

Representations of Kashmir in Bollywood Cinema

Nivedita Sharma

Abstract: *Literature is a reflection of culture and art today due to ever growing dynamic of film studies variety of critical approaches are used for analysis of films. Film theory seeks to develop concise and systematic concepts that apply to study of film as art. Bollywood movies have a wide appeal and audience not only in India but have wider audience throughout the world. Bollywood has looked at Kashmir as picture perfect place ‘Kitni khoobsurat yeh tasveer hai yeh Kashmir hai’ (Bemisal) and has projected the beauty of Kashmir time and again. The paper intends to trace the journey of Bollywood and representation of Kashmir in Indian cinema. Attention is drawn on certain song sequences filmed in Kashmir. It will be an attempt to show how regional music strikes a chord across the audience and created a massive buzz in the industry by captured millions of hearts with vibrant beats to melodious lyrics and how Kashmir as a symbol of love and romance has caught an eye of Indian cinema and but over the years hardly any film has been created where Kashmiri culture has got a chance to be portrayed.*

Keywords: Bollywood, cultural reflection, picturesque, Valley, stereotypes, Appeal, Film theory

If poetry is what you can't translate as Robert Frost once suggested then art is what we can't define. Nevertheless, art covers a wide range of human endeavors. Cinema and films are one such unique art form that play vital role in changing the mind set of people and shaping new cultural social and political values. India is one of the largest films producing country in the world. Popular actors find God like reverence in India. India today is producing 1,000 to 1,500 films across languages every year approximately 25 to 30 films every weekend. History was made when Dada Saheb Phalke the pioneer of Indian Cinema produced the first entire feature film Raja Harish Chandra in 1913. Its success paved the way for countless movies. Today film theory is a scholarly pursuit which attempts to explain the essence of films and reflects how films provide commentary on society and on other elements of films like how films affect and are affected by viewers. As technologies have progressed, film theory now looks at where and how we encounter cinema. Dziga Vertov film theorist believed that the cinema acted as a second eye and through editing actual footage of real life it could unlock deeply hidden truths about society. The silver screen has looked at Kashmir as prime destination for shooting films. Over the years a large number of old and new movies were shot in Kashmir, Prime Minister Narendra Modi recently appealed Bollywood, Telugu and Tamil film industry to shoot in Kashmir. Bollywood had a simple equation Romance is equal to Kashmir from ‘Kashmir ki Kali’ to recently shot movie ‘Rocky and Rani ki prem kahani’, Kashmir for Bollywood is the most fitting backdrop to suit emotion of love. In her article in the wire Debashree Mukarjee contends that Kashmir is present in Indian imagination as a ‘fantasy Space’ a place which is not real but a cinematic wish, it is a picturesque postcard, a backdrop against which we can take our selfies”. Raj Kapoor in 1949 shot parts of his film ‘Barsaat’ in the valley. In 60's and 70's several films were shot in Kashmir. Hindi cinema was incomplete without its visuals of snowfall wrapping white carpet in Gulmarg and Mountains or a song and dance routine in Shikara on Dal in early sixties. The valley remained a permanent fixture as an idyllic locale. Kashmir in those times epitomized love and romance and nothing else, couples storming the valley, crooning dulcet ditty under the falling chinar leaves strolling across Nishat and Shalimar gardens, throwing snowballs at each other with delight, climbing the steep hills of Shankaracharya or song and

dance routine on shikara in Dal. The aim of Bollywood was unfailing flow of its onscreen lovers to Kashmir to lend a visually seductive charm. In the words of film scholar Jahanara and Kabir Valley was for film industry “territory of desire”. In these movies only topography of Kashmir was brought forth to the audience portraying valley of Kashmir as a tourist destination with majestic locals. Shakti Samanta's classic song sung by Mohammad Rafi with mesmerizing music of O. P. Nayyar in 1964 for “Kashmir ki Kali” in Dal Lake in shikara with Sharmila Tagore adorned with elaborately designed pherans embellished head gears, dome ear rings representing Kashmiri women became an eternal love ballet for generations to come. Although in movie Champa has distorted the essence of real Kashmiri women Champa selling flowers to support her father is a potent byproduct of the cinematic wish that feeds the Bollywood imagination of Kashmiri women who is fair skinned, docile, adorned shy doll fragile object of desire which is unlike representative Kashmiri women. Another song “Taarif Karun kya uski” picturized as an aquatic boat-ballet with Shammi Kapoor's steps in boat and all boats going around in circle and plunging in water of magnificent Dal Lake of the same movie is a treat to eyes even after so many years. Another song “Isharon isharon main dil” staged in rainstorm and two lovers take shelter in home of peasant women who provides them outfits is a song which has led thousands of tourists coming to Kashmir dressing up as “Kashmiri” couples for keepsake photos. Shammi Kapoor in his all colour “Jungle” yelling yyyahoo while hurling down the slopes of snowcapped mountains to woo his Lady love left the audience awestruck providing insatiable footage of pristine beauty of valley. The swagger and ebullience of Shammi Kapoor make every cine goer pine for such divine, romantic interventions in their lives. Raj Kapoor in his “Bobby” shot extensively in valley with its popular anthem for love birds played by Rishi Kapoor and Dimple “hum tum ek kamre me band ho” at a guest house which later became tourist spot. The lyrical eulogy cast a hypnotic spell even in this era of technology. The song sung by A. R. Rahman from the film Roja “ye haseen wadiyan yeh khula aasman” “socho na jheelon ka sehar ho” from Mission Kashmir in all these songs images evoked are of beauty and open sky of infinite possibilities and songs serve as sumptuous feast of foot tapping melodies that seem like odes to the paradise on earth. In all these movies Kashmir has been merely a filmset

and nothing more than that there is diminutive representation of Kashmiri narrative scarcely to speak of any Kashmiri identity be it culture, dress, dialect or music. However, in 2000 in a song from film "Mission Kashmir" by Vidhu Vinod Chopra performed by Priety Zinta and Hritik Roshan has given a contemporary twist to delightful song of Bumbroo with catchy beats created from traditional chakri melody of 'rouf dance" with Bambroo Kashmir made its wave into movies. The beautiful lyrics and loud drums captured the essence of Kashmiri culture and made it a popular choice. The delightful folksong which has its origin in composition from first ever written opera Bomber to yemberzal celebrating the colour of lord Krishna with its upbeat tempo and voice of jaspinder Narula, Sunidhi Chauhan and Shankar Mahadevan won over people and had high impact on audience. Another Kashmiri folksong Rind pooshmaal gindiney draye lo lo written originally by famous Rasul Mir from Kashmir took Indian cinema by storm. As both the songs with their indefinable and bewitching sweetness have send strange and delightful thrill in audience. The strong cultural influence in the lyrics made the songs evergreen. The vibrant beats of these songs have created massive buzz in the industry and captured hearts of millions. To acquaint Kashmir's rich musical heritage culture, folk music if used effectively and modernize it to get a right flavour combined well together can be turned into a successful formulae as regional music strikes a chord across the world. The songs have higher impact on audience since visuals combined with a melody etch memories of jingles along with surrounding setting and societal moods. Such music forms integrated and presented in movies will increase appeal and spread of culture of Kashmir, hence opening up avenues and awareness of rich history and repository of folk music of Kashmir hard to forget. The contention of the paper is there are very few instances when Kashmir culture or other aspects have chance to be portrayed in Bollywood. Kashmiri characters are limited to certain stereotypes and Kashmiri women as beautiful naïve valley girls. Kashmiri narrative is very minimal and there is diminutive representation of Kashmiri narrative and no representation of any constituent of Kashmiri identity. With the contribution of Kashmiri culture Bollywood can extend rich and pleasant narrative across the country expanding further Bollywood - Kashmir connections.

References

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