

SPRING CONTINUES TO BLOSSOM IN THE VALLEY

A documentary film

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Abstract:*Spring Continues to Blossom in the Valley*

This paper is written in support of my 27-minute film, *Spring Continues to Blossom in the Valley*, a poetic-political journey film that documents the sufferings of ordinary people in Indian-administrated Kashmir. These people have been stuck between the history and geography, crushed by both Indian army and the militants, in one of the world's longest-running conflicts. The historical-political context is provided in the first chapter. The documentary journey is discussed concerning structure, memories and hope for life along with the ethical issues regarding speaking for others, especially filming victims and their families. This paper also focused on the silent landscapes and signs of memory. The film's social-political pertinence is relevantly set about biased discourses, global terrorism, and Kashmir conflict.

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Introduction/Synopsis

It was the year 1989. My homeland of Punjab was burning with religious extremism after the anti-Sikh riots of 1984. The routine gunshots firings and the strict rules of religious fundamentalists made life unbearable. As a child, I may not have known the meaning of freedom, but I longed for a place to fly and breathe. Spring was not far away and that year my parents took me to Kashmir, one of the most beautiful locations in the world also known as the Heaven on Earth. It was my first visit to any region outside my homeland and finally I had found a place where I could breathe. I was in the lap of nature. I played with flowers, the river sang to me, and the breeze told me stories of Kashmir: of romance, love, and harmony. Although we stayed there for only a week, Kashmir remained in my heart. I never wanted to leave the fairy tale homes and the mystic land but wanted to stay there forever. That spring was in full bloom in Kashmir unaware of the black clouds marching towards it. A Pakistan sponsored militancy movement, which started in the year 1989, changed the socio-political structure of Kashmir. The stories of romances and communal harmonies have been replaced with the painful stories of killings, forced disappearances and hate. Spring Continues to Blossom in the Valley is a documentary film about my journey back to Kashmir, a homeland that was always in my dreams but was never mine. It is a story of love and pain for a place that never belonged to me. This film documents the sufferings of the ordinary people of Kashmir, stuck between history and geography, crushed by both Indian armed forces and militants in one of the world's longest-running conflicts. Told from the viewpoint of the beautiful landscapes of the Kashmir, the silent witnesses of conflict waiting for the spring to blossom, it is a story of an outsider in search of hope and peace.

Chapter One
History & Politics of Kashmir

According to the CIA, Kashmir remains the site of the world's largest and most militarized territorial disputes with portions under the de facto administration of China (Aksai Chin), India (Jammu and Kashmir), and Pakistan (Azad Kashmir and Northern Areas).¹ Far from the attention of world's media, the tensions keep on turning Kashmir into an unstable territory. It is one of the world's most dangerous areas. There is no other conflict in the world where nuclear weapons are a huge threat to the most fragile state like Kashmir. There is a reasonable risk of a war between world's two nuclear powers: India & Pakistan. India and Pakistan have already fought three major wars over Kashmir in 1947-48, 1965 and the Kargil War in 1999. It is under the constant influence of Islamist terrorist groups like Hizbul Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Taiba. This more than six decades old conflict has also blocked the economic development of the region.

Partition of Indian Sub-Continent:

The history of Kashmir's conflict dated from 1947 when the Indian sub-continent was divided into India and Pakistan by religions. Under British India, there were more than 650 princely states. These states were given the options to either join Pakistan or India, based on the two-nation theory (one for Hindus and another for Muslims) or remain independent. The people of these states were fighting for freedom from British rule, did not want to be ruled by princes anymore and were looking for a secular democratic country. So every princely state either joined India or Pakistan based on their religions. Hindu majority population states remained with India and Muslim-majority states joined Pakistan. More than ten million Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims moved from one territory to another, and more than half a million people lost

¹ "The World Factbook," Central Intelligence Agency (U.S), accessed December 17, 2015, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2070.html>

their lives in communal riots. Although this division of Indian subcontinent was based on religion, India adopted a secular democratic constitution unlike Pakistan, which approved the constitution based on Islamic law.

The issue stayed unsolved with the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. Given its geographical location, Kashmir could either join India or Pakistan. But the ruler of Kashmir, Maharaja Hari Singh, was a Hindu, and the subjects of the state were mostly Muslims. In spite of the fact that the Maharaja had the legitimate right to choose whether to accede to India or Pakistan, he decided to remain independent like other small neighbouring countries such as Burma, Bhutan, and Nepal. As the political analyst and writer Tariq Ali aptly put it, “In cases where the ruler did not share the faith of a vast majority of his population, it was assumed he would nevertheless go along with the wishes of the community.” But Hari Singh’s dream of Kashmir to be an autonomous nation was smashed when the Muslim tribesmen from Pakistan attacked Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir in October 1947. These tribesmen looted the property, raped women folk and killed people. A large number of Kashmiri people battled against these tribesmen to save Kashmir from the clutches of Pakistan. Hari Singh requested military assistance by the Indian government. The Government of India sent the help however on the condition that Kashmir will accede to India. Finally, Maharaja Hari Singh signed the Instrument of Accession, ceding Kashmir to the Dominion of India on October 26, 1947. The Indian government additionally provided unique autonomous status to the state of Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian constitution that identifies with Temporary, Transitional, and Special Provisions. Sheikh Abdullah, the most prominent Muslim leader from Kashmir, did not have any desire to join Pakistan, as he was anxious that if Kashmir turned out

to be a part of Pakistan, the Punjabi landlords would hinder any social and political changes. Punjabi landlords dominated the Muslim League, the association that was behind the formation of Pakistan and Abdullah regarded the Muslim League as a conservative organization. He did not like the accession of Kashmir to India either and was for an independent country. However, he respected the India's military help and asked the then Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, who was his close companion, to freely guarantee a plebiscite to give a right to Kashmiris to decide their future. In the meantime, Prime Minister Nehru sent a wire to the Prime Minister of Pakistan, Liaquat Ali Khan, saying:

*"I should like to make it clear that the question of aiding Kashmir in this emergency is not designed in any way to influence the state to accede to India. Our view which we have repeatedly made public is that the question of accession in any disputed territory or state must be decided in accordance with wishes of people and we adhere to this view."*²

Meanwhile, India and Pakistan battled their first war over Kashmir in 1947-48. In the wake of fighting for over a year, India referred the dispute of Kashmir to the United Nations Security Council. The United Nations then ordered the cease-fire along the Line of Control (LOC), which divided the Kashmir into India and Pakistan held territories. Presently Pakistan controls the northern areas that are Gilgit-Baltistan and some part of Kashmir, ranges of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh are under the supervision of India. Later Pakistan sold some part of Kashmir to the People's Republic of China, which now controls the northeastern portion (Aksai Chin and the Trans-Karakoram Tract).

² Hasan Raza, "Kashmiris continue to be the biggest victims of Indo-Pak tussle for Kashmir," The Nation, July 14, 2016, accessed July 18, 2016, <http://nation.com.pk/blogs>.

Right after the truce, The United Nations Security Council asked for the plebiscite to know the will of the general population of Kashmir. The terms of the referendum required Pakistan to remove its regular forces, Raiders, and tribesmen while permitting India to keep some of its troops to maintain the law and order in the state. With adhering to these conditions a plebiscite was to be held under the observation of UN, to decide the future of the people of Kashmir. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 47 on Kashmir, which was adopted on April 21, 1948 states:

Noting with satisfaction that both India and Pakistan desire that the question of the accession of Jammu and Kashmir to India or Pakistan should be decided through the democratic method of a free and impartial plebiscite, considering that the continuation of the dispute is likely to endanger international peace and security, reaffirms its resolution 38 (1948) of 17 January 1948. The UN resolution Recommends to the Governments of India and Pakistan the following measures as those which in the opinion of the Council and appropriate to bring about a cessation of the fighting and to create proper conditions for a free and impartial plebiscite to decide whether the State of Jammu and Kashmir is to accede to India or Pakistan.

1. The Government of Pakistan should undertake to use its best endeavors:

- (a) To secure the withdrawal from the State of Jammu and Kashmir of tribesmen and Pakistani nationals not normally resident therein who have entered the State for the purposes of fighting, and to prevent any intrusion into the State of such elements and any furnishing of material aid to those fighting in the State.
- (b) To make known to all concerned that the measures indicated in this and the following paragraphs provide full freedom to all subjects of the State, regardless of creed, caste or party, to express their views and to vote on the question of the State, and that they should co-operate in the maintenance of peace and order.

2. The Government of India should:

- (a) When it is established to the satisfaction of the Commission set up in accordance with the Council's Resolution 39 (1948) that the tribesmen are withdrawing and that arrangements for the cessation of the fighting have become effective, put into operation in consultation with the Commission a plan for withdrawing their own forces from Jammu and Kashmir and reducing them progressively to the minimum strength required for the support of the civil power in the maintenance

of law and order;

- (b) Make known that withdrawal is taking place in stages and announce the completion of each stage.³

Kashmir issue was never solved because Pakistan did not fulfill even the first condition for the plebiscite. Since the UN resolution, both countries claim to have solved the Kashmir conflict peacefully, but no one is severe enough to act upon the conditions of resolutions. Hence no positive results come out of it. Kashmir is now stuck in a vicious circle of violence and has become the biggest victim of Indo-Pak rivalry over Kashmir.

Rise of Armed Insurgency:

Kashmir was mostly a secular and peaceful state. There was minimal resistance and that too was only among political circles towards the Indian state. But the year 1989 changed the face of the political resistance of Kashmir. The Taliban's victory over Soviets with the support of U.S. and Pakistan's terrorist outfits gave them confidence, and they turned their guns towards India to start Jihad (Holy War) for the freedom of Kashmir. Pakistan armed the militant groups and the Islamic rebellions in Kashmir, and these insurgents targeted the local Kashmiri Hindu population. This resulted in ethnic cleansing of Kashmiri Pandits (Hindus) and their mass exodus from their homeland Kashmir.⁴ The young men crossed the border to get training and weapons from Pakistan. Pakistan always denied its involvement but admitted that it was

³ "Security Council Resolution 47 (1948)," United Nations Military Observation Group in India and Pakistan, [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/47\(1948\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/47(1948)), 4-5.

⁴ Hasan Raza, "Kashmiris continue to be the biggest victims of Indo-Pak tussle for Kashmir," The Nation, July 14, 2016, accessed July 18, 2016, <http://nation.com.pk/blogs>.

providing the moral support to the freedom fighters of Kashmir. To counter this insurgency, India deployed a large number of paramilitary forces in Kashmir that resulted in killings, tortures, and disappearances of youth from Kashmir. As indicated by the human rights groups working in Kashmir, since the armed resistance began in the late 80s, around 70,000 people have been killed, thousands have been injured, and more than 3000 people have been disappeared. There are 6,217 unmarked mass graveyards across five districts of Kashmir.⁵ Kashmir turned out to a war zone due to the Indian government's policies of continuous killings. Kuldeep Nayar, a prominent journalist from India once mentioned that India opened torture centers from where hardly anyone returned alive. He writes:

Even Kashmiri leaders were detained without trial. This was when the torture chambers, called Papa One and Two, were established. Apparently they were interrogation centres where indescribable cruelties were committed. If ever the history of Zulum (injustice) by the security forces is recorded, the interrogation centres in Kashmir will rank quite high up the ladder.⁶

The New Face of Kashmir's Resistance:

In 2008, the Kashmir's struggle for freedom entered a new phase with the most widespread and sustained mass uprising for over a decade. In her essay *Azadi, The Only Thing Kashmiris Want*, Arundhati Roy mentioned that after crushing the militant movement in Kashmir, the army is facing a new challenge of mass protests and the military does not know how to manage it. The people's memory of years of restraint in which many people have been killed, injured

⁵ Fahad Shah, "Blood will be avenged," in *Of Occupation and Resistance*, (new Delhi: Tranquebar Press, 2013), 10.

⁶ Ibid, 17.

and disappeared sustained this new face of Kashmir's resistance. She further mentioned that this kind of outrage couldn't be suppressed quickly.⁷

There was a mass uprising in Kashmir in 2008 over the transfer of Amarnath land (Hindu pilgrimage site) from the government of Kashmir to the Amarnath Shrine Board. The Muslims of Kashmir considered it as an Indian government's conspiracy to change the demography of the state. More than 80 people were killed amid the mass protests over this land and justice was not delivered. Because of the tenacious resistance of individuals, the government revoked the order to transfer the Amarnath land to the Shrine Board. The people of Kashmir celebrated their success, and this development had effectively passed the legacy of resistance for freedom from older generation to younger generation.⁸ The summer of 2010 again witnessed the mass protests by youth in Kashmir. A seventeen-year-old student, Tufail Mattoo was killed by police officers, which who again resulted in a civil uprising which leads to the killing of 120 people mostly school going boys by bullets and tear gas shells.⁹ This vicious cycle of the armed insurgency; the killing of militants in encounters, public protests, use of force on protesters by security forces and curfews has kept on repeating itself. The death of a fighter gave birth to one hundred more protesters. The separatist leaders inside Kashmir kept youth ignorant about the realities of the socio-political situation in Kashmir. The armed and moral support from the religious fundamentalists and terrorist organizations from Pakistan kept this conflict alive to serve their political motives. The religious fundamentalists hijacked a genuine political

⁷ Arunditi Roy, "Azadi: The only thing Kashmiris want," in *Kashmir: The Case for Freedom*, ed. Arunditi Roy et al. (London: Verso, 2011), 57.

⁸ Fahad Shah, "Blood will be avenged," in *Of Occupation and Resistance*, (New Delhi: Tranquebar Press, 2013), 2.

⁹ Ibid, 1.

movement of Kashmir. Now a large number of Muslims of Kashmir wants either an independent Islamic country or a part of Pakistan that is already an Islamic country. The aim of the radical groups and the terrorist organizations like Hizbul Mujahideen is to establish Sharia law not just in Kashmir but to spread it into the whole South Asia. But India considers this religious movement a significant threat to its secular nation.

The people of Kashmir are demanding the right to choose their destiny through voting under the United Nation's observation that was promised to them. The demography of Pakistan occupied Kashmir is already changed due to the migration of a vast number of populations from other states. Additionally, Pakistan broke the condition of plebiscite when it sold a part of Kashmir to China, which made the plebiscite under UN resolution impossible. On the other hand, the mass exodus and ethnic cleansing of Hindus in Kashmir have changed the demographics of Indian occupied Kashmir. Now the result of any referendum would be unacceptable to India as there is insufficient vote bank of Hindus and Buddhists to counter those who want to be an independent or a part of Pakistan. It is the common Kashmiri who is suffering tortures and killings in this war between two regional rivals.

Chapter Two
Continues Journeys

Journeys

Spring Continues to Blossom in the Valley is my journey back to Kashmir, the place that I remembered as a fairy tale in my memories. This film is a journey to witness the present and to take a trip back into the past through the subjects of the movie to deconstruct the history. Because spring itself is a metaphor for continuity and hope, this journey also speaks to the future and remains in continuation instead of any final destination. As one of the subject in the film, Naseema Akhtar said, her only wish is to provide for her daughter's education. Akhtar witnessed what happened to her husband who was disappeared and never came back but at the same time she has already grown a seed of hope inside. Her story is a journey from the past to the future, which is in continuation in the form of life's goal.

In her essay *Documentary Journeys*, Stella Bruzzi writes that in documentary films, the term 'journey' is either an exceptionally tangible term or a profoundly undefined one.¹⁰ *Direct Cinema* always faced the challenges of uncertainty and unpredictability, as 'what will happen next' is unknown to filmmakers. The filmmakers in *Direct Cinema* just record the subjects and events as they happen in front of them. However, in the chapter 'Chronologic' in *Claiming the Real*, Brian Winston argues that "journey films solved actuality's big narrative problem – closure. How should the film finish? Obviously, a journey film ends with the end of the journey".¹¹ Winston associates the journey entirely with time and according to him the 'time' in journeys is used only to create logic between unrelated events. But Claude Lanzmann's documentary film *Shoah* both confirms and denies Winston's presumption that journeys

¹⁰ Stella Bruzzi, "Documentary Journeys," in *New Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 82.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

fundamentally suggest finality. Intellectually *Shoah* has an innate uncertainty that is explained by historian Raul Hilberg. Hilberg argues that the last solution, however, a radical 'defining moment,' remains in continuation as opposed to a break with the past.¹² As Lanzmann himself comments: 'The film is the abolition of all distances between past and present; I have relived the whole story in the present'.¹³ The film *Spring Continues to Blossom in the Valley* is a journey to find hope amidst the ruins of conflict. 'Hope' in itself is an aspiration for the certain things to happen in the future. That certain thing, which in the case of Kashmir is the return to normalcy in lives of people, is yet to be witnessed but still it's the hope, which helps the journey of life to continue.

Bill Nichols proposes that there has been an extensive shift in our understanding of the very word 'documentary':

Traditionally, the word *documentary* has suggested fullness, and completion, knowledge and fact, explanations of the social world and its motivating mechanisms. More recently, though, documentary has come to suggest incompleteness and uncertainty, recollection and impression, images of personal worlds and their subjective construction.¹⁴

Nichols suggests that documentary does not need methods to control uncertain events anymore; instead, the instabilities such as memory, subjectivity, and uncertainty are now used to make documentary films. The journey films represent this trend, where it uses observational cinema mode by recording the events as it unfolds, without forgoing the essence of traditional

¹² Stella Bruzzi, "Documentary journeys," in *New Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 101.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹⁴ Bill Nichols, "Embodied Knowledge and the Politics of Location," in *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), 1.

documentary form related to historical research, memories, and explorations. Thus *Spring Continues to Blossom* is a documentary journey, which paddles into the past by collecting the memories of victims to learn, unlearn and to relearn the history. It also observes the present events while silently moving towards the future in search of the peace. There are many parallel journeys in the film, which are not intersecting and yet metaphorically related to each other. These journeys knit together the testimonies' of Kashmiri people and the boat ride, which is one of the important parts in the film.

Spring Continues to Blossom in the Valley is built on paradoxical foundations. On the one hand, it has uncertainty around the interviewees, as it was unclear that what kind of historical or emotional information I would get from my subjects. But at the same time, the film also follows a preconceived grand narrative of the boat ride. In the movie, the boat ride is a 'focused chain' that not only helped the story to progress in a physical way, but it also provides a narrative, a structure and a logical form to the otherwise random events. According to Edward Branigan:

In journey films, the term 'focused chain' is a series of cause and effects with a continuing centre. For example, the continuing adventures of a character, the events surrounding an object or place or the elaboration of a theme. The 'focused chain' has its own internal logic and relevance, where 'the ending situation can be traced back to the beginning', while regular narrative progresses in the film.¹⁵

The central journey of *Spring Continues to Blossom* is both metaphorical and actual. The linear repetitive boat ride represents beauty, which attracts thousands of tourists every year regardless

¹⁵ Edward Branigan, "Narrative Schema," in *Narrative Comprehension and Film*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 20.

of the unrest in the valley. This continued boat ride becomes a symbol for the progression in life even under the unstable conditions. The boatman provides a parallel narrative to that of the victims. It represents the ordinary course of life following its routine in silence like the flow of water. The reflections in the water at different intervals in the film, introduce the audience to the history and the continued pain, while the boat moves towards another destination.¹⁶



Figure 1: Reflections of disappeared persons.

At around two minutes in the film, the first boatman appears.¹⁷ We watch the boatman, in his silhouette, rows the boat, which takes us to the first sub-destination. While the boat is moving, the audience witnesses the reflection of stone-pelters in the water. This gives the audience a shock, where they watch a grave reality while rejoicing in the beauty of Kashmir. There are

¹⁶ See figure one.

¹⁷ See figure two.

four different boatmen in the film that appears at four different intervals, which carry the story further. The boat ride, while passing through the three separate times of a day, ends in the evening with the reflections of the Indian army in the lake.



Figure 2: The first boatman

The fourth and the last boatman appear on the screen near the end of the film. The boatman is carrying the flowers, which metaphorically represents a ray of hope and homage to the people who died in the conflict.¹⁸ Although the boat ride ends at the predetermined destination, the

¹⁸ See figure three.

journey of the people of Kashmir never ends. Boats may halt at different points in the lake, but it keeps on moving, so do the people of Kashmir.



Figure 3: The flowers in the boat

Deconstructing History

I took the boat ride in Spring Continues to Blossom in the Valley, to witness the beauty once again, which I adored 25 years ago. It was decided to create a narrative and contrast between the beauty and conflict that again affirms Brian Winston's assumption. The boat ride always takes us further, to move the story from one point to another in search of a ray of hope in the conflicted zone. But the ride also halts in between to witness the personal stories of the subjects who are taking me with them on their journeys of the past. In Stella Bruzzi's essay

‘Documentary Journeys’, while discussing film *Shoah*, Marcel Ophuls observes that this constant blending of the past and present, rather than a mere juxtaposition is the core principle on which the whole film is constructed to re-create a continuous reality.¹⁹

In the film, I tried to comprehend the past through witnesses’ testimonies, with a motive to deconstruct the histories of Kashmir. Because according to a Kashmiri writer Arshia Malik, when we talk about the conflict in Kashmir, it is not just the battle for land and resources. It is also a battle of narratives depending on which side of the border one is on and which community one belongs to in the Valley itself. Numerous books and scholarly articles have been written since the origin of the Kashmir conflict that resulted in different historical facts and viewpoints about Kashmir. Malik further said that the narratives should not and cannot be dismissed, reviled, cut down to shreds just because we feel that our pain is more deserving and justified.²⁰ *Spring Continues to Blossom in the Valley* is a history documentary and a poetic journey. But unlike other history documentaries, it does not include the archival footage or the interviews of the scholars and historians but instead the film focuses on the subject’s personal testimonies. Scholars and historians have their own already set beliefs on the subject, which I never wanted to follow. In Stella Bruzzi’s article, while talking about his film *Hotel Terminus*, Marcel Ophuls has argued:

But I think part of a documentary filmmakers business is not to have any absolute principles; otherwise he/she closes too many doors in advance. So you must always be prepared not only to surprise other people but to surprise yourself. Something might

¹⁹ Stella Bruzzi, “Documentary journeys,” in *New Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 102.

²⁰ Arshia Malik, “Kashmir’s Battling Narratives,” *The Nation*, July 2, 2015, accessed July 20, 2015, <http://nation.com.pk/blogs/02-Jul-2015/kashmir-s-battling-narratives>.

happen to you in the course of events that change your mind about previous statements in previous interviews.”²¹

The Spring *Continues to Blossom in the Valley is also a journey* to understand the conflict, which I tried to envision through the interviews, informal meetings and the discussions on the social media forums. There are numerous books written on the history of Kashmir, but what one chooses to believe depends upon one’s understanding and stand on Kashmir. Bakhti Begum, one of the mothers in the film remembers her childhood and how she used to play with army personnel. She talks about peace, communal harmony and fearless days that dominant media intentionally hides to give more volume to their narratives. That was my main motive to deconstruct the history that has taught to us for decades. Every boy I interviewed wants to pick up guns, not only to get freedom but also to establish a ‘*Law of Allah*’; an Islamic country with the Islamic laws. But the local media deliberately avoids this kind of a point of view, as they don’t want to present the communal side of this movement to get more sympathy from the international community when the world is already facing the threats from Islamic terrors. The media purposely avoids the narratives of those mothers who do not endorse the use of guns and want to move forward; instead heroes be created every day out of those young boys who subscribe to the idea of using guns. By juxtaposing these two different standpoints; one of a stone pelter who wants to pick up the gun and another of those mothers who hates guns, I tried to pave a way to look beyond the popular rhetoric. No matter what is the history or the politics of Kashmir conflict, it is the ordinary people of Kashmir, who are paying the prices of a never-ending conflict. So it is relevant to decode the histories to understand the conflict and the

²¹ Stella Bruzzi, “Documentary journeys,” in *New Documentary* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 86-87.

existent situation to support the moderate voices from Kashmir that are being crushed between the extreme narratives of *hyper-nationalists* and the *regressive left*.²² Hyper nationalists are those people from India who at any cost want to acquire the land of Kashmir without caring for the atrocities committed by the armed forces on the civilians inside Kashmir. On the other hand, there is a regressive left, which is supporting the current radicalized moment by ignoring the secular voices of Kashmir. The regressive left is going against the same principles for which it stands, i.e., equality for all.

Growing up in India, I always read the history which is either trying to force the Indian state's stand on Kashmir or the one which is seeking to justify the Kashmir's struggle for freedom without knowing the real evidence and facts which lead to the conflict. Pierre Nora, in *Between Memory and History*, states that history is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer.²³ History calls for analysis and criticism. Then how can one deconstruct and reconstruct history, which is always problematic? Do we need to follow certain narratives that are close to our ideologies or do we need to dig further to reach the valid evidence? R.G. Collingwood in *The Idea of History* argues that:

²² Within the specific context of multiculturalism, British anti-Islamism activist Maajid Nawaz used the term 'Regressive Left' in 2012 in his memoir *Radical: My Journey out of Islamist Extremism* to describe "well-meaning liberals and ideologically driven leftists" in the United Kingdom who naïvely and "ignorantly pandered to" Islamists and helped Islamist ideology to gain acceptance. He elaborated on the meaning of the term, saying that it describes "a section of the left" that has, in his opinion, "an inherent hesitation to challenge some of the bigotry that can occur within minority communities ... for the sake of political correctness, for the sake of tolerating what they believe is other cultures and respecting different lifestyles".

²³ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History," trans. Marc Roudebush, *Representations*, No.26, Special Issue: Memory and Counter Memory (Spring 1989): 8, accessed July 20, 2016, <http://www.staff.amu.edu.pl/~ewa/Nora,%20Between%20Memory%20and%20History.pdf>

Good history writing requires making inferences that are always based on questions directed towards a careful examination of the facts themselves. They can only come to serve as valid evidence when freshly taken up into the author's own interpretative discourse. The historian must pose questions that infer what really happened rather than adopt the views of others.²⁴

Through my journey in the film, I tried to reconstruct the historical facts to discern the miseries of common people. Instead of following the dominant narrative of Kashmir that is widely accepted and propagated by the media inside Kashmir, I tried to scratch beneath the surface to recognize the silent majority. These moderate people are being silenced and constantly threatened by the violent mobs and terrorist groups, merely because they do not agree with the popular discourse related to freedom or to merge with Pakistan.

Remembrance: An Act of Forgetting

The subjects in the film remember their sufferings, and they recount their experiences but hasn't the remembrance of mass violence and conflict become an irrational, obsessive practice, an indulgence in pain in which one is possessed by ghosts.²⁵ Roger I. Simon, Sharon Rosenberg, and Claudia Eppert discussed in *Between Hope and Despair* that:

On the basis of such distrust of remembrance, memorial practices are thought to produce nothing but anguish, grief, and a righteous, desperate rage that only risks

²⁴ Bill Nichols, "The Question of Evidence, the Power of Rhetoric and Documentary Film," in *The Documentary Film Book*, ed. Brian Winston, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 34.

²⁵ Roger I. Simon, Sharon Rosenberg, and Claudia Eppert, "Introduction," in *Between Hope and Despair: The Pedagogical Encounter of Historical Remembrance*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 1.

fuelling more violence. Rather than offering the possibility of a reconciled future, memories of victimization seem to fester social division and conflict.²⁶

The advocates of freedom and separatist movement often manipulate the collective memories of people of Kashmir to spread their propaganda. As a result, instead of getting closer to any possible solutions, the common people of Kashmir who want a peaceful future are usually pushed back. The subjects in the film were interviewed many times before. They shared their sufferings with me too, sometimes with reluctance, sometimes with hope for help from the authorities. No doubt memories are always vulnerable to manipulations, but their pain is real; the subjects in the film lost their dear ones. That is the reason, instead of pressurizing my subjects to tell me about the violent time they witnessed, I preferred to ask them about their present life, and how the conflict is affecting their lives and what they think about their future. It is during these casual discussions that they brought forward their memories. The focus of the film is the hope for a peaceful Kashmir. The interviews of the victims and their families are juxtaposed with the Journey of a boat. The boat which keeps on moving towards a metaphorical future till it shifts to another boat with flowers on it, which signifies the hope. The people whom I interviewed in the film are the common masses who are facing routine problems regarding their kid's education, inflation, and unemployment issues. These people are tired of this decade's old violence. The more they remember, the more they want to forget about the past and move forward because remembrance is also a hopeful practice to learn from the past. But, what keep on fuelling the violence are the selfish interests of politicians, corrupt officers, and journalist who are the primary beneficiaries of this conflict. As one of the secular voices of Kashmir, Arshia Malik once mentioned in a social media discussion that Kashmir has more

²⁶ Roger I. Simon, Sharon Rosenberg, and Claudia Eppert, "Introduction," in *Between Hope and Despair: The Pedagogical Encounter of Historical Remembrance*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 1.

journalists than any other Indian state including those who report for foreign agencies. In a media ecosystem where journalists have no choice but feed off a frantic and tense land, the prospect of a peaceful state is practically impossible. These are the very people who are fuelling the violence by using the remembrances of those people who want to forget and advance in life.

There is a fragile line between two extremes, i.e., violence against the oppressor or to step forward for peaceful reconciliations. The modern discourse propagated by the media inside Kashmir is being used as a tool to spread anger among youth, who no longer fear death. The child who never witnessed peace are more vulnerable to the propaganda of hate than the older generation who are longing for the same peaceful time which they saw as kids. So this thin line between violence and peace is created by incomplete truths about Kashmir conflict. A senior journalist from Kashmir, David Devdas rightly said in his article that between the Azadi (freedom) and the national interest, the half-truths on Kashmir widen the gulf of ignorance and hate.²⁷

An Outsider-Insider

One of the characters in the film, Bakhti Begum once expressed her frustration towards journalists and NGOs. She accused them of using her agony for their selfish interests. She explained how they want her to perform in front of their cameras so that they can fetch more

²⁷ David Devdas, "Between the Azadi and the National Interest: The Half-Truths on Kashmir widen the gulf of Ignorance and Hate," Scroll.in, July 26, 2016, accessed July 31, 2016, <http://scroll.in/article/812353/between-azadi-and-national-interest-half-truths-on-kashmir-widen-the-gulf-of-ignorance-and-hate>.

funds from foreign countries. She said, “they used me without providing any help and they never showed compassion or sympathy.” Susan Sontag called this a voyeuristic practice where photographers lack understanding of the subjects.²⁸ Sontag’s thought of outsider’s photography is that it objectifies people and it prevents both empathy and identification with the subjects. Instead, she favors an insiders approach in photography. In her essay *Inside/Out*, the writer Abigail Solomon-Godeau explained that Sontag’s criticism of outsider’s ‘voyeuristic’ pleasures depends on binary couple inside/out. Solomon-Godeau writes:

This binarism is one of the photographic criticisms dealing with the ethics and politics that are clearly foster two possible positions for the photographer; insider and outsider. In Sontag’s example of the Arbur’s work, the insider position is seen as being the ‘good’ position – is thus understood to imply a position of engagement, participation and privileged knowledge, whereas the second, outsider’s position as ‘bad’ which is taken to produce alienated and voyeuristic relationships that deepen the distance between subject and object.²⁹

I was an outsider for my subjects, but I did not want just to visit them and bring back their stories. I wanted to experience their pain and comprehend Kashmir’s conflict. I tried to enter their inner space and engage with them. My approach was an outsider-insider to know about their sufferings and to bring out the truths by deconstructing histories. Solomon-Godeau additionally explores Martha Rosler’s, *In, Around and Afterthoughts (On Documentary Photography)* that investigates the power of the photographer which can impact the subject by taking away their power to present themselves. Rosler calls this ‘victim photography,’ an outsider approach. A possible alternative to this is by providing the participant a way to self-

²⁸ Susan Sontag, “America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly,” in *On Photography*, (New York: Picador, 1977), 32.

²⁹ Abigail Slomon-Godeau, “Inside/Out”, in *The Everyday: Documents in Contemporary Art*, (Cambridge and London: The MIT Press, 1994), 195.

present themselves.³⁰ But Abigail Solomon-Godeau concluded that, no matter what approach a photograph uses, there is always a danger of the subject becoming a spectacle. Solomon-Godeau points out that it is not easy to analyze and understand the complexity of this duality. We usually consider that truth can only be told if we photograph/film our subjects as insiders. But it is not always the case. Even the insider approach cannot be as truthful as images can only show the outside and it cannot bring out the internal truth of the subject. On the other hand, the truth can also be revealed in outsider photography.

In the film, my approach was an outsider who eventually becomes an insider. I am neither from Kashmir nor do I belong to the Muslim community like my subjects but I have affection and a longing for this place. I have empathy for the people of Kashmir who suffered in this protracted conflict, and I wanted to know the reasons of their problems by myself. When I visited my subjects, a local journalist accompanied me. He was an insider, already knew what happened to the victims, how their children and other family members were lost in the conflict. These people were already exposed to the journalists and their numerous questions, and they were not comfortable with me behind the camera. Representing subjects as an 'Outsider', Susan Sontag speculated that the camera frees the photographer from any responsibility towards the subject because of the distance it can create. I wanted to involve my subjects in the process of filming. I decided to leave my camera 'on' and tried to engage with them in routine talks. That is the time when my subjects opened up the most because I was an insider at that moment. From the viewpoints of both Susan Sontag's and Martha Rosler, documentary photographers perpetuate an act of violence against, and takes something from the subject, while only seeing a partial view of the subject. But I never flooded the victims with the questions which journalists

³⁰ Ibid, 196.

usually asked them. There was a moment in the film when talking about her husband; Nassema Akhtar broke down in tears. She was reluctant to tell me anything about her husband. For her, I was an outsider behind the camera, visited her to exploit her pain once again for my selfish interests. I felt her pain; I had the whole sympathy for her, and I never wanted to use her problems for my artistic ambitions. I was about to leave her place but the moment I quit my camera and sat closer to her by addressing her as my sister to console her, she broke into tears. It was at that particular moment when she revealed her helplessness and expressed her dreams to provide education for her daughter.³¹ I tried my best to avoid my subjects becoming a voyeuristic pleasure for the audience or myself. As an insider, most of the reporters from Kashmir might have shown the pain of their subjects, but they intentionally hid many facts about them. Sometimes these journalists referred their subjects collectively as ‘the victims of the conflict’ by deliberately ignoring the information related to the killings of people by the militants and the other family deputed. They used the collective memories of individuals to propagate their own ideology and avoided what goes for enemies (The Indian Armed Forces). I being an outsider may not be an advocate of the popular demand of an Islamic nation in Kashmir, but by choosing an approach of an ‘Outsider-Insider’, I was able to get what the silent minority of Kashmir is going through and what are their aspirations.

³¹ See figure four.



Figure 4: Naseema Akhtar and her daughter

The subjects of the film relived their past by telling me the human rights violations and the good times they spent in Kashmir. This creates a path for the young generation of Kashmir that has never seen peace and has grown up under the shadow of the gun. In its most basic form, the pedagogical justification of remembrance asserts that, to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past, we must learn the lessons of history.³² This was clearly mentioned by mother, Bakhti Begum, despite her pain for a disappeared son and her anger towards the militants and armed forces, she wants people of Kashmir to move forward. She said, “how can the guns do good to the people of Kashmir, which itself killed the sons of the soil. Are these guns are more important than the people.”³³ On the one side, there are mothers, half widows, brothers, fathers,

³² Roger I. Simon, Sharon Rosenberg, and Claudia Eppert, “Introduction,” in *Between Hope and Despair: The Pedagogical Encounter of Historical Remembrance*, (Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), 1.

³³ Ibid, 1.

who lost their dear ones but want some peaceful solution, on the other side, there are crowds of young boys, who are being pushed towards guns, glorified by the terrorist groups like Hizbul Mujahideen and Lashkar-e-Toiba. Instead of learning from the history and stopping the cycle of brutality, the angry youth kept the circle moving and which is spinning equally by the armed forces.

But Spring Continues to Blossom

*‘Rise! O’ narrator of the grieving! Look at your Punjab,
Today, fields are lined with corpses, and blood fills the Chenab’³⁴*

These lines are from a famous poem “*Ajj Aakhan Waris Shah Nu* (Today I am asking you Waris Shah)” by a noted Punjabi writer Amrita Pritam on the horrors of the partition of Punjab in 1947. She expressed her pain by referring to the rivers of Punjab, which we used to water our fields, but now filled with poison and blood. The blood filled *Chenab*, Silent *Jehlum* (river) of Kashmir, *Hibaku* trees of Hiroshima,³⁵ and the landscapes of conflicted areas in the world are some of the sites used by artists for their creative expressions. Creators draw these symbols to represent nature as a silent witness to wars and disasters. Trees and rivers silently watch us fight; they bear human’s madness but somehow, always managed to survive. Talking about *Hibaku* trees, Peter Del Tredici said that regardless of what fate awaits the earth, it is clear that life will go on, with or without people. He further mentioned:

³⁴ Chenab is the name of a river in Punjab. This is one of the five rivers of Punjab, which flows from India to Pakistan.

³⁵ Hibaku is a Japanese word meaning “something that has experienced a nuclear bomb.”

Nowhere is this truth more evident than in Hiroshima, Japan, the first city on the planet to experience the full force of a nuclear bomb. In most people's minds the detonation of an atomic bomb connotes total and absolute destruction, yet this wasn't entirely the case. At the hyper center of the blast, the devastation was indeed complete, yet just a few hundred meters away many people, as well as many plants and animals, survived, albeit seriously damaged.³⁶

Among the survivor trees in Hiroshima were the Ginkgo Biloba trees. These trees were situated close to the blast, seemed to bud after the impact without significant deformation. Ginkgo trees, regarded as the 'bearer of hope' are still alive today. In the film *Spring Continues to Blossom in the Valley*, spring has been used as both metaphorically and literally. It represents the actual spring season in Kashmir but at the same time, spring is used as a metaphor for hope. While describing their sufferings in the film, every interviewee showed their desires for a healthy life and a peaceful future. One of the respondents Mohammad Ashraf Gilkar mentioned in the film that he is very hopeful that one day Kashmir will be a better place. Army took Gilkar's younger brother during a crackdown in his village. Ahmad has been searching for his brother for fifteen years but all in vain. Despite his personal loss, he is hopeful that one day his brother will return, and spring will blossom. An anonymous person in the film, a tailor by profession who himself has suffered the torture of Indian paramilitary forces and lost his two brothers in the conflict. He had feelings of revenge towards Indian troops, which fades away with time when he realized that providing better health and education to his kids is the greater cause than any worldly borders that politicians want to create for their selfish interests. He said, "enough is enough, we want some solutions now." A mother of a disappeared son, Bakhti Begum, cried many times during her interview, but there was a shine in her eyes when she talked about her peaceful past. The shine in her eyes is a seed that is a symbol of hope for the future generations.

³⁶ Perter Del Tredici, "Hibaku Trees of Hiroshima," [www.arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu](http://arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu), 1993, <http://arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu/pdf/articles/1993-53-3-hibaku-trees-of-hiroshima.pdf>

This longing for a peaceful future among people of Kashmir is metaphorically represented through an actual spring season in the Kashmir valley. Nature simply exists.³⁷ What it knows or does not know is unknown to human beings. We are attracted towards nature because it is a part of a truth known as life. Although nature, the landscapes, and the trees, witnessed this long-standing conflict of Kashmir, the life inside them never ceases to exist.



Figure 5. Cherry flowers in Kashmir

Nature keeps on growing and spring continues to blossom. We as human beings failed to learn from this beautiful message of the life around us. We forget how to move forward. But to advance in life, people need to leave their egos, which no one wants to do under the dominating narrative of violence. The politicians and the local separatist leaders have failed to address the

³⁷ See figure five.

concerns of people; instead, they are pushing the lives of individuals in a treadmill of violence.

But despite witnessing the pain of its inhabitants, sufferings the human madness, the spring continues to blossom, as hope is the only way forward, as life must go on.

Chapter Three
Documentary Form and Methodology

Speaking With Others

I do not belong to any community of Kashmir, and I consider myself an outsider. The question that I kept asking myself throughout this project is that how can I as an outsider talk about the others especially when different layers of history and differing viewpoints already occupied the area in question. There is always an ethical dilemma involved in representing others, especially for marginalized groups. In her article, "*The Problem of Speaking for Others*", philosopher Linda Alcoff writes, "many people believe that when speakers speak for other groups or communities to whom a filmmaker does not belong, the subjects are most vulnerable to misrepresentation and abuse, no matter how well-intentioned the speaker is."³⁸ Alcoff further discusses philosopher Gayatri Spivak argument that if an outsider aims to change the conditions of the subaltern by according them a collective voice, it will make subalterns dependent on western intellectuals to "speak for" their conditions instead of permitting subalterns to represent themselves. Alcoff asserts that there is no single answer to respond related to the problems of representing others. But she does see hope and potential in Spivak's approach that replaces "speaking for" with "speaking to" because it attempts to engage in a dialogue with others, and give subjects (others) a space to talk without intervening and suppressing them.³⁹ Instead of talking about Kashmiri people, I preferred to listen to their stories. Thus my camera became the medium between the speaker and the listener. I had to face this challenge of being an outsider many times during production. The local writers from Kashmir often accuse the outsiders of playing communal politics and distorting the facts of Kashmir, especially if the outsider's narrative does not match with the dominant discourse. But there are many moderate voices within Kashmir itself, which deny complying with the

³⁸ Linda Alcoff, "The Problem with Speaking for Others," *Cultural Critique* 20 (Winter 1991-1992), 6.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 22-23.

majoritarian view.

Initially, my project was about the impact of militarization on the children of Kashmir, but I was not ready to relate myself with their call for an Islamic revolution and their desires for *Jihad* with the gun. Being raised in a secular domain and an advocate of equal rights, I found it impossible to endorse a narrative, the core of which is to get freedom with conditions and only for certain sections of the society. There are numerous examples of human rights violations against minorities and women in Muslim countries. Arshia Malik, a Kashmiri writer, once wrote, “the Islamo-fascists and the Leftists subvert the meaning of the “free and open society” to mean an independent Kashmir which will have Islam as its official religion and a theocratic constitution, the same as in the Middle-East where minority rights are not recognized.”⁴⁰ Malik and other modest voices of Kashmir accused regressive left and non-resident Kashmiris of enjoying secular democracy in western countries, and exercising freedom of speech but advocating a suppressive Sharia (Islamic) law in Kashmir. People like Malik are already fighting a tough battle in their land not just against the Indian Army but also against religious fundamentalists. By supporting the radical views of children, I do not want to weaken the struggles of Malik and alike.

My inspirations to make this project are documentary films *Five Broken Cameras* (2012) and *War Dance* (2007). In *Five Broken Cameras*, the director Emad Burnat recorded his village’s resistance to the encroachment of Israeli settlements through five different cameras, which got broken in the conflict. These cameras also capture the keenness and the muddles of a child born

⁴⁰ Arshia Malik, “Uncategorized,” Musings: The ‘Other’ Speaks (Blog), Word Press, June 25, 2016, <https://arshiamalik.wordpress.com/category/uncategorized>.

in a world torn area. And the film *War Dance* follows a group of schoolchildren from a refugee camp in northern Ugandan to a national music competition in Kampala. The film centers around three children; Nancy, Rose, and Dominic. Over the course of three months, the film observes these kids as they prepare and won the national competition. Alongside they told the stories about their lost families, fears, and dreams. This film is a story of hope in despair. These are observational documentary films where the director captured the events as they occurred in front of the camera. As a kid, I witnessed a life under terrorism in Punjab and I wanted to present the fears of a child, living in a war-torn area. I wanted to use the direct cinema documentary form, but due to limited time and security issues, it is hard to follow my subjects in their routine life. Instead, I have conducted interviews of victims, who lost their family members, which I weaved together with a *Shikara* (boat) ride at *Dall Lake*. Like *War Dance*, my aim was to look for the aspirations in an area that is battling to survive which I tried to achieve by showing the dreams of victims besides their struggles.

I listened to the different stories, not only of young boys because the children who born during the 90s have never experienced peace and the historical content was missing in their narratives. Born under the shadow of guns, these boys only witnessed violence and their arguments are formed around the dominant discourses that are sometimes rational but often biased. My subjects in the film are mothers, a *half-widow*,⁴¹ and two middle-aged men who have lost not only their family members but also communal harmony in Kashmir. These testimonies are important as they saw the violence and heard the atrocities committed to their fellow citizens.

⁴¹ Half-widow is a term given to Kashmiri women whose husbands have disappeared and were still missing during the ongoing conflict in Kashmir. These women are called "half-widows" because they have no idea whether their husbands are dead or alive.

But “Can witnesses speak?” is a question, which is raised by a German artist Hito Steyerl.⁴² She argues that the witness, through whom the viewer wants to understand the truthfulness of the event, is fundamentally doubtful. Witnesses can speak the truth but they can also lie because witnesses have their biases and whatever they convey is based on their memories that only exist in their imaginations. But regardless of their prejudice and favoritism, witnesses do communicate about the events and their experiences. Without relying on the witnesses, it is impossible for the individuals to understand or just to know what is happening in far-away areas. Steyerl states that it is a stage towards adopting an inconsistent task, which according to Austrian-British philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein is feeling the pain in the body of the other.⁴³ Although testimony is problematic and uncertain, however, it is essential. In the film, both young boys and other interviewees told their experiences of living under the conflict. The young boys want to follow the path of violence, but the mothers and other respondents want a peaceful solution. These testimonies are contradictory yet important to understand the situation, as they provide the first-hand experiences of those who themselves got tortured, maimed by the armed forces. At the same time, these testimonies are incomplete; these contain “*lacuna*” as described by Giorgio Agamben.⁴⁴ While these testimonies are about those people who are no more, are dead and cannot speak for themselves, a lot of historical and political context is also missing in them. Agamben explains that “the value of testimony lies principally in what it lacks; at its center, it contains something that cannot be borne witness to, and that discharges the survivors of authority.”⁴⁵ Testimonies are unable to attain an absolute truth, but these are

⁴² Hito Steyerl, “Can Witnesses Speak? On the Philosophy of the Interview,” European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies, (May 2008), accessed August 8, 2016, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0408/steyerl/en>, 1.

⁴³ Ibid., 3.

⁴⁴ Giorgio Agamben, “The Witness,” in *Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen, (New York: Zone Books, 1999), 33.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 34.

important to feel the agony and experiences of others.

Interviews of two stone pelters are included in the film. The stone pelters were initially hesitant for the interview due to security reasons. After interacting with them for few days and filming their protest, they eventually agreed to the interview. Journalists in Kashmir usually cover the protests from behind the forces but to win their trust, I put myself in danger and filmed the protest from the boys' side. They were ready for the interview but were reluctant to show their faces. I did not show the face of an anonymous stone pelter but I kept the interview of Hamid without hiding his face.⁴⁶



Figure 6: Hamid

There are two reasons to show his face; one he gave me permission and a newspaper already printed his interview with his photograph in it, second his testimony is relevant as he suffered

⁴⁶ See figure six.

the violence of armed forces. While going to attend his coaching class he was caught between the ongoing protests. During that protest, he became the victim of pellet guns, and he lost his one eye. I feel it's important to show the intensity of the conflict through his face. Conveying information about an incident is, however, important but viewing the human face can evoke an emotional response in the viewer.

Scenes of Empathy

There is a scene in the film where an old mother broke down in tears while providing me accounts of her disappeared son. She removed her glasses with shaking hands, wiped her face with the corner of her headscarf and put her glasses back on.⁴⁷ The pace of the film here briefly slows, and the emotions of the mother become the point of attention. There is another scene where a young woman went silent while narrating her husband's disappearance. I kept her silence in the film for few seconds. The audience may accuse me of using my subject's emotions for artistic desires, but this was not my intention. Film theorist Bela Belaz writes, "If we look at and understand each other's faces and gestures, we not only understand, we also learn to feel each other's emotions."⁴⁸

⁴⁷ See figure seven.

⁴⁸ Carl Platinga, "The Scene of Empathy and the Human face on Film," in *Passionate Views: Film, Cognition and Emotion*, ed. Carl Platinga and Greg M. Smith (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 243.



Figure 7: Old mother wiping her face

The young woman and the old mother were not just narrating their losses, but they were expressing their helplessness. They were forcing the viewer to feel their pain. Carl Plantinga calls these kinds of scenes, the *scenes of empathy*:

Where we see a character's face, typically in close-up, either for a single shot of long duration or as an element of point-of-view. In either case, the prolonged concentration on the character's face is not warranted by the simple communication of information about character emotion. Such scenes are also intended to elicit empathetic emotions in the spectator.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Ibid., 239.

Signs of Memory

The landscapes in the film are the silent witnesses of conflict waiting for the spring to blossom; this film is a story of hope and a search for peace. The title, the *Spring Continues to Blossom in the Valley* has been used metaphorically and also to show the actual spring season. As spring represents the new beginnings; in the film it is used to show the new cycles, both for the continued sufferings of the people and the starting of another spring season in Kashmir. I knitted the story of conflict and hope with a boat ride, which passes through the beautiful landscapes and introduces the audience to the decade's long-sufferings. The Dall Lake is the most famous and beautiful tourist spot in Kashmir. I chose the boat ride because I wanted to build the story by creating a contrast between picturesque and mournful Kashmir as the landscapes always carry with them the memories of the past. Because *Spring Continues to Blossom* is a poetic journey, I used the metaphors as a photographic approach to capture the displaced life and memories of people in a magnificent place. According to David Macdougall:

Films, which focus on memory, do not record memory itself, but its references, its secondary representations and its correlatives. In films, objects survive from the past, people recollect, and certain objects evoke or resemble those of memory. He termed these as the *signs of survival*. These signs are the images of objects which have a physical link with the remembered past.⁵⁰

Trees, lake, graves, images of disappeared persons and birds are some of the metaphors used to represent the long wait, sufferings and the lost generation of Kashmir. Trees are silent witnesses but at the same time, they signify life. The remnants of the past and the symbols of hope, these trees also represent the prolonged socio-political conflict. The graves inside

⁵⁰ David MacDougall, "The films of Memory," in *Transcultural Cinema*, ed. David MacDougall, (New Jersey: Princeton, 1996), 233.

Kashmir represent the sacrifices of the people of Kashmir; hence these graves possess a unique space in the film. The graveyards often appeared in the film with the interviews of mothers. These silent graves are signs of absence and an anecdote for the violent past. They are carrying hidden messages to remember their lost generations. The parents sit silently in their monthly protest to get justice for their lost sons. Their stillness is juxtaposed with the cemetery, which represents an end in itself. There are flowers in the graveyard too, showing great reverence to the departed souls. It may be an impulse to keep fighting a never-ending battle or an indication to adopt a path of peace. All these signs are strategically used to create a visual poem in the film.

During the ride, the camera goes back and forth from lake to the victims, from interviews with people to the graveyards and then backs to the lake. The boat ride ends with flowers in the boat. These flowers represent a beginning of the spring season which continues to blossom despite violence and conflict, in a hope to witness peace. The stories of people's aspirations are juxtaposed with flowers; despite their sufferings, they are dreaming for a new life. Naseema Akhtar, whose husband went missing many years ago and she does not know whether he is dead or alive, her only wish is to provide for her daughter's education. I juxtaposed her desires for a better future with the image of her daughter and a tree full of flowers.⁵¹ This scene itself represents the spring as both mother and daughter are laughing together to welcome their future and the flowers blossom in the backyard.

⁵¹ See figure eight.



Figure 8: Young widow Naseema Akhtar with her daughter

Chapter Four

Conclusion

The film *Spring Continues to Blossom in the Valley* is not about the politics of Kashmir conflict, but about the miseries of ordinary people of Kashmir. So I remained politically impartial throughout the project. My goal was not to impose my opinion but to understand the victim's subjective experience to decode the already accepted narrative on Kashmir.

In the film, I took a metaphoric 'journey' that represents a long-standing conflict and the ceaseless efforts of people in pursuit of their lost paradise. Apart from the boat trip, various other signs are used to translate the memories of a violent past and the yearning for a peaceful future. I cannot claim that my audience read the metaphors in the same way as I created them because how they perceive the messages is very subjective. There is always a risk of misrepresentation while projecting others. Although I was an outsider, I succeeded in listening to their repressed feelings and unacknowledged desires.

This project is relevant today when the whole world is engulfed in Islamic terror. It was not possible to add another dimension to the already complicated subject. But a brief context is provided to understand the Islamic fundamentalism that hijacked the genuine political problem of Kashmir. The significant number of work has already been produced on the Kashmir conflict, yet both arts and academics did not explore the possibilities of peaceful solutions. *Spring Continues to Blossom in the Valley* is a stand-alone poetic journey that tried to create a space for those who look beyond politics for a better future of Kashmir.

Words Count: 11138

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