

Waadi Mein Chhirka Barood: Kashmiri Masculinity, Family Trauma, and Militancy in Film

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Abstract

This paper analyses a movie from Indian cinema (*Haider*, dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2014) and a movie from Pakistani cinema (*Azaadi*, dir. Imran Malik, 2018). It compares how these two films depict Kashmiri masculinity and how family trauma compels the protagonists to engage in militancy. It establishes the link in two ways. First, it analyses and compares the natures of the traumas suffered by the two movies' protagonists. It then studies the impact of the trauma suffered and the changes that it causes to deepen the analysis. This paper aims to fill the existing gap in literature on the portrayal of Kashmiri masculinity in film. It draws fresh attention to, specifically, Kashmiri masculinity's relation to family trauma and masculinity, through a comparative study of Indian and Pakistani films.

Keywords: Kashmir in Film, Pakistani Cinema, Indian Cinema, Kashmiri Masculinity, Family Trauma

Introduction

This paper presents a comparative study of Kashmiri masculinity and its link with militancy as portrayed in Indian (*Haider*, dir. Vishal Bhardwaj, 2014) and Pakistani (*Azaadi*, dir. Imran Malik, 2018) cinema. It does so by identifying not only the cause for the trauma but also the effects. This paper moves away from seeing family trauma as a secondary source of motivation for militancy and the birth of ethnic consciousness for the protagonist, that only serves the function of humanizing the militant and their decisions. Instead, it proposes looking at family trauma as the primary cause of Kashmiri masculinity turning to militancy, because of traditional family structures that deem it the man's responsibility to protect and provide for the family. The resort to retributory violence is then a logical turn of events, due to the protagonist's self-perceived failure to fulfil their duties. They adopt vengeance, for both their shattered sense of self and their family. These two films not only see Kashmiri men being influenced by family trauma over all other forms of oppression, they also depict them choosing vengeance to recover from the damage to self, caused by family trauma.

How Kashmir went from the idyllic background in romantic Bollywood films and songs to a conflict-ridden ground for uprising after the events of 1989 is extensively researched, by scholars such as Ananya Jahanara Kabir. As seen in *Kashmir ki Kali* (dir. Shakti Samanta, 1964) and *Aradhana* (dir. Shakti Samanta, 1969), Kashmir used to be a getaway where one could fall in love and forget their worries, especially in the 1960s. It was picturized as fertile, perpetually snow-

capped and in bloom at the same time. With the Kashmiri Intifada⁶¹, Kashmir went from being a scenic backyard to a hotbed of terrorism in the Indian filmic imagination. The sociopolitical changes in Kashmir were even more impactful because they coincided with the increasing Hindu ethno-nationalism in the Indian state.

The demolition of Babri Masjid in 1992 fueled rising Hindu supremacy and Hindutva mobilization that insisted there was no room for Muslims in India (Kabir). This was marked by a pivot in depictions of not just Kashmir but of Kashmiris themselves, taken from romantic boatmen in *Jab Jab Phool Khile* (dir. Suraj Prakash, 1965) to bearded Muslim men in topis. They were increasingly shown as people whose militancy was motivated by religion above all. This demonstrated the shift in popular Indian imagination, which now saw religion as the driving force behind the Kashmiri resistance. Research into these has been undertaken by various scholars, such as by Kabir. She compares the Kashmiri Muslim being portrayed in films as the Other such as *Roja* (dir. Mani Ratnam, 1992), *Mission Kashmir* (dir. Vidhu Vinod Chopra, 2000), etc. The Indian national attitude towards Indian Muslims changing meant the perception of Kashmir—India's only Muslim-majority state—changed as well. Kashmir's growing resistance and militance post-1989 was ascribed mainly to a rising wave of Islamization. As militant calls for freedom or accession to Pakistan grew, more and more Kashmiris rose up against the state. This link failed to see how the recruitment of militants increased in times of the house arrest and imprisonment of its political leaders by the occupying Indian army (Hartwell). That link could be used to show Kashmiri disenfranchisement stems from a lack of autonomy and control over their lives and futures, as it does for the protagonists.

Either way, the bulk of the representation swung in extremes and produced stereotypes. Kashmir was either its light-skinned and naïve residents (such as Champa in *Kashmir ki Kali*) or it was a terrorist breeding ground that the Indian army was valiantly sacrificing its youth for, trying to restore Kashmir to its former glory (Chakraborti). For this reason, *Haider* stands out as diverging from traditional Bollywood narratives on Kashmir (Chakraborti). This was partly because of the influence of its Kashmiri scriptwriter, Basharat Peer. The exceptionality of *Haider* is further highlighted by its status as 'the fifth highest-rated crime drama of all time' (NDTV Movies).

This paper suggests that family trauma is the most powerful precursor to militancy, often in the same films mentioned earlier. In fact, that pattern can be seen in movies apart from *Haider* and *Azaadi*. The protagonist of *Mission Kashmir* (Altaaf) is set on his path to militancy by the discovery of his family's killer, obsessed with revenge. This link between family trauma and militancy is visible not only in Indian films on Kashmir but also in Pakistani films on Kashmir, most notably *Azaadi*, which this paper analyses. It must be noted that *Azaadi* was released in 2018, two years after the death and massively attended funeral of Burhan Wani. Wani was one of Kashmir's most popular militants, from the Hizbul Mujahideen⁶² party; this allows Pakistani cinema to have a direct and real-life source of inspiration in his form. We know that he intrigues people in Pakistani cinema because a film on his life is rumored to be in the works, slated to be Amir Liaquat's⁶³ film debut. Access to *Azaadi* was nigh impossible because of the cycle of film-

⁶¹ A revolt in Jammu and Kashmir against the Indian state's occupation because of the reversal of democratic reforms and the disputed election of 1987

⁶² Literally translated as 'Party of Holy Warriors.' Pro-Pakistani separatist organization founded in 1989 that wants integration of Jammu and Kashmir into Pakistan. Considered the militant wing of Jamaat-e-Islami that advocates for jihad.

⁶³ Prominent (often controversial) television personality and politician.

to-DVD in Pakistan, even though shops in both Lahore and Karachi were visited. The employees at Rainbow Center⁶⁴ in Karachi informed the author that no DVDs would be found anywhere because the film had not been successfully pirated and uploaded on any digital platform. Because there was no DVD, no one could pirate them. I watched a cinema-recorded print on YouTube that also allowed me to note the audience's interaction with *Azaadi*. The print was barely passable in audio or visual quality for entertainment watching.

The analysis is grounded in both the ethnicity (Kashmiri) and the gender (male) of the protagonists. This is because of two reasons. Firstly, the protagonists' social realities and decisions are shaped by the positions in society they occupy; those positions then influence their positions on the margins as well, because of the constant tension between the center and the sidelines. Secondly, neither of the two protagonists (Haider and Azaad) is singled out for arbitrary, random violence devoid of any context. They and their families are impacted because they are Kashmiris residing in Indian-occupied Kashmir. They are both suffering the consequences of upsetting the Indian state. Azaad's father espoused anti-Indian sentiments by calling for resistance and a struggle for freedom. Haider's father was accused of aiding militants by operating on them. Their lives and experiences—and thus, the trajectories of their stories—are fundamentally informed by their social context, such as their ethnicity, gender, class, etc.

Azaad's Trauma

Haider and Azaad are both protagonists who face different family traumas. For the purpose of this essay, family trauma is defined as trauma suffered by an immediate family member. This then affects the protagonist because of the closeness of the bond between the two. In the case of Azaad, the family trauma that fuels him is the sexual abuse his sister suffers at the hands of Indian personnel. Watching his sister be dragged away and being unable to do anything about it traumatizes Azaad as well. This sets him on the path to militancy. For Azaad, the trauma is relatively easy to decode. It is narrated in flashbacks by one of his sisters (Sanam), which makes it sound more like an expositional origin story than a real event (which will be of note while discussing Haider's trauma). This contextualizes the trauma mainly in its impact on him, but not entirely; the changes in other family members are depicted and explained as well. When Zara (Azaad's soon-to-be love interest) asks Sanam where Azaad is, she tells her he is fighting for the freedom of Kashmir. This is in a close shot, that allows the audience to focus on her smile disappearing and her face becoming somber immediately. The darkness of the room reinforces the seriousness and tragedy of the story. The curtains in the entire house are drawn even though it is clearly daytime outside, highlighting the pall that has fallen over the family.

As the story unfolds, the scene shows Azaad's father in familiar garb. There is a close-up shot with soft lighting that makes him look like a revered religious figure. He is a sage in Muslim symbols of religiosity and wisdom: white clothes, beard, wrinkles, glasses. One recalls Muslim pirs, saints, poets, such as Bulleh Shah, who resemble that physique of veneration and pious suffering. Azaad's father is a pro-Pakistani leader, dressed and groomed to resemble Syed Ali Shah Geelani. Syed Geelani is a separatist leader who heads Tehreek-e-Hurriyat and used to be a part of Jamaat-e-

⁶⁴ A well-known DVD shop that has so many films at its disposals that people say that a CD inaccessible there is inaccessible everywhere.

Islami. With the same white beard, shalwar kameez and Jinnah cap⁶⁵, Nadeem Baig cannot fail to embody Syed Geelani. Geelani is a leader Pakistan has openly supported because of his pro-Islamist rhetoric and his friendliness towards Pakistan. The trauma unfolds as his father is threatened and manhandled (grabbed by the collar) by a member of the occupying Indian forces, who demands that the elderly man stop advocating for freedom for Kashmiris. The disrespect is shown even in his language; the army member asks him ‘karta hai’ instead of ‘kartay hain’. The latter form is used to acknowledge seniority and authority. ‘Karta hai’ is informal Urdu used between peers and is seen as rudeness when used by someone younger for someone older.

At that moment, his daughter—and Azaad’s sister—comes running out of the house and tries to defend her aged father by grabbing onto him. It is telling that the character of the sister, a Kashmiri woman, is named Jannat because of the popular narratives around Kashmir. Ananya Jahanara Kabir notes in *Territory of Desire* that Kashmir is frequently discussed in explicitly feminine imagery, as a paradise on earth, an object of desire in the Indian imagination. In *Azaadi*, as this scene is unfolding, Azaad’s father himself uses the feminine in Urdu to talk about Kashmir; he tells the soldier that Kashmir will never back down and keep fighting for her freedom. This link between the paradise-status of the woman and the Valley makes Jannat a literal embodiment of Kashmir itself. The meaning of Jannat in Arabic is heaven. This meaning reinforces purity, innocence and beauty as the common traits between the region and the woman, as allowed only to the worthy—good Muslims—and coveted by the unworthy. Both Muslims and those familiar with Islam will recognize the meaning of her name immediately. It marks her (and Kashmir) as the ultimate reward for a lifetime of good deeds, of service to God. Similarly, Jannat is then chosen as the target instead, which can be interpreted as a visual metaphor for the violence and brutality inflicted on Kashmir—feminine, innocent, helpless—by the masculinist state of India, depicted in the form of the army member to be lascivious, immoral and abusive. Her father is thrown to the side to be held back by other soldiers.

The army member proceeds to grab a fistful of Jannat’s hair, a gendered mode of assault that exploited the length of hair and reinforced a man’s physical power over a woman. He announces his intentions to abuse her to silence the father, confirming for the film and its audience that a woman being an extension of the man and the family unit exists within the film’s internal logic. Just before Azaad runs out of the house, the camera cuts to a close-up shot of the army member jerking Jannat’s head around in slow motion. This allows the audience to focus on his rage and her fear, implying that what comes next is significant. Her cries of pain and half-sobs then draw Azaad out of the house, who yells ‘Jannat!’ in slow motion. The army’s attention and targeting are not diverted to him, even though he is as much his father’s child as Jannat was, and more socially valuable as the only son and heir. The camera operates mainly in close-up shots here, moving in a triangle between the faces of Azaad’s father, Azaad and Jannat. The frame widens to include the army member as he drags Jannat by her neck to Azaad. Azaad yells at him in clear rage, characterizing Jannat primarily as ‘my sister’. Her primary identity is grounded in her relationships to the men around her, both by the men themselves and the soldier. The transitions are quick and jerky, accompanied by a swooshing suspense-filled sound effect that emphasizes just how critical

⁶⁵ A fur qaraqul cap that has been named after the founder of Pakistan because of how often he wore it. Because of its association, it becomes a reminder of Mohammad Ai Jinnah, who was also similarly aged and wizened by the time Pakistan was founded.

the unfolding moment is. The army member sneers and tells Azaad to do whatever he wants. Jannat is then dragged away again, while she cries and implores her brother to save her.

Only Jannat is used as a weapon against her father. This is proof of the female body being a site of the honor of the men around her. From her springs the family, the nation, the culture, etc. (Ortner). In accordance with the collectiveness of Jannat's body because she is the building block of society, she is dragged offscreen to be assaulted. The exact nature of the sexual violence is not clear but the fearful reactions of her father and brother speak volumes. The subtext of this scene demonstrates that it was Azaad's duty to protect his sister as her strong, muscly brother, who can barely be held back by more than five soldiers. He is the unspoken head of the household because of his youth and strength. But even that is not enough in front of the embodiment of the Indian state, the army member, who towers over everyone. The latter's masculinity is more powerful because of its proximity to the hegemony, challenging and hurting Azaad's sense of manliness both directly and indirectly. He fails because Jannat is raped and he, specifically, did not do enough about it. She appeals mainly to him for help, as heard by how she cries out *Bhai* repeatedly; she expects protection from him. In fact, she explicitly begs him to save her. The protective defensive nature of the bond between the two is reinforced in flashbacks throughout the movie. In those shots, she exhibits a jovial and childish disposition that Azaad teases her about, where she calls him *bhai*⁶⁶ while he calls her only Jannat, etc.

That he accepts the burden of the blame and internalizes the guilt is demonstrated by how the story is told in retrospect to explain why Azaad has turned militant. The sense of shame and failure he feels for the inability to defend his sister compels him to take up arms. He effectively adopts the Kashmiri nation in the movie as those he will protect instead, in place of the family he could not save. The enemy remains the same: the Indian state and its machinery. In fact, this is the introduction the audience gets to Azaad. He and his band of militants are helping a boy called Umer get away from the Indian army. Umer is the polar opposite of Azaad and his men, because he is bespectacled, a computer genius, lost, confused and understandably terrified. Umer is cast as more feminine. That comparison reinforces Azaad's hypermasculinity as impressive, showing him as someone who is armed, taller than everyone else and muscle-bound. Azaad is in control of the situation, indicating his capabilities in the role of a leader. The way that Jannat called him *Bhai* to denote his senior status, how she looked to him for protection, is quickly duplicated by Umer. Umer is characterized as vulnerable and feminine to highlight Azaad's reclaimed competence as a protective, defensive figure.

The failure to protect Jannat is now the reason for his success in protecting other Kashmiris in the rest of the film. How deep his own sense of guilt and sense of duty goes is evident in the contrast between the family's flashbacks and his current self. In the flashbacks, he is usually recalled fondly as laughing and teasing in open fields and daylight, while he is grim and curt in present tense, given mainly to barking orders and betraying little emotion. His current self darts furtively from one closed space, symbolizing his entrapment in his guilt.

Haider's Trauma

⁶⁶ a term for elder brothers

Haider's trauma, instead, is portrayed as something that is unfolding along with the story. His father, Dr. Hilaal Meer, has been missing for twenty days by the time he goes to the police to file an FIR⁶⁷. It started when Haider's neighborhood was raided by the military because of an anonymous tip. During what appeared to be a customary search, Hilaal was identified for aiding a group of militants. Hilaal had been hiding them in his house, performing an appendectomy. They came to him because if they had gone to the hospital, they would have been arrested. While he was apprehended, the army engaged in crossfire with the militants still inside. They refused to emerge and surrender and started retaliating instead, so the army blew the house to smithereens with a bazooka. The fact that it is an adaptation of Hamlet goes to show that the 'something rotten in the state of Denmark' is the violence in Kashmir. But what brand? The army's? The separatists'? The family's, as they turn on each other to cope with loss because they cannot do anything about the actual cause? Right here, Haider's and Azaad's stories diverge. Azaad's family suffered trauma a long time ago; Haider's family is split by a change as recent as three weeks ago. This makes Haider's pain fresher. We get to see Haider try to cope with it, whereas Azaad has already made a choice and stuck with it.

Haider's story becomes human and suspenseful that way, meant to be an exploration of grief and loss. Azaad loses his sense of power; Haider loses someone who provides for him and protects him—his father. In that sense, he is closer to Jannat than to Azaad. He loses a parental figure, a source of knowledge and learning (as demonstrated by the flashbacks and hallucinations where their poetry battles are shown). In the present unfolding of the story, he is shown to have carried that connection forward. As Haider returns to Srinagar for the first time, he is stopped and asked by a soldier what his subject of research is. He responds with, 'The revolutionary poets of British India.' This also hints at Haider's future role: a revolutionary poetic figure battling the neo-colonial settler Indian state occupying Kashmir. The soldier at the checkpoint hands him his notebook back, commenting on his poems as 'very nice' and 'difficult.' This affirms his identity as a poet for the audience. But the most blatant example of it is when Arshia Lone, his love interest, recounts telling the police officer, 'You're [Haider] a poet, not a militant.'

Much like his father, he (initially) chooses a path that deals with the woes and worries of the people: poetry. As his father addressed trauma in the individual body, the poet addresses the trauma in the collective imagination. He is the figure voicing their concerns. Even towards the end of the film, as he joins the gravediggers, he still works with people. Again, like his father, he handles people as sick, as dead instead of dying. What his father could not save, he buries. This way, all his actions involve complementing his father's work and legacy somehow, emphasizing the closeness of their bond, the linkage of their destinies. Haider bears witness to the death of others, compensating for his inability to ever bear witness to his father's death. As Chakraborti notes, 'the quintessential Shakespearean question turns out to be the hushed up howls of the Kashmiris whose right to self-determination, at odds with the hegemonic intent of the state, produces a cauldron of violence and nihilism that matches the anguished utterances of the Shakespearean tragic hero' (178). Haider becomes the representation of all Kashmiris, suffering a loss that is uniquely universal to them: the disappearance of a loved one.

That closeness between father and son is also explicitly spelled out for the audience when Haider's mother (Ghazala) says she always knew Haider loved his father more during a walk. The story

⁶⁷ Stands for First Information Report, filed as evidence of the first-time police receives information about an offence. It commences investigation.

moves into a flashback, showing Ghazala discovering a hand-pistol in Haider's schoolbag. Even when both the parents sit opposite Haider, together as a unit, and tell him he must go to Aligarh, Haider yells that he wants to stay here. After a pause, he adds in a muted tone, "*Abbu ji ke saath*" (with Father). Then, he storms off. There are many such instances that highlight not just the connection between Haider and his father but also how Haider associates home with his father. He sees all of Kashmir as a prison⁶⁸ when he comes back home, because his father is trapped in it. That bond pervades all other aspects of his identity, his sense of belonging.

However, it must be noted that Haider also had an affinity for his mother. Because it is a Hamlet adaptation, Oedipal undertones in their bond shine through. But in the flashbacks, a younger Haider climbs into his parents' bed and embraces his mother. An adolescent Haider puts her perfume on her neck for her and kisses the spot. This is repeated as a parallel when Ghazala is getting ready for her marriage to Khurram. Ghazala recounts his wish to grow up and marry her when he was a child, how he used to lose his temper when his father would touch his mother. In fact, even the most popular film poster circulated was a shot of Ghazala hugging Haider goodbye, before she steps out to detonate her suicide bomber jacket. His current anger and distance are, thus, rendered abnormal; it proves how much Haider has been affected by the loss that he will turn against what he deems to be the source—even if it is someone he loves. His jealous policing of his mother, even as a moral act that preserves the sanctity of his parents' marriage, can then be seen as an assertion of masculinity.

Haider loses a man who has done nothing but heal others, while he was present in the film. When Ghazala asks Hilaal whose side he is on (when he is operating on the militants), he says, 'Life's.' If we look at it from Haider's point of view, we see the undue punishment of a man who did not even actually aid militants in militancy. He assisted people in staying alive and healthy. All he did was perform the duty he was assigned by taking the doctor's oath: to help those in need. For that, the family lost their home and Hilaal suffered a fate that drives Haider mad, partly because he never truly knows definitively what end his father suffered. He is made to disappear; Haider has to look for him, unable to ascertain whether the man from whom he derives his both his social (patrilineal descent) and personal (he is closer to his father than his mother) identity is even alive. Haider is desperately hopeful; that hope consumes him, destroys his relationships. It drives him into parts of Kashmir and witness brutalities that disillusion him. That hope makes him unable to trust those around him, warping his sense of reality.

The need to find the reason behind his father's suffering sets him on the path for revenge, much like Azaad. However, Azaad's journey is straightforward. It culminates in a clear motive and a target; it has a beginning, middle, and end and that is depicted by telling it in reverse. This artistic choice allows us to join all the parts of the story together and see what fits where. Azaad's trauma is based in Azaad having power and being the guardian, then losing that power by failing to live up to the role. He gains that power back by ending up even more masculine than he was before, now a successful defender to a much larger family. His enemy was clearly defined and very much outside of his family or anyone he considered a friend, allowing the construction of an us-vs-them world. Haider's position is powerless (at least, relatively) from the beginning. He loses a beloved parental figure, who guided him and was a source of identity, in both name and habits (such as a love for poetry that had survived long and deep enough for him to pursue it in university). It transformed his homeland for him. Kashmir became the place he had to tear apart to find his father,

⁶⁸ "*Pura Kashmir qaidkhaana hai.*" (Haider to Arshia)

a list of sites where his father might have died that Haider could haunt for the rest of his life without ever truly knowing if he had.

Haider did not just lose his father, but also his family. His view of his mother and his uncle changed radically, making him suspicious of them both, transforming his relationships with them so he regards them as enemies. His relationship with his mother is now fraught with tension, because it was her who held a gun to her head and coerced him into leaving Kashmir for Aligarh. It was because of her that he was away while his father was taken away, his home demolished, and he could do nothing about it. His first sighting of his mother is laughing and singing with his chacha⁶⁹ (Khurram Meer). This makes him suspicious enough to tell them both plainly that they don't look particularly sad to have lost a husband or an elder brother. The fact that he sees her from behind a gauzy white veil, while she doesn't spot him, is symbolic of the divide between them. Haider is isolated in his grief. He can look outwards and see those who do not appear to join him in it, such as Ghazala and Khurram. They are shrouded in the sunlight from outside, while he stands literally in the shadows that symbolize his hopelessness and loneliness. However, the inverse can be true. Haider is the one in the real world, affected by its events and open to suffering. He is the one wasting no time to look for his father, who visits mortuaries and police stations. Ghazala and Khurram, behind the veil and in a hexagonal enclave that holds only the two of them, appear to be uncaring. Either way, Haider is by himself. As far as he is unconcerned, he has no one to share his grief and trauma with.

Azaad gains a team of people he trusts and chooses to walk away from family, but it still awaits his return so they can reintegrate him back into it. Each person in Azaad's family is also impacted by the trauma, all showing signs of strain. His father is wizened; Sanam is quiet and withdrawn. Jannat only paints in black and refuses to talk. Azaad is not constantly surrounded by reminders of the trauma his family suffered because he has left that life behind. On the other hand, Haider comes back to a charred family home. He is now the son of a 'disappeared person'. Hilaal's absence becomes the doctor's most prominent characteristic, a paradoxical state that erases him even further by making his absence now the only thing he is remembered by. As Pervez Lone points out, Haider is now marked by something as ephemeral as his father's absence, unable to travel or get a government job. In the space of the film, the state of being missing and of being missed is concrete, more recognized by the state than presence itself. Not only does that emphasize how fundamentally informed Haider's identity is by Hilaal (that they are connected even when he is missing), it also underscores Haider's current identity and its construction around missing-ness, around absence, around a constant reminder of everything he has lost. Haider is, in the eyes of the state, is recognizable not because of who he is as an individual, but by his wound and trauma. As Hilaal enters a state of liminality, Haider follows. Both are stranded in it, unable to find each other.

Haider loses everything he had because even his family is snatched away from him, the bonds undone by his inability to trust them. He loses everyone he can depend on to either death or mistrust and ends up isolated. The most telling proof of his isolation is in the lack of a Horatio. Horatio was Hamlet's best friend. But in this Hamlet adaptation, he is accompanied everywhere by Arshia, the equivalent of Ophelia. If she is seen as a conflation of Horatio and Ophelia, he has suffered twice the loss upon her death. His two friends, Salman and Salman, are spies planted to keep an eye on

⁶⁹ Urdu for uncle, younger brother to the father.

him by Pervez Lone, Arshia's father. Azaad's betrayal and trauma is entirely external to the family unit. Haider's grief has multiple sources, ranging from his own kin to the state.

His family trauma reshapes his entire life and does not allow him to have a past to return to, because the people who are a part of it die as the movie progresses. Some commit suicide (such as Ghazala and Arshia), while others are taken away (such as Hilaal). It effectively strips him of roots that previously grounded him. That trauma changes his relationship with his birthplace and hometown; the memory of the past is permanently colored by traumatic events. For Haider, the past and the present collide all the time and disorient him. The impact echoes through the years, indicated by his father's ghost following him, embodied by Roohdar, a man claiming to have shared confinement with Hilaal. That symbolizes the memory of the past quite literally following him everywhere, seeping into his present. Another interpretation of the ghost could be that Haider's past interferes literally with his present; the loss of a past prevents him from making a future, by trusting people. He is so traumatized by the loss of what grounded him (his parents, his home) that it prevents him from grounding himself anew by attaching himself to a new life, as with Arshia Lone.

Conclusion

Azaad's trauma is gendered in terms of power; he is a man who failed to defend the honor of a woman. In comparison to Azaad, Haider's story makes him look more feminine and sensitive and makes him closer to Jannat, in that he lost someone he depended upon for safety and protection. Much like Azaad, Haider too undergoes transformation and adopts certain masculine traits to reassert the sense of power and masculinity he has been stripped of by the actions of the Indian state, such as arming himself, changing his physical appearance, etc. Much like Azaad, he too is emasculated by the actions of the deep state for what it takes from him, how it treats him dismissively when he searches for his father. Both choose revenge and violence to regain their power and masculinity; however, Azaad's choice is to protect *and* avenge, while Haider's is mainly to avenge, though he reiterates the Indian's state's violence against Kashmiris several times. Azaad becomes the patriarchal protector of another family, while also avenging his sister's suffering by fighting the same army member who assaulted her later on. Haider is shown to disengage entirely, seeing as how he walks off into the frame to the sound of his uncle begging for death as a form of mercy. He may not have given his life completely over to militancy, but it still helped him process the trauma and reassert his masculinity against the emasculation by the state. Their relationships with the rest of the family are also changed, because they are singularly affected by the trauma due to their closeness to the victims. Both choose militancy to exact revenge to come to terms with the emasculation, because of how war and conflict allow 'a social space for the cultivation of and validation of masculinity,' as per Cock. The fact that they choose the specific method of militancy to exert control is highlighted by the choices made by others around them.

Khurram claims to be contesting elections to bring about change. Sanam chooses to stay back and serve the family. They are dealing with the specific strain of emasculation that can occur only in occupation of a homeland, with structural threat to identity that the state in question (India) wants to subsume, and that leaves them logically with one option in a land characterized by stone-throwers and its Azaadi chants. Carrigan et. al note that 'the importance of violence (...) as a constitutive practice that helps to make all kinds of masculinity.' That view could help see Azaad's and Haider's efforts as an attempt to recreate and redefine their masculinities on their own terms,

outside of the narrow parameters determined for them by the Indian state. By engaging in violence, they can demonstrate to themselves and the world what they stand and by extension, what they stand against: demonstrating values, alliances and enemies in a masculine framework. Given that this is all unfolding in Kashmir, Fanon's work becomes particularly relevant here, because this can be seen as another instance of the colonized yearning to become the colonizer, to have his weapons, his power, his ability to do as he pleases. When the interaction between the colonizer (in this case, India) and the colonized (Kashmir) is so fundamentally informed by violence and exploitation, where rule in Kashmir is maintained through keeping it the most militarized zone in the world, militancy becomes the 'form of aggression' through which the repressed rage can be released for 'collective catharsis'.

Both Haider and Azaad are suffering from feelings of guilt and self-loathing for not preventing the family trauma (Haider repeatedly berates himself for leaving). They both feel isolated and alienated in their grief and perceived failure. The violent expulsion of these feelings is now due, to undo the internalization of worthlessness and helplessness. Militancy is now revolutionary violence, to even the playing field between the settler and the native, the only way to attain freedom. Alternatively, the movement can be seen as a switch from suffering violence arbitrarily to now suffering it for a cause, such as inflicting it. This can be perceived as trading in one form of suffering—and violence—for another. Their response was determined for them by the conditions they were in, questioning the extent to which this was a reclamation of power on their terms or if it was only the inevitable conclusion to a state of affairs that could happen to anyone in random, which only reifies their helplessness and makes it eternal. The fact that things happen without making much sense or being fair in Kashmir is reinforced by a commonality in both stories: both Azaad and Haider watch someone innocent and trying to do the right thing get brutally punished by the Indian state, just because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time. To look at it from this lens would invert the balance of power; Azaad has picked one overlord (Pakistan) instead of another (India). Even though Haider was also presented with that choice, with Roohdar suggesting he go to Pakistan to train, one can say he has truly broken free of it and refused to choose. He steps out of revenge, partially because his mother has effectively exacted it on his behalf by detonating herself and injuring Khurram irrevocably, and walks away from further bloodshed, from continuing the cycle.

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