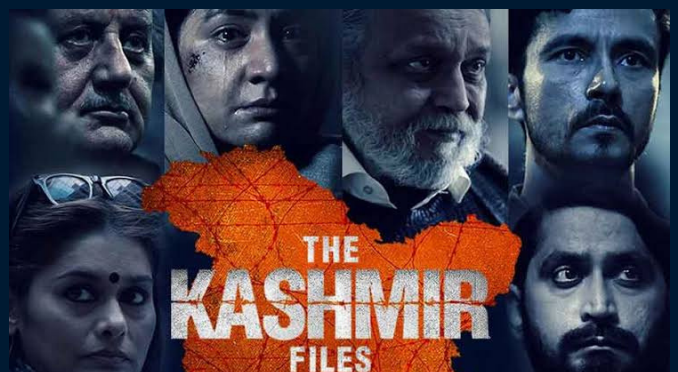
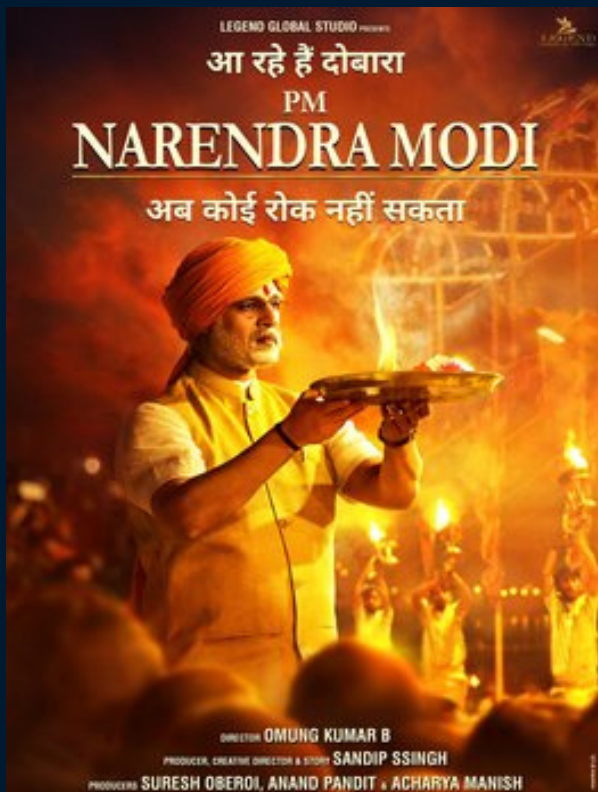


KASHMIR AND BOLLYWOOD

Hindu Nationalism, Islamophobia And
Obfuscation of the Military Occupation



2024

LFK Brief

Legal Forum for Kashmir - LFK

www.lfkashmir.com

ABOUT

The Legal Forum for Kashmir - LFK is an international legal Advocacy group working on the conflict in Kashmir. Its members are indigenous people of the occupied territory in Jammu and Kashmir. The aim of the organisation is to defend the political, social and human rights of Kashmiris and to promote the UN sanctioned Right of Self-Determination.

In today's world, the notion of conflict resolution necessitates that those who continue to be denied their rights or remain excluded be given an opportunity to present their case. Unfortunately, it remains the case that Kashmiris themselves continue to be marginalised, even invisibilised, in most discussions or narratives on the conflict. LFK has, therefore, been established to fill the gap, providing an international forum through which its members can become effective participants and contributors in the international community.

LFK works to address the consequences of marginalisation, working with its members. As an independent organisation, LFK advocates, nationally and internationally, the Right of Self- Determination and respect for human rights in Occupied Kashmir through legal research, documentation and capacity-building to address, under international law, the violations of individual and collective rights of Kashmiris.



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**Kashmir And Bollywood:
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**Kashmir And Bollywood: Hindu Nationalism,
Islamophobia And Obfuscation of the Military Occupation**

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Abstract

The occupied region of Kashmir and India's Mumbai-based Hindi cinema, popularly known as Bollywood, share a long history of relationship. The beginning of this relationship can be traced, at least, to the late 1940s when India took control of the Muslim-majority region. Historically Hindi cinema has represented Kashmir through a particular imaginative lens, consistent with the official narrative of the Indian state. In the Indian official imagination, Kashmir remains an integral part of the India for various contradictory reasons, reflecting the very contradictions of the Indian nationalism itself. For the country's liberals Kashmir as a part of the Indian nation testifies to the post-colonial nation's secularist ethos and pluralism; yet the Hindu identity remains at the center of this imagination. This narrative was deployed by the country's founding fathers, most prominently by M.K. Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. For the Hindu nationalist or Hindutva ideology, India primarily is a Hindu nation, and Kashmir is the crown to this Hindu nation for the latter's Hindu Brahmanic past. Current Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) represents the core of this imagination. Hindi cinema has been a vehicle to carry these imaginaries through multiple forms and themes. The forms of the films have constantly changed over the years depending on the social and political context and currents of the country, yet the central narrative has remained unaltered. Even today, in the Hindutva dominated nation, Bollywood continues to work as a conduit to transmit the fantasies of Hindu nationalism. While Kashmir is an internationally recognized disputed territory between India and Pakistan, Hindi cinema's engagement with the region, however, has been simplistic, privileging "culture" over "history". It is through this obfuscation of the historical context that the armed insurgency of Kashmir, which began in 1989, is seen as a disruption. This study delineates different stages of Hindi cinema's filmography on Kashmir, and outlines the thematic and contextual relevance of the films to the disputed territory of Kashmir.

Keywords: Bollywood, Kashmir, Muslims, Hindu Nationalism

Bollywood And Muslims: An Overview

Hindu texts and myths provide vital ingredients for the enunciation of individual, family or national values and meanings in Hindi films. The national imaginaries are often articulated through the metaphors of family and individuals, while as the Hindu symbolism allows enough space for the India's political unconscious to be expressed. The Hindi narrative cinema in India actually started off in the early twentieth century—right from Palke's *Raja Harishchandra* in 1913—with mythological and devotional movies.



The privileging of Hinduism in Hindi cinema, therefore, led to an erasure of Muslims in Hindi cinema narratives. Most of the post-independence Hindi cinema undertook the task of promoting nationalism in India. Scholars have demonstrated how the Hindi narrative films captured the socio-political reality in different times periods. In post-colonial India where state continues to be a site of ideological struggle, Hindi cinema as a cultural form too, therefore, proved to be an important space where different ideologies—Hindutva, secularist or leftist—articulated themselves. The signs and symbols of the film content—valorization of mother characters, police officers upholding law and order of the country, soldiers protecting the “mother India” from disintegration—was often borrowed from Hindu mythology.

As soon as the sub-continent was partitioned “Hindutva films” began to emerge, portraying

the partition-related violence as “communalized”. In Hindutva films, thus, Muslims were portrayed as outsider, the Other, threatening the integrity of the nation. The secularist films—where Hindus and Muslims were presented in an amicable relationship, representing communal unity of India—were led by the so-called progressives to validate the pluralistic character of India. As a result of centering Hinduism in Hindi cinema in its articulation of nation, the film industry developed certain tropes to characterize Muslims over the period of time.

Another important fact with respect to Hindi cinema's relationship with Muslims is the issue of underrepresentation despite the fact that large number of Muslims are working in variety of area in the film industry, such as directors, producers, actors, lyricists and so on. Muslims are only relegated to the margins of film narratives and performing subordinate roles to Hindus, often subservient to the Hindu protagonists. Hindu culture in this film form became the normative feature. Hindi cinema has failed to capture the “social” realities of Muslims by reinforcing the majoritarian myths, anxieties and fears, ignoring the data provided by Sachar Committee report which highlights a gruesome socio-economic condition of Muslims in India.

The beginning of the dominant appearance of Hindutva nationalism in Hindi films could be traced to early 1990s, a conjectural moment in independent India's history. It was when the armed insurgency began in the disputed region of Kashmir following Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan after a decade of war. India liberalized its economy, and the communal violence engulfed the country after demolition of the Babari Masjid in 1992 by Hindu nationalist mobs led by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP).

Consequently, the socio-political atmosphere of the country also began to mirror on screen. Muslim began to appear as enemy collaborator, terrorist, and hence a threat to the

integrity of the nation. Thus, Muslim was reduced to a position where he/she had to prove his/her loyal allegiance to the nation.

The September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States gave a fresh impetus to the negative portrayal of Muslims in Bollywood. In line with the global representation of the Muslims, Bollywood created its own iconography of Muslims and Islam in which global fears and anxieties were merged with the local. Although no involvement of any Indian Muslim was recorded, Bollywood put Muslims on trial in order to justify Indian state's counter insurgency program in Kashmir as well as its rhetoric against Pakistan. *Amir* (2008) and *New York* (2009) are examples of this filmography. In some recent films like *Animal* (2023), *Panipat* (2019), *Padmavat* (2018) and *Jodhaa Akbar* (2008), 'Muslim' is employed as a general category that presents threat to the Hindu civilization. They reinforce a notion of synonymy between India and Hinduism, and Muslims a threat to this Hindu-ness. Presenting India essentially as a Hindu nation reinforces the "Otherness" of minority Muslims.



Kashmir And Bollywood

Kashmir has been a special place for Hindi film texts because of the myriad accounts of historical myths that echo sacredness of the place together with its natural beauty. Historically the texts of Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and colonial era have pronounced Kashmir's geographical beauty as 'heaven on earth', a place that inspired spirituality, ascetism and sensualism alike. Therefore, the ideological cooptation of Kashmir by post-colonial Indian national imaginary would be based on those texts. After the independence of India in 1947, which also marks a historical turning point for Kashmir as India took control of the region, Hindi cinema too appropriated the materiality of these mythological texts. For a cinema like Bollywood that reflects statist responsibility of endorsing multiple versions of nationalism—Leftist, Secularist, Hindutva—Kashmir became an important channel through which Indian nation was articulated.

In the years following independence of India some important filmmakers of Hindi cinema including Raj Kapoor, whose films are thought to have brought the iconic image of Kashmir to Indian public, began to focus on the natural beauty of Kashmir. The image of Kashmir as articulated by the India's first prime minister Nehru as inheritor of Indo-Aryan traditions became essential in Hindi cinema for the articulation and romanticism of the post-colonial India, sacred Hindu religious thought, values and moral consciousness, away from the materialism of urban spaces. Many writers, such as Meenu Gaur, Jahanara Kabir and Lutgendorf, have showcased how the ancient Hindu mythological ascetic and erotic fantasies about the remote Himalayan mountains were translated in the narratives of Hindi cinema.

A number of narratives of Hindi cinema either partially or fully set in Kashmir before 1990 that captured the scenic beauty and fantasies about Kashmir are *Barsaat* (1949), *Ram Teri*

Ganga Maili (1985) and *Henna* (1991), *Kashmir ki Kali* (1964), *Junglee* (1961), *Love Story* (1981), *Rocky* (1981), *Betaab* (1983), *Janwar* (1965), *Kabhi Kabhie* (1976), *Arzoo* (1965), *Ek Phool Do Mali* (1969), *Jab Jab Phool Khile* (1965), *Ek Musafir Ek Haseena* (1962).



The period which saw the peak of production of such movies—also known as holiday movies mainly produced for consumerism—was from 1960s till late 1980s when the people of Kashmir, fed up of decades-long political situation, began to express their resentment more profoundly. These films captured variety of themes that the Indian nationalists, and upper- and middle-class people were concerned with. Some scholars argue that Hindi cinema represented the remote mountain peaks of Kashmir as an abode for those who practiced a deviant social code. The

beautiful mountain slopes became realm of permissibility for romance and erotic dalliance, away from the patriarchal gaze of Indian society. The films of 1960s, particularly, articulated an Indian subjectivity that was youthful, modernizing, and driven by urban middle-class gaze. The films reflected the moment when the world was waking up from wars, and mass production and consumption was becoming a new reality throughout the world. Through these film narratives, scholars argue, the film makers articulated Indian notions of modernity and spirituality by using Kashmir valley as a backdrop.

For the newly formed nation-state, India, where the post-partition communal violence was rife, the Muslim-majority beautiful valley of Kashmir was represented both an emblem of pluralism as well as threat to the integrity of the nation and the idea of so-called co-existence. These post-independence films captured the themes that reflected Indian secularist and Hindu nationalist anxieties. Therefore, in the decades following independence of India it was the beautiful terrains and landscapes of Kashmir that figured in Hindi cinema, and very rarely did dwellers of Kashmir appear.

Islam And Kashmir in Bollywood

Hindu mythology has historically informed Bollywood filmography on Kashmir. The Hindi films immediately following the establishment of the Indian state in 1947 have captured the theme of Kashmir as a spiritual abode by plotting romantic drama among the mountainous terrains of the valley. Hindi cinema's treatment of Kashmir has been in line with the enunciations of the first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. In his *Discovery of India*, he described the Kashmir valley an inheritor of Indo-Aryan traditions, the place of sacred Hindu values and moral consciousness, away from the materialism of urban spaces of mainland India (Gaur, 2010, p. 172, 178).

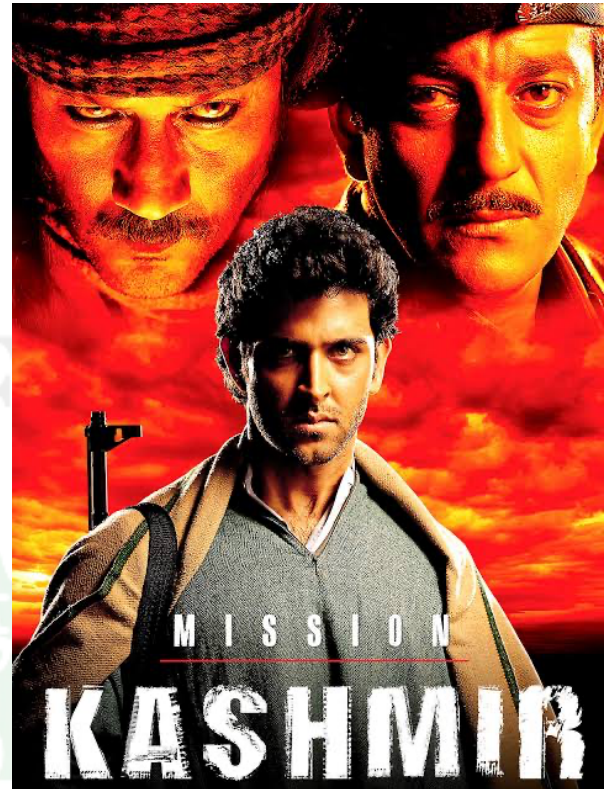
Also, scholars argue, the remote mountain peaks of Kashmir in Hindi cinema were treated as a realm of permissibility for romance and erotic dalliance, away from the conservative gaze of Indian society (Lutgendorf, 2005, p. 8).

The construction of Kashmir as essentially a Hindu place led to a symbolic annihilation of the Muslim identity of Kashmiris (more than 96% of Kashmiris are Muslims) in Hindi cinema until 1990 even as Kashmir was going through a political trauma. Besides, the singular focus on the natural geographical beauty of Kashmir through the privileged centrist gaze of Hindu middle-class turned the beauty trope into a metonym for Kashmir the result of which was the erasure of Kashmiri social and cultural life. Such as misplaced focus on enchanting scenic beauty and Hindu sacredness of Kashmir obscured the political realities of Kashmir.



With the beginning of insurgency in Kashmir in 1990, challenging decades of Indian state control in the region, Muslim identity of the people of the region finally began to figure in Bollywood films such as *Roja* (1992) and *Mission Kashmir* (2000). A widely cited scholar on Kashmir and Hindi cinema, Jahanara Kabir apprehends the meaning of this break in her 2010 essay, *The Kashmiri as Muslim in Bollywood's 'New Kashmir films'*: “*Roja* revived and recontextualized this narrative use of Kashmir within a new political

framework, without, however, ever forsaking the romance plot. With *Mission Kashmir* and . . . *Yahaan* (2005), the trend continued into the next decade.



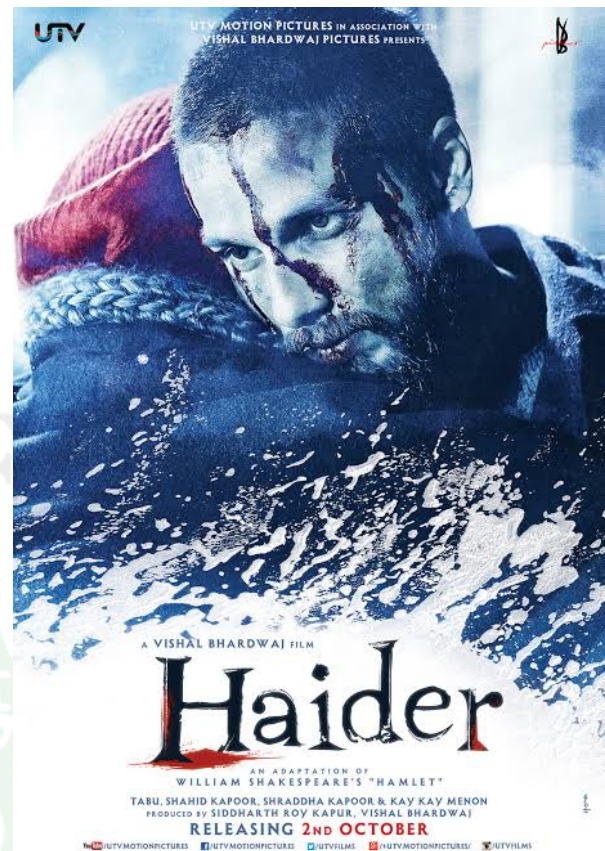
This recontextualization includes breaking cinema’s earlier rules of self-censorship regarding the Muslimness of its Kashmiri protagonists. While such self-censorship has often been discussed in relation to the increasing communalization of the public sphere, its relationship to that other index of national belonging, ethnolinguistic identity, has not often been remarked upon”.

The recurrent appearance of Islamic symbols and Muslims in relation to Kashmir in Hindi cinema has been triggered and sustained by many national, regional and global events: the beginning of insurgency in Kashmir supported by Pakistan, the country that is one of the contenders of the Kashmir issue; rise of Hindu nationalism in India; demolition of Babari Masjid in 1992; and 9/11 events in the United States, which made the Muslim identity a contentious issue throughout the world. However, there has been a binary construction

of Muslims/Islam in the so-called “terrorism films” of Hindi cinema. For example, those who follow global extremist Islamic ideologies are presented as unacceptable; and those whose faith is rooted in the syncretic tradition of local culture of Kashmir is acceptable. The strategies of rejection, incorporation and negotiation of different variants of Islam have been a hallmark of Hindi films’ engagement with Muslim identity, particularly the identity of Kashmiri Muslims. Most of the films on Kashmir following the insurgency of 1990s are informed by the binary stereotypes of “fundamentalist” versus “secularist” Muslim. Such as representation of Kashmir is a misappropriation or selective appropriation of the Kashmir’s history and Sufi tradition of Islam to which Kashmir’s syncretism alludes. The endorsement of syncretic coexistence of Vedic Hinduism and Sufi Islam—at a time when the relationship between India and Kashmir is running through turbulences—primarily reflects the secularist Indian imaginary about Kashmir. Such a representation of the relationship is consistent with the pluralist conception of Indian nation. Thus, Sufism becomes instrumental that ensures ideological cooptation of the Muslim majority region of Kashmir.

The Eurocentric rationalist view of secularism has characterized religion as an attribute of primitive, barbarian, anti-modern societies, despite a vast amount of evidence from across the globe showing a very complex relationship between religion and modernity, and not just a simplistic progression from primitive religious beliefs to a “rational”, scientific phase. The approach to Islam or Muslims in Indian cinema continues to date as we can see that in films like *Laila Majnu*, *Haider* and many others. Patriarchal Muslim families in *Laila Majnu* that reject the romantic relationship of their children, the Islamic tradition of *idda*, a specified period of time that must elapse before a Muslim widow or divorcee may legitimately remarry, supposedly becomes oppressive for women, and so on. It shows the

embeddedness of religion in the society and its role in social oppression.



Haider, a very popular film of the past decade based on Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and a Kashmiri writer, Basharat Peer’s memoir called *Curfewed Night*, makes direct allusions to the practices of Islam which are reminiscent of “terrorism films” such as *Roja* and *Mission Kashmir* that collapsed the categories and Islam, Muslim and “terrorist”, as well as showing Kashmiris as weak and vulnerable, in need of an intervention (Indian State) to prevent their being used or abused by outsiders, international Islamists (reference to Pakistan). *Haider* portrays religion within the social matrix of Kashmir as an instrument through which political and personal betrayals are carried out and legitimized. By presenting a binary image of religion—in line with modernist aesthetic—as anti-progress, anti-rationality and anti-peace, and an instrument of betrayal, Hindi films obliterate the cultural significance of religion in determining social morality and ethics.

As mentioned earlier, Sufism or mystic tradition of Islam has been used as an antidote to political Islam in Hindi cinema for various reasons. While it provides a cover for the ongoing political struggle of Kashmiris, its so-called spiritual dimension serves to focus inward on a human soul. The so-called “syncretic” dimension, which has been endorsed in Bollywood over the years, helps the film narratives to connect with Hinduism and obfuscate the Islamic or Muslim character of Kashmir’s right to self-determination. The recent film *Laila Majnu* is an example of such narrative politics of Bollywood. *Laila Majnu*’s romantic story and repression has to be read within the currently unfolding political atmosphere of Kashmir and young people’s role in it; it has also to be interpreted in the light of Indian dominant official discourse which has salience all over Indian public sphere.



Past Decade of Kashmir And Bollywood: Changing Representation

Over the past decade Kashmiri society has witnessed an immense transformation socially and politically. Growing literacy among youth and widespread digital consumption have also led to a rise in political consciousness. Kashmir has witnessed widespread anti-India uprising throughout this period and the Kashmiri educated youth have resorted to armed insurgency culminated in the likes of Burhan Wani and Manan Wani picking up guns—a departure from the 1990s uprising when the general education rate among Kashmiri Muslims and political consciousness was low. Simultaneously, India’s repressive policies too have grown in Kashmir in response to the local’s political assertion. Though India has historically maintained a violent position over Kashmir, tried to appropriate Kashmir by appeasing different groups of Kashmiri society, the violent absorption of Kashmiri has increased manifold due to BJP gaining power in India’s Centre. The party won elections solely on the basis of anti-Muslim and anti-Kashmir propaganda. Such Islamophobic and Kashmirophobic discourses have been deployed in Bollywood too as this propaganda has also expanded the markets for these films in India. These films have employed different modes and forms to construct an image of Kashmir which is not historically-based, and create stereotypes akin to the Orientalist imagery of Kashmir. Some of the most popular films of the past decade on Kashmir have been *Kashmir Files* (2022), *Shikara* (2022), *Uri* (2019), *Laila Majnu* (2018) and *Haider* (2014); and one the recent film known as *Article 370* (2024) aims to exalt the Narendra Modi government’s abrogation of Article 370, symbolically read as the autonomy of Kashmir, and incorporation of the valley fully by the state. The films capture different themes about Kashmir that have also been salient in public discourse in India. They include “youth problem of Kashmir”, religious

identity of Kashmiris and Kashmir's territorial beauty.



The associated ideology and politics of these themes has been charted out below:

1. The Trope of Geographic Beauty And Erasure of Kashmiris

Hindi cinema has extensively focused on Kashmir's natural beauty, especially in 1950s and 60s. For a cinema that is predominantly focused on middle-class imaginaries, Kashmir's geographical beauty has been infused various overlapping meanings in Hindi cinema. Kabir writes about *Mission Kashmir*: "In Sufi's song in particular, then, we may locate Mission Kashmir's debt to and reappraisal of Kashmir's privileged place within Bollywood. The lovers on the shikara in Mission Kashmir compress a long history of Bollywood's vision of the Valley as the 'eroticized landscape of the mind in the social imaginary of Indians,' whereby 'as a place for honeymooners and lovers [it] was translated by the Bombay film into a symbol of purity and unspoiled nature'. However, it could be conceded, by focusing on enchanting beauty of Kashmir's landscapes, Hindi cinema's engagement with Kashmir has only articulated the India's national subjectivity that helped to systematically conceal the political realities of Kashmir that had been unfolding in 1950s and 60s. Bollywood apathy with the Kashmir's social life has a historical precedence, in Mughal and colonial era representations, though.

The visual obsession with Kashmir's natural beauty can be traced to the Orientalist photographers who began to travel to Kashmir in mid-nineteenth century after British conquered Kashmir from Sikh rulers in 1846. The global interest in Kashmir was also generated by the Great Game and Kashmir's proximity to Afghanistan and Central Asia where British and Russia vied for influence. Most popular of these photographers were Samuel Bourne and John Burke. The photography captured the beautiful landscapes of Kashmir. Mughals, after establishing their rule in Kashmir in 1586, treated the mountainous valley as their pleasure ground to escape the scorching heat of plains — "a heaven on earth". While the beauty of Kashmir fascinated them, the inhabitants struck them as uncultured creature and uncivilized.

Such a fascination to the natural beauty of Kashmir in Hindi cinema continues till date and the recent examples are *Uri* (2019) and *Laila Majnu* (2018). While scenic beauty of mountains and landscapes of Kashmir mostly forms the background imagery of *Uri* film, for *Laila Majnu* Kashmir's landscapes and mountains are an essential part of the vary narrative of the film. The film deploys the dualistic discourse, that is, people versus the land they inhabit: the geographical beauty of Kashmir blemished by its "primitive" inhabitants.



The protagonist Qais Bhat moves to his family house in Pahalgam to escape the repression of society of the plains where his heart is broken. While the films following Indian independence focused on Kashmir's pastoral beauty and romanticism, they produced

reductive the reductive caricatures of the Kashmiri people, new films reveal the mystery about the valley's dwellers. Thus, the filmic discourse of *Laila Majnu* provides us with an explanation of Kashmir's residents who have been constantly mystified and vilified in the Hindi cinema much like other public discourses aimed to legitimise an external intervention.

2. Youth of Kashmir in New Hindi Films

The most prominent films of the past decade departing from the conventional representation of Kashmir in Bollywood are *Haider* and *Laila Majnu*, as mentioned earlier. These are the first films on Kashmir that attempt to thoroughly portray the "inside" of Kashmir, its social and political complexities, and its impact on Kashmiri youth. While *Laila Majnu* completely erases the political conflict of Kashmir, the direct and indirect impact of the conflict on the psyche and physiology of Kashmiri youth, it magnifies a picture of a unit of society, family, along with the conflict that torments the youth. The film focuses on a tragic love story of two Kashmiri youth whose families, due their rivalry, refuse to accept their relationship. Both the lovers eventually die of the trauma caused by social rejection. *Haider* represents the conflict of Kashmir through the perspective of educated Kashmiri youth. The social allegory is articulated through the chaos of the protagonist's family. The tension of the narrative relies on Shakespearian betrayal of Haider's father by his uncle, who casts spell on Haider's mother. By putting the family at the center of the narrative, the film integrates political and personal in the same plot.

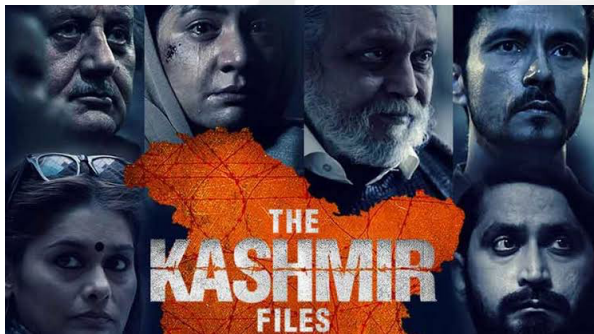
3. Modi'fication of Bollywood And Kashmir

Though Islamophobia has been there throughout the history of India, it has become more ostentatious since the Hindu nationalist

party BJP came to power in the country in 2014. Every public institution, including a wide range of national and local media and educational institutions, has taken part in peddling Islamophobia narratives. However, the racism and discrimination against Muslims in India has rocketed since the BJP won its second term in general elections in 2019. Hindu nationalism, represented by the biggest public face of the country, Narendra Modi, has been emboldened by electoral victories and taken control of every aspect of public life, most importantly digital media and the country's largest film industry Bollywood. It could be called as 'Modi'fication' of the country's public sphere. Most of the films produced by Bollywood over these years have focused their narratives on the grandeur of Hinduism or Hindutva, while Muslims have been either vilified as terrorists or outside intruders, or completely erased. The representation of Kashmiris and Kashmir in Bollywood too has drastically changed along with the political realities of Kashmir. In August 2019, the BJP led government abrogated the Article 370 of the Indian constitution that gave autonomy to Kashmir, though only symbolically, raising the specter of demographic change in Kashmir and altering the nature of the dispute unilaterally. The abrogation of the article won a massive popularity for BJP in Indian public and further sanitized the anti-Muslim and anti-Kashmir antipathy in India. Bollywood has unleashed Islamophobic films that misrepresent the nature of the dispute of Kashmir, many important historical events and trivialize the resistance of Kashmiri people against Indian occupation. The films, including *The Kashmir Files* (2022), *Article 370* (2024) and *Shikara* (2020), have exclusively focused on the minority of Kashmir, the Hindus. They extol the Kashmiri Pandiths' victim heroism, particularly since the armed insurgency began in Kashmir. Their departure from Kashmir is being portrayed as an exodus facilitated by Kashmiri Muslims, not taking into account the role of Indian state in their flight, and the broader historical context of Kashmir in which

the minority Hindus dominated every sphere of life in Kashmir – as has been investigated by Mridhu Rai in her scholarly work, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*.

The Kashmir Files has been problematic not only for distorting the history of Kashmir conflict but also selectively picking events related to the displacement of Kashmiri Hindu Pandiths to fan hatred against Kashmiris Muslims. *The Kashmir Files* is directed by Vivek Agnihotri who is known for his links with the Hindu nationalist party BJP. Though he has started his filmmaking career 2005, he has failed to garner any critical or commercial appreciation until recently.



It was the release of *The Kashmir Files* in 2022 and campaigns organized by the BJP-controlled media, especially social media platforms, that brought the director to limelight, establishing an image of the film larger than its artistic and historical value. This media campaigning aided it to attract millions of viewers to cinema halls in India and boot anti-Muslim sentiment, which eventually raises the popularity of the Hindu nationalism in the country. The film portrays the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits, a powerful Hindu Brahmin community of Kashmir, in the early 1990s. Until then the community had controlled Kashmir's polity, bureaucracy and education system. Under the protection of the Hindu Maharajas of Kashmir and the Indian state since 1947, the community has been instrumental in marginalizing Kashmiri Muslims. When the armed uprising of the marginalized Muslims began in 1989 against the Indian state's control in Kashmir, Pandits found themselves

in an odd situation. Fearing retaliation, they began to flee and the massive flight was facilitated by the Indian state that wanted a clean ground for counter-insurgency operations. It is this situation that the BJP wants to capitalize on and presents it as an exodus in public and political discourses. *The Kashmir Files* film dramatizes these events through the prism of Hindutva. A renowned international filmmaker, Nadav Lapid, criticized the inclusion of *The Kashmir Files* at the International Film Festival India (IFFI), where he was the jury chief. He described the film's superficial and unartistic treatment of a historical event as "vulgar" and "propaganda". In India, however, the film exposed the Hindutva bias of the Bollywood film industry itself as no notable filmmaker or actor openly criticized the film for its distortion of history and its anti-Muslim, anti-Kashmir propaganda. At the 69th National Film Awards, the film won two awards, Best Feature Film on National Integration, and Best Supporting Actress (Joshi). At the 68th Filmfare Awards, the film received 7 nominations, including Best Film, Best Director (Agnihotri), Best Actor (Anupam Kher) and Best Supporting Actor (Kumar and Chakraborty).

Another recently released film focuses on the exaltation of the image of Modi in Kashmir. His abrogation of Article 370 of the Indian constitution is portrayed as a long-awaited "liberation" for Kashmir. The film ostentatiously named *Article 370* (2024), just like its counterpart, *Kashmir Files*, is an unambiguous attempt by the Hindi cinema to propagate the Hindutva project of the ruling party BJP.



Article 370 of the Indian constitution gave the so called “special status” to Jammu and Kashmir after India occupied the region following the signing of the Instrument of Accession with Kashmir’s Hindu ruler, Maharaja Hari Singh in 1947. The region of Jammu and Kashmir is a disputed territory between India, Pakistan and China. Article 370 conferred on Kashmir the power—though eroded by the Indian state over the years—to have a separate constitution, a state flag, and autonomy of internal administration. It stated that the Constituent Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir would be empowered to recommend the extent to which the Indian constitution would apply to the state. The state assembly could also abrogate the Article 370 altogether, in which case all of Indian Constitution would have applied to the state.



After the state constituent assembly was convened, it recommended the provisions of the Indian constitution that should apply to the state, based on which 1954 Presidential Order was issued. Since the state constituent assembly dissolved itself without recommending the abrogation of Article 370, the article was deemed to have become a permanent feature of the Indian Constitution. On August 5, 2019 Indian government issued a Presidential Order superseding the 1954 order, and making all the provisions of the Indian constitution applicable to Jammu and Kashmir. There was no state assembly in place in Kashmir since BJP had dissolved it. Not only was the autonomy of Kashmir abrogated, but the state was divided into two Union territories, Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh, to be directly ruled from New Delhi.



Ahead of the national elections in India Bollywood has openly collaborated with the ruling BJP, producing Hindu nationalistic and Islamophobia films to garner support for the party. *Article 370* is another film in the present scheme. The film juxtaposes multiple tropes and idioms: abrogation of the autonomy of Kashmir as the true liberation of Kashmir, particularly Kashmiri women, who are oppressed by the men; completely erase the history of Kashmir as a occupied territory; trivializes the Article 370 and resistance of Kashmiris; cancel the real life situation in Kashmir where economic breakdown, military crackdowns on journalists, students, academicians and activists; cancel the fact of drug addiction among youth facilitated by the Indian state; unrepresented the curbs on religious practices and so on, that has paralyzed the entire cultural life in Kashmir.

Most of the film’s producers and cast belong to the right-wing section of Kashmiri Pandiths and are associated with BJP, such as the film’s co-writer and co-producer Aditya Dhar. Most of the Indian mainstream and digital media has focused their analysis on the performance of the film’s actors, and none has criticized its distortion of facts, its overtly Hindu nationalist agenda. The film ostentatiously portrays characters of Narendra Modi and his right-hand man Amit Shah, yet there is no mention of these aspects. The film even attempts to distort the events and people that are very fresh in the public memory of Kashmir: mostly

importantly the youth insurgency and uprising in Kashmir that produced many important figures which have made their lasting imprints on to the history of Kashmir—Burhan Wani (presented by Shivam Khajuria), Zikir Naikoo (presented by Ashwini Kaul).



CONCLUSION

The imagery and iconography of Kashmir created by Hindi cinema over the years has had strong influence in imagining Kashmir, not only for outsiders but also for Kashmiris themselves. In today's digital age, with shooting technology like digital and mobile phone cameras easily available, this imagery of beautiful, peaceful Kashmir, peace-loving people of Kashmir victimized by years of violence is being reproduced visually with ever faster pace and high frequency. Over the past few years, a number of video songs have been produced by Kashmiri artists and the songs are distributed through social media platforms such as YouTube, Facebook and Instagram. These video stories almost capture similar themes of Kashmir's geographical beauty, impact of violence on peace-loving people of Kashmir, hope for better future, and so on. These video songs have become one of the important platforms for narrating Kashmiri nation that is purportedly emerging out of the

years of violence. They are replicating the narratives of Bollywood films such as *Mission Kashmir* and *Fitoor*, which present 1990s insurgency as an interruption in the historical continuum of Kashmir. Young Kashmiri artists perform in the backdrop of beautiful landscapes on Kashmir's traditional Sufi songs, invoking a nostalgia of Kashmir similar to that of Hindi films. From a cinema like Bollywood, which is essentially a commercial industry, it is not logical to imagine a filmography that departs from conventional official narratives on Kashmir. There are interrelated reasons, including economic, political and ideological. A Bollywood film, whose production process involves immense finances, requires a market. And in Indian society in general Islamophobia has a high market value today. Besides, many Islamophobia filmmakers, producers and actors have found their way in Bollywood, and they are making films that are overtly anti-Muslim. This way Bollywood has established a nexus between itself, politically dominant Hindutva party, BJP, and society in general. Hence, a win-win is driven by Islamophobia.

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