

Identifying the Enigma of Kashmir in Gazala's Silence: A Study of the Film *Haider*

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Abstract: Kashmir, a paradise on earth or one of the world's most politically sensitive regions, has been passing through the issues of human violence and socio-politics of two developing countries namely India and Pakistan for six decades. This turmoil and displacement has become more enigmatic in last three decades that is clearly represented in the movie *Haider*. The core part of this dichotomy consists in Gazala's silence which is the major concern of the present paper. In her character, she is supposed to be seen doing a righteous act at a wrong place or an erroneous act at a right place. Vishal Bhardwaj clearly thinks of such philosophical perspectives which are always shifting in the process of identifying Gazala's silence which becomes more important than the other characters in the movie. Even the major character is supposed to be a reflection of Gazala's mysterious silence.

Keywords: Kashmir, Militancy, violence, enigma, silence, dichotomy, fluidity,chutzpah.

The issue of Kashmir has been an unresolved dispute and an enigma in the socio-political history of two South-Asian countries namely India and Pakistan, because its legacy is divided into the ideological, geographical and emotional gulfs of Hindu-Muslim communities over the territory of this paradise. Scholars have analyzed it differently time to time but the existing criticism and research is unable to present any concrete solution for the turmoil of this Valley. Vishal Bhardwaj through the movie *Haider* (2014) has tried to present his philosophical perspectives concerning this displacement of Kashmir. The substance of this movie has been derived from Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* but the movie should not be considered as a pale imitation of this play because the thematic design of this play is frequently changed with respect to the issue of Kashmir. On the contrary, one critic comments, "Make no mistake – *Haider* is not about Hamlet. It is about Ghazala. The woman married to a righteous, respected but uncaring man, but falling for his conniving, untrustworthy younger brother and deeply desired by a confused son who is caught between tales told to him and is not sure anymore what is true" (Balakrishnan 1). Scholars can realize the essence of the movie different from the Kashmir issue because to delimit the story up to the enigma of Kashmir will mean to restrict the literary and scholarly scope of the movie *Haider*. Hence scholars should try to be more interpretive than the present interpretation of the story because reviewers have analyzed it differently as Koel Purie states "*Haider* is neither about Hamlet nor about Kashmir, it's about ... I don't exactly know what." (Purie 1)

Generally, the movie *Haider* depicts a tragedy of Gazala's family which is raised up to the level of universal sufferings of human life where man is

unable to judge the value of truth and justice and also feels unable to choose the right option likewise Hamlet in Shakespearean tragedy. Therefore, the movie is similar to Shakespeare's play in its demographical growth where characters usually pass through the situation of indecision and silent sufferings as Gazala does in the story. Hence, the meaning of the movie is not in its title character Haider but it is in Gazala's silence which always speaks in its mysterious tone. Moreover, she understands the pain of all; but there is no one who is able to understand her silence. After all, she is playing a role of a mother and a wife who knows the truth; but she herself remains a mystery in the whole story. Actress Tabu, in an interview expresses the ambiguity of the story and the predicament of Gazala:

Ghazala is torn between her idealistic husband, opportunistic brother-in-law and her innocent and passionate son. Somewhere she feels she has the responsibility to keep everything in control but obviously she can't. Her love for her son is crazy. She is always trying to protect him from being misled and misguided... He (Bhardwaj) cast me as Shahid's mother because he wanted the oddity of the relationship to come out which wouldn't have come across with a regular aged mother and son combination. Haider shares a love/hate relationship with Ghazala but it's a very passionate emotion. You almost feel odd that these two are mom and son. Haider's predicament is that he doesn't know what to do with his mother—whether to love her, hate her, believe her or kill her. (Singh, Interview)

From the very beginning of the movie, she has been portrayed as a serious and silent character who has a lot of things to share but what to say, whom to say and how to say, are the hidden questions which remain significant upto the end of story. Actually Gazala's character stands for Kashmir-issue after the partition of Indo-Pak territory which has been a matter of debate and discussion over six decades. In addition, her husband Dr. Hilaal Meer is a supporter of militancy across the border. It becomes very clear in the opening when Meer is asking to shift a patient in his own house for an operation secretly because the patient belongs to a gang which wants to push back Indian Military from Kashmir. Moreover, they provoke civilians to entangle in their secret project which is to operate their own ideological and political agenda over the territory of Kashmir in the name of freedom. On the other hand, Meer's brother Khurram is an agent of Indian Military which is assuring the people about their safety and security. But the division of territory of Kashmir within socio-political temptations and tensions has become a means of endless sufferings for civilians who are demanding freedom from this imprisonment. Hence, the whole substance of the movie is replete with a high seriousness which deals with the unresolved predicaments of human violence in Kashmir Valley where thousands of people have lost their lives within a short period of few decades. Moreover, the roles of women have been very mysterious throughout the history of this turmoil and displacements of the Valley because they have been identified differently time to time; yet their roles are still a riddle which is a matter of continual research and identification in the studies of Humanities. Gazala's silence

has that potential to explore the mystery which can be interpreted in relation to other characters in the movie. Hence Gazala's character can structurally be divided into four parts: her relationship with Dr. Hilaal Meer (her husband); with Haider (her son); with Khurram (her second husband) who is Haider's uncle and Meer's brother; and her relationship to herself.

Firstly, Gazala's silence reflects the dichotomous view of truth and reality where she has no single option of political temptation that deals with the division of Kashmir on the basis of conditioned and constructed means of a belief system which usually ignores the valuable significance of civilians' lives. Hence she represents that idea of reality which has always been shifting in the politics of external forces concerning Indo-Pak strategies over Kashmir Valley. That is why everybody is searching for a means of truth, belongingness and identity into the world of displacement. The characters including Meer, Khurram and Haider have a single constructed direction to view the reality that remains away from the exact locus of reality which can only be felt in Gazala's dichotomous perception which supports neither this side of Khurram nor that side of her husband Meer, because no one is fully fit for the holistic vision of her mind that deals with the means of non-violence for the peace of Kashmir juxtaposing the ideological contradictions at a single platform where these will be matter of unification rather than dis-unification and displacement of human values in the name of blind dogmas. But her perception of this globalized world remains a matter of resistance and violence throughout the plot of the story. Therefore, there is no option for her in the world where she is forced to commit suicide by strapping the bombs around her body. In addition, every means of living for her has been a matter of politicized choice but she will never be able to opt for that one. So the earthly desires of peace and harmony become fraud in her life. In other words, she wants to get renunciation which can only be possible not in this world but in imagination. Moreover, she can be happy with one sided view but that will be a momentary bliss. Her real spice of peace and happiness remains a matter of doubt and interrogation throughout her life. So her occasional laughter will remain momentary in the world of divided territory; but she is not divided within herself. She obviously says to Haider that "Revenge only results in revenge" (*Intkam se intkam paida hota hai*); and Haider perhaps would have come out from the conflict following her message in the end. That is why he refrains from killing his uncle in the end. Gazala's silence is so much dichotomous that it is expecting for an independent identity for Kashmir which has nothing to with the politics of India and Pakistan concerning the matter of safety, security and freedom. Though she herself has been unable to articulate this vision verbally, this is always visible through her dichotomous loyalty for dichotomous geographical gulfs of Kashmir. Moreover, her own son Haider exposes the hypocrisy of militancy (Pak) and military (India) in his speech saying:

*Hum Hain Ke Hum Nahi...law and order...law and order
Jiska law uska order...India and Pakistan ne milkar khella border border...*

Moreover, other incidents in the movie try to justify the discussed independent view for the turmoil of Kashmir Valley. When Haider goes to meet military officer legally regarding the matter of his missing father Meer, then he is disillusioned by the answer of the officer who refuses to register an FIR, and says: "When two elephants fight, it is the grass that gets trampled (*Jab do hathi ldte hain to ghass hi kuchli jaati hai*)."

This grass is Gazala and her family which metaphorically represent the harsh reality of Kashmir in the turmoil of an enigmatic violence that always goes to a graveyard where it ends over the dead bodies of civilians who are being trapped into a play of certain socio-political codes.

Secondly, Gazala's dichotomous vision of unified loyalty has a contradiction within it which makes the silence more enigmatic and doubtful. Everything, in other words, is taking a profound sense of contradiction and conflict which explore multi-directional views about the existential truth of Kashmir Valley. The conflict is a universal part of human existence where everyone is Gazala or her reflection Haider. Even Shakespearean tragedies have presented this universal essence of conflict which deals with unresolved predicament of human beings in the world. Hence the movie can also be associated with Hamlet's madness where he faces the similar situation which is also the part of Haider's mind reflecting the hidden part of Gazala's silence. Gazala herself is a victim of this conflict where she remains more enigmatic than other characters in the story. This turmoil is a core part of the story which makes it more alive and truthful. G. B. Shaw once said "no conflict, no drama" which is true about the substance of this story. So the movie is replete with this vision which also reflects multiple perceptions about the enigmatic nature of Gazala's silence. In addition, she cannot be interpreted with a single minded construction. She should be considered to be more dynamic than the reality itself. It does not mean that her identity is not a matter of identification; but the process of her identification makes the research interesting and provokes scholars to think of her silence more than what she actually is. In addition, she can be seen as a victim in the hands of militancy (Pak) that uses her as a suicide bomber to create turmoil in Kashmir Valley where peace and harmony will never be restored until the civilians do not understand the hidden agenda of militancy which is only to colonize the community for exploitation in the name of certain ideological belief system. Swati Parasher in her article on "Gender, *Jihad*, and Jingoism: Women as Perpetrators, Planners, and Patrons of Militancy in Kashmir" aptly avers about the conditions of women in Kashmir:

The role of women in religio-political movements has been subjected to a great deal of political and theological debates. Most of these movements adopt a conservative approach wherein women are not supposed to play any political role. However, in recent years women have made remarkable political contributions to religio-political projects and have even participated in a variety of militant activities, particularly as suicide bombers. (295)

T. S. Murthy, Brigadier (Ashish Vidyarthi), in the movie, frequently says that the people are not demanding freedom but slavery and

imprisonment from militancy (Pak). Gazala as a suicide bomber is a clear representation of this view because she has become a puppet in the hands of Roohdaar (Irfan Khan) who belongs to that militancy which has been trapping the civilians to take revenge upon their own people. In other words, Meer, Khurram, Haider and Gazala are the members of the same family, but they are being divided by the external forces which are successful to divide them and manipulate them accordingly. Moreover, Gazala's dress, by which she hides the bombs given by Roohdaar (militancy), shows how that typical style of dressing becomes a means of hiding grenades and guns to implement the dangerous plan of militancy in Kashmir. The innocent women have been the victims of such means of violence:

The author narrates how this dress was to become a garment of *jihad* because militants could hide guns and grenades inside their *pherans* instead of the usual *kangris* (earthenware pots holding hot coal) and blend in with the local population... In the days before the conflict, it was possible for the author, a woman, to go out on a bicycle or ride a horse in Srinagar, wearing a T-shirt, which is unthinkable now. (Singh 148)

Moreover, Gazala and her family represent the Muslim majority in Kashmir Valley; but it does not mean that she is representing that essence of this community which deals with the hegemony of Islam there, because Gazala has a warm view of humanity that remains visible continuously in the movie. Hence, she tells Haider that she is half-married and half-widow which means neither dead nor alive. In other words, she is living a life as a zombie. What can be more painful for a woman than saying that she is half-widow even though she is married to a person vis-à-vis Dr. Hilaal Meer or Khurram; but both cannot meet at a time because they are like two poles representing the harsh realities of human politics where their division should be considered as a matter of their illusion; but it is never felt completely because this is the point where they can be one but they will never be in the story. Moreover, their unification means to be Gazala's happiest realization of being married but that remains incomplete in the movie. In addition, she has to commit suicide in the story without a perfect married life. The Valley of Kashmir has been passing through this dichotomous loyalty. Its spice is lost between the fights of brothers who are incomplete without each other. Here the metaphor of two brothers stands for India and Pakistan. Gazala (Kashmir) is that geography on which the brothers have been incessantly shedding the blood of each other. This battle ground reminds scholars the situation of the *Mahabhart* where Pandavas and Kauravas were face to face to have their ideological matrix over the land of Kurukshetra. Whatever the matter had been with that battle but one thing was clear that to be a winner over the dead bodies of brothers and relatives should not have been considered as the winner in true sense because that victory becomes more painful without the presence of those who had lost their lives at the same place where the victory was being celebrated in the name of killing brothers and projecting them as the means of ills and evils

metaphorically. Therefore, Pandavas had to have the same realization after becoming victorious. In addition, they had to leave that place of victory while searching for other means of renunciation which would be a path of salvation in this materialistic world. The issue of Kashmir has a similar but not exactly the same grounding of a war where no one should be associated with Kaurvas and Pandavas but with the endless sufferings of the uprooted communities vis-à-vis the Shia-Shuni Muslims, and Kashmiri Pandits who are the different branches of a tree that would undoubtedly be alive with them; and the separation and displacement of these parts will be the destruction of an innocent life that is within the tree itself. Therefore, the movie presents this endless sensitivity of uprooted communities' pain through the silent sufferings of Gazala who has always been waiting for that day when she will be complete by having the harmony, and the unification of these communities without any spec of human violence in Kashmir.

Kashmir is considered to be a paradise on earth but its present scenario represents the ironical vision of this land that has completely become inhuman and stigmatized concerning the bloodshed of certain communities there. The movie *Haider* is obviously depicting this half way of freedom through its enigmatic characters including Gazala, Haider, Meer and Khurram. Gazala's attachment with her son or vice versa can be associated with the idea of Oedipus complex because their profound bonding hints at the social constructions of people's mind that deal with a limited scope of human relationships. Tapobrata Kumar deliberates it as:

[*Haider*] is a tale of mother in love with her son and the woman possessive about the man in her son. In one of the boldest movie in recent times, *Haider* and Gazala portrayed a relationship that was—Deliciously complex, passionate, vulnerable and full of insecurity, hence one can't avoid a smile when Gazala heart-achingly complains that Haider loved his father more than her. While Haider wanted to avenge his father's death from his uncle Khurram, one may debate whether he hated him more as he dared to take away the woman, the mother he almost owned in every sense—Gazala. One wished little more back-story between young Haider and her mother was shown to help the audience explore the depth of the relationship. (Kumar 1)

However, the present relationship in the story is not purely Oedipus; rather it represents the silent feelings of a motherland (Gazala), who does not want to lose her sons (like Haider). On the other hand, her sons should be viewed as freedom fighters who themselves are trapped in the web of certain socio-political ideologies that create a confusion in the whole story going off track from the obsolete idea of Oedipus complex.

Thirdly, Gazala's enigmatic silence with reference to Kashmir does not end here because it has many other things to share with audience. She, in other words, cannot be only a victim of militancy (Pak) because she tells *Haider* that '*intkam se intkam paida hota hai*' that means she has a distance from the means of militancy (Pak) which only believes in the means of violence in the movie. Hence, she is the follower of her father-in-law's wording that does not support the means of violence for the peace of Kashmir. Therefore Gazala's silence refers to Gandhian means of

freedom where non-violence is the only strongest base of getting freedom and peace. Gandhi himself has proved this vision in Nationalist struggle for India from the hegemony of the British government. Here Gazala desires for the same thing which can only be a solution for the enigma of Kashmir otherwise Mother-land will replete with the dead bodies of innocent human beings who themselves do not know the reality and truth of socio-political constructions. Haider reflects this dilemma in the following painful poetry before Arshia (his beloved) said deliberately in his disguised madness:

*Shak pe hai yakin to,
Yakin pe hai shak muje,
Roohdaar ka afshana sachha,
Ya juthi khani chacha ki,
Kiska juth (lie) 'juth hai',
Kiske sach mai sach nahi,
Hai ke -'hai nahi'
Bas yhi swal hai –aur swal ka jwab bhi swal hai,
Dil ki agar suno to 'hai'—dimag ki to hai 'nahi'
Jaan loon ke jaan doon
Main rahu ke main nahi...*

One interesting metaphor in the movie is “*Chutzpah*”, pronounced as “*Chutspa*” often by Haider, which is juxtaposed and equated with AFSPA (Armed Forces Special Powers Act). Bhardwaj has intentionally made it sound suspicious in order to show Haider's disappointment, anger and disgust with the militancy that cost his father's life. However, the word connotes the entire situation of Kashmir that has been projected in *Haider*. The story reflects the crux of the word *Chutspa* in Gazala's silence which deals with diverse things that signifies nothing because the life in Kashmir has become so complex that it shows the feelings of nihilism and absurdity. That's why even the jokes in the movie are neither a matter of laughter nor enjoyment but rather represent the high-serious modes of the character's minds especially Gazala, whose existence as a half-married and half-widowed woman is always a confusion. Rathish Balakrishnan very aptly identifies the intention of the director in screening the word *Chutzpah* as:

You can fault *Haider* for many things – For its length, for some of its casting choices, for its indulgence. But you cannot fault *Haider* and its maker for one thing – *Chutzpah*. This is a bold film on all counts by a director who is so sure of his craft that he is not just telling you a story. He is creating a work of art—filling the screen with brush-worthy landscape, bridging silences with a score so haunting, drawing performances out of every actor and saying so much and still leaving so much unsaid. (Balakrishnan 1)

Hence, the enigma remains an enigma in the movie but it demands more interpretations where reality and truth are always a matter of fluidity and shifting, but one thing is clear that violence and revenge are not proper ways of communicating anything that is always misunderstood in the name of freedom and secularism otherwise a question will always lead to another set of questions that remain unanswered in the answering

process; but it does not mean that there is no answer for that particular enigma. In other words, there can be a lot of possible answers but peace and harmony, which have always been expecting for an affirmative point in the discourses of humanities, will never be possible over the territory of this paradise without a profound grounding of humanitarian outlook that is clearly visible in the mystical tone of Gazala's silence.

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