SYNOPTIQUE

Death Becomes Her: Bombay Cinema, Nation and Kashmir

Kaushik Bhaumik in conversation with Desire Machine Collective, Guwahati

The conversation presented here, featuring filmmakers Sonal Jain and Mriganka Madhukaillya—who form the Desire Machine Collective (DMC), Guwahati—and film historian Kaushik Bhaumik, explores the ironic histories that inform a mythic love triangle of contemporary Indian history, connecting the Indian nation, Bombay cinema, and the region of Kashmir.[i] *DMC did extensive research and documentation in Kashmir during the production of their video installation* Nishan I.[ii] *While working on* Nishan I, *they stumbled upon a number of cinema halls that have remained closed since 1989 when Islamic doctrinaires enforced a ban on the showing of Bombay and imported cinema in the Valley. Subsequently, these halls came to be used by the occupying Indian military forces as barracks, interrogation centers and ammunition dumps. The conversation presented below takes up DMC's experience of Kashmir, Bombay cinema, and the workings of the nation-state through a discussion about the recent history of Firdous, one of the cinema halls in Srinagar (the capital of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir) that was closed down and was subsequently occupied by the Indian army. The Collective's ruminations about the fate of cinema in Kashmir and the logics of work such as* Nishan I *elicit a perception about the manner in which the senses become disciplined, furtive and strained in the presence of military disciplinary regimes, and how such a phenomenon spells the death of cinema in the lives of the people in many senses beyond the literal closing down of cinema halls. Disciplinary regimes spell the end of the organic pleasures that went into the making of cinema as a celebration of the potentials of life as such.*[iii]

KB: *Could you tell me a little about Firdous and about the manner in which its spaces were employed by the army?*

DMC: Prior to the insurgency in 1989, Kashmir had many well-attended movie houses. Firdous—then one of Srinagar's most popular theatres—was closed down as the Bollywood films being shown there were considered anti-Islamist. It was taken over by the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF). Over the years, militants have carried out dozens of attacks, including a suicide attack, on the cinema hall. The premises were also under occupation of the Border Security Force (BSF), which replaced the CRPF to fight militancy in 1993, before it was again handed over to the CRPF in 2003. Last year,

after almost 21 years of occupation, the hall was vacated by the CRPF. It was used for years as a military interrogation centre that primarily targeted Kashmiri youth suspected of militancy. During this time, people were executed inside quite regularly.

The many cinema halls in Srinagar are all fortified and act as bunkers for the army. They use Firdous as their bunker and barracks and as cook houses, bath-houses, mess rooms, living quarters and ammunition dumps. The balcony of the auditorium is not used, while the lower section of the auditorium serves as a store and accommodation space. The smaller rooms and landings on the sides are also converted into living quarters, while the foyer is the recreation area where there is a television that the soldiers can watch in their spare time. There was a Hindu temple on the landing of the projection room (fig. 1).

Fig. 1: A view of Firdous Cinema, Srinagar, Kashmir.

KB: *The ironies of an army interrogation centre in a cinema hall called Firdous are many. Firdous, or paradise, is of course the word that appears in Jahangir's famous*

exclamation about Kashmir being paradise on earth. And then, Bombay cinema shot Kashmir endlessly in the 1960s and 1970s as a cinematic paradise. And, of course, cinema itself is an apparatus that is often used to promise us paradise in our imperfect lives.

DMC: It is perhaps not ironic that the favourite cinema 'location' for Bombay cinema through the '60's and '70's quickly turned into a battlefield set out of bounds to the civilians. The same cinematic voyeurism with which the directors filmed the landscape of Kashmir in numerous films, with its lakes, snow clad mountains, valleys and rivers, infiltrates certain discourses of the desire of the nation-state to retain control of Kashmir as a paradise that defines Indian nationhood (as can be evinced from the lyrical tone of Films Division coverage of life in the Valley in Nehruvian times). There was a kind of anthropological voyeurism involved, of the kind displayed by anthropologists like Furer-Haimendorf who were obsessed with the beautiful body of the tribal. They were expressing their own sexual desires through their writings and photography. A similar thing seems to have happened to Kashmir with Bombay cinema. Sometimes we might be too much in the thrall of 'structural' issues affecting Kashmir. It might be interesting to see the problem in Kashmir as 'auteur-driven' by the fantasies of discrete individuals—filmmakers, politicians, intellectuals etc.—fantasizing about Kashmir as an Edenic locale for playing out desires that cannot be actualized on the plains.

KB: *There is an excess of plains' histories that played out in infantile regressive forms such as we see in the Bombay cinema of the 1960s. Even then the excess created a certain kind of 'target' of the Kashmiri, especially women, in the eyes of the hero seeking to work out his plainsman excesses in a landscape where he was free from social and cultural surveillance. This target-creation as some kind of 'compensation' for the asceticism of a violent historical society is a structural function of discourse creation that is coeval with social constructs such as 'frustrated soldiers raping women in sexual denial over long periods'. Audiences, too, are interpellated through the filmic apparatus to run rampage over Kashmir in compensation for their anxiety-ridden lives on the plains. Of course, Kashmiri women were 'hyper-fair', making this option even more*

attractive to plainsmen obsessed with obtaining fair brides abetted by their familial fantasies. Plains' histories need the carrot and the stick, the stick of hard 'civilizational' life offset by the carrot of 'holidays in the mountains', cybernetic on-off codes that confuse the mind, create anxiety. We have been made to see only Kashmir as carrot, as Paradise, we never saw the underlying history of frustrations on the plains that fuelled such a fantasy.. Now if the local population reacts against this run of fantasy, the tendency would be to want to sweep away such reaction through the application of a nomadic force equivalent to the force of the total mass fantasy that India has about Kashmir.

DMC: We don't think there is any difference between the Shammi Kapoor films of the 1960s, with its voyeuristic tourism, and a film like Mani Ratnam's *Roja*. The premise is the same except that now the gaze cannot penetrate the landscape so easily; the paradise has turned sour due to political issues. The militarization of Kashmir can then be seen in some senses as some kind of a sublime castration carried out on the object of fantasy that no longer fulfills one's desires. Deleuze argues that the virtual worlds created by screen forms intervene in all aspects of things in the worlds on screen and the bodies in the worlds external to that screen. Cinema produces new concepts that change how we perceive and interact with the world.

KB: *When the military interrogation replaces cinema in Firdous, in some senses the interrogation of our desires by cinema is suddenly replaced by an interrogation of our sensory capacities by the military. This double meaning of interrogation in the irony that Firdous comes to embody over the decade probably relates to your formulation about war and cinema.*

DMC: Paul Virilio's understanding that "war is cinema and cinema is war" foregrounds what is fairly transparent: the long historical relationship between war and cinema. From the early days of the development of cinema, war and cinema share the same technologies—telescopic lenses, freeze frames, virtual reality, point-and-shoot—mutually inspire each other's narratives, and, in turn, construct the realities of their

audiences. Going back to the origins of cinema, we could speak of Marey's first chrono-photographic 'rifle'. This association continues with the pilotless Drone, an aircraft whose camera can take two thousand pictures and whose onboard television can broadcast live to a receptor station 240 kilometers away.

At Firdous, what is fascinating is that one form of cinema, Utopian fantasy films, are replaced by another kind of film…the interrogation. The cinematic apparatus is dismantled, but the seats remain. It is as if a ghost audience seated in the hall is being interrogated through the spectacle of the interrogation of individuals (fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Viewing stalls inside Firdous, now abandoned and in ruins

We feel the after-images of this movie of army interrogation every time we are in Firdous. In terms of the early conception of photographic mediums as a 'ghost industry' where ghosts were phenomenon of electrical energy, this absence of image and light in the cinema halls with soldiers living, sleeping, dressing and eating in that space seems like an apparition and some kind of residual afterimages of films that have happened

here. A theater of the absurd is being played out in the dark, without an audience and any reference to time. Delirious new ghostly images invoked anew where the flow is disrupted, the past disconnects from the present.

But now all this will be whitewashed.

KB: *Yeah…it is as if one film was followed by another, which now will give way to the 'next release'. One is reminded from your metaphor of whitewashing the spectacle of the replacement of the poster of a just-gone film by that of the new one…the older film is 'whitewashed' over in favour of the new one.*

DMC: Modern political cinema begins from a very different position, premised not on the "already there" of the people, but on their absence. This, according to Deleuze, is also the answer found in modern political cinema. The stakes involved in proclaiming the people "missing" is nowhere more evident than in the postcolonial cinema of Rocha and Sembene. These filmmakers, Deleuze argues, understand that what is required is not simply an assertion of an identity counter to the one proposed in colonial rule; they thus resist the urge to evoke dubious notions of "origins" – a true identity, a unified peoples, prior to colonialist domination – and, instead, actively seek to forge a new collectivity, a people who belong not to the past, to history, but to the future: the people as future conditional.

KB: *Cinema operates in particular ways in the timecode of spaces like Kashmir, where life, until recently, was pastoral and non-industrial. Suddenly modernity comes along and seeks to discipline such a society. The lyrical presence of cinema is suddenly withdrawn by state diktat to announce the end of a certain historical timecode for populations.*

DMC: Just as war does, cinema also takes place in time, as the primary commitment we make to experience it is time-sensitive, not place-sensitive, and as space disappears in the cinema when scenes are flattened onto a screen. We are transported

quickly in our railway-car styled theater through 1-dimensional celluloid topography. Fittingly, the "cinematic" functions occasionally as a form of "kinematic," and kinematics. Cinema simulates the feelings of movement, speed, and immediacy, creating, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer called it, an imposture of immediacy.

A similar thing is achieved by the spectacle of the military, a certain kinematic effect where the spectacle forces us watchers to 'move'; it produces effects of speed and immediacy within people watching it. An essential dimension of trauma is the breaking up of the unifying thread of temporality. Trauma results in a dissociation and multiplicity, which leads to a disruption in the sense of being-in-time and a consciousness of duration. Trauma is pre-verbal and timeless—still and silent. The body used to be confined in space, and now it is time that imprisons us. It is the body in time—in a space-time too infinitely compressed for man not to feel a fundamental claustrophobia.

KB: *Yes, one is reminded of cinema's endless fascination with filming military drills…the Riefenstahl films. Indeed, one wonders whether the kind of disciplining of bodies that military surveillance is carrying out on Kashmiri bodies through the exercise of what Foucault called bio-power, a vast reality TV show if you wish, does not have something in common with the manner in which Bombay cinema today focuses on fit bodies, the script as fit narrative etc. After all, classical Hollywood cinema could only happen after certain docile bodies were made possible through military-industrial discipline* (fig. 3).

Fig. 3: Military Kinematics – Kashmir at the speeds of the Indian armed forces (scene from *Nishan I*, a four-channel video installation with four channels of sound).

DMC: Exactly. something of that kind is happening. Controlling time is essential to war—the activity of the narrative consists in constructing coherent temporal ensembles in order to configure time and the role of nation-state in disrupting the linear assemblages of time of the local people. Disrupting communal activities of yore—watching movies in a cinema hall, weddings that traditionally took place at night and so on—is essential to military control of Kashmir. Against the earlier cinema of Kashmir as paradise, filled with good, easy-going people, a new kind of cinema of military discipline is being imposed. Indians on the whole take the army's presence in Kashmir for granted. There is, in a lot of popular media discourse, an unquestioned patriotism which flows through cricket, commerce, media and pro-army stands in Kashmir, and this, I guess, produces a certain kind of cinema of discipline towards a space like Kashmir.

KB: *Could you please say a little about the temple shrine placed in the space where the cinema screen once was in another of the Srinagar theatres?*

DMC: Cinema halls have been read as cathedrals and the speed effects of light as creating a form of collective experiences and memories in these new temples. The Hindu temple replacing the screen in Shiraz Theater does lend easily to the feeling of a ritualistic function of purification and purging of the space in progress. It also seems to function like an exorcism of the many ghost images that lie suspended in the dark auditorium and a substitution for the dark screen. It is a fascistic thing that is happening: the shrine coming into the cinema hall, the suppression of all signs of Islamic culture all over Kashmir in favour of Hindu cultural symbols, invokes for us some kind of Nazi *swastika* marching in. All this is deeply disturbing.

The only functional movie theater in Srinagar, Neelam, which does screen film right now, is also under army occupation, and moviegoers have to pass through intense security checks to enter. The body is being disciplined by such measures to some kind of military routine. So paraphrasing Paul Virilio, “cinemas were training camps which bonded people together in the face of death agony, teaching them to master the fear of what they did not know”.

KB: *Before continuing with cinema, a little about* Nishan I, *the video installation that Sonal made in Srinagar, out of which the experiences of Firdous also come out.*

DMC: *Nishan I* looks at sensory disorders that result from a disruption of "organic flows" due to sustained conflict. It looks at interior spaces of a derelict apartment, with traces of absences of that which is repressed, while daily life goes on with apparent normalcy in the streets and canals outside. A departure from reality that war produces opens up many more dimensions puncturing the discourse of normalcy. The interior of the house unfolds in a complex labyrinth both in space and in time. Multiple geometric planes collude and liner perspective collapses in the fractured mind, and only fragments are left to us to make structures out of. Concealed behind the foreground (layers of dust) present only in the form of absence, in the threatening unknown is that which is expressed. The layers of time that don’t fit at the seams create a dissonance,

discontinuity that is the cause of a discomfort. In this contraction, time and the disappearance of territorial space in times of war, multiple temporalities converge into one space, breaking the chronological continuity; in the fissures that are produced by the senses coming apart, perceived reality is destroyed and new realms of perception open up—the mundane everyday assumes the realm of myth and fairy tales (fig. 4).

Fig. 4: *Nishan I*, four-channel video installation with four channels of sound

Linear perspective invented during the European renaissance abstracts from psycho-physiological space that is an unpredictable flow of visual phenomenon, a homogeneous, unchanging infinite space—purely mathematical. It is an abstraction on which the camera is also based. It depicts the individual gaze. In Nishan, many perspectival planes collide, breaking the illusion of a single homogeneous, unchanging space and the single position for the viewer. The horizontal monumentality of the work also works against the vertical modernity, and one has to navigate the space and change one's position to experience the work. It is about the freeing up of perception and from being bound to single standpoint and immobile eye. Also *Nishan I* goes against the Renaissance perspectival stable view of the viewer looking out of the window, which creates an absolute distinction between the grounded viewer and the world in flux out there brought to focus from this point of grounded vision. The widow, however, has to be left out, as it is the location of the gaze. In Nishan, however, the window and interior space is also revealed, referencing the subject himself/herself and also making evident his/her centered gaze to the world outside. In this case, the house was used by the army as a bunker. A viewer who loses his gaze and is drawn into the continuous flow of sensory phenomenon loses this subject position and can merge with the object he is experiencing—the perceptual flow.

KB: *This of course then loops back to the Virilio equation between war and cinema through the idea of common use of visual devices that home on a target.* Nishan I *thus seeks to interrupt the habits of the vision that homes and targets.*

Back to cinema then. How do you think the love triangle between the Indian state, Bombay cinema and the 'regional' actually function?

DMC: The triangle relation you mention is quite a perverse one. Nation state and Bollywood cinema conspire and create identity and wipe out multiplicity of the regional by appropriating them as stereotypes or zones or a fantasy land. There are instances of films like *Dil se..* or *Tango Charlie* which need to be seen in this light.

In Kashmir, we think what happened was that a certain generation progressively got alienated from mainland India in a political sense. Then, the same films that entertained Kashmir in the 1960s were seen as an alien point of view… say where a Kashmiri is portrayed as a villain and is bashed up by a north Indian hero, this would be seen as some kind of negative gesture made by the Indian nation/Bombay cinema towards Kashmiris. It is with politicization that critiques of stereotyping Kashmir and Kashmiris arose. Then of course the Islamists brought in the logic of Bombay cinema as being anti-Islamic. But then there are other things. There is deep resentment amongst the Kashmiri young that young men from Kashmir cannot get into the Bombay film industry despite being so good-looking by cinematic standards. It is always the women who are coveted by the industry.

KB: *That brings us to the ironic historical loop that marks the passage of Kashmir in Bombay cinema in the 1960s into something like Firdous, and it involves the issue of unemployed young. After all, one may argue that the Shammi Kapoor films set in Kashmir mark a decisive break in the relationship between Bombay cinema and the nation-state ideal, with the stern task of nation-building giving way to frothy youth culture playing itself out freely in the margins of India. A logic of 'unemployment' is written into the content as well as the economics of such films. And somehow the*

events that lead to what happens in Firdous passes in substantial ways through discourses about the unemployed young.

DMC: Society is not able to quench youth desires. Cinema steps in, but over time this fantasy fails to quench youth desire. 1980s youth culture in India wanted to open up to liberal culture, but India was not liberal enough. A story of a Kashmiri young man seducing a Bombay girl was never made. The image is not liberated. Older images open up minds and bodies, but images that follow cannot answer the sensory needs of the young. National fantasy has no place for the Kashmiri youth or the young for that matter.

A narrative that we come across here in Kashmir very frequently is about young men who became militants after being unsuccessful in love—love defined by the logics of Bombay films watched in the cinema halls. Here, the energies of cinema turn so easily to insurgency. Indeed, we should be only making horror films given the levels of sexual repression the young have gone through.

KB: *People die for the loves inspired by cinema seen inside halls, and here we have people being executed inside cinema halls. Sublime castrations seem to abound in a nation perpetually in the grip of melodramatic throes of either repressed love or authoritarian patriotism. Yes, there is horror cinema all around the idea of Firdous – the interrogation film, the execution film, the military spectacle kinematics.*

DMC: The fact is that in spaces like Kashmir, Assam or Meghalaya, there is no culture of the film screen onto which people living in these regions can project their fantasies. Bombay cinema can step into the absence of indigenous screen cultures for a time, but it can never satisfy these regions' local people's fantasies about themselves. Cinema is about projecting one's thought onto a moving image, about contrasting one's experience with those depicted in cinematic images to figure out one's life's experiences. The cinema screen is some kind of prosthesis for perception. It teaches us what the contemporary is, what friendship or love are, etc. This is missing in Kashmir.

There is no space for fantasy. A similar thing is happening all over India, where multiplexes are rooting out screens. There is no representation of the desires of people—art-house cinema from 'regions' focus too much on village life, and Bollywood is urban only in a certain way. There is no representation of contemporary modern youth experience on screens in these regions. This connects strongly with the ban of Hindi cinema in Manipur and the huge popularity of Korean cinema and now Korean fashion in the state and slowly in the region.

KB: *In a sense, militarization of regions precisely produces the abolition of the 'cinematic' within populations. Militarization is aimed against the fantasies of sensory freedoms of the people. In a profound sense, militarization abolishes the cinema screen and what we call the 'cinematic' within our lives. Of course, the youth suffer most from the abolition of the 'cinematic'* (fig. 5).

Fig. 5: Fade In/Fade Out in Kashmir (transformation scene from *Nishan I*, four-channel video installation with four channels of sound)

It is interesting to think in this respect about the situation in urban contexts from the 1970s onwards around the world, where a certain confused interface emerges between sensory radicalisms produced by cinema and political confusions of the time. For Kashmir, I have heard this story of an erstwhile JKLF leader trying to woo a contemporary academic by singing Hindi film songs to her on the phone through the night. You have lived through similar turbulent times in Assam in the same period. In some ways what happens in Kashmir and Assam after the 1970s is precisely the Indian state's inability to handle this new kind of youth sensory radicalism arising on the interface between cinema and politics.

DMC: I am an accidental becoming. In Guwahati, while I was growing up, I had an abundance of choices. Calcutta was a major reference point for Guwahati, sending films and books accessible to the middle class. We loved Bombay cinema. But I also saw Bergman films in 16mm in a hot room in Cotton College where I studied. Cinema was a space for meeting people, where we discussed our desires and fantasies. Before a place globalizes, cinema is already there to de-territorialize you; it expands the horizons of experience, where you are in the world, Utopian desires. Youth needs Utopia. Radical politics was possible because choices were available in what you read, what you saw and what you experienced. After 1989, the space for such politics went missing.

Today, there is this SEZ model driven homogenizing happening. Guwahati has been taken over by Delhi. New citizens are coming on who want to live and consume as the rest of India. Identical houses being built all over India, and media decides how you live. We are becoming like an island. We are living life televisual on a 70mm LCD screen.

KB: *The dynamism of what Deleuze calls 'any space whatever' where anything connects with anything gets curtailed in media-driven consumerist lives. There is this illusion that the world is at your doorstep on your television screens—a false 'any space whatever'. We are back to surveillance, but this time authored by Karan Johar, where the new Indian patriotism is wearing branded American clothes. It is ironic that it is in*

this time of standardization that, more than ever before, one needs films—of the kind Rivette makes or Pasolini's Trilogy of Life—set in 'any space whatever' to capture the complexity of Indian experience, but also to challenge that spurious and false discourse of 'unemployment' (something that a film such as Kamal Swaroop's Om Dar-b-Dar *was). I am reminded of* Nishan I *challenging the Renaissance single-point perspective through the invocation of miniature paintings and the plural nature of religious architecture in Kashmir.*

Finally, a meditation on the perception of the Bombay industry as a well-oiled machine productive of pleasure that wants to steamroll into quiet frontier regions and shake up such regions into industrial excitement. Sometimes there would be resistance to this noise (as in Manipur), sometimes magical success (as in the case of the JKLF leader I referred to above). For the Kashmiris, I guess Indian colonialism probably produced conditions fraught and pain-ridden akin to the 'intimate enemy' situation that Ashis Nandy speaks of with respect to British colonialism in India.

DMC: We see Bombay cinema as some kind of a neighbourhood cinema where there is a voyeuristic eye that goes around peeking into houses to see what's going on there. Kashmir is one such house that Bombay cinema peeks into…there are many others. The Northeast has had no place in Bombay cinema—so culturally alien is the Northeast to mainland sensibilities. This kind of neighbourhood cinema cannot respond to a multicultural society like India. Its vision is too uni-dimensional. Bombay cinema is not nomadic enough, like French cinema revealing new lives after May 1968 or like Asian cinema. It cannot imagine producing cinema in any space whatever. Ronnie Screwvala will produce *Dev D,* but it is anchored in the production of a patriotic film such as *Swades*. There is today a tyranny of nationalism in India and an idea of the global filtered through this patriotism.

It is possible that the images of Kashmir from 1960s Bombay cinema would have satisfied the father of this JKLF leader of whom you speak, but for the son's generation such images were not enough. They did not correspond to reality around the younger

generation. That's when the questioning of representation begins.

KB: *One thing that has always intrigued me about current Bombay cinema is the manner in which it can make films about spaces alien to its imagination only when some kind of popular marketable framework is provided for that space. So* Udaan *set in Jamshedpur post the 'nationalist' stardom of the Indian cricket captain whose domicile it is,* Peepli Live *when there is enough 'national' media focus on farmer suicides. Media popularity in the 'national' register of certain issues might be providing a new framework for the nation-Bombay cinema connection that was very feeble from the 1960s through the 1980s. Here, Mani Ratnam is a pioneer. He brings Kashmir back into Bombay cinema and Bombay cinema back into the nation-cinema nexus precisely when Kashmir becomes a media event. Firdous then becomes, ironically, a laboratory—a metaphor for the transformation of Indian lives, Bombay cinema and of everything in between, where bodies trained to live under the conditions of an earlier Bombay cinema are now being disciplined to a new regime of bio-power driven by media-fuelled consumerism and standardization of life towards a new order of productivity, failing which they shall be executed* (fig. 6).

Fig. 6: The derelict projector room of Firdous Cinema, Srinagar, Kashmir

[i] Desire Machine Collective (DMC) consists of filmmakers Mriganka Madhukaillya and Sonal Jain, who are based in Guwahati, the capital of Assam, a state in northeastern India. Formed in 2004, DMC employ film, video, photography, space and multimedia installation in their works. They assume their name and theoretical disposition 'from *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, a seminal text from 1972 by French philosopher Gilles Deleuze and psychoanalyst Félix Guattari, [and they seek] to disrupt the neurotic symptoms that arise from constricting capitalist structures with healthier, schizophrenic cultural flows of desire and information.' In doing so, they seek to 'confront the many forms of fascism that lead to violence and injustice through their practice, both regionally in Guwahati, Assam, and around the world'. DMC have shown their work extensively around the world. Their work *Residue* was part of the India Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennale, 2012. *Residue* and *Nishan I* were shown at the *Being Singular Plural* show at the Guggenheim Museum, New York, curated by Sandhini Poddar in 2012. DMC also helm Periferry, 'a nomadic space on ferry for hybrid practices'. Periferry is 'a trans-local initiative which looks at critical uses of technology, collaborative experiments with local communities in an environmentally and socially sustainable manner. It works as a laboratory for people engaged in cross disciplinary practice.'

[ii] *Nishan I* is a 4 channel video installation with 4 channels of sound. Set in a derelict building in Srinagar, it is described by DMC as 'cityscapes in conflict zones are dotted with abandoned, disused houses that bereft of their primary functions serve as bunkers for the army. *Nishan I* registers the interior space of these homes with traces of the absences that are repressed within them. While daily life goes on, in apparent normalcy in the streets and canals outside. The window determines the relation with the world and this relates to the split between the interior and exterior, the ego and the gaze, public and private.'

[iii] The state of Jammu and Kashmir that forms the northern crown of the Indian nation-state has been the powder-keg for a global conflict over territorial sovereignty since its formation in 1947 when India and Pakistan gained independence from British rule through a partition of the Indian subcontinent on the basis of religious majorities. The state was, during colonial rule, an independent Princely State ruled by a dynasty of Hindu Dogra kings. Disputes began between India and Pakistan over Kashmir, which was a Muslim majority region and which Pakistan claimed should be part of it since the creation of nations in 1947 had been carried out on the basis of regional religious majorities. Pakistan invaded Kashmir in 1947 and things came to a head in 1948 through a UN Security Council engineered Cease Fire that resulted in an informal redrawing of national boundaries, leaving huge areas in Kashmir in control of Pakistan. Decades of border warfare followed that included two wars fought in 1965 and 1971 in addition to simmering political and cultural tensions among the people of the valley along the Indo-Pakistan/Hindu-Muslim axes of confrontations. Things came to a head when the Mujahideen movement was launched by Islamic radicals in 1989 in emulation of the Intifada in Palestine and in the aftermath of the events in Afghanistan and Punjab in the 1980s. The armed revolution was spearheaded by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF) which has since faded out, ceding place to a spate of militant organizations deemed 'terrorist' by the Indian state and international liberal governments elsewhere. Links for activities in Kashmir with the Taliban and Al-Qaeda are routinely quoted when discussing the issue. However, things remain, at best, nebulous, given the placement of the region under virtual Martial Law since the 1990s making it into an inaccessible fortress, an opaque zone for any sober consideration of historical or political matters. The Indian army's presence in the region has escalated steadily, as have accusations of gross violations of human rights by the army that include acts such as 'encounter killings without trial', 'disappearances', torture and rape and random interrogation and harassment of civilians, amongst others.