

India and Pakistan on the Screen: The Portrayal of the Kashmir Border in Hindi Cinema

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Abstract

The present thesis discusses how Hindi cinema represents the region of Kashmir, the territory divided between Pakistan and India today, through the analysis of three iconic films, *Henna* (1991), *Roja* (1992), and *Mission Kashmir* (2000). The three case studies show a paradigm-shift in the representation of Kashmir, which reflects on contemporaneous political and social changes. Whereas earlier films conceived the region as a romantic metaphor of an idyllic landscape, from 1990 onwards the narratives start addressing the conflicts between India and Pakistan, terrorism, and the concept of barriers within the society. Given the extreme popularity and success of these films, the main argument put forward is that the Bollywood industry acts as an able opinion-shaper in present-day India, and thus contributes significantly to the way Indians think of Kashmir. To understand the movies themselves, the coeval events of war and terrorism are highly relevant, especially because the filmmakers evidently reflect on those. Part of what makes these films successful is that the political developments are presented from a hegemonic ideological perspective, combined with traditional and newly established tropes.

Table of contents

Introduction	3
Imagining the Indian nation	5
The unfinished business of partition	11
1. Henna: God made Land, man made Boundaries...	15
A dream realized	15
The flower of love	18
“Bullets of hatred”	22
Reflections on <i>Henna</i>	25
2. Roja and the competing claims for the valley: Regional vs. national	27
Making and watching the patriotic romance	28
“Why should I be afraid to go to any corner of India?”	30
“India will not be partitioned again”	33
Hindu patriots in Kashmir	36
Religion as a boundary	39
3. Mission Kashmir: “A border drawn among the hearts”	42
A film for “Kashmiriyat”	42
“A fight between love and hatred”	45
Kashmiri identities	48
Conclusions	53
Bibliography	56
References	56
Filmography	59

Introduction

Kashmir, the northernmost region of the Indian subcontinent divided in the present day between India and Pakistan, has always occupied a special place in hearts of Indians, which makes it no surprise that it features prominently in the national film industry as well. Besides its age-old historical associations, events such as the 1947 Partition leading to the first Indo-Pakistani war, followed by the second war in 1965, then by the Kargil War in 1999, and the emergence of terrorism, led to a special kind of cinematic portrayal. Able movie directors make considerable profit from the special status of the region. Given that most Indians would unanimously approve that Kashmir is an inalienable part of the country and that the representation of the conflicts does not clash with their perspective, the Kashmir-themed films enjoy great popularity throughout India. Because of that, cinema acts as an important catalyst in shaping the public opinion, especially with regards to questions of national identity and nationalism.

While focusing upon the representation of the Line of Control, the *de facto* border dividing India and Pakistan, in Hindi cinema, the present thesis aspires to shed light on many of the above-mentioned issues.¹ The following chapters constitute respective cases studies of *Henna* (1991, directed by Randhir Kapoor), *Roja* (1992, directed by Mani Ratnam), and *Mission Kashmir* (2000, directed by Vidhu Vinod Chopra). These three films represent a changing view in the way the Kashmiri borderland appears on the screen, spanning from a traditional narrative to prompt reflections on contemporaneous political events. In addition

1. “Hindi cinema” and “Bollywood” are used interchangeably in the present thesis.

to pointing out how the present world shapes the subject-matter of the plots, the present thesis concludes on how those films build up a nation-wide appreciation of the past, and how they contribute to the formation of a national identity.

The films discussed in the following chapters are set mainly in the same geographic region, the territory of Jammu and Kashmir, disputed for seven decades since 1947, the coeval events of Independence from the United Kingdom and the Partition between India and Pakistan. Since the Line of Control (henceforth: LoC) cuts through the region, Kashmir, in particular, became the symbol of boundary, separation, segregation, and seclusion. Among other media outlets, Hindi cinema shows a particular interest in Kashmir and keeps it in its repository of symbols. Apart from its post-1947 hermeneutics influenced by the Partition and the ensuing conflicts, films also often move back to the former historical symbolism representing the region as an idyllic location of romance. Indeed, as demonstrated below, the three case studies visualise Kashmir with various, even self-contradictory, meanings, which generally changed through the 1990s. The reason for this is the outbreak of the Kashmir insurgency in 1989 challenged the Indian government's authority in the region. Bollywood movies were quick to reflect on those events and intended to dispute the perspective of Muslim separatists by their own educative narrative. Accordingly, the cinematic portrayal of the Valley and the LoC shifts significantly, from a romantic heaven on earth to the stage of civil war and quest for identity.

Addressing the relationship between Hindi cinema and Indian nationalism necessarily involves a poststructuralist approach to the understanding of 'nation' and 'nationalism'. Within the framework of this thesis, 'nation' is a discursive construct, in which borders and boundaries play an important role in framing it as a more concrete entity.² In that manner, borders are considered in both their geographical and symbolic sense;

2. Gita Viswanath, *The Nation in War: A Study of Military Literature and Hindi War Cinema* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 29.

however, focus is mainly directed at the liminal space around them, that is, the borderlands. Studying the borders and borderlands through the lens of cinema allows us to understand the different ways in which popular culture works towards the creation, maintenance, and transgression of borders.

In support of the general argument of the thesis, the present chapter first maps out the relationship between Hindi cinema and nationalism, which is followed by a discussion of boundaries in general, and the Kashmiri one in particular, demonstrating the way it plays a role in imagining the nation. As demonstrated through the present works, the Indian-Pakistani border is featured prominently both in Bollywood movies and, partially as a result of that, in the mindset of the Indian society.

Imagining the Indian nation

In Hindi cinema, we can see the daydreams of society. Thus, we can see Hindi cinema as a unique repository of India's public imaginings, shaped by fantasy, nostalgia and desire, and it is one of the most productive arenas for us to discern clearer patterns of India's public imaginings, so we can learn how India sees itself today, how it hopes to see itself in future, and how it views its past.³

As Rachel Dwyer asserts, Bollywood is a crucially important realm for understanding how contemporary Indian society views itself and its place in the world. Even though India is a vibrant, complex, and highly diverse entity featuring a wide range of regional, religious, economic, social, and linguistic cleavages, Hindi films are enjoyed by virtually all layers of the society. Jyotika Viridi goes as far as to claim that Bollywood is the dominant cultural institution of India, providing affordable entertainment for all, regardless of class, caste,

3. Rachel Dwyer, "Bollywood's India: Hindi Cinema as a Guide to Modern India," *Asian Affairs* 41:3 (2010): 384.

gender or level of education.⁴ She argues that Hindi cinema is an important area of imagining the Indian national community for a number of reasons. The accessible nature and wide popularity of the films makes them an apt tool for disseminating a common understanding of what it means to be Indian. And since the plots are often far removed from the realities of everyday life, they are sufficiently detached from regional characteristics, and thus construed as common national products. She claims that Hindi cinema has been involved in

inheriting and circulating notions of national identity, negotiating conflicts experienced by the imagined community, producing new representations of the nation, constructing collective consciousness of nationhood through special cultural referents.⁵

In terms of language, even though Hindi itself could be considered as a regional tongue, spoken by less than half of the population, various political and social movements elevated it to the status of the national language. Its predominant use in the channels of official communication has even led to political clashes, and yet, as Viridi argues, when it comes to cinema, Hindi is not perceived as a tool of a forceful national integration.⁶

Ever since its appearance in India, cinema has been reflecting on the changes in the society and has accordingly been influenced by the greatest crises and challenges. Undoubtedly, the single most formative period in India's modern history was the aftermath of the Independence and the Partition. Dividing the territories of British India for India and Pakistan consequently led to mass migration and surges of inter-religious communal violence. Partition resulted in an uneasy relationship between the two independent countries, likened to twins separated at birth, who share a great amount of cultural similarity but are nevertheless engaged in constant enmity and war.⁷

4. Jyotika Viridi, *The Cinematic ImagiNation: Indian Popular Films as Social History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 1.

5. Viridi, *Cinematic ImagiNation*, 7.

6. Viridi, *Cinematic ImagiNation*, 31.

7. Jisha Menon, *The Performance of Nationalism. India, Pakistan and The Memory of Partition* (Cambridge - New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 7.

In addition to creating new geographical boundaries, the Partition established mental barriers as well. Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh term this phenomenon as the “partition of the minds”, referring to both the newly conceived Indo-Pakistani enmity, as well as to the internal social and emotional ruptures evolving within India.⁸ Indeed, an internal divide runs through the Indian political body between the Hindu majority and the Muslim minority. Since the movement for establishing a separate homeland for South Asian Muslims and the subsequent birth of Pakistan were perceived as betrayal of the common goal of the independent India, Muslims who chose to stay in India were often subject to distrust. They were suspected to be latent Pakistani agents and were thus expected to pledge their alliance to India time and again.⁹

Despite that the Partition continues to influence Indian society and politics, Bollywood was for a long time hesitant to address this issue directly. The principles of modernity, socialism, and secularism, propagated by the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1947–1964), resulted in pushing such questions as the discourse of religious identities into the background. Filmmakers were supported to concentrate their efforts on the creation of a strong, unified national culture, whereas addressing ethnic or religious minorities, let alone the most delicate question of the Muslim community, was discouraged.¹⁰

However, this is not to say that Bollywood avoided the topic of the Partition altogether. Gita Vishwanath and Salma Malik argue that the trauma of 1947 is featured, at least implicitly, in many films produced soon afterwards. They call attention to such characteristics as, for instance, the tendency to portray national identity in the framework of

8. Ian Talbot and Gurharpal Singh, *The Partition of India and Pakistan*, (Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 8.

9. Menon, *Performance of Nationalism*, 89.

10. Kavita Daiya, *Violent Belongings: Partition, Gender and National Culture in Postcolonial India* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 7.

family relationships.¹¹ As Virdi points out, the patriarchal Indian family often symbolises the rigid framework of the nation-state in cinematic narratives. In turn, the figure of the mother often stands for the homeland, and the way her children love her is parallel to the love of the patriot towards the nation. This explicit message should be understood in the context of the affective mode of address in Hindi cinema, in which the emotional register creates an additional level of meaning. Probably the best example of this phenomenon is the film *Mother India* (1957), in which the mother of the family is squarely equated with the nation itself. The idealised hero is often expected to save his mother, and thus, by extension, the nation. This tradition of portraying India as mother goddess goes back to the beginnings of the independence movement.¹²

Malik and Vishwanath argue that the representation of the Partition should be read into narratives dealing with divided families, lost brothers, separated lovers, and similar scenarios.¹³ For Amit Rai, whenever the ruptured family ties are amended in the narrative, the cinematic plot symbolically resolves the Partition on an imaginary level. In addition to that, the portrayal of a reunited family, the allusion for nation, also helps imagining a trouble-free relationship between the majority and the minorities, which leads to a reassuring conclusion for the audiences.¹⁴ In that manner, the cinematic family, as presented in Bollywood movies, was the primary arena of addressing the questions of national identity and minorities. That is, the events of the Partition had their lasting effect on film production, even though delicate questions were rather expressed implicitly through a system of metaphors.

11. Gita Viswanath and Salma Malik, "Revisiting 1947 through Popular Cinema: A Comparative Study of India and Pakistan," *Economic and Political Weekly* 44:36 (2009): 64.

12. Virdi, *Cinematic Imagination*, 7, 24, 66.

13. Viswanath and Malik, "Revisiting 1947," 64.

14. Amit Rai, "Patriotism and the Muslim Citizen in Hindi Films," *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, Summer (2003): 5.

The late 1980s and the early 1990s witnessed a rapid change both in the Indian society and in its cinematic depictions. The Hindi film industry became openly interested in political issues, and thus the films began to revisit the event of the Partition itself, and its contemporary effects on the problematic Indo-Pakistani relations. Hindu-Muslim communal and religious tension, interstate wars, border disputes, cross-border terrorism, and intrastate religious conflicts, having been taboos for decades, began to appear on the screen. Amit Rai uses the term *cinepatriotic films* to describe this new wave of Bollywood productions. He sees the films of this period as a separate group, because they engage directly with contentious social and political issues from a nationalistic point of view. They blend the tradition of Bollywood melodramas and that of the social realist cinema, inasmuch as they voice the pain of trauma and suffering in a melodramatic mode, and as a result, they also come forward with a “pedagogical project of transforming history”, that is transmitting an educational message to their audiences.¹⁵

By taking up contemporary issues and presenting them in a historical perspective, the new wave of films addresses national, religious and ethnic identity rather directly.¹⁶ One of the most significant changes concerns the portrayal of Muslims in Hindi cinema. Priya Kumar points out that not only does Pakistan begin to be referred to as the “enemy nation”, but Indian Muslims are also increasingly often portrayed as the “enemy within”, or else affiliated with religious fundamentalism and cross-border terrorism. Apart from that, Bollywood also tends to differentiate between the “good Muslim” who is loyal to the Indian nation and its secular ideas, and the “bad Muslim” who is, in turn, rather loyal to Pakistan-supported terrorist organisations.¹⁷

15. Rai, “Patriotism and the Muslim Citizen,” 5-6.

16. Daiya, *Violent Belongings*, 156.

17. Priya Kumar, *Limiting Secularism: The Ethics of Coexistence in Indian Literature and Film* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 195.

Resulting from the surge of interest in renegotiating national identity, the question of contested borders and, in particular, the one in Kashmir, also begins to feature in Hindi cinema.¹⁸ Following up Etienne Balibar's conclusions, Sharmila Sen notes that, contrary to the marginal position of Kashmir, this region takes a central role in Bollywood. The LoC located on the edges of the country is represented as if it were running through the heart of the nation. The border between India from Pakistan is like the social segregation between Hindu and Muslim, Kashmiri and Indian, or, in other words, the "other" from the "self", in which only the "self" is dignified enough to share the "national hegemonic culture".¹⁹ By that, she seems to mean the "hegemonic nationalist self", defined as an upper-caste, upper class, North Indian, Hindu male, a well-established central character in Hindi cinema.²⁰

The way in which a geographically marginal issue is put into the focus accords with Gita Vishwanath's argument on Hindi war films playing an important role in constructing a nationalist discourse by fetishizing the idea of the nation. By connecting the nation to a concrete, material territory in war films, the Indian nation rises to the role of a "fetish object to be coveted, loved, and, therefore, worthy of sacrifice."²¹ Comparably, the new wave of film narratives discussed above also reflects on the recently construed Indian nation as a bounded reality, objectified by borders drawn on the maps. Even though the films analysed in the present thesis cannot be defined within the narrow framework of war films, the way they emphasise geography and boundaries, they seem to perform a similarly fetishizing role. Indeed, they make the abstract ideas of borders and boundaries more concrete through their

18. Purewal and Kalra note that border studies internationally emerged as an independent discipline around the turn of the 1990s, as a result of the end of the Cold War and the increasing globalization; Virinder S. Kalra and Navtej K. Purewal, "The Strut of the Peacocks: Partition, Travel and the Indo-Pak Border," in *Travel Worlds: Journeys in Contemporary Cultural Politics*, ed. Raminder Kaur and John Hutnyk (London and New York: Zed Books, 1999), 55.

19. Sharmila Sen, "No passports, no visas: The Line of Control Between India and Pakistan in Contemporary Bombay Cinema," in *Alternative Indias: Writing, Nation and Communalism*, ed. Peter Morey and Alex Tickell (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2005), 199.

20. Rai, "Patriotism and the Muslim Citizen," 5.

21. Viswanath, *The Nation in War*, 92.

engagement with the border and thus, by extension, with the nation as a geographically bounded entity.

The unfinished business of partition

The above-outlined phenomena are of particular significance in post-Partition and postcolonial India, which remains to grapple with deep-rooted “cartographic anxiety.”²² This arguably results in a sense of insecurity or even fear when it comes to the discourse of its borders, and especially the one dividing the Indian-administered state of Jammu and Kashmir, and the Pakistani-administered Azad Kashmir.

The course of the LoC running through a mountainous terrain for 742 km, originates from the western border of the erstwhile princely state of Jammu and Kashmir prior to the Partition. In 1947 the Hindu ruler of the state, Hari Singh, had the chance to decide into which state he would prefer to merge. Eventually, in the last moment, he opted for India, despite that Pakistan had argued that a territory predominantly populated by Muslims must join the Muslim state. As an emphasis to this argument, Pakistan fueled a tribal insurgency in the region. India retaliated by sending the army there, and thus the first Indo-Pakistani war began, and neither state has given up its claim for the entire territory ever since then. Despite that the LoC effectively functions as a border, it is still unacceptable for either India or Pakistan.²³

22. Sankaran Krishna, “Cartographic anxiety,” in *Challenging Boundaries: Global Flows, Territorial Identities*, ed. Michael J. Shapiro and Hayward R. Alker (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 194.

23. Sumantra Bose, *Contested Lands. Israel-Palestine, Kashmir, Bosnia, Cyprus, and Sri Lanka* (Cambridge – London: Harvard University Press, 2007), 156; Deepa M. Ollapally, *The Politics of Extremism in South Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 133.

Despite the violent establishment of the *de facto* border as the conclusion of the first Indo-Pakistani war in 1949, the Kashmir region and the effective course of the border was still relatively porous in the 1950s. The local population could cross the border with relative ease, and family relations and trade networks remained uninterrupted, unlike, for instance, in the case of the partition of Punjab. However, the repeated failures to negotiate a peaceful solution led to the sealing of the border on its either side. Then the unexpected Pakistani attack on the Indian-administered Kashmir in 1965 resulted in the deterioration of relations between the two countries.²⁴ The division of Kashmir settled permanently, and both states acknowledged this *status quo* in the 1972 Shimla agreement, in which they also renamed the initial ‘Cease-fire Line’ for ‘Line of Control’ (LoC).²⁵

The course of the border has not changed significantly since 1972, even though both India and Pakistan maintain their respective claim on the entire territory of the former princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. The explanation for their stubbornness derives from the ideological nature of the conflict. Whereas Kashmir has always been a multi-ethnic and multi-religious territory, the central area, the Valley is populated predominantly by Muslims.²⁶ Therefore, Pakistan, the envisioned homeland for all South Asian Muslims, could never give up its claim on a Muslim piece of land, and claims Partition to be unfinished until the incorporation of Kashmir. As for India, Jammu and Kashmir, the only Muslim majority federal state, serves as an alleged proof of its success in establishing a secular nation contrary to the numerous ethnic and religious differences. The post-colonial country was in fact built upon such fundamental principles as secularisation and integration, and, for that

24. Ananya Jahanara Kabir, *The Territory of Desire: Representing the Valley of Kashmir* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 43.

25. Bose, *Contested Lands*, 155.

26. Deepa M. Ollapally, *The Politics of Extremism in South Asia* (New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 118.

reason, it can never give up Kashmir either.²⁷ Unfortunately enough, the only voice unheard in the debate is that the Kashmiri people. The United Nations proposed a series of resolutions between 1948 and 1957, aiming to achieve a referendum on the future of the region, but such democratic solution could never take place.²⁸

The 1980s brought about some changes in the situation of Kashmir. As the disenchantment with the Indian federal government grew significantly, the struggle for political representation escalated into the Kashmir insurgency in 1989. Multiple groups took up the fight against the Indian military to achieve *azadi*. This term, in theory, means ‘freedom’ or ‘liberty’, whereas, in practice, was applied for several different goals, including complete independence, freedom from India and annexation to Pakistan, or autonomy within the Indian federation. The Kashmir Liberation Front proclaimed that “Kashmir will become independent!”, whereas the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen said, “Kashmir will become part of Pakistan!”.²⁹

Regardless of the contradictory claims, the majority of Indians understood the call for *azadi* as the Kashmiris’ wish to merge with Pakistan. Consequently, they began to conflate the Kashmiri identity or *Kashmiriyat* with a radicalised form of Islam,³⁰ which also left its mark on Hindi cinema. Prior to 1990, whenever films showed interest in Kashmir, it was mainly because of its cinematic landscape, the picturesque background of romantic song sequences, in which the urban heroes and heroines found escape from their urbanised lifestyle of society. Conversely, the Kashmir insurgency changes Bollywood’s interest in

27. Sumit Ganguly, “Explaining the Kashmir Insurgency: Political Mobilization and Institutional Decay,” *International Security* 21:2 (1996): 79.

28. Bose, *Contested Lands*, 169.

29. “कश्मीर बनेगा खुदमुख्तार”; “कश्मीर बनेगा पाकिस्तान”; Bose, *Contested Lands*, 180; Kabir, *Territory of Desire*, 10; Ollapally, *The Politics of Extremism in South Asia*, 122.

30. Ananya Jahanara Kabir, “The Kashmiri Muslim in Bollywood’s ‘New Kashmir Films’,” *Contemporary South Asia* 18:4 (2010): 377.

Kashmir, and the traditional hermeneutics associated with the region are gradually superseded by war, terrorism, borders, identity, and nationalism.

One of the lead motives of the films discussed below is the multiple interpretations of borders. The course of the LoC seems to be perfectly clear; it is sealed by the Shimla agreement and drawn on thousands of maps today. Be that as it may, the effective barrier is seldom, if ever, sharp, especially not on cinema, which makes even basic question difficult to answer. Is the actual conflict between India and Pakistan or, rather, between Indians and Pakistanis? Is it a Hindus-Muslims clash or maybe that between Muslim Kashmiris and Hindu Indians instead? As the case studies will demonstrate, the different movies frame the Kashmiri conflict in different perspectives and thus draw the boundaries along different lines. Building particularly on the arguments of Sharmila Sen, the present thesis demonstrates that the LoC established at the time of the Partition is, in effect, fluid and multiple. Apart from the one lined up by gunmen facing each other on its either side, many other territorial, religious, and social boundaries stemming from the LoC exist and continue to influence masses of the Indian society.

1.

Henna: God made Land, man made Boundaries...³¹

Henna, the 1991 Bollywood film directed by Raj Kapoor and Randhir Kapoor, narrates the tragic cross-border love story of the eponymous Pakistani heroine and her Indian love interest. It was one of the biggest blockbusters of the year of its release, and it enjoyed popularity both in India and Pakistan, just as among the audience in diaspora. The film was a rare example of cross-border cooperation in terms of production, as well as a rare example of a peaceful message regarding its narrative. Since this film was first to address the question of Indo-Pakistani rivalry and its toll taken on the population of the Kashmir Valley, *Henna* set a significant precedent for subsequent Bollywood films addressing the same topic. The present chapter first discusses the production and reception of the film, and then, following a short summary of the plot, proceeds with its depiction of borders in this film.

A dream realised

Henna was the dream project of Raj Kapoor, one of the most influential filmmakers in the early years of Hindi cinema. Having become a popular actor, he went on to establish R. K. Films in 1948, that soon became one of the largest film production companies in Bombay. Kapoor had long been interested in questions of national identity and was thus particularly

³¹ “God made land, man made boundaries...” is the promotional slogan of the film, by which the central message of the story is fairly clear from its poster.

instrumental in presenting the Nehruvian concept of secularism in India through his films. Although his family hailed from Peshawar, Pakistan, and lost their ancestral lands at the time of the Partition, Kapoor did not share the jingoistic attitude of other victims of the Partition.³² Conversely, he wished to draw attention to the need of peaceful coexistence with Pakistan through *Henna*, even though he died during the filming process. His sons, Rishi and Randhir, the next generation of the influential Kapoor clan, were the ones to finalise his project.

According to the wishes of Raj Kapoor, the film was made with an international cast and crew. The Indian side comprised of the director, Randhir, the lead actor, Rishi Kapoor, and most of the actors including Reema Lagoo, Farida Jalal and Ashwini Bhawe. The story was written by Khwaja Ahmad Abbas and the music director was Ravindra Jain. The female lead, however, was the Pakistani actress, Zeba Bakhtiyar. The dialogues were written by the renowned Pakistani scriptwriter, Haseena Moin, also on the special request of Raj Kapoor.³³

This sort of co-production is a rare example in the history of the warring film industries of Indian and Pakistan. Whereas Hindi cinema enjoys great popularity on the other side of the border, official channels of distribution, let alone production, often suffer in the wake of political tensions between the two countries. Even in the case of *Henna*, cooperation was not flawless, but rather led to unfortunate complications for the participants. Zeba Bakhtiyar, the Pakistani lead actress received death threats for portraying a Muslim girl who fell in love with a Hindu man and thus claimed to have gone against the traditional codes of Islamic conduct. Haseena Moin, the dialogue writer had her name removed from the credits of the film because she was worried about her television career in Pakistan.³⁴ Moreover, the shooting itself could not be as international as the filmmakers had envisaged. According to

32. Priya Joshi, *Bollywood's India* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2015), 22.

33. Khwaja Ahmad Abbas Memorial Trust, accessed June 5, 2017. <http://abbaska.com/filmography/henna>.

34. Philip Shenon, "It's No Ordinary Film in Pakistan," *Chicago Tribune*, September 06, 1991, accessed June 5, 2017. http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1991-09-06/news/9103070216_1_india-and-pakistan-indian-pakistani-henna.

the storyline, large portions of the film are set in Azad Kashmir, and they wanted to shoot those scenes in Pakistan. Having received no answer to their repeated requests from the Benazir Bhutto government, the Kapoor brothers decided to start shooting in Austria and in the Indian Himalayas. Though they could eventually include some shots of Pakistani landmarks, ironically, Azad Kashmir is substituted by foreign landscapes in most of the film.³⁵ This is particularly striking in the light of the promotional message of *Henna*: “God made Land, man made Boundaries...”. Raj Kapoor himself and later his sons argued, that the film is not about politics, but has a simple humanistic message transcending contemporary history and international relations. Both Raj Kapoor and Randhir Kapoor have expressed on multiple occasions that the film is based on fictitious events and has no political resonance beyond the universalistic messages of peace and love.³⁶

Henna achieved considerable success upon its release in India, both financially and critically. It was a huge box office success,³⁷ its music reached iconic status, and it was India’s submission for the Academy Awards for the Best Foreign Language Film.³⁸ However, it was not screened in Pakistan because of the two countries’ mutual ban on the other’s films, a legislation in effect since the 1965 Indo-Pakistani war. Nonetheless, in spite of the official ban, Pakistani audiences could access the film on pirated videotapes, just like any other Bollywood production. As a result, it became popular on the other side of the

35. Madhu Jain, “Labour of Love,” *India Today*, July 31, 1991, accessed June 5, 2017. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/raj-kapoors-dream-film-henna-releases/1/318566.html>.

36. In his review, Madhu Jain even states that the main theme of the film is the Jhelum river, which thus fits into Raj Kapoor’s oeuvre focused around the theme of rivers, such as the *Ram Teri Ganga Maili* (1985); Jain, “Labour of Love.”

37. According to the Indian Box Office Records, *Henna* grossed around 4.3 crore rupees in the year of its release and it was the ninth highest grossing film of the year; *Indian Box Office Statistics*, accessed June 5, 2017, <http://ibosnetwork.com/asp/filmbodetails.asp?id=Henna>.

38. *Khawaja Ahmad Abbas Memorial Trust*, accessed June 5, 2017, <http://abbaska.com/filmography/henna>.

border as well,³⁹ even though some condemned the cooperation with Indians as shown by the problems that members of the crew had to face.

The flower of love

“The story is built around a river, the Jhelum that starts in India and flows into Pakistan. This part of the country is Hindu, but the moment you go to that part, it becomes Muslim. Why? Because man has divided it. But can you divide love? [...] This is basically the theme of the film I intend to call *Henna*.”⁴⁰ (Raj Kapoor)

As Raj Kapoor stated years before making the movie, he intended to make a film about the transcendent power of love and the futility of borders and wars. And yet, not only do man-made borders feature prominently in the film but in the end, they are emphasised even more powerfully than previously called into question. Indeed, *Henna* thematizes the divide to the extent that the border becomes an active social catalyst, a characteristic that was virtually unprecedented in Indian cinema.

The story focuses around Chander Prakash, a young and carefree Indian lumber merchant, who is about to marry his love, Chandni, when he suffers an accident on his way to their wedding. He falls into the river Jhelum and is carried by the flow to the Pakistani territory of Azad Kashmir. A young village girl, Henna, finds the unconscious Chander and, with the help of her family, nurses him back to health. As Chander suffers from amnesia, they provide him with a substitute name and identity: he becomes Chand, the foster son of a local healer woman, Gul Bibi. Henna falls in love with him, and they are about to conduct the marriage. However, the sudden storm disrupts their *mehendi* ceremony, which reminds

39. According to Sharmila Sen, *Henna* might be read as a paraphrase of the earlier Pakistani film, *Lakhon mein Eik* (1971, dir.: Raza Mir). The latter narrates a very similar story from the reverse perspective, in which an Indian girl crosses over to Pakistan, and her death is the symbol of the deadly enmity of the two states. Sen, “No Passports,” 208.

40. Jain, “Labour of love.”

Chand of the stormy night of his earlier accident. His memory returns, erasing the newer memory of his life among Henna's tribe. Consequently, not only does he break Henna's heart, but induces a whole set of other problems as well. His newly rediscovered Indian identity jeopardises the safety of his foster family, because the scheming police superintendent, Shahbaz Khan, has been looking for an opportunity to blackmail Henna and force her to marry him. Now that it turns out that Chand is, in fact, Chander, the Indian, Shahbaz Khan arrests him on charge of spying and takes measures against Henna's family as well. Through a set of adventures, Henna and her family manage to rescue Chander from the prison and vow to reunite him with his Indian fiancé across the border. However, when Chander and Henna eventually reach the Indo-Pakistani border, they are caught in crossfire, and Henna sacrifices her own life to protect Chander, whom she loves ceaselessly and unconditionally.

The outset of the story presents the picturesque landscape as one of the countless wonders of nature, created by God for everyone's enjoyment. In the first song sequence performed by Zeba Bakhtiyar, Henna is portrayed as an integral part of this idyllic scene. Ananya Jahanara Kabir calls attention to the fact that portraying Kashmiri people in their ethnic dresses as part of the landscape is an established trope in Hindi cinema, through which they are depicted as alien to the modernity of other characters.⁴¹ This film indeed portrays Henna as an innocent girl beyond the machinations of nation-states, who listens to her heart when making decisions about people. She is named after the henna plant used for decorative purposes as part of the preparations before a traditional South Asian wedding. The apparent metaphor lends a certain innocent nature to her character: she appears as a child of nature or even as an integral feature of the Kashmiri landscape. Furthermore, her name alludes to the ways in which the henna plant is used. The henna plant is ground before being applied to the

41. Kabir, "The Kashmiri Muslim," 376.

hands and feet of the bride, who will then participate in the happiest event of her life, the union with her groom. Similarly, Henna's role is to unite Chander and Chandni at the end of the film, regardless that she needs to sacrifice herself in the process. Her legacy, nonetheless, survives her, just as henna leaves its colour on the hands of the couple.

The song *Main hoon khushrang hina*, playing with this double meaning of henna/Henna is featured along with a panoramic view of the valley and its inhabitants. Some men are offering prayers, while others are immersed in the daily business of village life. Everything works towards establishing an idyllic image. Henna, however, is set apart from the rest of the people, dancing in the abandoned countryside. She even emphasises her alienation from the society by singing the following lines:

I am the beautifully coloured henna,
I am the lovely henna
Life too is colourless without me.
The entire world is my abode,
I only speak the language of love,
My movements reflect love,
It is a part of my life to love.⁴²

Singing about the fact that she is not concerned with linguistic or geographic boundaries foreshadows her cross-border love, and puts her beyond the reach of the category of national citizenship as defined by the states. She also emphasises her emotional capacities, which is to be important in the symbolic transgression of those boundaries.

The border is already introduced at the beginning of the film. The first location of the film takes the viewer to the picturesque landscape of the Kashmir valley with prolonged shots of the fast-flowing river. Then, in a philosophical monologue, the voice-over of Heena's father contemplates over the arbitrariness of man-made borders:

42. मैं हूँ खुश रंग हिना, प्यारी हिना .जिंदगानी में कोई रंग नहीं मेरे बिना .प्यार ही मेरी जुबां, प्यार ही मेरा चलन .प्यार करना मेरा जीवन का एक अंग है.

This story begins on one of the banks of the Jhelum river. That Jhelum, which starts in India but flows to Pakistan. On one bank of its blue, cool waters, a Pandit does his Surya Namaskar, whereas, on the other side, a Maulvi recites his morning prayers. Just like any of the other countless wonders of nature, the water of this river does not differentiate between human beings. But then why do humans observe this difference in their hearts? Henna is the story of that flower of love, which was nurtured by the soil of one country, but whose beautiful colour was not stopped by any border.⁴³

The scene of the Pandit and the Maulvi reappears in one of the paintings by the renowned Indian painter, M. F. Husain (1915–2011), which were commissioned for the credit titles of the film. They comprise a meaningful visual introduction to the story, and the one with the Pandit and Maulvi serves to symbolise the similar perception of the sacred environment of the river on both sides of the border. That is, different in belief and practice as Muslims and Hindus certainly are, they still rejoice over the same beauty of nature. Notably, most of the paintings are divided into two sections juxtaposing events from either side of the border. The scenes often compare the two women in Chander's life, both of whom are beautiful, and it is only their respective traditional outfit that marks them as Hindu and Muslim. Whereas Chandni is shown with a *bindi* and bridal accessories, Henna wears traditional Kashmiri costumes, and her figure is encircled by Urdu script. The script itself is a clear reference to the linguistic boundaries that are, in fact, fluid. Although the language of the film is Hindi – as shown by the Board of Censors' certificate in the beginning of the film – there is no remarkable difference in the linguistic registers of Hindus and Muslims. The register of the Pakistani characters could be classified as bending towards Urdu but not significantly, thereby reinforcing the film's emphasis on cultural similitude.

43. यह कहानी दरिया-ए-झेलम के एक किनारे पर जन्म लेती है .वह दरिया-ए-झेलम जो हिंदुस्तान से शुरू होकर पाकिस्तान में बह निकलता है .जिसके नीले, ठण्डे पानी में इस पार पण्डित सूर्य नमस्कार करता है, तो उस पार एक मौलवी नमाज़ अदा करता है .कुदरत की बेशुमार नेहमतों की तरह यह दरिया का पानी तो इंसान इंसान में फर्क नहीं करता, फिर यह फर्क इंसानों के दिलों में क्यों? हिना प्यार के उस पौधे की कहानी है, जिसे सींचा संवारा तो किसी एक मुल्क की मिटटी ने, पर जिस का खुशरंग कोई सरहद महदूद न कर सकी .

“Bullets of hatred”

Despite Henna’s openness, the boundaries are, in fact, sensible and even visually mapped out in the scene of Chander’s accident. A sketch map of the Indo-Pakistani borderland is superimposed upon him, who is seemingly nothing but a lifeless body floating downstream on the river. This dramatic image is further imbued by the effect of the *qawwali* being played at the wedding, at which Chander is supposed to be. While his fiancé, Chandni, is anxiously waiting for him, she sings a song with lyrics referring repeatedly to borders and boundaries crossed by an absent lover. In the meantime, Chander is being driven by the fateful storm that lands him in Pakistan, tearing him out of his cultural milieu, and placing him in an unknown environment.

Nonetheless, once resuscitated in Pakistan, Chander is not even aware of the foreignness of his new surroundings, firstly, because he is suffering from amnesia,⁴⁴ and because the new environment is not that different from his own social milieu. Regardless that he previously lived the life of a wealthy Hindu merchant in Baramulla and now becomes a poor Muslim potter in Azad Kashmir, the overarching linguistic and cultural similitudes allow him to adjust with relative ease. Because of his amnesia, he is essentially a *tabula rasa* that can be filled with meaning in accordance with the needs of the community that surrounds him. In that manner, the situation of the protagonist exposes the inherent insecurity of the mimetic relationship between the two post-colonial states. As Jisha Menon aptly demonstrates it in the case of the military ceremonies at the Wagah border, by trying to show their own cultural identity, the two states incidentally showcase deep-rooted cultural

44. The amnesia of Chander and the lost-and-found family could also be read as a common cinematic trope representing the Partition. Viswanath and Malik argue that the “...recurring themes of separated lovers, feuding families, and the trope of brothers lost in a mela or the well-known lost and found theme – all resonate with the Partition of the subcontinent.” Separation between loved ones could very often be understood as a metaphor for the division of British India and its people, who belonged to the same national family according to the official Indian narrative; Vishwanath and Malik, “Revisiting 1947,” 64.)

similitude with one another.⁴⁵ Comparably, the fact that Chander and Chand can reside in one and the same person emphasises the common features shared by the two communities.

Contrary to the above observations, even though both Chander and Chand can exist within the same person, they cannot be present at the same time. The two personalities are mutually exclusive, and one is unaware of the other. The differences between the two personalities manifest clearly in the framework of family relations. The character's family affiliation is emphasised in both cases, and it is the familial ties that establish him as part of the Pakistani or the Indian national community. Chander is about to become part of Chandni's family, but the accident thwarts the wedding. In Pakistan, he gradually becomes part of Henna's tribe, and Gul Bibi adopts him. He is about to marry Henna and thereby to become a member of her family when his memory returns and thus becomes displaced again. Having regained his memories and identity, he does not want to be part of his Pakistani family anymore but thrives to return to Chandni and his Indian identity. That is, whereas his Pakistani identity is only temporary and achieved by accident, he is Indian by his own choice.

Chand's sudden transformation into Chander poses emotional problems, especially for Henna and her entire family, who are disappointed by losing Chander. And yet, the real trouble ensues only when the Pakistani state, represented by its official bodies intervenes in the story. In *Henna*, just as in later films in which the nation-state is explicitly portrayed, the representation of the government makes its appearance through the armed forces. Accordingly, in *Henna*, the Pakistani state is represented through an officer, Shahbaz Khan. He is unquestionably the evil character in the story, who is willing to sacrifice even justice and humanity to achieve his goals. He also leads to the tragic climax of the events, which results in the death of the selfless heroine, Henna.

45. Menon, *The Performance of Nationalism*, 23.

Having set out by the peaceful portrayal of the borderlands, the film concludes again at that location. However, this time Henna and Chander are caught in a crossfire at the no-man's land,⁴⁶ and Henna falls victim to the indiscriminate firing coming from both border posts behind the barbed fences. It is important to note that the film remains ambiguous on who fires the lethal shot. In that manner, the intentionally impartial message of the film is maintained, and the following rhetorical outburst of Chander can be viewed in a peace-loving perspective. Standing over Henna's dead body, he emphasises the futility of war, and calls upon both nations to lay down their weapons:

Whose bullets were these? These were not the bullets of India or Pakistan. [...] These were the bullets of hatred! [...] Why does man even make bullets? If all of us can live in peace, then why this hatred?⁴⁷

Chander also calls upon the border forces to take inspiration from Henna, who acted like the plant after which she had been named: even though she had to be destroyed in the process, she has left behind the legacy of love. Her example has demonstrated that “borders can divide lands, but they cannot divide hearts.”⁴⁸ As a result, the border forces, having heeded to Chander's appeal, dismantle the barbed fences and shake hands over the border. Thus, the film ends on a slightly melancholic note, as well as conveys the hopes for a better future. That is, the film's conclusion is apparently in line with the filmmakers' intentions, namely to present an apolitical, impartial, peace-loving, and humanistic message.

46. As noted by Sen, this set is comparable to the one in Saadat Hasan Manto's short story *Toba Tek Singh*; Sen, “No passports,” 207.

47. किसकी थीं ये गोलियां? और वह गोली किसकी थी जिसने यह बेगुनाह मासूम लड़की की जान ले ली? हिंदुस्तान की नहीं, पाकिस्तान की नहीं. [...] ये नफरत की गोली थी. इंसान गोली बनता है क्यों? हम सब अमन से, चैन से जी सके, तो यह नफरत क्यों?

48. सरहद सिर्फ ज़मीन को बाँट सके, दिलों को नहीं.

Reflections on *Henna*

Contrary to the ostensibly positive message of *Henna*, film scholars dealing with this product tend to take a more polarised view on this question. Jyotika Virdi, for one, highlights the inherent contradiction in the narrative of the film. According to her, whereas narrative of *Henna* – both on the diegetic and the extra-diegetic level – is meant to represent the need for peaceful co-existence between the two neighbours, its climax fails to achieve that goal. The romance of Chander and Henna cannot be realised for that Chander now remembers his original commitment to Chandni, and then Henna is murdered on the Indo-Pakistani border. Virdi conceives this contradiction as the result of a hegemonic taboo in Hindi cinema, prohibiting the fulfilment of a Hindu-Muslim romance on the screen. She argues that such relationships were inconceivable – and thus often depicted in negative light – in Bollywood films prior to the release of Mani Ratnam’s paradigm-shifting film, *Bombay*, in 1995. Consequently, Chander’s return to his nation and religion, represented by his Hindu fiancé, ought to be viewed as the materialisation of this cinematic convention.⁴⁹

Sharmila Sen takes a similar stand, in that she describes this transgressive, cross-border romance as a “superficially liberal outlook” hinting on the possibility of such inter-community encounters, which, however, fails. Chander is doomed to return to his home country, and his Pakistani love is killed. In other words, the transgressive romance is never actually realised. Sen argues that it is, in fact, the Indo-Pakistani border which is “hermeneutically sealed over her dead body”, providing the definitive contours of Indian and Pakistani nationhood.⁵⁰ Vishwanath and Malik go as far as to propose that Henna’s death could be interpreted as a symbol for the failed process of peace-making efforts. They argue that “[t]he plot seems analogous to peace attempts between India and Pakistan, which at their

49. Virdi, *Cinematic ImagiNation*, 36.

50. Sen, “No Passports,” 210.

best can only be mild flirtations after which they invariably return to their respective hostile positions.”⁵¹

In the light of the abovementioned views, one ought to accept that – contrary to the filmmakers’ claims – *Henna* provides a politicised message, one which would recur in later films dealing with Kashmir. This was the first mainstream Hindi film to focus on the politically sensitive question of the Indian-Pakistani border, set within the context of a cross-national romance.⁵² The melodramatic closure of the story might seemingly call for a revised assessment of Indo-Pakistani relationships, but leaves certain cultural taboos untouched, and thus even reinforces deep-rooted stereotypes. The amnesia of the main hero can be interpreted as a metaphor of the Partition of the two nations, symbolised by the two families on the two sides of the border. By failing to transgress the man-made boundaries and returning to his home, even at the cost of an innocent life, Chander eventually enhances his commitment to his nation.

One additional characteristic on *Henna* is the multiple natures of borders, or, in other words, the border that continuously reconfigures itself. In some cases, the boundaries are portrayed as fragile and even artificial. Not only is a storm enough to transgress the border and to defy state authority, but the society that receives Chander on the other side is also culturally and socially congruent his original community. In other cases, however, the borders are firmly fixed and impenetrable: Henna cannot cross but must pay with her life for attempting to do so. On that note, it is of particular relevance to turn to *Roja* in the next chapter, a film that yields an additional layer to the various natures of borders, focusing on the boundaries between the religious communities living in India.

51. Vishwanath and Malik, “Revisiting 1947,” 67.

52. In addition, Sharmila Sen highlights some other features that make *Henna* an important precedent for many Bollywood films, including its set in Kashmir, the transgressive border crossings, and the motif of the self-sacrificing Muslim. Sen, “No Passports,” 208.

2.

Roja and the competing claims for the Valley:

Regional vs. national

The 1992 blockbuster, *Roja*, directed by Mani Ratnam, is one of the most noteworthy film productions dealing with the Kashmir conflict for several reasons. This was one of the first films – and certainly the first within the framework of the present thesis – to take into consideration the eruption of the Kashmir insurgency, resulting in a sea of changes in the portrayal of the Valley and its people. The film focuses on cross-border terrorism and even depicts that as representative of Islam. By moving on from the quasi-secular perspective of *Henna*, *Roja* celebrates the newly emerging Hindu middle class and envisages a new kind of patriotism, in which nationalism, motivated by the proximity of the border, is a crucial aspect. In addition, while the film has a Hindi language version and it follows many of the cinematic conventions of Bollywood, it was originally produced in Tamil by a Tamil director. Thus, it narrates the tribulations of a South Indian couple in the terrorist-infested Eden, as Kashmir is depicted here.

The present chapter argues that *Roja* is a milestone in the history of the Kashmir conflict in cinema, not only for its pioneering perspective but also for the influence it exerted on the perspectives of later Hindi cinematic narratives. Since contemporaneous political events and the social circumstances of its production have left a major impact on this film, the chapter commences with discussing those factors, followed by the analysis of the newly introduced image of the Indo-Pakistani border. Finally, it demonstrates how *Roja* comprises

the offset of a new trend in Indian cinema, in which the two main religious groups of India, the majority Hindu and the minority Muslim communities, are divided by an internal, invisible, and yet realistic boundary.

Making and watching the patriotic romance

The director of *Roja*, Mani Ratnam, is unanimously considered to be the most influential contemporary director of Tamil cinema among critics and audience alike. Apart from that, he is widely known and appreciated for his work in Hindi cinema, and his films are often dubbed or reproduced in Hindi so that they would reach a wider audience. *Roja* was also originally produced in Tamil, and subsequently dubbed into Telugu, Malayalam and Hindi, reaching out for virtually all of India. In her review published in *India Today*, Madhu Jain claims that the film became immensely popular in Jammu and Kashmir as well, despite being officially banned and denounced in the media outlets associated with the militants of the state.⁵³ It was both a commercial and a critical success, not surprisingly though, given that it was endorsed by the Indian state on multiple levels. Its production was supported by the Ministry of Defense, then it won a government prize for national integration, because of which it was exempted from paying entertainment taxes.⁵⁴ Moreover, *Roja* continues to play an iconic role in the history of Indian television as it is regularly screened on Independence Day on the state channel *Doordarshan*.⁵⁵

53. Madhu Jain, "Guns and Roses," *India Today*, January 31, 1991, accessed June 6, 2017. <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/maniratnam-roja-wins-acclaim-for-its-patriotic-theme-and-good-music/1/292718.html>.

54. Rustom Bharucha, "On the Border of Fascism: Manufacture (sic) of Consent in *Roja*," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29: 23 (1994): 1389.

55. Ravi Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public: Film Form and Spectatorship in Indian Cinema* (Ranikhet: Permanent Black, 2010), 213.

Roja was the first of Mani Ratnam's films that explicitly dealt with the question of national identity, and with threats towards Indian state. *Roja* and two of his other films, *Bombay* (1995) and *Dil se...* (1998), comprise his so-called "terrorism trilogy". They are set against the background of the 1992–1993 Hindu-Muslim riots in Bombay, and the insurgency movements in North-East India and Kashmir. *Bombay* and *Dil se...* also reached considerable popularity,⁵⁶ even though they could not compete with the cult status of *Roja*. Tejaswini Niranjana describes some of her viewing experiences in various cities across India, mentioning that not only were the tickets all sold out even after a long running time, but the enthusiastic attitude of the audiences was also exceptional. The slogans cheered by the audience at the crucial moments of the film included "Jai Shri Ram" (Hail Lord Rama), "Pakistan murdabad" (Death to Pakistan) and "Bharat Mata Ki Jai" (Hail Mother India).⁵⁷

Most of the critics explain the extreme popularity of *Roja* by the historical circumstances in which it was produced, as the beginning of the 1990s was marked by remarkable economic and social changes in India. The economic liberalisation led to the opening of markets and the emergence of a new middle class.⁵⁸ This was also the time when the Nehruvian legacy of a nation – secular and socialist, at least in theory – began to crumble. In the meantime, the country was exposed to a variety of internal and external challenges. The insurgencies in the Punjab, Kashmir and the North-Eastern states all led to a certain insecurity and crisis in Indian national identity,⁵⁹ which also manifested itself in cinema.⁶⁰ The rising popularity of the Hindu right-wing and the consequent Hindu-Muslim communal clashes contributed significantly to the shaking of the principle ideas on which the Indian

56. *Dil se..* was a box office flop in India, but became a cult hit in diasporic audiences; Chakravarty, "Fragmenting the Nation," in *Cinema and Nation*, ed. by Mette Hjort and Scott MacKenzie (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 236.

57. Tejaswini Niranjana, "Integrating Whose Nation? Tourists and Terrorists in 'Roja'," *Economic and Political Weekly* 29:3 (1994): 79.

58. Niranjana "Integrating Whose Nation?," 79.

59. S. V. Srinivas, "Roja in 'Law and Order' State," *Economic and Political Weekly* 29:20 (1994): 1225.

60. Chakravarty, "Fragmenting the Nation," 230.

state was founded. These events culminated in the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992, the same year in which *Roja* appeared in the cinemas.⁶¹ Those times were characterised by the “radicalizing public sphere”,⁶² and many critics conceive *Roja* as an iconic reflection on the turbulent events.

Consequently, to understand the context of *Roja*, it is first desirable to enlighten the status of the Kashmiri borderland from a specifically South-Indian perspective. Apart from that, the chapter discusses the ways in which the Tamil characters are portrayed in the film and argues that their approach to Kashmir is validated through their patriotic acts towards the nation. With little attention to the differences between the Tamil and the Hindi versions of the film – though some of which are mentioned below – the focus shall be on the latter version. This reached and incomparably wider audiences than the former, and could thus play a significant role in nation building – the point on which is the focus throughout the present work.

“Why should I be afraid to go to any corner of India?”

The above-quoted rhetorical question comes from Rishi Kumar, the protagonist of *Roja*, a young cryptographer setting out on a military intelligence mission to the Kashmir valley rocked by the repeated surges of insurgency of the early 1990s. He takes his newly wedded wife, the eponymous *Roja*, along. They enjoy the scenic landscape as generations of young lovers have done before, until one day Rishi is kidnapped by militants demanding the release of their leader, Waseem Khan, in exchange for Rishi.⁶³ *Roja*, the young and innocent village

61. In fact, the Hindi version of the film premiered shortly before the first anniversary of the demolition of the Babri masjid; Niranjana “Integrating Whose Nation?,” 79.

62. Kabir, “The Kashmiri Muslim,” 374.

63. Even though the film claims to bear no resemblance to real events or characters, Meenu Gaur calls attention to the contemporaneous high-profile kidnapping cases in Kashmir, such as the kidnapping of K.

girl tries to do everything in her power to tackle the bureaucratic hurdles and free her husband. With politicians and militants reluctant to act, it is eventually the result of Rishi's personal bravery and the help of a sympathetic Kashmiri woman that he escapes from his captor, Liaquat Ali. In the end, the somewhat reformed terrorist, Liaquat Ali, lets Rishi run and thus reunite with Roja.

The film does not visualise the border as explicitly as Henna did, but it is built upon an equally pronounced ideological basis, influenced by the political changes that took place in the time elapsed between the making of the two films. It presents Kashmir as an inalienable part of India. The Line of Control between India and Pakistan is firmly in place, Kashmir's secession is unimaginable, everyone who would support that move is misguided and fails to understand the essence of the overarching Indian patriotism. This message is essentially conveyed by contrasting regional – “Kashmiri” and “Tamil” – against the national, “Indian”, identities. The main characters move along the “Kashmir to Kanyakumari” axis – an expression describing the vastness of India by denoting its two furthestmost points – however, those two regional identities could not be portrayed more differently from each other. Those with “Tamil” identity manage to harmonise themselves with the national identity, whereas all the negative characters are Kashmiris, who are misled by the foreign agents of Pakistan and thus place themselves outside of the national discourse.

In *Roja*, both the director and the actors – just as the characters played by them – are South Indian, that is, far removed from the actual hotbed of the Kashmir conflict. To some extent, even the Kashmiri landscape, as appears in the film, is South Indian, as many scenes set in Kashmir were shot in Tamil Nadu.⁶⁴ As Viswanath and Malik note, themes related to the Partition of 1947 are rare in South Indian cinema, for this territory has a completely

Doraiyaswami or Rubaiya Sayeed as a possible source of inspiration for the plot; Meenu Gaur, “The Roja Debate and the Limits of Secular Nationalism,” in *Indian Mass Media and the Politics of Change*, ed. Somnath Batabyal (London: Routledge, 2010), 69.

64. Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public*, 215.

different experience of Independence than people in the Northern states of the country. The traumatic events both preceding and following the Partition affected the population in the South to a much lesser extent.⁶⁵ On the other hand, South India has a long history of conflicts with – and would repeatedly claim cultural suppression by – the North. Therefore, the Tamil film on the conflict concerning the northernmost corner of the country provides an unusual perspective on this question.

Contrary to the original, the Hindi version of *Roja* is not only dubbed but also relocates the plot, moving the story to Uttar Pradesh rather than Tamil Nadu. As a result, according to Ravi Vasudevan, the film loses most of its regional characteristics.⁶⁶ Indeed, some of the subtleties are indeed lost through the process of dubbing, and the linguistic differences, for instance, are mainly absent from the Hindi version. On the other hand, the visual signifiers are not translated or adapted in any way, those visualise the same couple from South India despite their Hindi language. Roja is always seen in typical South Indian *sarees* and the landscape of Roja's home village is unlike the villages in Uttar Pradesh. Apart from that, the film features some written texts that are not translated, and they play a crucial role in the narrative. The Hindi newspaper article about Rishi, which Roja cannot read, remains oddly unexplained for the Hindi audience, whereas the note in Tamil left by Rishi on the floor does not confine to the Hindi language of the characters. These and other elements clearly indicate that the protagonist couple comes from a very different background than the average Hindi cinemagoer.

The first half an hour of the film is taken up by establishing Rishi and Roja as firmly integrated into Tamil Nadu. Even in the Hindi version, in which Rishi lives in Kanpur (and not in Madras as in the original), the couple is markedly South Indian and Hindu. Rishi represents a modern member of the upper class, whereas Roja complements his figure by

65. Viswanath and Malik, "Revisiting 1947," 64.

66. Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public*, 221.

adding a layer of village innocence and bucolic romance.⁶⁷ In fact, Roja's Tamil identity is so strong that she cannot speak any language but Tamil. Her English is limited to understanding Rishi's love confession but speaks no Hindi, which yields a challenging obstacle while in search of Rishi in Kashmir.

Despite the protagonists' Tamil background, the national, Indian identity superimposes itself upon their characters. This patriotism is especially apparent when they encounter the contested border and the question of national integrity, and Rishi demands the territory of Kashmir in the name of the Indian nation. In an important dialogue with his boss, Rishi claims that Kashmir is an integral part of India, so he needs not to worry about travelling to there – indeed, in no corner of India should an Indian be afraid. Thereby, he lays the territorial claim based on his national stand even before arriving to the actual plot. Rishi's perspective on an inalienable, Indian Kashmir is further emphasised by their exploration of the Valley, accompanied by romantic song sequences.

“India will not be partitioned again”

The Kashmiri landscape features prominently throughout the story and is shown with emphasis on one of two very different purposes. The first way of portrayal features it as very different from the home environment of Rishi and Roja, even as an alien and menacing territory. In contrast, the same dissimilitude can also be portrayed as the source of exotic and romantic experiences. Accordingly, the first scenes of the film take the viewer to a dangerous, unknown borderland with terrorists lurking in the dense, cold, foggy forests. All

67. Niranjana explains the popularity of the film with the suggestion that urban audiences could identify with the hero very easily. The multi-faceted portrayal of Rishi as the typical urbanized, modern Indian man and the restrained nature of his action scenes lends an aura of credibility to his character and the way he conceives nationalism; Niranjana “Integrating Whose Nation?,” 79.

that is in fierce contrast with the open, reassuring, idyllic images of the Tamil Nadu countryside in the next scene, in which Roja roams joyfully with childlike innocence, singing the song sequence *Choti si asha* (“Little hope”).

Nonetheless, Kashmir becomes a mysterious realm to be explored, tamed, and even liked both by the protagonists and the audience. Regardless of the hostile atmosphere, Rishi and Roja spend some time discovering Kashmir, the idyllic territory that has been living in the imagination of generations of Indians. Emphasised by the lyrics of the song sequences “*Ye Haseen Vadiyan*” (“These beautiful valleys”) and “*Roja*” (“Rose”), the visualisation of the scene represents the Valley as a romantic plot. The first song focuses on the sensual relationship developing between the couple against the picturesque background. The song features Kashmiri women wearing colourful folk costumes and dancing along the couple, and they appear to be part of the landscape, representing the fully developed stereotype of Kashmir.⁶⁸ Roja and Rishi are nothing but tourists during the daytime, enjoying the exotic landscape, playing with the snow, rolling down on the slopes, playing in the fields, as well as passionate lovers during the night.

These beautiful valleys, these open skies...
Where have we arrived, my dear?
My heart started blossoming in this spring.
I could not be happier than having received you.⁶⁹

The second song, *Roja*, is featured while Rishi is captured, in which his nostalgic sentiments for his love and the lost paradise of Kashmir come to the surface and materialising in a melancholic song in solo.⁷⁰ Roja appears in his imagination but keeps eluding him by hiding

68. Niranjana notes that this is the only place when ethnic Kashmiris are shown in the film, except for the later appearance of a newspaper boy and the terrorists; Niranjana, “Integrating Whose Nation?,” 80.

69. ये हसीं वादियाँ ,यह खुला आसमान ,आ गए हम कहाँ ,ए मेरे सजना ?इन बहारों में दिल की कलि खिल गयी ,मुझको तुम जो मिले ,हर खुशी मिल गयी.

70. Niranjana argues that this nostalgia towards the lost peace and beauty of the valley addresses the feelings of other middle-class Indian tourists, similar to the couple in the film, who can no longer visit Kashmir; Niranjana “Integrating Whose Nation?,” 80.

behind the trees of the sunlit Kashmir Valley. The reality of his loss and the surrounding winter landscape underscore the difference between the idealistic past and present of both Rishi and the Valley. Despite being a fantasy sequence, this provides a partially realistic view on the Valley, for awareness of the current situation is portrayed alongside the nostalgia of the past.

Apart from Rishi's territorial claim on Kashmir as a place of romance, he also intends to corroborate his rights with a political argument – whether it accords with the ethnic Kashmiris residing in the Valley or not. Although the Indo-Pakistani border is not visualised in the film explicitly, it makes its appearance in some of the dialogues, occasionally even more harshly than in *Henna*. Pakistan is not mentioned by name but referred to as the “neighboring country” or the “country across the border”, and yet, it is strongly present behind the events. The implicit presence of the border manifests most clearly in the conversation between Rishi and Liaquat Ali, a dialogue that forms the ideological core of the narrative, and in which Liaquat Ali explicitly admits that his militant outfit receives orders from across the border. This reinforces the supposition commonly held among Indians, which claims that not only is the Kashmiri insurgency funded by Pakistan, but *azadi* – the proclaimed goal of Kashmiris – means actual unification with Pakistan. When Rishi questions Liaquat Ali why his group engages in this violent struggle claiming lives of innocent people, instead of conducting peace talks with the Indian state, Liaquat Ali declares that negotiations proved to be fruitless. The only solution is partition. Rishi, however, refutes that instantly: “No, not this time. India will not be partitioned again”.⁷¹

Rishi's passionate stance on the partition moves the current situation into a historical context, establishing a direct link between the events of 1989 and 1947. It frames the

71. नहीं, इस बार नहीं. इण्डिया अब नहीं बंटेगा. Notably, the English “India” used here positing it as a modern, secular entity, instead of calling it “Bharat” according to the official, Hindi usage, which nevertheless conveys certain religious connotations connected to Hinduism.

Kashmir insurgency as a pro-Pakistani movement that aims at disrupting the indisputable integrity of India. Regardless that the history of the real-life Kashmir insurgency, eludes such clear-cut categorizations as “anti-Indian” and “pro-Pakistani”, the film *Roja* takes an openly one-sided perspective. According to *Roja*, Kashmir is an integral part of India, and under no circumstances could the borders be renegotiated, especially not if Pakistan continues to meddle in the internal affairs of India. This stand is clearly expressed in the dialogue between Rishi and Liaquat Ali.

Rishi’s wariness of the “other country” seems to be justified when the border turns out to be just as dangerous for the Kashmiris as it is for the rest of the Indians. When Liaquat Ali’s younger brother leaves Indian Kashmir to receive military training in Azad Kashmir, Pakistani militants murder him at the border. This episode accords with the claim that Pakistan only abuses the Kashmir insurgency to push its own agenda, and cares little for the well-being of the Kashmiri people. Not only Rishi, but also Liaquat Ali is shaken by Pakistan’s betrayal, and this situation contributes significantly to the climax of the events.

Hindu patriots in Kashmir

Rishi proves his merit as a patriotic Indian citizen not only on the level of rhetoric but also on the level of acts, by which he aims to justify his claims on the Valley. His justification, however, is rather debatable, given that he is a South Indian tourist claiming the Valley on the ground of such an abstract concept of ‘nation’. He even disregards what Kashmiri people might say, for they show little if any willingness to participate in building the Indian nation. In that manner, *Roja* juxtaposes the inhumane acts of the Kashmiri militants and Rishi’s patriotic acts. According to the film, even though the Kashmiri people live there for centuries, by engaging in anti-national activities, they have, by now, lost their right to the

territory through their military operations, which hurt not only soldiers but families, innocent civilians and even children. The way this film depicts Kashmiris as outsiders of the Indian society is best explained by Roja's words, shouting at Waseem Khan in the jail: "You can leave India if you don't like it here, but leave my husband alone!" In a conversation between Rishi and Liaquat Ali, the latter admits that he would kill his own mother if the leaders of the insurgency would demand so – a concept that would be inconceivable for an average Indian.

Rishi's diligent patriotism reassures his Indian identity and commitment towards the development and protection of the nation, regardless in what situation he is. Not only does he work for the Indian secret services as a cryptographer, but he also performs patriotic acts – even on the expense of casualties. He proves his commitment in two iconic acts: first, when he should cooperate with his captors in recording a message to the Indian military asking for ransom, he exclaims "*Jai Hind*" (Long live India) several times, despite that he is physically assaulted for that.⁷² Even more iconic is the legendary scene of the torching of the Indian flag. As one of the terrorists puts the Indian flag into flames for his annoyance by with the Indian government's unwillingness to release Waseem Khan, Rishi, badly injured and locked up in a room, is suddenly possessed by the surge of superhuman power, breaks out of the house and puts out the flames with his own body.⁷³

In these acts, Rishi proves himself as a dedicated patriot, who is willing to sacrifice anything for his country, and his personal safety and well-being come only second after that. On the other hand, Liaquat Ali only follows the barbaric orders of his leaders and fails to take

72. According to Niranjana, these utterances never failed to attract loud cheering from the audience of the cinema. Niranjana, "Integrating Whose Nation?" 81.

73. Niranjana says he resembles the anti-Mandal agitators who committed self-immolation to protest the reservation policies of the government approximately two years before the release of the film. She draws the parallel not only because of the visual representation, but also because of the way both Roja and the anti-Mandal agitators demonstrate their identity as nationalist and truly secular. Similarly to the anti-Mandal agitators' argument saying that they are truly secular because they do not believe in caste but merit, Roja believes that there are no regional identities that would be as salient and natural as that of the Indian; Niranjana, "Integrating Whose Nation?," 81.

into consideration the interests of even his Kashmiri compatriots in case they disagree with him.⁷⁴ Although the terrorist leader goes through some positive change of character towards the end of the film, it is Rishi and his patriotic claims-making on the Valley that is celebrated throughout the narrative. And yet, it is not him, but Roja who learns the most about how to be a good Indian citizen. Coming from a small village, she needs to adjust to urban life, which begins with her transition to adulthood and her marriage. Then her youthful naivety finally fades away when she encounters the border. She learns that even though her own personal issues are important, whenever the nation is at stake, one ought to put those aside. As Ravi Vasudevan puts it, throughout the narrative, Roja “comes to understand that she inhabits the political space called India.”⁷⁵ He argues that spatiality plays an important part in this aspect. Roja realises that her space is not limited to the rural Tamil Nadu landscape as portrayed under the “*Choti si Asha*” song, but she is, in turn, part of a larger political and social entity. She has certain rights, including the right to rescue her husband, but also certain responsibilities, and priority should be given to the latter group.

Apart from becoming a mature Indian citizen, Roja plays another vital role in the narrative. Throughout the film, she is portrayed as a devout Hindu, by which, according to Kabir, provides another important aspect of laying claim to Kashmir and marking it as an integral part to India.⁷⁶ Roja is devout already in Tamil Nadu, but when she comes to Kashmir, she initially goes to visit a local temple. Therein she explains that her father taught her that all deities are the same, and so she hopes that praying to the “god of Kashmir” would convey her message to her chosen deity in Tamil Nadu. As Vasudevan argues, this act can be interpreted as a claims-making device through which Hinduism does not only transcend regional difference but also “extends the space of national territory”.⁷⁷ In addition to that,

74. He disregards the sufferings of the Kashmiri pandits and of his family members.

75. Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public*, 216.

76. Kabir, “The Kashmiri Muslim,” 377.

77. Vasudevan, *The Melodramatic Public*, 217

the story also indicates despite the territorial differences, India forms a single state, and Hindus are welcome in any of its corners.

Religion as a boundary

Considering the fact Kashmir is the only Muslim-majority Indian state, the religious aspect of *Roja* deserves a few more words. Just as Hinduism features prominently in the film, Islam is no less present although portrayed in a very different light. References to Islam appear exclusively in a militant context, for instance when soldiers pray with their guns, and, in particular, when they commit their most vicious acts. Thus, it emerges that Islam and war are closely related, which is an unprecedented concept in Indian cinema. Conversely, this soon becomes standardised in Bollywood movies that emphasise the militancy of the insurgents as well as their Muslim faith.

Roja's concept of Islam might sensibly be explained, as Kabir does, with both internal and external factors. Namely, Kashmiri Muslims indeed waged a *jihad* in order to achieve *azadi*, though this event should not be viewed as independent from the global emergence of *jihad* and terrorism, or especially not from the alleged relationship between the two.⁷⁸ Be that as it may, *Roja* makes a powerful anti-Muslim claim, and, as Bharucha argues, the real significance of the film lies in marking the enemy clearly, and thereby building a Hindu consensus about separatist Muslims. The narrative also presents itself in the framework of communal tensions all across India. In that manner, the film foregrounds a boundary very different than the one drawn on maps: the internal divisions of religion within the Indian society.⁷⁹

78. Kabir, "The Kashmiri Muslim," 376.

79. Bharucha, "On the Border of Fascism," 1391.

Although the plot of *Roja* aspires to downplay this divide by emphasising the importance of family unity – a trope already established by previous films – it achieves little success in that sense. As Srinivas observes, the representation of the nation-as-family symbolism happens through a didactic, even teleological manner, in which it conflates the image of the family with that of the nation. Part of the film’s success in mobilising nationalist sentiments might be explained by that it brings abstract concepts such as patriotism or national security into down-to-earth, everyday dimensions like family and personal security.⁸⁰ Also for Niranjana, the popularity of the film derives from the successful contrasting between micro- and macro-level questions. This is the story of everyday people who find themselves in a conflict much larger than their usual perspective, but they manage to overcome the obstacle through their common sense and national patriotism.⁸¹

Produced in the context of the eruption of the Kashmir insurgency and emerging conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, *Roja* addresses a set of questions with regards to patriotism and nationalism that are unprecedented in earlier cinema. Whereas the plot of *Henna* impeded the inter-community romance to come true, but religion played no explicit role in the conflict, *Roja* pioneers in a new generation of films focusing on the same general theme. It essentially merges Islam and terrorism, foregrounding religion as the main reason of the Kashmir insurgency, and thus creating a template for future films. Indeed, Kashmiri insurgency comes to be visualised repeatedly as the indignation of barbaric Muslim terrorist.

Because of the change of the Nehruvian model both in society and on the film screen, the quasi-secular outlook portrayal of society that is still present in *Henna* gives way to a new type of discourse. In that, the secular character is reconstituted as Hindu, middle-class citizen, and this everyday hero serves the benevolent Indian state to preserve the unity and

80. Srinivas, “*Roja* in ‘Law and Order’ State,” 1225.

81. Niranjana, “Integrating Whose Nation?,” 79.

security of the country.⁸² The border stands firmly in its place between India and Pakistan, Kashmir is an integral part of India, and it is equally important for the national identity of South Indians. The Kashmir Valley itself still acts as a locus of romance, but is threatened by outside elements and unpatriotic elements, and, therefore, the patriotic citizen must act upon the threat and protect Kashmir. The border in this narrative performs a pedagogical, transformative role, as it teaches people how to overcome their regional affiliations and act as patriotic, Indian citizens. Later narratives, to be explored in the next chapter, refine this view to some extent, in which, however, continues to portray religious difference as a main explanatory factor for the hateful situation.

82. Niranjana, "Integrating Whose Nation?," 79.

3.

Mission Kashmir: “A border drawn among the hearts”

The expression “a border drawn among the hearts” comes from the title song of *Mission Kashmir* (2000), a blockbuster action-drama directed by Vidhu Vinod Chopra, and starring famous actors. The father-son pair was played by Sanjay Dutt and Hrithik Roshan, two great film stars of their respective generation, both of whom would later feature in other terrorist-themed films.⁸³ The female lead was Preity Zinta, right before the apex of her career in the early 2000s. As a result, the film attracted large audiences and it received mostly positive reviews from film critics as well.⁸⁴ As the third case study of the present work, this chapter focuses on *Mission Kashmir* and, especially on the film’s representation of a new wave in Hindi cinema, thematizing the Kashmir conflict and terrorism.

A film for “Kashmiriyat”

The song titled *Dhuan, dhuan* – loosely translates as “Smoke everywhere” – expresses the film’s main approach to the Kashmir valley. It contrasts an imaginary paradise that Kashmir was in the past, and the present-day hell into which it has been turned, and explains that change with the division of the hearts and the disturbance of human relationships. The

83. Sanjay Dutt reprised his role as the savior of Kashmir in a later production, *Lamhaa* (2010), but this film failed to make the same mark as *Mission Kashmir*. Hrithik Roshan starred in another film in the same year, in the financially less successful but critically more acclaimed *Fiza* (2000).

84. It was the third highest grosser of the year 2000. *Indian Box Office Records*, accessed June 6, 2017, <http://www.ibosnetwork.com/asp/filmbodetails.asp?id=Mission+Kashmir>.

consequences of the Kashmir insurgency are portrayed through the image of a family, albeit the romantic relationship as in *Henna* and *Roja* is overshadowed by a problematic father-son relationship that is the main reason behind the escalation of violence. By presenting the “correct” understanding of Islam and the “distorted” views of the extremists, *Mission Kashmir* foregrounds the figure of the terrorist and takes the discourse on Islam a step further than the films discussed in the previous chapters.

Scholars discussing *Mission Kashmir*, most importantly Sujala Singh and Ananya Jahanara Kabir, tend to focus on how the views presented in the film are influenced by the historical circumstances in which it was produced. The Kargil War in 1999, a few-month-long military encounter initiated by Pakistan and perceived by India as betrayal of the ongoing peace process, inevitably left its impact on the film’s portrayal of Pakistan and its army. No less significant was the worldwide discourse of Islam, radicalism and terrorism, and especially the much-contested relation between those. In addition, the film would not miss the opportunity to reflect on the internal socio-political debate over the changed relationship between civil society and the state. Questions such as economic liberalisation, globalisation and the growing role of religion in the public sphere are all featured in *Mission Kashmir*.⁸⁵

Amit Rai notes that the historical circumstances around the turn of the millennium resulted in a new trend in Hindi cinema. According to him, *Mission Kashmir* is one among the “new Kashmir films of Bollywood” that focus not only on the border itself but also on its contribution to the country’s internal problems. During the late 1990s and early 2000s, the genre of the “cinepatriotic films” emerged in Bollywood, which “represent, visualise, and narrativize the sovereignty of the supposedly secular, but in practice upper-caste, Hindu

85. Sujala Singh, “Terror, Spectacle, and the Secular State in Bombay Cinema,” in *Terror and the Postcolonial*, ed. Elleke Boehmer and Stephen Morton (Chichester: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), 348; Ananya Jahanara Kabir, “The Kashmiri Muslim in Bollywood’s ‘New Kashmir Films’,” *Contemporary South Asia* 18:4 (2010): 377.

Indian nation”.⁸⁶ Film falling into this genre engage with contentious social and political issues. Indeed, they tend to be set against the background of social and political conflicts, and generally address the relationship between the Hindu majority and various religious and ethnic minorities such as the Kashmiri Muslim population.⁸⁷

Priya Kumar also highlights a certain shift between the narratives of earlier terrorism-focused films, such as *Roja* (1992) and *Pukar* (2000), and those of the more recent products. In films of the latter group, the terrorist is also the protagonist, and, rather than being depicted as an utterly evil figure, his motivations for turning to violence and his subsequent moral reforms are usually in the focus. They suggest that there is a direct cause-effect relationship between state-violence and minority grievances in many of the cases, which may, at least partially, explain why a soul would turn to violence. In that manner, terrorist violence often grows out of a desire of revenge on the state or its agents.⁸⁸ According to Sujala Singh, this “apologetic take” of the newer Kashmir-focused films is a result of the guilt that Indians felt for their state’s responsibility in the escalation of the conflict.⁸⁹ Creditable as this explanation may sound, Singh fails to clarify what exact films would represent that “guilt”, and for what specific conflicts would the filmmakers, in the name of their “nation-state”, would feel guilty. Be that as it may, focusing on themes much along the same lines as the above-introduced genre, *Mission Kashmir* nicely fits into that category.

Notably, the plot of *Mission Kashmir* stems from the director’s childhood memories, as Vidhu Vinod Chopra is a Kashmiri expatriate.⁹⁰ He thus addresses the cognitive dissonance felt between the Kashmir of his youth and the present situation of the Valley and

86. Amit Rai, “Patriotism and the Muslim Citizen in Hindi Films,” *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, Summer (2003): 5-6.

87. Rai, “Patriotism and the Muslim Citizen,” 5-6.

88. Priya Kumar, *Limiting Secularism: The Ethics of Coexistence in Indian Literature and Film* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 200.

89. Singh, “Terror Spectacle and the Secular State,” 346.

90. Claudia Richter, “The ethics of coexistence. Bollywood’s Different Take on Terrorism,” *CrossCurrents* 59:4 (2009): 493.

aims to convey the message of peace and understanding.⁹¹ In the dedication of the film, it says it aims to contribute to the “Kashmiriyat, the centuries old tradition of religious tolerance and harmony”. Conversely, the plot itself will make the audience aware of the lack of religious tolerance and, for that matter, of harmony. In fact, the ostentatious incongruity between the harmonious past and the disturbed presence is omnipresent in the film.

“A fight between love and hatred”

The story of *Mission Kashmir* is centred on the escalation of the troublesome relationship between a Kashmiri orphan, Altaf, and the Inspector General of the Kashmiri police, Inayat Khan. During the Kashmir insurgency, Inayat Khan inadvertently massacres Altaf’s family in a police raid searching for a gunman hiding in their home. He then regrets his sin, adopts the child, but conceals his involvement in the massacre. One day, however, Altaf finds out the truth, escapes from his foster parents, and soon joins a militant outfit. Only ten years afterwards does he return to the Valley to carry out the “Mission Kashmir”, and take vengeance on his foster father, Inayat Khan. The mission is a co-operation between mysterious *jihadist* organisations and not-so-mysterious government agencies, by which they aim to disrupt the fragile communal harmony of the Valley. This would also give a new impetus to the Kashmiri separatist movement that intends to annexe Kashmir to Pakistan. Everything goes smoothly as planned until the very end, when, unexpectedly, Altaf fails to accomplish the mission, ceases to execute his heinous terrorist acts, and turns against the terrorists. Thereby, he saves the Valley and, by extension, India from being engulfed in yet another spiral of violence, similar to the post-Ayodhya riots in the 1990s.

91. Rachel Dwyer in conversation with Vidhu Vinod Chopra. SOAS, University of London. Accessed on June 5, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UtNIZLTAnyE>

The dramatic turn of the events can only be explained with Altaf's love for the two women in his life, his love interest, Sufiyan Parvez, and his foster mother, Neelima Khan. In that manner, the film features one of the most successful examples of the nation-as-family trope, as well as portrays the Kashmir conflict within the framework of personal and political issues. Apart from that, *Mission Kashmir* repeatedly refers to the traumatic rupture between past and present, as well as to the lingering nostalgia that forms a bridge between the two. To that effect, the film highlights certain symbols representing different epochs.

In one of its song sequences, the audience hears about a dreamlike past – “*Sochon ke jheelon*” (In the ponds of fantasy) – an idealised present – “*Chupke se sun*” (Listen quietly) and a wishful future – “*Rind posh mal*” (Welcoming spring). Most representative of the phenomenon, however, is the *Dhuan, dhuan* song sequence, which explicitly calls attention to the gap between present and past. The first scene of the film depicts the undisrupted beauty of the Valley with all the necessary elements of a Kashmiri postcard: tall mountains, clear skies, and the peaceful waters of the Dal lake with floating houseboats. This calm beauty, however, is suddenly disrupted by an explosion blowing up a houseboat, and the dramatic change is emphasised by the lyrics of the song *Dhuan, dhuan*.

This land of deities has been drenched by blood, and neither the sound of the conch or the call for prayer resounds anymore. The evil eye of the skies fell on my homeland. Why are these people uprooted? Why are these houses on fire? This is a fight for power; this is a fight for positions. Even the blood of the innocents shed is coloured by politics. There is a border drawn among the hearts of the people.⁹²

The song narrates the billowing smoke covering the landscape of the Valley, making its people impervious to the beauty that surrounds them. The turmoil even disrupts age-old religious traditions, as symbolised by the silence of the conch shell used for Hindu religious

92. धुआं धुआं ... लहू-लुहान हो गयी ज़मीन यह देवताओं की, न शंक की सदाएं, न अब सदा आजान की .नज़र मेरी ज़मीन को लगी है आस्मां की .है दरबदर ये लोग, क्यों जले हैं ये मकान .यह तख़्त की लड़ाई है, यह कुर्सियों की जंग है .यह बेगुनाह खून भी सियासतों का रंग है .लकीर खींच डी गयी दिलों के दरमियाँ.

ceremonies, and the absence of the *azan*, the Muslims call for prayer. It emphasises the suffering of the people, whose hearts are now divided by a border, a metaphor clearly alluding to the 1947 Partition. Following that, the films also gives some explanation of the current situation of the Kashmir conflict, presenting it as a result of high politics that divide the hearts.

One of the key scenes of the film takes the viewer to an undisclosed location outside of India, which the audience may tentatively identify with Azad Kashmir. We find ourselves amidst a group of mysterious people who are gathered to decide on the future of India and Kashmir. The assembly, led by a bearded man whose resemblance to Osama bin Laden seems not to be accidental,⁹³ eventually commissions a Pathan veteran of the Afghan war, Hilal Kohistani, to execute the “Mission Kashmir”. He then proposes to execute this mission by sending his most trustworthy *mujahid* to India, namely the protagonist of the film, Altaf. The assembly reveals that “Mission Kashmir” is aimed at disrupting the inter-communal harmony, and waking the Muslims in India, whose number surpasses that of the Muslims in Pakistan. This would be their revenge for India’s meddling into Pakistan’s internal affairs in 1971, which resulted in the secession of Bangladesh. In other words, they are agents of the Pakistani state, who wish to break up the integrity of India.

The next scene features Altaf running through the wild terrain that symbolises the no man’s land between the Indian and Pakistani administered Kashmir, on his way to execute “Mission Kashmir”. He seems to have no fear, he trespasses the border unnoticed and enters the Indian territory with no hindrance. Amit Rai goes as far as to read this scene as a metaphor of an infection that attacks the Indian nation,⁹⁴ regardless that this interpretation is in evident contradiction with the events to follow. In fact, Altaf is not an outsider to either

93. As many critics of the film mention, this figure, especially his beard, turban, and Arabic accent while speaking Urdu, inevitably reminds us of Osama bin Laden.

94. Rai, “Patriotism and the Muslim Citizen in Hindi Films,” 4.

Kashmir or India, but a local citizen whose later acts could only be presented as his reintegration to the state.

Sharmila Sen sees Altaf's border-crossing as one of the most important moments in the film, for that it signifies his transition not only between India and Pakistan but also between his past and present.⁹⁵ He left the Valley ten years before, and now he returns to kill his foster father, Inayat Khan, and, by that, to put an end to the traumas haunting him ever since his youth. Whereas Altaf sees the terrorists' act justified by a certain interpretation of religious sentences, personal vendetta remains to be his primary driving force. Regardless of his purpose, the border-crossing, in practice, signifies the commencement of a very different kind of journey, one that leads to home to his family and nation. Even though Altaf has betrayed the community in which he had grown up, is still a member of the Khan family as well as of the Indian nation. Thus, stages in Altaf's life may even symbolise the history of the Valley: after an idyllic youth, he was misled by *jihadist* propaganda, alienated from his family and submerged into conflicts, now, however, he yearns for a future of love and peace.

Kashmiri identities

Mission Kashmir depicts the political and social conditions of the Valley as integrated into and, thus, inalienable of, India, even though there are some local characteristics that are dissimilar to the rest of country. For instance, Inayat Khan is integrated into the broader framework of the Indian nation through his wife, who is a Hindu from Lucknow, and through the men serving under him, who are representatives of the Nehruvian secular state. In fact,

95. Sharmila Sen, "No passports, no visas. The Line of Control Between India and Pakistan in Contemporary Bombay Cinema," in *Alternative Indias: Writing, Nation and Communalism*, ed. Peter Morey and Alex Tickell (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 2005): 215.

they line up a carefully selected plethora of different ethnicities, faiths, and identities, including a Sikh from Delhi, a Pandit from Kashmir, several Kashmiri Muslims, and many Hindus. Apart from these personal and familial ties, the Valley is also permeated by Indian institutions. The female protagonist, Sufiya, works for the Kashmir branch of the All-India Radio, Inayat Khan is the head of the Indian police forces in Srinagar, and the prime minister also pays a symbolic visit to the state. These features emphasise that, when it comes to telecommunications, armed forces, or politics, Kashmir is an integral part of the state of India.

Mission Kashmir also proposes some doubts about citizenship and national identity. The film aims to convey a reassuring message about the reliability of Kashmiris and, by extension, of Muslims, to the broader audience. For instance, in a dialogue between Inayat Khan and Mr Deshpande, a Hindu officer of the Indian Administrative Services, the former asserts his loyalty to both India and Kashmir and justifies that with strong emotional bonds.

It is the misfortune not only of us, Muslims, but it is the misfortune of the entire country, that an officer, who has been risking his life for 21 years now, still must prove his loyalty repeatedly. And only, because his name is not Deshpande, but Inayat Khan. I am related to this soil by blood. My nine-year-old son rests in this soil. The way I love this country cannot be measured to the certificate of an IAS officer.⁹⁶

This monologue hints upon a range of doubts and insecurities that face Kashmiris and other Indian Muslims and the film is determined to put those to rest. Khan reassures the IAS officer about his loyalty, and that even though he belongs to a different group, this will not result in a tragic event similar to what happened with Indira Gandhi and her Sikh bodyguards. He declaims his loyalty to both his immediate territory, Kashmir, and to the broader national

96. यह हम मुसलामानों की ही नहीं नहीं, बल्कि पूरे मुल्क की बदकिस्मती है, की इक्कीस साल से गोली खाते हुए सिपाही को बार बार अपनी वफादारी का सबूत देना पड़ता है क्योंकि उसका नाम देशपांडे नहीं, इनायत खान है .मेरा खून दफ़न है .मेरे नौ साल का बीटा दफ़न है इस मुल्क से मेरी जो मुहब्बत है, वह किसी आय .ए .एस .अफसर की सर्टिफिकेट की मुहताज नहीं है .

body. In additions, he calls the omnipresent discrimination of Muslims into attention, arguing that a Muslim like him ought to prove his merit and loyalty repeatedly. This point highlights a very real problem in the Indian society, particularly since the Partition. Since their co-religionists, at least in the eyes of Hindu nationalists, betrayed India by establishing Pakistan, Muslims are expected to prove their loyalty to the country.⁹⁷

Mission Kashmir also engages with the role of Islam and Muslims in the subcontinent through another character. Sufiya, Altaf's childhood friend and love interest, forms a bridge between the nostalgic past of disturbed present, and she is also the strongest pulling force for the protagonist to return to the society.⁹⁸ What is more, the way she represents Islam is in fierce opposition with the interpretation of Hilal Kohistani. Kabir argues that she is the "female Inayat Khan", that is, the template of a modern Muslim,⁹⁹ Sufiya plays an even more significant role in presenting a modernist, the normative interpretation of Islam than Khan. Whereas Khan is only shown performing his quotidian religious rituals, Sufiya engages in conversation about "real Islamic values", and thereby transmits the filmmakers' message.

Kohistani provides little explanation of what he understands by jihad, or how that relates to Islam values, referring to God, martyrdom and paradise, though never does he explain his motivations in more detail. It is even suggested that he abuses these concepts to foster his own agenda and make money from the Pakistani government. Human lives, even those of his devout followers, matter not to him. He would sacrifice Altaf, whom he calls "son", for the success of "Mission Kashmir". Consequently, it becomes clear that *jihad*, just as Islam itself, is but an empty concept for Kohistani. Conversely, Sufiya represents an entirely different understanding of the same religion. She is a modern, secular woman, yet she is who has strong faith, and, in a sequence of nightmares, she reprimands Altaf for his

97. Gyanendra Pandey, "Can a Muslim Be an Indian?," *Comparative Study of Society and History* 41:4 (1999): 610.

98. Rai, "Patriotism and the Muslim Citizen in Hindi Films," 10.

99. Kabir, "The Kashmiri Muslim," 380.

“incorrect” understanding of Islam. She reminds him that it is a sin to spill the blood of innocents, and that is an unacceptable way of taking revenge for his own losses. She stands for peaceful Islam and represents the specifically South Asian tradition inspired by Sufism.¹⁰⁰ With her vocal support of religious tolerance, peace and coexistence, she is a reassuring figure, whose love and devotion can convince even a terrorist.

The other female character particularly influential in the film is Neelima Khan, Altaf’s foster mother. They share a strong emotional bond. She heals his wounds, helps him to re-integrate into the family and into the broader society. In a key dialogue, she tells Altaf that the real fight is not between him and Inayat Khan, but between the forces of good and evil, love and hatred. That is, he needs to find the solution within his own soul to solve the conflicts as long as it is still possible. She also puts forward a prophecy saying that if men keep on opposing each other, it is her, Neelima, who will suffer. And indeed, she eventually falls victim to the spiral of violence, which is the decisive moment in Altaf’s change of character.¹⁰¹ By her love for Altaf, another role of Neelima in the plot is to symbolise how a prodigal Kashmiri son belongs to there, and thus to strengthen the narrative of the national family. Faiza Hirji argues that “the Hindu mother becomes a thinly veiled metaphor for the nation and the war between Altaf and Khan ultimately results in her destruction (...).”¹⁰² The opposition of the two men and the suffering woman can be read with a duplicate meaning: first, it stands for families falling apart because of the insurgency, and, second, the fight between the India and Kashmir results in the ultimate destruction of Mother India.

Traumatized in his childhood and having grown up under disturbing circumstances, the persona of Altaf is inevitably complex. On many occasions, he finds himself at life-changing crossroads with various religious and emotional influences. His initial trauma

100. Kabir, “The Kashmiri Muslim,” 379.

101. Altaf kills her accidentally by planting a bomb in Inayat Khan’s bag, which blows up next to Neelima.

102. Faiza Hirji, “Change of pace? Islam and tradition in popular Indian cinema,” *South Asian Popular Culture* 6:1 (2008): 65.

caused by political reasons is further exacerbated through his disillusionment with his foster family, followed by his engagement in various violent acts that take their toll on his psychological and emotional health. And yet, especially his oedipal struggle with his foster father, Inayat Khan, that eventually leads him to terrorism, represent an emotional, human being, to whom the cinema audience can relate. And indeed, by addressing the grievances and giving a human face to the Kashmir insurgents in a novelty in *Mission Kashmir*, whereas presenting the origins of the conflict as part of a family drama is highly problematic. As Sujala Singh has argued, this approach infantilizes the figure of the terrorist and discredits the validity of otherwise justifiable political goals of the insurgency.¹⁰³

The fight for *azadi* is portrayed in the film as an uninformed struggle resulting from *jihadist* propaganda, Pakistani intervention, and a general confusion stemming from those two factors. With regards to the internal boundary running through the body of the Indian nation, it can be established that *Mission Kashmir* shifts the emphasis from inter-community to intra-community divisions. The notion that Hinduism is compatible with secular nationalism whereas Islam is not, as appears in *Roja*, is absent from *Mission Kashmir*. Instead of that, this film finds the demarcation line within the Muslim community, namely between those who are peaceful patriots of India, and those who are extremists and refuse to live under the control of the Indian state. The latter group is against communal harmony and seeks to disrupt that for the sake of their personal goals. As Amit Rai argues, this is very typical of the cinepatriotic films, which, apart from asserting that Hindus and Muslims make up a national family, also intend to provide pedagogical templates for Muslim how to be acceptable for Indian nationalists.¹⁰⁴ On the other hand, such narratives as the biased view of good and evil distances the audience even further from reality, and from what the insurgency aspires to achieve on the ground in Kashmir.

103. Singh, "Terror and the postcolonial," 347.

104. Rai, "Patriotism and the Muslim Citizen in Hindi Films," 10.

Conclusions

Bollywood has produced numerous films focusing on the theme of Kashmir, some of which achieved considerable success, while others less so. As for the present analysis, three iconic products have been chosen, mainly for that, they reached masses of the population in India, and thus arguably shaped the public opinion. In addition, they were produced within the decade between 1991 and 2000, through which the paradigm of representing Kashmir shifted significantly. Admittedly, Kashmir remains to be popular in the last decade and a half, however, the more recent narratives show little novelty in the way they represent Kashmir, but rather elaborate on the hermeneutics presented herewith. Probably for that reason, they failed to have achieved such popularity and success as *Henna*, *Roja*, and *Mission Kashmir*.

It emerges from the three case studies that the cinematic visualisations of the Kashmir Valley are integrated into the public discourse about politics and national identity. The films reflect on the social and political climate of their making. In addition, they even influence the public discourse by foregrounding certain issues, such as religious boundaries, while other delicate issues, such as the insufficient political representation of the Kashmiris, remain unexplored. In addition, the three narratives showcase a certain shift in their views about the Kashmir conflict, which is evidently correlated with the socio-political environment in which they were born. Produced before the rise of the Hindu right-wing movement and the bloody conflicts that followed, *Henna* is still influenced by Nehruvian secularism. It construes the problem of Kashmir as simply a border conflict between two countries. In contrast, *Roja* and *Mission Kashmir*, produced in a very different political and social context, focus more on the sociopolitical questions relation to Kashmir and frame the

conflict as a predominantly religious problem. Accordingly, *Henna* argues that the conflict should be resolved by the two states living peacefully side-by-side, whereas *Roja* and *Mission Kashmir* depict a more complex, multi-faceted and probably unresolvable problem.

As depicted in *Henna*, the LoC borderline between India and Pakistan, demarked by the, is essentially nothing but a barrier between two states. *Roja*, in turn, introduces a set of barriers between various communities of the society, representing a South Indian Hindu perspective. Whereas the border and the countries are sensible in the film, emphasis heavily lies on the religious barrier between the Kashmiris and the Hindu Indians. *Mission Kashmir* takes a step further, arguing that the most effective barrier is between the good Muslims who would join the Indian nation, and the evil, who are rather loyal to terrorist organisations. It is, however, clear that Pakistan meddles with the internal affairs of India, that is, the border between the two countries is not without significance. What all the movies agree on is that Kashmir, regardless of all the barriers, is an integral and inalienable part of India.

A crucial difference between the approaches of *Roja* and *Mission Kashmir* lies in the way they depict the insurgency and its relationship with religion. *Roja* portrays Kashmiri Muslims as inherently prone to violence, unable to accept the hegemony of the new Hindu middle classes and blend into the modern Indian society. *Mission Kashmir* identifies a fault line running deep in the Muslim community itself, dividing secular, nationalist Muslims from the religious extremists participating in the insurgency. Both films, however, propose that Kashmiris and Indians should try and mend their relationship by rediscovering the beauty of their temporarily lost emotional bonds. By presenting the insurgency as based primarily on religious grounds or supported by external sources, they both refuse to give any legitimacy to the claims of the insurgency. These narratives reinforce the unity and stability of the Indian nation and convey the idea that Kashmir is firmly integrated into the Indian

political body. Consequently, through such movies of mass success, the Bollywood industry reaches a wide audience and contributes to the way Indian society construes Kashmir.

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