrest released in May 2017 stated: "In the summer of 2016, the state and central government have waged a war against the 'seeing' in Kashmir, willfully maiming and blinding civilians,

²⁶ Kashmir Unheard. "Kashmir Unrest 2016-17." *Youtube* playlist, maintained by VideoVolunteers, youtube.com/playlist?list=PL60GAnFL6tn2fcowZ7wIUmJtAUmIcLp3-. Accessed 10 June 2017.

²⁷ JKCCS. *Annual Report 2017: A Review of Human Rights in Jammu and Kashmir*. Srinagar, 2017, jkccs.files.wordpress.com/2017/12/jkccs-annual-human-rights-review-2017.pdf. Accessed 11 July 2018.

most of whom are young, unmarried men aged 16-25 years.”²⁸ JKCCS assisted this citizen’s report in the fieldwork but Irfan Mehraj says,

The report you saw doesn’t even come near to what has happened if we begin to document what happened last year. 100 people killed, 15000 injured, 500 blinded, 10,000 people arrested, it is not small. Since what has happened last year, the work that we do has only increased. It will take another few years to have a compilation of the data that we are looking for. We do fieldwork every week. We go to districts where these violations have happened. Last week, there was a killing so maybe today or tomorrow people (from the office) will go and visit that place to find out what happened. We base our work on RTIs whenever we cannot get (sufficient data) from the field. In terms of testimonies, like if a killing has happened, it is all field work.²⁹

As mentioned by Mehraj, a detailed report by JKCCS would take longer to prepare thus in that scenario, KU correspondents have gone door to door to record the testimonies of pellet victims in their cameras instead of waiting for the situation to calm down to pursue this video documentation. These documentaries record Kashmiris in the middle of the pellet injuries and deaths that filled the hospitals in the valley. This immediacy of the recording provides them a raw, undeniable authenticity. KU’s work creates a culture of accountability in the valley where law and justice are distant dreams for many victims. The video *JK1478 Tamanna Follow up, Afroza reports* is about a young girl in Ganderbal district of Jammu and Kashmir who lost her eyesight partially after being hit by a pellet gun. The correspondent visited Tamanna a year after the injury to follow up on her eyesight and health. Tamanna sits in a corner of the kitchen in her house and says, “These cruel men hit me with a pellet. I can’t see properly and I can’t

²⁸ *Why Are People Protesting in Kashmir? A Citizen’s Report on the Violation of Democratic Rights in the Kashmir Valley*. New Delhi, May 2017, p. 21.

²⁹ Irfan, Mehraj and Khurram Parvez. Personal interview. JKCCS office, Srinagar. 1 June 2017.

play outside anymore.” When asked what her aspirations were, she replies, “I wanted to be a doctor.” She doesn’t say anything looks blankly at the camera when asked if she thinks she can still pursue her aspirations. Another video *12 YO Boy Blinded in One Eye by Pellets* is about Imtiaz Ahmed from Shopian district. The community correspondent Basharat Amin interviews the child at his home, asking him to narrate what happened to him and how. The child’s mother tells the CC that she worries about his health and the medical bills. Both the videos represent the victims from economically meager backgrounds whose families, in addition to the medical care also worry about the young victims’ future. The children who have gotten embroiled in the conflict by such stray bullets become even more restricted physically as well as psychologically echoing the Citizens’ report that the pellets are not just targeting miscreants or protestors but civilians as well. The total number of such videos is 94 and they all cover several aspects of the unrest from the injuries to deaths to the material losses experienced by the valley due to the unrest. Kashmir was in a state of psychological, physical and economic torment throughout the unrest. *Kashmir Unheard* has provided testimonials of these torments through this playlist. While the correspondents recorded these testimonies, there were filmmakers from Mumbai, also stuck in the valley’s torment, witnessing the turmoil. They also turned their camera towards the unrest and created *Live from Kashmir*, a series which changed the way Kashmir is recorded and discussed.

c) *Live From Kashmir: Breaking barriers and laws of looking in at Kashmir*

In 2016, two filmmakers from Mumbai, Sumit Verma and Leo Vuppuluri moved to Srinagar in August during the curfews and unrest in the aftermath of Burhan Wani's death to explore what was happening in the valley that was largely cut off from the world as internet and prepaid phone services had been suspended. They decided to use this time to record what was happening in the valley whether it was constant clashes between the police, army and the civilians or people stuck at home with no work to do and nowhere to go. They met different Kashmiris, both young and old, men and women and recorded their views to establish an understanding of the Kashmiri point of view which they were themselves exploring during the filming. To film their interactions with locals, Sumit says that he had an anthropological perspective in his mind and that they did not go with a premeditated intent or a list of prepared questions for the local Kashmiris. Instead, they would strike up conversations as acquaintances and slowly, people would open up to them regarding the situation in the valley.³⁰ As they kept compiling the video material, they saw the potential to turn it into a video series which would provide a glimpse into life in the valley during the curfews and *hartals* and how long it takes for the city to get back on its feet afterwards. They released these videos as episodes on their YouTube channel *Video Daddy*³¹ under the title *Live from Kashmir*.³² They relied on their personal funds and friends' and acquaintances for funding their stay in the city.

Their crew involved the following people: Akshay Vaidya, a photojournalist who shot videos for the series while shooting some personal footage during the 2016 unrest;

³⁰ Verma, Sumit and Leo Vuppuluri (Video Daddy). Personal interview. Srinagar. 4 June 2017.

³¹ "Video Daddy." *Youtube* channel, youtube.com/user/videodaddytv. Accessed 1 June 2017.

³² Video Daddy. "Live from Kashmir | Web-series." *Youtube* playlist, maintained by Video Daddy, youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZheQJDGrfdTgfkBg08zRMkMs PzJNXzjZ. Accessed 1 June 2017.

Tanmay Kulkarni: editor and sound manager, Sumit Verma- filmmaker and co-founder of *Video Daddy*, Sreejith Karnaver- filmmaker and director of the series and Leo Vuppuluri, assistant to the director and co-founder of *Video Daddy*.³³ As equipment, they used the camera AX100 for the first two episodes before it was accidentally dropped in the lake by the director; afterwards, they used a Canon 5D Mark III and a Nikon D. A majority of the footage was also shot on two smart phones owned by Sumit and Leo, OnePlus One and OnePlus Two respectively and a Zoom H4N microphone for sound recording. Apart from this, editing and managing the channel was done on two iMac computers.³⁴ The interesting thing about their videos is that although they record different people and their view points, they never write the names or affiliations of anyone in the video. They abstained from the general rule of running a graphic indicating the identity of the subject to avoid labeling the speaker based on their political affiliations or religion. By deploying a method of anonymity, they stripped away those identities to foreground a singular identity of Kashmiris who are voicing their views. Their idea was to be able to listen to a thought or a discussion without jumping to conclusions or closing oneself to the debate solely on the basis of political affiliations as is the habit of mainstream prime time debates. For example, one might find an opinion agreeable and then find out that the person who said it was a party member of the People's Democratic Party or a separatist organization putting forth the same opinion on the situation in Kashmir as ours. But since the barricade of labels has been removed, everyone puts forth their opinion on a humanistic level, concerned about the life and situation of everyday Kashmiris. Kashmiris responded positively to them as a way of working through their traumas of the

³³ Verma and Vuppuluri. Personal interview. Srinagar. 4 June 2017.

³⁴ Ibid.

past few months. The reason for this response was their unique style of anthropological filmmaking rather than the impersonal manner of the mainstream media interviews. Eventually the series also becomes self reflexive in examining their own presence and role in this trauma laden environment and the act of trauma transference they felt and discussed in an exploration to understand why mass media has become untrustworthy in the valley.

Outlined below are the detailed descriptions of the six episodes in the series:

1. Episode 1: Paradise Waiting

The first episode opens on the day of Eid ul-Adha on September 12, 2016 in Srinagar. Following visuals of the city landscape, the episode dives right into the difference between the on-ground reality of Srinagar and Kashmir and the perception of both the city and its culture for visitors. The video assaults all senses with a series of conflicting images in juxtaposition wherein one set of images and footage from old BBC newsreels is set in contrast to the on ground situation in the Srinagar's SMHS hospital where victims of pellet guns are being rushed in for treatment. A Caucasian woman wearing a Kashmiri silk shawl from the newsreel is set in contrast with a Kashmiri mother blinded when she went to look out for her five years old son. The filmmakers constantly use such newsreels for establishing a narrative of Kashmir's history while deploying contrasting images of the exotic Kashmir and the 2016 Kashmir. The episode approaches various Srinagar residents, a local religious leader and the victims of pellets in hospital beds. These conversations are the filmmakers' and subsequently the viewer's introduction to the everyday reality of Kashmir. Without a conclusion,

the episode ends with Ali Saffudin's song *Faryaad* played against starkly contrasting images of the Kashmiri landscape - the natural beauty of its lakes and skies against the images of army personnel on the streets, the decaying of city structures and the barbed wires that signify military presence. The conflicting images show us what it is like to be in the middle of violence and brutality and yet be depicted and yet to be represented being in the midst of a land of mystery, beauty and intrigue in popular culture over the years.

2. Episode 2: Conflict-Part 1

The episode opens with archival footage of Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's 1971 speech at U.N. Security Council in the light of the 1971 Indo-Pak war.³⁵ This is followed by footage from an Edward Said interview in which Said lays out the causes as to why countries claim territories and fight over them. It leads to a clip from the popular American television show, *The Office* wherein the office manager attempts to resolve a dispute between two employees by calling for a 'Lose-Lose negotiation' in which neither party gets anything. Thus, we are led into the first of the two part episodes which examine the conflict in Kashmir by deploying pop culture references as tools for all the things that cannot be said or formulated otherwise in Kashmir. While being interviewed, Leo claims that in response to the series, many Kashmiris did not understand pop culture references like *The Office* or know who Edward Said was but they identified with what these people were saying in the footage that Kashmiris have constantly been in a 'Lose-Lose negotiation' with India and Pakistan. By using such references from popular

³⁵ Bhutto was upset with U.N. Security Council during the discussion on the resolution regarding the territory of East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

subcultures in a glitchy – chopped up editing style, the filmmakers attempt to point out the ironies and discrepancies in Kashmir’s history. Seeing how every discussion on Kashmir with an interviewee (which also included a voice interview of a Telugu CRPF Jawaan) would lead to a lesson in Kashmir’s historical past, this Part 1 episode delves into the history of Kashmir over centuries as an oral history project by using only the material told to them by the locals, be it the mythological origin of the Kashmir valley’s water springs or the religious transitions of Kashmiris throughout history.

3. Episode 3: Conflict-Part 2 (Games of Power)

This episode traces a young Kashmiri who opened a school in his village in 2015 so that the local children would remain engaged in their studies regardless of the situation in the valley. Furthermore, the episode follows the day of *Muharram* during which Kashmiri Muslims mourn the martyrs of Karbala. The processions are powerful depictions of collective mourning by Kashmiris which although religious, point significantly towards the collective mourning of the community not just for their religious past, but for their present day scenario as well. Amidst the procession, photojournalist Syed Shahriyar says, “People come out to say that they are against injustice, they are against oppression and they are against brutalities.”³⁶

Throughout the series, there are glimpses of Kashmiri women only twice in the series, the first one is when a group of Kashmiri women protest against the paramilitary forces in a narrow street, and the second is when Kashmiri women

³⁶ Video Daddy. “Episode 3 - Conflict (Part 2): Games of Power | Live from Kashmir.” *Youtube*, uploaded by Video Daddy, 18 November 2016, youtu.be/MStnnu_Inxg. Accessed 1 June 2017.

mourn during the *Moharram* procession. The series creators have faced significant criticism for almost eliminating women and issues of gender from the series. Subsequently, they have made gender issues visible to all those who refer to the series for discussions on the Kashmir conflict. The series brings the two part episode on conflict to an end by more oral history interviews on the presence of communism in the valley and the Kabali attacks of 1947.

4. Episode 4,5 and 6: Media (Part I, II and III)

The next three episodes are solely dedicated to the examination of the role of media in the Kashmir conflict and the increased mutual mistrust of Kashmiris and the mainstream news channels over the years. Part I presents a mixed up superimposition of American pop culture and Indian pop culture motifs on each other and on the imagery of Kashmir. With fewer locals in this episode, the editors rely mostly on footage available on the internet and news media channels to juxtapose opposing views and opposing ideologies, propaganda narratives and the polarized depictions of Kashmiris into ‘good Kashmiris’ such as Shah Faesal, the IAS officer and ‘bad Kashmiris’ such as the Hizbul Mujahideen commander Burhan Wani.

Further into Episode 5, Part II, Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s 70th Independence Day speech in which he addresses the sacrifices of Indian freedom fighters is again juxtaposed with violent clashes during the curfew in the valley. In a digital age, where we face constant assault of the senses by videos and images on social media channels, the series presents a linear timeline of the 2016 conflict in addition to the larger conflict between India and Pakistan from the Uri attacks to the surgical strike and their depictions by the

news channels. This video, as becomes evident from Episode 6 as well, has fair intentions in its pursuit of establishing an understanding of the conflict. However, these intentions don't materialize in assertive claims or provide any finality to the viewer in terms of reaching a conclusive end. Partially, because the director himself admits to a lack of conclusive understanding (as the narrator in Episode 6 points out) and partially, because they ran out of funds to continue documentation in Kashmir and had to give it whatever shape they could to have a sense of closure. In Episode 6, the series follows the detainment of JKCCS Program Coordinator and human rights activist Khurram Parvez and a ban on the newspaper *Kashmir Reader*. Media as the fourth estate has failed for the Kashmiri. The series creators remain successful in opening a can of worms but they don't know what to do afterwards. At this point, the series ends with a glimpse of the creation of a digital Kashmir through VPN (Virtual Private Network)³⁷ access during internet restrictions. The digital Kashmir is a displaced Kashmir which cannot be traced geographically.³⁸

Speaking of cultural trauma experienced by a collective community, Ron Eyerman says,

Certain occurrences, political assassinations for example, may create conditions conducive to setting in motion a process of cultural trauma, understood as a public discourse in which foundations of collective identity are opened for reflection and debate (Eyerman 2011a). This will not happen without the aid of meaning making forces, like mass media and certain carrier groups like intellectuals, who influence the formation and direction of a process of cultural

³⁷ VPN or Virtual Private Network is a tool designed to allow a safe and anonymous use of the internet.

³⁸ As VPN covers access to your IP address, allowing you to show a different IP (Internet Protocol) address which can be used to trace your local address. For example, Kashmiris use VPN access to browse Facebook, Instagram and Whatsapp as all three are banned in Kashmir valley. By temporarily showing an IP address from a different state or country, their phone can connect to these social media networks.

trauma. .. Cultural traumas are not things, but processes of meaning making and attribution, a contentious contest in which various individuals and groups struggle to define a situation and to manage and control it. I would add that these forces are unlikely to create a trauma out of nothing; there is likely to be a powerful, shocking occurrence which creates the possibility, providing the opportunity to mobilize opinions and emotions. There are thus two sides to a cultural trauma, an emotional experience and an interpretative reaction. Shocks arouse emotion by breaking everyday routines (behaviors as well as cognitive frameworks) and as such demand interpretation, opening a discursive field where well placed individuals can play a determinate role. In modern societies, access to mass media is significant in this process. The polarity and disparity between perpetrator and victim are what distinguishes cultural trauma as discourse. In this sense, cultural trauma is a contentious discursive process framed by a dichotomy between perpetrator and victim which is spurred by a powerful, unforgettable occurrence. What also characterizes cultural trauma as discourse is that an established collective identity is shaken and its foundations called into question. It is a discursive process where the emotions which are triggered by a traumatic occurrence are worked through and an attempt is made to heal the collective wound (Eyerman, 2013: 43-44).

The massive protests over Wani's death post July 2016 was a similar manifestation of the Kashmiri community's cultural trauma which had been simmering for decades with eruptions in 2008, 2010 and then in 2016 after his death. Wani had become popular within the valley through his social media interactions and video circulations as the Hizbul commander. His death was a shattering experience for Kashmiris. Many of them not only believed that Hizbul was fighting for their rights but the social media channels had fuelled Wani's image as the poster boy for Azaadi. He became an icon for the locals and represented their hopes for a free Kashmir. While the media reports clearly depicted him as a threat to India, his videos had turned him into a personal hero for many young Kashmiris. Thus, his death was a twice fold shock because

it not only meant the death of a young Kashmiri but also the death of the promise of Azaadi. “The very act of bearing witness in front of a camera helps politicize consciousness, stirring members of affected communities towards acts of resistance” (Sarkar and Walker, 2010:17) and for Kashmiris, Wani’s death was a witness of the brutality of every day existence in Kashmir whose virtual exposure also led to a wide circulation of the images of his dead body. Wani, who largely existed as an ideological threat because of his video messages, had to be killed twice: first in Kokernag, and second, through the social media circulation of the images of his dead body. This is what largely triggered a massive agitation in the Kashmiri community because the internet which is claimed to be a free space is constantly banned in the valley during curfews and even when Kashmiris manage to access it through services like VPN, their access to free speech is still a dangerous prospect.

This is clear in case of Sarjan Barkati, an *Ummat i Islami*³⁹ member in Shopian who became famous for his pro-freedom sloganeering in a crowd through a viral video and came to be known as ‘Freedom Chacha’⁴⁰. He was later arrested after he was identified through another video of a public speech on Pakistan’s Independence Day. A *Kashmir Unheard* correspondent visited his family and made a video on them after his arrest. The internet which connects thousands of Kashmiris, thus, also has its demerits because the Kashmiris, who become visible and distinct from the crowd through the internet, subsequently face the wrath of state and central government authorities. Since the technological medium of video and the internet used by the Kashmiri has an added

³⁹ Ummat i Islami is a religious organization. Not much information is available on the organization in the public domain except for a few news reports mentioning it as such.

⁴⁰ Ali, Jehangir. “Singer 'Freedom Chacha' Arrested in Kashmir.” *The Citizen*, 2 October 2016, thecitizen.in/index.php/en/newsdetail/index/3/8863/singer-freedom-chacha-arrested-in-kashmir. Accessed 25 May 2018.

burden of the 20th century history of Kashmir, the medium might be considered trustworthy as it exposes the discrepancies and propagandist narratives deployed by state machinery. The video documentation allows the marginalized Kashmiris to assert themselves as political subjects and attain agency in the mainstream narrative of Kashmir. This is a similar process that Charles Taylor has termed, “politics of recognition” that allows Kashmiris to attain agency in the mainstream narrative of Kashmir (quoted in Sarkar and Walker, 2010: 23). The Kashmiri’s awareness of the power of video and the internet puts a greater responsibility on the videographer when it comes to the dissemination of the said video. In the case of the man tied to the jeep, the video form becomes a way of documenting an act of human rights violations.

We see this “politics of recognition” in the culmination of mourning during the *Moharram* procession recorded by the *Video Daddy* crew in *Live from Kashmir* months after Wani’s death and the 2016 unrest. It was, thus, a collective mourning of an entire population that not only lost Wani and his promises but in the aftermath, also lost their loved ones and in many cases, their eyesight due to pellet injuries. At this point, the cultural trauma that has seeped into generations of Kashmiris found a performative release through chest beating and the songs of mourning sung collectively. While the series started off as emancipation for the act of witnessing the cultural trauma of Kashmiris, it could not find the resolution it was looking for. To look at this visual exercise, one must look at the social theory writings discussed by Eyerman. Many social theorists’ texts (Horkheimer and Adorno, Bauman and Freud) were plagued by their personal, collective and cultural traumas. Of these texts, written in an attempt at freeing the writers from the said trauma, Eyerman writes,

Bauman agrees with Adorno that social theory should offer no solace. And while it might not change the world, it could at least reflect on its condition. A voice in the wilderness is better than no voice at all, and personal trauma helped him find that voice. (2013: 50)

Similarly, for Kashmiris creating videos in the valley as forms of testimonies and for non-Kashmiris who are creating videos as acts of witnessing, these video texts might not provide any solace either but a video on Kashmir in the wilderness of the internet is better than no video at all because it is helping Kashmiris to voice their trauma.

Projects like *Kashmir Unheard* and *Structures of Violence* are examples of creating and articulating such agency to form a collective in which video becomes a medium to foreground the cultural traumas experienced by Kashmiris. These videos create testimonies as they did in Farooq Ahmad Dar's case. The testimonies create an intimate manifestation of witness-survivor relationship (Sarkar and Walker, 2010: 5) and the process of making the above discussed videos and bearing witness in front of a trustworthy camera allows Kashmiris to transfer a traumatic historical witnessing to the visual format and through the internet, it allows them a channel to voice their trauma to the world at large.

CHAPTER 3

HIP HOP, KASHMIRI FOLK AND THE NEW KASHMIRI

MUSICIAN

Music, the organization of noise... reflects the manufacture of society; it constitutes the audible waveband of the vibrations and signs that make up society. *An instrument of understanding, it prompts us to decipher a sound form of knowledge.* (Attali, 2012: 30)

As discussed in the previous chapter, the video form allows the subjects of the state to create testimonies through the camera and the internet. This chapter takes the argument a step further to address the aural moment in Kashmir's digital history and looks at how the production of songs and music videos made by Kashmiris in the digital age are in itself 'acts of defiance' because of the nature of the music, lyrics, the visual aspect of the videos, the presence and relation of the Kashmiri musician to a larger Kashmiri society and the production-distribution techniques used by them.

Kashmir has had an ancient oral and folk music tradition. Songs attributed to Lal Ded and Habba Khatoon have been passed down from generation to generation. Singers like Raj Begum (the Nightingale of Kashmir),¹ Gulam Hassan Sofi, Vijay Malla, Kailash Mehra Sadhu and Santoor player Bhajan Sopori have kept the traditional Kashmiri music alive throughout the 20th century. But it is in 2010 when a young Kashmiri boy, Roushan Illahi aka MC Kash uploaded his song, *I Protest*, during a period of unrest in the valley

¹ IANS, "'Nightingale of Kashmir' Raj Begum dies of prolonged illness." *Indian Express*, 26 October 2016, indianexpress.com/article/entertainment/music/nightingale-of-kashmir-dies-of-prolonged-illness-3103743. Accessed 18 June 2018.

that a new generation of Kashmiris who resort to the DIY² form of music was ushered in. His song quickly spread through the masses which brought him popularity and state scrutiny in equal measure. There was no critical evaluation of his music because no one in Kashmir was making or understood such music. Many Kashmiris had no idea about the musical form he was using but they understood the sentiment. This is how Hip Hop music and the DIY musician arrived in Kashmir. It is important to consider 2010 as an initiation point because almost every young Kashmiri who wanted to make music would have had to knock on the doors of studios to rent them to record music, or approach the Radio Kashmir and Doordarshan offices for a chance, but by following MC Kash's example, they used the internet to find ways to record music in their own homes and upload their songs directly on the internet. Ali Saffudin whose first YouTube video was a cover of Vijay Malla's famous song based on Rehman Rahi's *ghazal*, '*Zind Rozne Baapath Chiye Maraan Lakh*'³ ("People die to stay alive") followed suit in reviving old Kashmiri folk songs, ghazals and poems with the music composed and played on his guitar (traditionally, no Kashmiri songs have used guitars). Like him and MC Kash, a new breed of Kashmiri independent musicians has grown out of easy access to the internet and the low cost of creating songs using a laptop and microphone and videos shot on their phones.

There is however, a divide between the independent and institutional structures within the Kashmiri music society as I discovered during my field work. There are not just creative but ideological differences between the musician who uploads his content on

² DIY = Do It Yourself

³ Saffudin, Ali. "Zind Rozne Baapath Chi Maaran cover." *Youtube*, uploaded by Ali Saffudin, 18 May 2016, [youtube.com/watch?v=eDAJ0ASXBcI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eDAJ0ASXBcI). Accessed 18 June 2018.

the internet and the one who sings for the state broadcast television and radio channels like DD Kashmir and Radio Kashmir. But the music produced by the young, independent musicians from the valley has sought to bring the elements of a rooted cultural and historical poetry under the umbrella of *Sufi* rock music. The musicians working for state channels also run the risk of losing their jobs, if they attempt the kind of music made by MC Kash or others, which young musicians uploading content on the internet are exempted from.

This chapter will focus solely on the independent musicians whose music appeared on the internet from 2010 onwards. In section I, the transformation of the figure of the Ladishah in the present day Hip Hop scene will be discussed. In section II, the contemporary Kashmiri musicians and the revival of Kashmiri folk songs and progressive poetry will be foregrounded. In section III, the two concerts: *Ehsaas-e-Kashmir* and *Haqeeqat-e-Kashmir* will be discussed to reiterate the exclusion of Kashmiri people from the cultural sphere managed by the state.

The focus of this chapter is to address the songs of protest and resistance produced in both English and Kashmiri by Kashmiris and to address the agency of the music videos created for these songs. Creating songs of protest and dissent in Kashmir is not something new because Kashmiri progressive poetry grew in the 1960s, but the dissemination of these poems and songs is now taking place in ‘new packaging’ and at a different historical moment reflecting the formation of a digital Kashmir. I propose that through the internet, these songs become vehicles of dissent and resistance in today’s Kashmir. Jacques Attali says that music reflects the manufacture of society and the audible wavebands tell us what makes up a particular society (2012: 30), and this chapter

attempts to chart out Kashmiri music which has also transformed due to the drastic political, social and technological changes in Kashmir since 2010.

Section I: Reinvention of the Ladishah: Hip Hop Music and the Songs of Dissent

Rumblings of revolution. Sounds of competing powers. Clashing noises, of which the musician is the mysterious, strange and ambiguous forerunner—after having been long imprisoned, a captive of power (Attali: 2012, 37).

Kashmir has had an ancient oral tradition of satirical songs called the Ladishah. In the folk tradition of Kashmir, the Ladishah⁴ was a traveling minstrel who addressed the socio-political issues of his time through the medium of satire and music. According to the website of the National Bhand Theatre, this figure is defined as one who discourses through humorous songs on the beat of the *dehra*⁵ on serious subjects like floods, droughts, and the tyranny of rulers, the escalating prices of essential commodities, new inventions and social concepts.⁶ The character became so popular that it turned into a family profession and its legacy continues to this day. The Ladishah would express his observations of harsh realities coated in humor through song to make the village folk forget their sorrows for a moment or two. B A Bashir writes that the Ladishah, in this manner, simultaneously played the part of a poet, a critic, a reformer, an adviser and a revolutionary⁷.

MC Kash aka Roushan Illahi is a Kashmiri Hip Hop and Rap musician who calls himself the modern day Ladishah. Devoid of the trademark sarcastic tone of Ladishah

⁴ Ladishah is the name of the art form as well as the person who performs it.

⁵ A musical instrument consisting of iron rings put on an iron rod.

⁶ “Synopsis of Laddi Shah.” *National Bhand Theatre*, www.kashmirculturenbt.org/synopsis_laddi_shah.php. Accessed on 18 June 2018.

⁷ Bashir, B A. “The art of Ladishah.” *Greater Kashmir*, May 14 2014, greaterkashmir.com/news/opinion/the-art-of-ladishah/169960.html. Accessed 10 March 2018.

poetry, his music is piercingly honest to the reality of living in today's Kashmir. Inspired by the likes of Tupac Shakur⁸ and Eminem,⁹ Roushan Illahi began a string of amateur low key produced rap songs that spoke of civilian tribulations and the feeling of being trapped and subjugated in one's own land. Today MC Kash is one of the most prominent rap artists from the valley and calls himself a 'street poet'. His music is inspired from his life in the violence ridden Kashmir of the 1990s. His songs speak about army brutality, the missing sons and the half widows, the streets of Kashmir silenced by violence, and talk about courage and survival in the violence ridden state. While MC Kash focuses specifically on Kashmir's issues, he uses the English language to rap. About his choice of language he states that the people of Kashmir already know what's happening. It is the outside world with whom he wishes to establish a dialogue about Kashmir and English being a universal language serves that purpose, and so he uses Hip Hop as a form of struggle and protest.

*I see the dreams in your eyes, my brother
And the fire that will burn down their lies, my brother
I've seen you stand up to their hate, my brother
Seen the epitaph written on your grave, my brother
(From MC Kash's song "Listen, My Brother")¹⁰*

The public sphere in Kashmir has long ceased to be a space for dialogue and discussion between the members of society. When, due to political and economic implications, these members are unable to indulge in dialogue to access the working of

⁸ Tupac Shakur was an American rap musician whose breakthrough music talked about racism and unjust social policies in America.

⁹ Eminem (Marshall Bruce Mathers III) is an influential American rap artist who uses an alter ego persona *Slim Shady* to talk about issues that make him angry.

¹⁰ MC Kash. "Listen, My Brother feat. Mohammad Muneem and Highway 61." *Rebel RepubliK*, 2012. *Youtube*, uploaded by MC Kash, 24 Nov. 2012, youtu.be/bRnU_TfsJIQ. Accessed 10 July 2018.

the system, art steps in to take up this job. MC Kash's music consisting of songs like *I, Protest, Take it in Blood, Listen, My Brother* talk about the issues that mar life in Kashmir. The slogans for Azadi and the issues discussed in his songs prove to be an efficient tool to steer the youth to pick up the pen instead of stones or guns. MC Kash speaks about the collective pain of the community and calls for collective action, a call to arms, if one will, through peaceful means. The presence of the army in Kashmir which has become a part of its system is challenged through his songs. This music creates a rupture in the popular imagination of Kashmir as a militancy ridden state which requires the presence of the army. Instead, MC Kash's music questions this presence while seeking answers for the violence against civilians. Radical movements with different kinds of political agendas have long accepted that the personal is political. It is imperative to note that in the case of Kashmir as well anything personal is deeply political. The Tibetan poet, Tenzin Tsundue says that just as the Tibetans' understanding of their history has divided itself into the period before and after self-immolations when the latter became a choice of protest for Tibetans, their poetry too, is divided into these time periods.¹¹ These poets cannot sing songs of love; they sing of self immolations and yearning for freedom. Similarly, MC Kash says that in spite of the valley being as beautiful as paradise, in spite of the Jhelum river being beautiful, he cannot write songs about that.¹² The landscape tainted with the horrors of everyday life in Kashmir blurs the beauty out of focus. The contours of everyday conflict unravel quickly when the musician engages with Kashmir. MC Kash sings about a woman worrying for her son's return once

¹¹ Bhat, Niyati. "This book gives the poets of Tibet who are fighting for freedom a voice to reach the world." *Scroll.in*, 18 February 2018, scroll.in/article/869068/this-book-gives-the-poets-of-tibet-who-are-fighting-for-freedom-a-voice-to-reach-the-world. Accessed 10 June 2018.

¹² MC Kash's interview in *Soz: A Ballad of Maladies* (dir. Tushar Madhav & Sarvnik Kaur, 2016).

he has left home for school in the morning in the song, *Like a Sufi*.¹³ The lyrics convey a truth deeply political and painfully personal. In Kashmir, there is no guarantee whether one will return home safely on that day or cease to exist. Suvir Kaul calls the lives of these young men as “traumatized lives under siege”. To quote him,

Creative texts produced in times of conflict offer a way of addressing crucial lacunae in our understanding of Kashmir and Kashmiris, for they illuminate not only the political and ideological issues at stake, but also states of being precipitated by violence, loss and resistance (Kaul 2018: 301).

Music, thus, becomes a form of witnessing that challenges power structures. These songs expressively record the structural and systematic violence bringing to life their own truth. Other movements in which this music finds its peers come to mind – the Algerian Rai music was born out of the necessity to break away from the strict conservative culture of Algeria and transformed into the voices of the curbed. I also think of Kendrick Lamar’s *Alright* being chanted by the protesters during the Black Lives Matter movement, the rise of Tibetan Hip Hop songs like *Brothers On Fire* by Dagyap Sonam and the viral Tibetan song *Phur* (“Fly, if you don’t fly, all hope will be lost”).

MC Kash got his breakthrough in 2010 when his song *I Protest* went viral during the 2010 unrest in the valley. Subsequently, his studio was raided and he says, it was done so to check who was paying him to create the songs. The music video was also taken down. The song’s powerful lyrics gained momentum among the youth in the valley and everyone started asking who MC Kash was. *I Protest* carried powerful and politically charged lyrics which acquired a visual layer through the music video. The video begins

¹³ MC Kash and Alif. “Like A Sufi.” *Youtube* music video, uploaded by 101 India, 21 June 2016, [youtube.com/watch?v=VS971lu-bcc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VS971lu-bcc). Accessed 10 June 2018.

with clips from different news channels describing the violence and deaths in Kashmir during protests and clashes followed by images of protest, civilian deaths, funerals and passport sized images of those who died during the 2010 protests. This visual evidence lends an affective charge to his music in which he talks about his protest against state oppression and the systematic violence of the state. The music video spread like wildfire in 2010 during the new Kashmiri Intifada when Kashmiris took their protests and agitation against the state to the streets and to social media platforms. As the SMS services were shut down in the valley, Kashmiris created Facebook groups called *I Protest* where they shared information, news and images of the violence committed against civilians¹⁴. The song not only influenced Kashmiris to use the music video but it also made them aware of the use of the internet to disseminate information of the protests. In her unpublished thesis, Harshita Bathwal talks about the reluctance among the valley's Hip-Hop artists to call their work political. She rebuts their claim when MC Kash and other artists say that they are simply narrating their lived experiences and calls their music 'Reality Rap' and invokes Plutarch's philosophical understanding of politics as "not a public chore to be got over with. It is a way of life" (Bathwal, 2017: 120). Indeed, it is important to note that MC Kash's music broke out of the period recognized as the new Intifada. The song became an anthem of protest for Kashmiris, but it also became a matter of concern for the state administration as demonstrated through the studio raid and the censorship of the music video that accompanied the song. I argue that these songs are not only 'reality rap' and political in their existence, but they are also symbols of resistance through peaceful means. MC Kash opened up a way for young

¹⁴ Hogan, Caelainn. "Revolutionising the Revolution." *University Times*, 21 Feb. 2011, universitytimes.ie/2011/02/revolutionising-the-revolution. Accessed 18 July 2018.

Kashmiris to rap their own truth. Eight years since the release of his first video, many have followed his footsteps to create their own niche. Kash meanwhile has drifted to the idea of Sufism and co-existence with peace.¹⁵ He released the music video for the song *Beneath this Sky*¹⁶ in February 2011 in which he is seen walking through unknown places in Srinagar, showing us the side of this city which is largely ignored and never represented through the visual medium. He recites the following lines while standing in front of the public sign “Save Dal” near Dal Lake: “*These self proclaimed, self righteous people have been using the taxpayers’ money for everything called evil.*” He brings attention to the lack of basic amenities in the city, water pollution and constant curfews by passing through a closed down market place. He sings next to a battered old poster on a pillar featuring Maqbool Bhat, “*if you try to do what’s right, they will murder you and put an end to your plight.*” This particular song is full of disappointment in the system, and shows the influence of Western Hip Hop on Kash’s songwriting. Clemens and Pettman, in their book, *Avoiding the Subject: Media, Culture and Object*, highlight the role of the object in creating mediascapes by citing Walter Benjamin:

Prior to its replication, the auratic object represents more than just a useful or (fleetingly) desirable object, but an opaque doorway to “something else”. Something seductive and beckoning, both intimate and aloof – whether we think of it in the terms of Rilke’s archaic torso or Lacan’s sardine can. Something beyond the boring, everyday world, yet at once immured within it. An alien trophy or souvenir. Or even an ambassador from another time, another space, another – less alienated, more considered and selective – way of being. The aura of an object compels attention: “as if it had the power to look back in return” (Walter Benjamin, quoted in Clemens and Pettman 2004: 14).

¹⁵ “MC Kash aka Roushan Illahi | #HipHopHomeland.” *Youtube*, uploaded by 101 India, 10 February 2016, [youtube.com/watch?v=Tn-xuwuKyC8&t=300s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tn-xuwuKyC8&t=300s). Accessed 10 June 2018.

¹⁶ MC Kash. “Beneath This Sky.” *Youtube* music video, uploaded by MC Kash, 23 July 2011, [youtube.com/watch?v=bPiCzV7-irI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bPiCzV7-irI). Accessed 15 June 2018.

MC Kash's song *I Protest* becomes an auratic object which allows the creation of a new mediascape, rather cyberspace for Kashmiris where the songs become objects of dissent for Kashmiris. It is an object which has the 'power to look back in return' as described in the above quotation. Kash's style adopted from his western hip hop peers demands attention. That is precisely the reason why the song, when pulled off from the internet, led to a host of user generated music videos which also used media images from news reports highlighting the violence Kashmir has suffered through the years. Every time a video got pulled down, another user would upload a similar video. Today, the song *I Protest* and its music video don't exist on MC Kash's YouTube channel but on different users' channels. Similarly, the music video of the song *Take it in Blood*¹⁷ about mothers of disappeared Kashmiris is featured on different users' profiles and has a slideshow of missing persons and their families holding their photographs during protests and sit downs organized by the APDP.¹⁸

Caroline Turner says that "Artists can through their work, reflect the values and aspirations of their own society and humanity" (2005: 4). Furthermore, Greg de Cuir Jr. says, "When Hip Hop is at its best, it is a method for social critique and engagement, one of the most powerful, democratic and versatile artistic methods in the contemporary world" (2017: 53). By using the form of Western Hip Hop and molding it to talk about the reality of his own experience of living in Kashmir, MC Kash opened up a new path for Kashmiri musicians to reflect on their own social reality whether it was using Hip Hop or Kashmiri music. His album *Rebel Republik* was first uploaded on Reverbnation

¹⁷ MC Kash. "Take It In Blood ft. Junaid Altaf." *Youtube* music video, uploaded by Faisal, 27 October 2011, [youtube.com/watch?v=MAOgT49w2Co](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MAOgT49w2Co). Accessed 10 June 2018.

¹⁸ The organization Association of Parents' of Disappeared Persons led by Parveena Ahanger organizes monthly sit down protests for the disappeared and their families.

in 2012 and has since been removed from there.¹⁹ By using a website on which it is easy to upload and disseminate music for free for the masses, Kash broke away from the gatekeepers of culture like Doordarshan and Radio Kashmir. The purpose of this music is not commercial. Kash says, “Tupac (Shakur) became my mentor, musically. But intellectually, Malcolm X pushed me towards becoming an activist as well.”²⁰ While talking about Tupac Shakur’s work, Murray Forman says that Shakur sang about the hip hop ‘characterized by *public actions*...that were simultaneously accompanied by risks of varying severity’ (Formal and Neal, 2004: 1). When MC Kash says that he is inspired by Shakur and Malcolm X, he is identifying not just with the history of hip hop music, but he is also comparing his own existence in Kashmir to that of an African American experience. My concern is that invoking the roots of hip hop music in African American experience alienates him from other Kashmiris looking to similarly identify with his music. In an interview, Khurram Parvez raises the question of the acquired accent which many Kashmiri musicians are picking up after MC Kash. Parvez questions the authenticity of this accent since the Kashmiri accent is quite distinct and is in itself a marker of Kashmiri identity. He suggests that possibly there is insecurity among Kashmiris regarding their own identity.²¹ And indeed, if it is so, it creates a loophole in someone’s attempt to assert a Kashmiri identity through Hip Hop music. However, on the other hand, by using English language and Hip Hop music, Kash is establishing a crucial connection between the Kashmiris’ struggle against violence and oppression and larger movements that similarly count on objects of dissent.

¹⁹ It is unclear whether he removed the song from the website.

²⁰ MC Kash’s interview in *Soz: A Ballad of Maladies* (dir. Tushar Madhav & Sarvnik Kaur, 2016).

²¹ Irfan, Mehraj and Khurram Parvez. Personal interview, JKCCS office, Srinagar. 1 June 2017.

MC Kash's work not only symbolizes life on Kashmiri streets that he aspires to communicate, but it also shows Kashmiri lives under siege. A Kashmiri stuck inside his house during long curfews finds an outlet by making music inside his make shift home studio and uploading it on the internet – disseminating both his inner life and restricted outer life for the larger audience to witness. Among those MC Kash inspires are rap musicians like Muazzam Bhat and Emcee Ame aka Amir Ame (who calls himself rapper from the alleys of downtown) and a young female rap artist Menime aka Mehak Ashraf (seventeen years old school girl) who performs with Emcee Ame and talks about her struggle as a Kashmiri woman in the man's world of Kashmiri rap. Regarding his choice of rap music, Muazzam Bhat says,

If I want to talk about politically charged things, if I want to talk about the government, if I want to talk about oppression, if I want to talk about how people are subjugated, anything that's emotionally charged up, I think Rap is the perfect genre to do justice to that.²²

Indeed, the growing interest of the Kashmiri youth in rap music following MC Kash can be perfectly summed up in Bhat's words. While these musicians are producing amateur songs and music videos, they are strictly focusing on speaking their truth to power.

The modern day Ladishah doesn't travel from village to village on foot but journeys through the internet. The Internet is in itself a complicated space in Kashmir because Kashmiris are easily cut off from the world because of bans on accessing the internet which are implemented from time to time by the government citing security reasons. But it is also the internet that is used by Kashmiris to connect with the outside world. The songs of dissent become objects of dissent when they travel far and wide

²² Muazzam Bhat's interview in *In the Shade of Fallen Chinar* (dir. Fazil NC and Shawn Sebastian, 2016).

through the internet. Today, every artist prefers to upload his/her song with a YouTube video rather than putting them on audio websites like Reverbnation. Visibility has become the end goal for the musician. The purpose is to get the sound as well as the visual out to the world.

The figure of the rap artist, especially Kash has become a poster boy of resistance for Kashmiris, but the same rap artist is also a nuisance for the state authorities who see him as nothing but a disruptive force. In one of his early interviews with Aijaz Hussain (2011) right after *I Protest* made him famous, Kash's voice is determined and thirsty for change. Hussain writes that even the authorities strictly deny going after the rap artist who is "using Internet or music as an outlet for protest" as "their focus remain the street protesters who hurl stones at law enforcement officers" (2011: 114-5). It is much later that Kash grows mellow and turns to 'sufi rap' in collaboration with Mohammad Muneem.

Section II: The Music Video and the New Kashmiri Musician

The music video, which has been a commercial and promotional marketing tool (Arnold, Cookney, Fairclough and Goddard, 2017: 1) to sell cassettes and CDs, took a vivid turn in the YouTube era. The easy to upload and free viewing approach made it easier for filmmakers and musicians to spread their work. Low cost tools like phone cameras, DSLRs and editing software also helped the filmmaking requirements. The music video appears as a kind of chameleon and catalyst of media change (ibid.: 3), borrowing its visual language and its actual significance from a number of different

disciplinary territories (ibid.: 6). In the case of the Kashmiri music video, its transformations also lie in the realm of technological changes from analogue to digital which allowed a cheaper cost of production and room for experimentation with the visual form. The Kashmiri music videos produced by different studios and Doordarshan have been aesthetically similar in many ways. They feature the Kashmiri artist lip-synching to their songs in the beautiful landscape of the valley, by a river stream or surrounded by flowers and fountains at the Mughal Gardens. In the background, a group of Kashmiri women dressed in the traditional *phiran* costume and jewellery perform the Kashmiri folk dance called *Rouf*. These videos reflect the image of the valley as projected in the Bombay cinema from the 1960s. This music video aesthetic changed with the transformation of the aural landscape of Kashmir. The figure of the Kashmiri which remains in the background in Indian cinema as discussed in Chapter 1 emerges in the foreground through the new Kashmiri music video. This begins with MC Kash's music video *I Protest* which paved the way for the music video form to be used by young musicians to narrate their own truth. The new Kashmiri musician also revives traditional songs through his/her music along with transforming the way these songs are performed and recorded in the age of the internet. Through musicians like Muneem and Ali Saffudin, the youth has found a way to articulate their emotions through music in Kashmiri while overriding the virtual eyes and ears of the state authorities.

a) Revival and transformation of Kashmiri folk songs and poems

Ali Saffudin uses the poems of the 16th century poet Habba Khatoon who sang of separation from her lover but those songs, to Saffudin, are deeply political. Through a 16th century poem sung on the guitar in the 21st century, particularly to talk about the

ravages of war, where the separation of a lover is transformed into the separation every Kashmiri feels for the loved one lost or disappeared, Saffuddin is reimagining and remapping a cultural space and is creating a cartographic practice of Kashmiri music. He is reimagining Habba Khatoon by breaking her from the mould of the mystic or mythic figure into today's Kashmiri woman and her yearnings.

David Devadas suggests that "...names and dates represent only the shell of Kashmir's story. The meat is in its social and cultural history..." (2007: 2). Devadas's statement points to how much like the rich oral history of Kashmir, its folk songs and poetry have been instrumental in the social and cultural transformations of the valley. As mentioned earlier, Saffudin is creating a new cartography of Kashmiri music – mapping it from the time of Habba Khatoon – measuring atrocities from another time in Kashmir's history when the Kashmiri King Yusuf Shah Chak (Khatoon's husband) was taken prisoner on Mughal Emperor Akbar's orders.²³ By invoking this chapter of injustice from Kashmir's history, Saffudin is reviving old tales along with old songs. Khatoon's songs which have been entrapped in the image of model love songs from Kashmir, have long forgotten their origins as yearnings of a Kashmiri woman distraught at the betrayal and unfair imprisonment of her husband. Saffudin projects the present of Kashmir onto its past with his raw voice and the DIY audio and music video. He is not a singer with fancy instruments or a work force at his disposal. He is a lone man with a guitar who sings songs heard from his grandmother. He says, "A guy like me, in the 1990s, would have

²³ Bhat, Niyati. "Where is your woman poet, Kashmir? A Search and Six Discoveries." *Scroll.in*, 25 June 2016, scroll.in/article/810310/where-is-your-woman-poet-kashmir-a-search-and-six-discoveries. Accessed 10 June 2018.

picked up a gun. A guy born twenty years later picked up a guitar with the same ideology: to resist.”²⁴

The first song he ever uploaded on his YouTube channel was *Zind Rozne Baapath* (To survive) which was a poem written by Rehman Rahi and first sung by Vijay Malla after he migrated to Jammu in the 1990s. The song, said to have summed up the ‘tragedy of the valley’²⁵, is a translation of Maxim Gorky’s “Death and the Maiden.”²⁶ Rahi, like many others during his time, was quite taken with Marxist philosophy.²⁷ The subsequent turmoil in the valley dissolved the communist movement and Rahi came to be called ‘The Poet of Silence’.²⁸ When Vijay Malla recorded Rahi’s song, it gave new meaning to the lyrics,

*Zind Rozne Baapath Chiy Maraan Luk/ Tche Marakh Na?/ Lolpeth chyekha pyala
kyoho/ Uff ti karakh na? (People die to survive / Won’t you die as well? / Will you
quietly drink from your cup / Without even a sigh?).*

The song became an icon for survival through Malla who had faced the forced migration of the 1990s and for the Kashmiris, it too became an anthem to not sit back and watch but participate in their state and its politics. Vinayak Razdan speculates that in Kashmir, Rahi’s poem has become a ‘primal call to embrace death’. But when Ali Saffudin sings it, it is not as a primal call for death; rather, it is a call for action. Rahi’s lyrics question the Kashmiri who simply sits back without moving a finger on his state’s condition, and this

²⁴ Ali Saffudin’s interview in *In the Shade of Fallen Chinar* (dir. Fazil NC and Shawn Sebastian, 2016).

²⁵ “The legend will live through his songs: Remembering Vijay Malla.” *Greater Kashmir*, 14 May 2012, www.greaterkashmir.com/news/gk-magazine/the-legend-will-live-through-his-songs/120378.html. Accessed 10 June 2018.

²⁶ Razdan, Vinayak. “Rahi: Live, Drink, Die.” *SearchKashmir*, published on 5 May 2017, searchkashmir.org/2017/05/rahi-live-drink-die.html. Accessed 10 June 2018.

²⁷ Mehraj, Irfan. “The Poet of Silence: new film on Rehman Rahi is a ‘creative observation’ of the poet’s work.” *Wande Magazine*, 8 Nov. 2017. wandemag.com/film-poet-silence-rehman-rahi. Accessed 10 June 2018.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

is the sentiment that Saffudin reiterates by doing his part in creating noise for Kashmir when he sings this song. Saffudin does not adhere to a specific form or genre of music, but of his ideology he says,

You open the newspaper and you see that somebody has been shot, somebody has been killed. And you are not seeing that for the first time. It has been going on for a long time. As a musician, if you pick up a guitar on that particular day, if you are someone who believes in expressing through music honestly, you will write about these things.²⁹

He picks his inspiration wherever he can find it whether it is in the folk songs sung by his grandmother, a Rehman Rahi poem or a Peerzada Gulam Ahmad ‘Mahjoor’ poem *Sahibo Sath Cham Mye Chaiyni* (*Sahibo Sath Cham Mye Chaiyni* / Lord, You are my only guide / *Wath mye aslich hawtam* / Show me the right way) which has been recited as a religious hymn in both Kashmiri Muslim and Pandit households for years and has become a mandatory morning prayer in the schools of Kashmir.³⁰ With *Sahibo*, Saffudin introduced the term ‘Koshur Rock’³¹ in his videos. With his songs, clearly born out of the idea ‘to resist’, he experiments with different western forms such as soft rock and blues because of the early influence of Western music on him. Veteran musicians like Waheed Jeelani and many listeners I have had conversations with, still insist that Saifuddin must hone his skills as a singer and performer. According to them, simply talking about Azadi is not enough. If you are a musician, you work on your craft and your voice.

²⁹ Saffudin, Ali. Personal interview. Srinagar. 1 June 2017.

³⁰ Kirmani, Iqbal. “Mahjoor's poem would now be recited as morning prayer in schools of Kashmir.” *DNA*, 13 April 2016, dnaindia.com/locality/srinagar/mahjoors-poem-would-now-be-recited-morning-prayer-schools-kashmir-90466. Accessed 10 June 2018.

³¹ Saffudin, Ali. “Sahibo sath chem - Koushur Rock.” Youtube, uploaded by Ali Saffudin, 27 July 2017, youtu.be/8_c0n7emDHc. Accessed 10 June 2018.

This sharp divide between the sought after veteran musician and the new age musician is scaled by the internet. Saffudin might not get record deals to create a CD of his songs, but through the internet, he took his music to the masses. Both Waheed Jeelani and Ali Saffudin were invited to perform at a Live Concert in Dubai “Koshur Soz Boz,” in 2017. Jeelani, a household name in Kashmir, was surprised that this boy with natural talent but minimum practice was invited to perform at the same event as him and Shazia Bashir (playback singer). He says that he insisted that Saffudin should work on his craft if he has been given such opportunities to play at live events.³² Saffudin has been receiving conflicting opinions for his resistance songs since he began performing at live events. While there is a divided opinion on his craft, it is undeniable that his reach to the outside world is much larger in terms of listeners and face value recognition. In February 2018, he performed at the coveted Pahalgam Winter Festival organized by Jammu and Kashmir Tourism. Social media went into fits of anxiety at the fact that Saffudin had betrayed his own cause and ideology by accepting money to perform at a state sponsored event. Saffudin resorted to statements that by choosing to perform his resistance songs at a state sponsored event, he maintained his integrity and was able to voice his opinions through his songs, and from the videos of the event, it became evident that Saffudin had done what no other Kashmiri musician was able to do. He sang the lyrics, *Meri Awaaz Suno, Mujhe Azad Karo*³³ (Listen to my voice, Give me my freedom) that day in front of state authorities and tourist crowds. In one of our interviews, Khurram Parvez told me about the collaboration between a veteran poet and a seasoned musician. They created a collection of powerful resistance songs which I had the chance to listen to in their studio.

³² Jeelani, Waheed. Personal interview. Srinagar. 6 June 2017.

³³ The song is Saffudin’s ‘Inqalab O Inqalab’.

But owing to the fact that they both have a history of run-ins with the government and a general fear of retaliation and loss of work, they have been skeptical about ever releasing those songs. In a scenario where self-censorship has been very strong, because of Saffudin's zero involvement or dependence on a government job as a singer, and his public persona, there has been an absence of that fear for the new age musicians like him. But the new Kashmiri musician is not alone in his quest to reach the masses. Websites like Gyawun also provide a platform to musicians like Saffudin and help them reach a larger audience.

b) Gyawun:³⁴ A Curated Music Website



Figure 3.1: Logo of the Gyawun Website

Saffudin did not become famous solely because of his resistance songs but because his music was marketed on a much larger YouTube platform than his own. Saffudin³⁵ says,

Gyawun paid me around 1800 INR for the songs when they earned from YouTube through my videos. I didn't ask for the money but they said since they had a monetized account and earned through my videos, they shared the profits with me.³⁶

³⁴ In Kashmiri language, the word Gyawun means: 'to sing' or 'singing'.

³⁵ Saffudin, Ali. Personal interview. Srinagar. 1 June 2017.

³⁶ Saffudin, Ali. Personal interview. Srinagar. 1 June 2017.

“Gyawun: Spotting Elegance Within The Chaos #Kashmir³⁷” started off as a music curation website by Manan Hakak, but today, it has grown into a Kashmiri Buzzfeed³⁸ website of sorts with sections curating music, books, art and travel on Kashmir. The material here is mostly user generated since the website picks up music videos, short films, and artworks of young and upcoming Kashmiri artists from internet platforms like YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. The website also has a section through which you can write to them about your Kashmir story.³⁹ The website focuses on positive stories and profiles young Kashmiris with success stories, inter-faith and inter-religious love stories, and tourists who share their personal stories from Kashmir.

I mention this website here to discuss its role in creating a large digital archive of Kashmiri music. Many young musicians including Saffudin refer to the website for lyrics of folk songs, to download a host of songs from the late 70s onwards which may not be available in the public domain unless one finds a song in the obscurity of YouTube channels or only when one visits a DVD shop in Srinagar. Gyawun is a constantly growing archive and possibly the largest one to exist on Kashmiri music till date. The songs are free to be downloaded since Gyawun does not claim copyright or ownership of its archive.

³⁷ *Gyawun* homepage. www.gyawun.com. Accessed 10 June 2018.

³⁸ Buzzfeed is an American Internet Media Company that focuses on social and entertainment news with a focus on digital media. Source: BuzzFeed.” *Wikipedia*, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BuzzFeed. Accessed 15 June 2018.

³⁹ Regarding your experience as a traveler in Kashmir, or if you have married into a Kashmiri family.

Download New Age Kashmiri songs for free

Mayi Chani – Mehmeet [Link 1](#)
 Sahibo Be Ha Chani Mayi Zayi Kornas [Link 1](#)
 Sahibo Sath Chem – Ali S [Link 1](#) | [Link 2](#)
 Peer Myanio [Link 1](#) | [Link 2](#)
 Mayi Chani – Ali Saffudin [Link 1](#) | [Link 2](#)
 LalleWaan – Yawar Abdal [Link 1](#)
 Jhelumas – Alif [Link 1](#) | [Link 2](#)
 Roz Roz- Parvaz [Link 1](#) | [Link 2](#)
 Wasiye Gulan – Saim Bhat [Link 1](#) | [Link 2](#)
 Gul Gulshan – Parvaz [Link 1](#) | [Link 2](#)
 Dubraaye Gayem – Kabul B [Link 1](#) | [Link 2](#)
 Rah Bakshtam – Ali Saffudin [Link 1](#) | [Link 2](#)
 Ikebana – Highway 61 [Link 1](#) | [Link 2](#)
 Zarum Na Doorer [Link 1](#) | [Link 2](#)
 Yi Chi Sein Kasheer [Link 1](#) | [Link 2](#)

Figure 3.2: New Age Kashmiri Songs on Gyawun

The website not only promotes young musicians like Saffudin, bringing their work into the limelight, but it also provides them monetary compensations when their YouTube videos make profit by setting up a monetised AdSense account.⁴⁰ While a lot of audio visual material from Kashmir speaks of injustices, fear and clampdown on citizen rights, Gyawun’s website serves as the platform for irrational hope – spotting elegance in the chaos of Kashmir.

c) Sufi Rock Music: Reimagining a poetic and visual Kashmir

Mohammad Muneem is a multilingual musician and poet from the valley who started his journey with his band Highway 61 which eventually became a band titled ‘Alif’ (Oneness). He came into prominence with the Kashmiri poem, *Sahibo*⁴¹ performed with Highway 61 at the “Leapfrog to Coke Studio” event in Mumbai in 2013. The video eventually went viral, and I, like many others, discovered Muneem’s music. Mohammad

⁴⁰ “How to Earn Money on YouTube.” *WikiHow*, [wikihow.com/Earn-Money-on-YouTube](http://www.wikihow.com/Earn-Money-on-YouTube). Accessed 15 June 2018.

⁴¹ Discussed in the Ali Saffudin section.

Muneem not only writes original Kashmiri and Urdu poetry for his songs now, but he is also instrumental in creating music videos that present a distinct image of the valley, one that is absent from the mainstream narrative of the valley. In the introduction to the *Sahibo* performance in 2013, Muneem hints at the song being a prayer to ask for strength during tough times. He says, “In times today, when anyone who has an authority throws his weight around, it is a prayer saying, ‘keep me sane’.” Reluctant to fully explore Kashmir through his music in the early years and restricted by a 10 member band, Muneem with his new act called Alif⁴² eventually discovered Roushan Illahi’s (MC Kash) music, and hence, started expressing himself on Kashmir through his collaborations with MC Kash on the album *Rebel RepubliK*. Alif and MC Kash then collaborated on the song *Like a Sufi* which was termed as ‘*Sufi Rap*’ by the portal 101 India which shot their music video. About his collaboration with MC Kash, Muneem said,

I did not have the courage to share my thoughts of music in Kashmir before meeting Roushan; and my friends in Kashmir, I did not know how they would receive it. And then, I heard MC Kash and I was mesmerised.⁴³

Eventually, the music produced by Mohammad Muneem’s band Alif also inspired many young, independent musicians from the valley like Yawar Abdal who have sought to bring the elements of Kashmiri cultural and historical poetry under the umbrella of *Sufi* rock music. Arnold, Cookney, Fairclough & Goddard write that Benjamin’s observations

⁴² Alif is a five member band consisting of Mohammad Muneem (Poetry and Vocals), Hardik Vaghela (Keyboards), Chaitanya Baidhkar (Guitars), Karan Chitra Deshmukh (Drums), and Amit Gadgil (Bass).

⁴³ Muneem, Muhammad. “Muhammad Muneem: A journey from Highway 61 to Alif.” Interview by Hanan Khan, Deeba Ashraf and Tayzeem Rasool. *SaddaHaq*, 22 March 2015, saddahaq.com/muhammad-muneem-a-journey-from-highway-61-to-alif. Accessed 15 June 2018.

about the aesthetical transition from still photography to cinema to the internet has similarly fuelled the aesthetic form of the music video:

In 1936, Walter Benjamin's essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' charted the way that the advent of moving picture changed not only our understanding of but also for uses of visual art as a whole. Cinema, he claimed changed art's status, its aesthetics and its political usefulness; exploding what he deemed 'the prison world' of still photography, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go travelling. In many ways, the advent of the Internet has had the same effect. Music videos have been similarly infused with a new spirit of understanding, both political and aesthetic (Arnold, Cookney, Fairclough & Goddard, 2017: 4).

Kashmiri music too gets infused with a new political and aesthetic spirit in the form of *Sufi* rock music initiated by Muneem's Alif and taken further by Yawar Abdal. The Kashmiri music video attempts to address the political situation of the valley through the aural dimension and at the same time, it brings the previously invisible Kashmiri figure to the fore. In the cinematic representations discussed in Chapter 1, this Kashmiri figure experiences a psychological and physical entrapment. The Kashmiri musician too articulates this entrapment in his music videos.



Figure 3.3: Still from *Roumut Daiwanaie*

Muneem's band Alif collaborated with Ruman Hamdani on one such music video which depicts the stagnant life of a Kashmiri. Their work foregrounds everyday Kashmiri life through videos like *Roumut Daiwanaie*. Muneem says that he chooses to express his passion for his motherland through a humanistic approach in his visual and aural depictions of Kashmir.⁴⁴ In Alif's music videos, all we see are women, children and old men. It is a representation of not just the reality of today's Kashmir but also its inhabitants, most of whom, are mourning the loss of their young. The melancholy of Muneem's music is quite evident in the music videos produced by his band Alif. Muneem sends a powerful message through a subtle music video of *Roumut Daiwanaie* (Lost beloved) in which we see a man wandering in Srinagar mourning the loss of his child. Ruman Hamdani, the videographer and Muneem, the singer-songwriter have together created a space of visual and aural self representation of the mourning Kashmiri Muslim figure which is missing from the mainstream imagination of Kashmir. In the music video, the mourning Kashmiri man with a radio (Figure 3.3) – cut off from the real and virtual world, holding onto his past. The lyrics of the song talk about a Kashmiri pleading for his loved one's return:

I have lost my beloved. O, listen to my story.

You are the cure to your absence.

The mourning Kashmiri figure in the music video roams through the streets of Srinagar but finds no solace in its shrines, or parks. He does not communicate with anyone despite being surrounded by people in different frames of the video. The Kashmiri man in *Roumut Daiwanaie* is haunted by ghosts who lead him to a grave where

⁴⁴ Muneem, Muhammad. "Muhammad Muneem: A journey from Highway 61 to Alif." Interview by Hanan Khan, Deeba Ashraf and Tayzeem Rasool. *SaddaHaq*, 22 March 2015, saddahaq.com/muhammad-muneem-a-journey-from-highway-61-to-alif. Accessed 15 June 2018.

he eventually breaks down. The search of the Kashmiri figure for his missing loved one ends at a graveyard which is reflective of today's Kashmir's search for their disappeared.



Figure 3.4: Still from *Jhelumas*

This search continues in the music video of Alif's song, *Jhelumas* created in remembrance of the 2014 floods in Kashmir, where we see a woman preparing food for a boatman and taking it to the banks of the Jhelum. The figure of this Kashmiri woman is melancholic and her house is deserted. She shares the 'tehr'⁴⁵ with a young girl on the way to the banks while Muneem sings, "*Kadaltal di na kanh, Jhelumas?*" (Will someone help me cross the Jhelum?). In a boat, crossing the river, the woman is visibly scared and the lyrics go, "My boat is fragile / And I fear to cross the river alone". This Kashmiri woman of the 21st century is a far cry from Sharmila Tagore's Kashmiri woman, fully adorned in traditional attire and jewellery, flirting with Shammi Kapoor on a shikara in the middle of Dal Lake in the song *Taarif Karoon Kya Uski (Kashmir ki Kali, dir. Shakti Samanta, 1964)*. The Kashmiri woman in popular culture gets reconfigured through the *Jhelumas* video as the Kashmiri woman in mourning. The garland thrown

⁴⁵ Kashmiri yellow rice.

around Tagore's neck in *Ye Taarif Karoon Kya Uski* is symbolically reflected when the Kashmiri woman in *Jhelumas* picks up a dried vegetable garland and puts it in her bag to be taken to the ferryman. The resemblance of visuals in both songs and their contrasts are visibly uncanny. In her work, Ananya Kabir urges us to scrutinise the Indian representations of the valley which add to its exotic image and 'sustain the Indian desire for the valley' (2009:17). Shammi Kapoor who represented this desiring figure in *Taarif Karoon Kya Uski* gets erased by the absence of a male figure, except an old ferryman in *Jhelumas*. One is forced to think, in this rich landscape, now all grey and sepia toned after the floods, where did all the men go? The use of an old boat in *Jhelumas*, the slow passing of time, the man in a *phiran* with a radio in *Roumut Daiwanaie*, all indicate a Kashmiri who is stuck in time, unable to move on, either due to traumatic circumstances or the loss of loved ones. One striking image to emerge from these videos is that of the Kashmiri woman drowning towards the end of the *Jhelumas* video. The Kashmiri woman in mourning chooses to drown over safe passage (Figure 3.4), quite unlike the romantic figure of the Kashmiri woman in *Mission Kashmir* (2000), *Yahaan* (2005), or *Rockstar* (2011) seen dancing to the tune of romantic songs in shikaras. While Muneem's songs constantly evoke the disappearances and deaths in Kashmir as subtle 'absences', his live performances carry a similar element of a slide show with images of a lone old man in mourning or a Kashmiri woman wailing. Even Muneem's vocals evoke the wailing sounds, as if he were crying and mourning over someone's death in his songs.

Yawar Abdal, another young musician from the valley writes original Kashmiri lyrics for his songs and revives folk songs by creating a fusion between the Kashmiri

lyrics and rock music. The song *Chane Bartal Rayam*⁴⁶ (I lost my nights knocking on your door) originally sung by the iconic Kashmiri singer Gulam Hassan Sofi, evokes the melancholy of a Kashmiri waiting by his lover's door. The angst reflected in this song acquires a new aural dimension through the use of rock music by Abdal in collaboration with rock musician Habeel Bakshi. The music video of Abdal's version titled *Chani Bartal*⁴⁷ opens with Abdal knocking on a dilapidated wooden door. Afterwards, the entire video moves in reverse mode in which Abdal and Bakshi keep retracing their steps separately through narrow streets eventually coming face to face with each other. Abdal, visibly in distress, sings, "*Chani Bartal Rayam Ratchyi, awaaz watchyi no?*(I lost my nights knocking on your door, didn't you hear it?). He eventually finds a guitar and picks it up to express his distress. This song and the music video reflect on a Kashmiri's inability to voice his opinions and eventually discovering the medium of music to express his pain.

Not every musician, though, is quite so proactive in carrying the burden of being a Kashmiri. While the Bengaluru based band 'Parvaaz' which has been dubbed 'the most exciting band right now' by Rolling Stones India, has two Kashmiris on lead vocals, Khalid Ahamed and Mir Kashif Iqbal providing back vocals with a guitar⁴⁸; they constantly shy away from talking about the turmoil in Kashmir in reference to their music. I bring this up because most of their songs are in Kashmiri, set to different styles like progressive rock and alt-rock. However, their audiences are spread all over the

⁴⁶ Sofi, Gulam Hassan. "Chane Bartal Rayam." *Youtube*, uploaded by Kashmiri Music, 24 February 2015, youtu.be/xje-sUBilAM. Accessed 20 July 2018.

⁴⁷ Abdal, Yawar. "Chani Bartal feat Habeel Bakshi." *Youtube* music video, uploaded by Yawar Abdal, 11 May 2018, youtu.be/lx6i9hURwyQ. Accessed 20 July 2018.

⁴⁸ The other two Parvaaz members are Bengaluru natives, Sachin Banandur (drums) and Fidel D'Souza (Bass).

country and the globe. In the first instance, one wonders how a band, without any music videos makes it big in the Indian music scene, but after attending a live performance, you understand why. The people who attend their concerts have memorised the Kashmiri lyrics and sing along with the band. The songs by Parvaaz, some picked up from Kashmiri poetry like those of Saffudin and Abdal, while deeply political,⁴⁹ have gone through re-branding, use Kashmiri language as an exotic element, giving the band's own image, the 'desirous Kashmir' makeover. Much like the recent Jammu and Kashmir Tourism ad which is set to a beautiful Kashmiri song, we see a jolly and helpful Kashmiri man, taking an Indian couple on the tour of the valley. Kashmiri musician, Noor Mohammad whose music became viral through a Kashmiri Pandit's video while he sang in the streets of Srinagar, is positioned similarly in the tourism video. His presence is symptomatic of years of (mis) representations of the valley. Parvaaz's confused stance on Kashmir is reflected in the only music video they shot in Kashmir for a song called *Color White*. In the music video of *Color White*, the band members tread through the heavily snowed Gulmarg, distraught by the cold, and searching for a purpose, they try to discover what they want to say, but eventually shy away from saying anything at all. The *Sufi* rock music which attempts to create a bridge between the traditional Kashmiri music and rock music has been explored diversely by different musicians as discussed above. The new Kashmiri musicians attempt to address their passion towards Kashmir and reflect on its current climate. Similarly, the Kashmiri Pandit musicians in exile reflect on their life in displacement.

⁴⁹ Translation of lyrics of the song, 'Roz Roz':
 "Oh beloved, stop and listen to the torment that pursues.
 The affliction is you, the pain continues
 It's you who heals, it's who you wrecks
 The childhood lost in the burning pyre."

d) Perpetually Homesick: Kashmiri Pandit musicians in Exile

Bhaskar Sarkar writes that the purpose of testimony (witnessing) has four possibilities or aspirations: “possibility of healing, form of immortality, experiences for posterity and a sense of history” (Sarkar and Walker, 2010: 17). As the production of music videos has become easier and free of running to music label offices for a ‘career break’, the young generation of Kashmiri Pandit musicians are also creating Kashmiri songs in fusion, singing folk songs and original Kashmiri poems in an attempt to hold on to their regional and cultural identity as Kashmiris. Musicians like Amit Kilam (Indian Ocean), Aabha Hanjura, Vibha Saraf and Rahul Wanchoo are the musicians whose work will be discussed in this section. The landscape of the Kashmiri refugees living in migrant colonies is explored in music videos like *Aalav* by Rahul Wanchoo. This creates the visibility of this migrant landscape of places like Jagti (outskirts of Jammu) which is often talked about in media reports and debates for political leverage in the Kashmir issue, but is not visually or aurally explored as a humanitarian crisis.

The song by Indian Ocean titled, *Roday* is about the displacement of communities. Sung in a dialect of a village displaced during the dam construction in Gujarat with excerpts in Sindhi and Kashmiri, this song permeates a larger dialogue on the loss of home. For displaced people, songs about the loss of home, does not necessarily ‘bring back home’ or take them back to their land, but what these songs do is leave the displaced with a yearning full of past memories and nostalgia. Hence, the perpetually homesick Kashmiri musician is born. These are the Kashmiri Pandits who either had to move away from Kashmir during the forced migrations of the 1990s or the ones who were born after 1990. Although, homesickness is not restricted to this

community as Ali Saffudin⁵⁰ and Parvaaz⁵¹ have both made songs while living away from Kashmir about their homesickness, the Kashmiri Pandit musician seems to live an incurable nostalgia for the past in his music. Among these musicians is Aabha Hanjura who has established herself as the face of Kashmiri folk music. Her songs, old medleys, Lalvakhs (songs based on the *Sufi* saint Lal Ded's poems) and folk songs from Kashmir, are performed in fusion with contemporary rock sounds. She calls her music 'Sufistication' and performs with a Rabab player, a Santoor player along with keys, drums and guitar in her ensemble. Her music is not something that Kashmiris haven't heard before, but it is the energy which she brings to this music that made Kashmiris sit up and take notice. Folk songs such as *Hukus Bukus* (Who am I? Who are you?), and *Rosheywalla Myane Dilbaro* (My beloved) went viral like Mohammad Muneem's first Kashmiri song, *Sahibo*. Like Hanjura, other musicians like Vibha Saraf have gone back to the valley to perform in front of live audiences, opening up a new connection between Kashmiris. When the first female rock band, Pragaash⁵² was banned after being issued a Fatwa by the Grand Mufti in 2012, we didn't see another female singer in the limelight from Kashmir. While singers like Shazia Bashir are involved in playback singing, the visual presence of a Kashmiri female singer has only been asserted by Aabha Hanjura and Vibha Saraf through their music videos and live concerts. If anything, their presence serves as an encouragement to Kashmiri women and girls like members of the band Pragaash.

⁵⁰ *Wadiyon me mera ghar hai* ("My home is within the valley") by Ali Saffudin. It was written while Saffudin was studying in Delhi and became homesick. Saffudin, Ali. Personal interview. Srinagar. 1 June 2017.

⁵¹ *Itney Arsay ke Baad* by Parvaaz. It was written during homesickness as mentioned in their concerts multiple times.

⁵² NDTV. "New trend in the Valley: Kashmiri girls form rock band." *Youtube*, uploaded by NDTV, 25 August 2012, [youtube.com/watch?v=nQLazbSiAXs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nQLazbSiAXs). Accessed 15 June 2018.

Gaash Films released a song titled *Aalav – The Calling*⁵³ this year featuring a young boy named Rahul Wanchoo. The song was first created and performed by Waheed Jeelani about the migration of Kashmiri Pandits. Jeelani created numerous songs about the loss of Kashmiriyat and the separation of Kashmiri Muslims and Pandits following the turmoil in the valley because he personally felt the loss of his colleagues and friends like Vijay Malla after the migration.⁵⁴ The cover of this song performed by Rahul Wanchoo was used by Gaash films in making a video about the Kashmiri Pandits in exile. The music video follows the rich landscape of Srinagar, following the deserted and empty houses of Kashmiri Pandits in juxtaposition with their present refugee settlement in Jagti, near Jammu. The lyrics talk about their wish to return to their homes to celebrate the auspicious days with their Kashmiri Muslim brethren as they were celebrated in the past. The video follows the absence of the Kashmiri Pandit from the Kashmiri landscape and shows the Kashmiri Pandit living in the refugee settlements in Jagti (Figure 3.6). The video features real Kashmiris settled in Jagti and each frame shows a new person documenting their lives in exile. A particular frame (Figure 3.5) shows an old married couple dressed in their traditional attire, literally wearing their nostalgia on their sleeves with the lyrics, “(Kashmir) Your name is etched in our heart”. This perpetual homesickness has no cure. This music video becomes an exercise in remembrance echoing Sarkar and Walker’s words that it creates a possibility of healing and a sense of history for the Kashmiri Pandits.

⁵³ Wanchoo, Rahul. “Aalav "the calling" | Song of Kashmir.” *Youtube* music video, uploaded by Rahul Wanchoo, youtu.be/uYCENXuqEi0. Accessed 18 June 2018.

⁵⁴ Jeelani, Waheed. Personal interview. Srinagar. 6 June 2017.



Figure 3.5: Still from *Aalav: The Calling*



Figure 3.6: Still from *Aalav: The Calling*

Vibha Saraf similarly explores homesickness in her song, *Harmokh Bartal* which is again, a popular religious hymn among both Pandits and Muslims (with a few interchangeable words in respective versions). The lyrics sing of “waiting for beloved/higher being at the gates of Harmukh.” In the music video of the song, Saraf moves through her daily life in a metropolis while missing home. Homesickness again becomes associated with a song from Kashmir that a Kashmiri Pandit sings in distant lands. The cityscape featured in the video becomes a defining factor in the music videos produced by Kashmiri Pandits. As explored in *Harmokh Bartal*, it serves as a constant

reminder that the Kashmiri Pandit protagonist would like to be in Kashmir rather than her current address. Haley Duschinski talks about the Indian middle class anxieties that gripped the Kashmiri Pandit community amidst the 1990s during the rise of the ultra nationalist ideology of the BJP and the same BJP-PDP alliance again sparked this anxiety through false promises of settlements and ‘a return to homeland’ (Duschinski, 2018). The anxiety which was previously about personal safety in the face of propagandas and rhetoric, this time grew into an eagerness to return home. Hence, the driving motif of homesickness and the calling to return home is present in the music videos discussed above. The recent collapse of the BJP-PDP alliance has again thrown the Pandits into a space of uncertainty which they mainly deal with by organizing annual pilgrims to their respective villages during the *Zyesht Ashtami* festival which is held in June before the Amarnath Yatra. While this serves as a religious trip to their ‘home’ temporarily, many undertake it just so they can visit home, one more time and meet the people (both Pandits and Muslims, friends and neighbors) who organize and participate in the week long festivities.

The *Poozai Posh* (Flowers for Prayers) album cassettes and CDs which contained Kashmiri religious songs became quite famous after the 1990s and are still found in every Pandit household. It became a way for them to hold onto a piece of home when the radio and television no longer played Kashmiri songs for them in the diaspora. The recent arrival of channels like DD Kashir, Gulistan News and ETV Urdu on satellite TV subscriptions brought back everyday news and nostalgic tele films to the Kashmiri households in the diaspora. In many ways, the music created by Kashmiris in exile is also an effort to connect with a part of Kashmir, but in doing so, it is nostalgia, an empty

nostalgia that the listener is treated to. In a bid to preserve their Kashmiri identity through this music, this assertion of Kashmiri identity has turned into a quest to hold sand between one's fingers.

Music video, as discussed in this section, becomes a medium for the Kashmiri musicians to reflect on their lives in Kashmir and elsewhere. The internet provides the platform to these musicians to express themselves but in Kashmir, music also becomes a tool of dissent as explored in the next section.

Section III: Music against State Oppression

Resistance is a choice, it's gonna make some noise!

(Kay Emmar and Kay Two, from the song, *Resistance*)

By listening to noise, we can better understand where the folly of men and their calculations is leading us and what hopes it is still possible to have (Attali 2012: 29).

Music and resistance have had a long standing relationship as reflected in different protests and movements throughout history. In Kashmir, where music emerged as a tool of protest in 2010 through the internet, it appeared in the cultural space as a tool of protest against the state in 2013. A counter protest- concert titled: *Haqeeqat-e-Kashmir* (The truth of Kashmir) was organized in opposition to highly publicized Zubin Mehta concert *Ehsaas-e-Kashmir* (The essence of Kashmir) held in Srinagar on 7 September

2013 by the German Embassy. JKCCS, the organisers of the protest concert also released ten songs titled *A Tribute to Shaheed Afzal*. In the counter-concert, two young rap artists sang about the importance of raising one's voice to resist and by listening to this noise, as suggested by Attali, it is possible to understand the hopes and dreams of a Kashmiri population that is using the form of music to dissent.

At the counter concert, performance artist Inder Salim urged the crowds to scream "Aahh!" He says, "No one can tell you to shout, it must come from within." The crowd chants after him, "Aahh!" He indicates that Kashmiris need to learn to make a sound to be heard before learning to make music that might eventually be heard. Pierre Schaeffer gave the name *reduced listening* to the listening mode that focuses on the traits of the sound itself, independent of its cause and of its meaning (quoted by Chion, 1994: 29). This sound and this music that the Kashmiris are learning to produce is born from years of subjugation and exclusion from not just public debate and politics but physical exclusion from spaces such as the German embassy concert. Harshita Bathwal writes in detail about this concert in her unpublished thesis wherein she points out the German embassy's efforts to call the concert 'apolitical' but nothing can be apolitical in the Kashmiri landscape specially when you exclude Kashmiris from the cultural discourse. The exclusion became a symbol of their exclusion from the decision making of the state and its politics. Zutshi points out in her recent work on Kashmir that the region is in a long process of decolonisation (Zutshi, 2018: 9), and an event like the *Ehsaas-e-Kashmir* concert only goes on to hint at a form of colonial assertion in terms of using the Kashmiri landscape, the venue for the concert – the Shalimar Bagh garden – but refusing entry to Kashmiris, and instead hosting VIPs from J&K, India and outside. In the concert itself,

the Kashmiri was either a mute spectator or a mute performer. But mostly, the ordinary Kashmiri was absent from this concert. Listening to music is listening to all noise, realizing that its appropriation and control is a reflection of power, that it is essentially political (Attali, 2012: 31), and hence, it is important to note that the collaboration in the concert between local Kashmiri musicians led by Abhay Sopori and the Bavarian Orchestra led by Zubin Mehta for the traditional folk song, *Rind Posh Maal* is representative of the same reflection of power that Attali talks about rather than a ‘reflection of peace’ as the organizers would like one to believe.



Figure 3.7: Haqeeqat-e-Kashmir Concert

Compared to this, the Haqeeqat-e-Kashmir concert held poetry readings by prominent poets like Zareef Ahmed Zareef, songs by young rap musicians like Kay Emmar and Kay Two along with fiery speeches on the clampdown of the rights of Kashmiris in their own state. Since this event, many concerts have been held in the valley, specifically a concert by Aabha Hanjura which saw large crowds of Kashmiris cheering and singing along to Kashmiri folk songs. Yawar Abdal’s concerts and Ali

Saffudin's live performances are jam packed with people who want to listen to music. Bathwal points out that the restrictions at the Zubin Mehta concert 'is a sign of deeper regression' (Bathwal, 2017: 60) within the politics of the valley because of which associating with state events [as in Ali Saffudin's case⁵⁵] can lead to a severe backlash from the Kashmiri public, for many Kashmiris, and in many cases, a threat to life and livelihood (Bathwal, 2017: 60).

Through a live telecast of the Zubin Mehta concert on Doordarshan, the state operated camera attempted to create a harmonious image of the valley, a peaceful garden where "Kashmiris" are enjoying elegant classical music. This image projected to the country was an attempt at creating a public image of a culturally thriving Kashmir because when a state is culturally thriving, it is bound to ensure, that the image also projects that the state is economically, socially and politically thriving as well. The protest concert, through the coverage on various news channels sought a way amidst this event to dismember the false image of the people of Kashmir that the reports on the Ehsaas-e-Kashmir concert were circulating. For their part, they also released a playlist titled, *A Tribute to Shaheed Afzal*.

"*Mai reeng reeng ke ye shab nahi guzarunga*" (I will not survive this night merely by crawling), recites Ahmed Nadeem Kasmi on one of the fifteen tracks on the playlist dedicated to Afzal Guru. Guru was executed on February 9, 2013, seven months before the Zubin Mehta concert, on charges of playing a part in the conspiracy to carry out the 2001 Parliamentary attacks. He became the face of the protest concert due to the

⁵⁵ As mentioned in Section II, his involvement in the Pahalgam Winter Festival led to social media backlash which turned ugly as Saffudin faced a similar backlash in public places as well.

questions being raised about the fairness of his trial and doubts over the lack of proper protocol⁵⁶. Human rights lawyer and author, Nandita Haksar notes that Afzal Guru was not seen as a martyr, but a traitor in Kashmir owing to the fact that he had surrendered after spending months at an arms training in Pakistan. It was only after he was denied justice by the Indian judiciary that he became an icon and a martyr for the Kashmiris⁵⁷. Therefore, when Inder Salim asks the crowd to make ‘noise’, he is highlighting the importance of the protest concert and why it was organised in the first place – so that Kashmiris are able to not just sing, but speak up in their own land and not remain mute spectators.

For Kashmiris, subjugation has felt like a long winter with a point of no return, and in this scenario, young men and women who have either seen nothing but violence or those who have never seen their home travel across the internet through these songs which are objects of resistance – a resistance against forgetting all that Kashmir has known and experienced. This music and the music video archive is an articulation of longing, aspirations and a desire for dignity. What this material does is that it conveys one simple truth: the need to be heard and acknowledged without interruption from any state medium. The Kashmiri performer walking through the streets of Srinagar while rapping or singing Habba Khatoon songs by the side of Dal Lake, or a Kashmiri singing on the rooftops of Jagti enables all Kashmiris to testify in creating an archive. This process of writing a song, recording it, making a video of it has also been turned into a

⁵⁶ “India: New Execution Points to Worrying and Regressive Trend.” *Amnesty International*, 9 February 2013, [amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2013/02/india-new-execution-points-worrying-and-regressive-trend/](https://www.amnesty.org/en/press-releases/2013/02/india-new-execution-points-worrying-and-regressive-trend/). Accessed 15 June 2018.

⁵⁷ Haksar, Nandita. “Was Afzal Guru a martyr or a militant? JNU students were debating a question that law can’t.” *Scroll.in*, 6 March 2016, scroll.in/article/804613/was-afzal-guru-a-martyr-or-a-militant-jnu-students-were-debating-a-question-that-law-cant. Accessed 15 June 2018.

process of testifying and creating testimonials. Currently, this music is a space of contestations and assertions of ideas and identities; perhaps, eventually, this music might also serve the purpose of healing the terrible wounds of the trauma of Kashmir.

CONCLUSION

The chapters of this dissertation have addressed the questions of Kashmir in cinema, internet videos and the significance of the use of music to rupture state narratives. The first chapter created a direction in terms of the changing representation of the Kashmiri figure in different mainstream, indie fiction films and documentaries over the years. But it is in the contemporary moment of the video and internet that Kashmir is being documented and articulated by Kashmiris themselves. Through the transition from the visual representation *of* Kashmir in films and documentaries to the self-representation of the Kashmiris' individual and collective experiences, Kashmir has emerged as a digital entity in the last few years. This digital Kashmir is also put under surveillance, controlled and frequently cut off from the rest of the world by internet blackouts. Cinema is slowly beginning to depict this new Kashmir – different from the popular imagination of it as a 'paradise' – one that is boiling and seething with anger, protest and violence. This Kashmir emerges and erupts every summer onto its streets. Occasionally, when filmmakers, videographers or research scholars find themselves stuck in that environment of suspended animation, it forces them to rethink their own ideas of democracy and freedom.

This project has been a quest to understand this Kashmir which comes to a standstill every year and yet finds a new life in virtual space where it challenges and questions the narratives built around it. This Kashmir is not just a geographically contested space, but a space of contestations of ideas and perspectives. Before we dismiss any Kashmiri idea as yet another attempt to foil Indian nationalistic assertions, we need to listen to this digital Kashmir with all the empathy that we can summon. This has not

been an easy project to pursue because each new video reveals a new assault on the Kashmiri figure, the recent one being where a man is crushed under a slowly moving army truck. While we contest narratives and ideas, lives are lost in the valley every day. The video format reveals a Kashmiri perspective on their grief – their lack of faith in the mainstream media which made them pick up the camera in their own hands. And what do we see when the Kashmiri does that? He films grief. When he takes the microphone to sing, he sings about this grief – this loss of life. The geographically displaced Kashmiri Pandit artist, filmmaker or musician in exile, having escaped this violence is not free of torment either. This Kashmiri similarly sings of the grief of the generations of Kashmiris whose lives have been suspended by the turmoil – both in the valley and in exile. While this Kashmiri yearns to go back home, their brothers and sisters in the valley sing of a devastated home. What can a Kashmiri return to? This is a Kashmir that Kashmiris themselves fail to recognise. It has been drastically changed by years of violence and trauma. While there is no respite from the violence and trauma, turning their cameras, and songs towards the pain of looking at their homeland in flames has created a digital Kashmir where if you want to, you can find Kashmiris locating long lost friends on Facebook as well as talking to them on Whatsapp video. To that end, poet and scholar, Huzaifa Pandit writes in his poem *Friends in Grief*, “Grief comes calling, in recorded messages of nostalgia in curfewed city” (2018: 24).

This project has had a beginning in locating Kashmir in the cinemas of India to locating this Kashmir in the digital sphere where it addresses the world through videos and music videos; however, this dissertation does not have a definite conclusion. All I have done is that I have marked this new territory of Kashmir which is rapidly expanding

and growing every minute in the digital sphere. Its growth is so exponential that it will have transformed from the moment I am writing this to the moment you are reading it. The quest of a digital Kashmir is in its nascent stages right now and though it grows, its growth is also a matter of concern. The moment when a camera button presses record in Kashmir, it is to record its violence, hence any growth of a digital Kashmir means that there is more violence to record. This dissertation born out of a curiosity to understand today's Kashmir, is still a work in progress. In recent years, research work on Kashmir has not escaped the ramifications of its political and social conditions¹. My field work in Kashmir required me to engage with the Kashmiris whose work was initially part of this dissertation. However, continued hartals and upended cellular services made it difficult to connect with several people whose work I had hoped to include here.

Going further, the next few years could possibly chart out much clearer ways in which Kashmir's engagement with the internet can be explored and understood. The risk in making assumptions about anything related to Kashmir is that the very air in the valley changes with each passing year. Hence, the region which remains geographically volatile carries that temperamental aspect into the digital sphere as well. The dissertation has attempted to address the aspirations of the Kashmiri people as seen through their involvement with cinema, the internet and music. They have recorded moments of pain and trauma in their cameras and it is up to those of us at the receiving end of these films, videos and songs to hear it straight from the horse's mouth.

¹ Harshita Bathwal (2017) mentions in her thesis, the problem in conducting field work due to the turbulent situation in the valley in 2016, and Chitralekha Zutshi also mentions the problem in acquiring essays by two writers based in Kashmir due to similar conditions in the recently edited anthology *Kashmir: History, Politics, Representation* (2018).

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