

## **The Meta-ethics of Military Homicide in *URI* and *Hamid***

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### **Abstract:**

The artistic contrivance of a film undeniably endorses a certain ideology, which often affects the notions of political correctness. The objectives of cinematic discourses have the potential to twist and turn the presumed doctrines of society. *URI* and *Hamid* function as platforms that induce the effects of certain political prospects. Both movies attempt to decipher the psyche of soldiers and other civilians against the framework of warfare. The project seeks to elucidate the ethical comprehension of nationalism and patriotism from the prospect of military ethics. The article inquiries about the genealogy of military morality and the contemporary influence of patriotism along with the historical guidance, the ethical ambivalence of homicide in militarization within the narratives of *URI* and *Hamid*, and the moral dilemma of soldiers in consequence of the post-democratic scenario and confers the relevance of postmodern plurality in the realm of military ethics.

Morality exists through a series of exclusions, the exclusion of the bad from the good, the abnormal from the normal, the uncivilized from the civilized, and the delinquent from the disciplined. Such a network of exclusions plays a key role in maintaining what the exclusionists call the balance of society. This balance, often called social order, although thought to be a collective responsibility is to be actually ensured by the state as far as modern societies are concerned. With the emergence of the state, the authority did not vanish altogether. On the contrary, it became more authoritative and powerful in

always being a hidden force; hence, the visibility of power has changed the most. The authority draws a veil over such tendencies with the responsibility of maintaining societal order.

The deliberate or indeliberate exercise of exclusions made by society is a product of the existing social hierarchy based on the genealogy of a particular power principle. Morality is a tool that facilitates the execution of such power principles. The inclusion of exclusive propaganda in the domain of democracy creates a social imbalance. The loopholes in the constitutional enforcement of law make this social as well as moral imbalance quite visible. Our constitution exalts rightful living and rightful killing at the same time. On one hand, the fundamental rights of human beings ensure the right to live, on the other hand, it negates the right to live and justifies the rightful killing on certain grounds.

Art must have unfettered freedom of choice in its subject matter. However, the politics of 'political-correctness' intervene in the realm of artistic independence. Even then, the cinematic genre of art often succeeds in creating an ebb and flow among the dominant patterns of socio-political discourse. The ideological stand of films operates in such a way that it can directly connect to the psychological as well as intellectual inferences of life activities. Moreover, it can support, subvert, or supplant the established notions of sociopolitical ethics. Movies such as *Uri* and *Hamid* willfully insist on a distinct quest for comprehending the ethics of necro-politics. Even though these movies exhibit the same military background, they disseminate different dogmas in their political agenda.

*URI, The Surgical Strike*, is a film starring Vicky Kaushal, Paresh Rawal, Yami Gautam, and Kirti Kulhari. It is based on the September 2016 counter-attack carried out by the Indian Army in response to the terror attacks at Uri, the army base camp in Kashmir.

The movie starts with a song of ambitions and desires sung by an ordinary soldier addressing his daughter as '*oh mori raani*' (my dear sweetheart) (*URI* 00:03:30). The song is interrupted suddenly by the attack of another group. Thus, the very beginning of the movie creates tension or a threat to the ordinary notions of desire as well as ambitions.

The lyrics of the song suggest the yearning of soldiers to have a normal life of love and compassion, but the serenity of the song is contradicted by the wild and sudden interruption of the attackers. The death of that soldier on the battlefield suggests how the rights of the soldiers to dream are negated. The eyes of the dying soldier question the uncertainty of life while the unsung lyrics reverberate through his last breath.

The film visualizes how soldiers give up their today for the nation's tomorrow and it reminds one of the nation's resolve to signify or repay the sacrifices they make for the country. As the lines quoted, *-zindagi haan thode thode faasle thhe kuch tere kuch mere kyun darmiyaan* (Oh life, why was there always a rift between us) (00:26:57- 00:27:05), there is always a rift between life and death for civilians in the society and especially for soldiers. *URI* puts a spotlight on the unacknowledged passion in their hearts and fire in their eyes. The film is a fitting filmy tribute to the Indian Army, which in some sense glorifies the nationalist in every compatriot.

Vicky plays the role of a dedicated soldier, Vihaan, who is known for his meticulous strategizing and planning in missions. After a successful mission, he demands a premature retirement to support his ailing mother, and the authority retorts, *-Desh Bhi toh hamaari maa hai* (after all, this country is also our mother) (00:16:52). Hence, the familial obligations of soldiers negate the façade of nationality by questioning their conscience and commitment to the nation.

The repetition of *-'how 's the josh? high sir ! jai hind! jai hind'* throughout the movie before

and after their acts of violence functions as a catalyst that supports the legitimacy of death even though it is in the guise of a political strategy.

There is an intensely emotional scene in the movie when the daughter of a dead soldier utters these words, *–Shauryam..Daksham...Yuddhe...||* (Courage and competence in war) (00:47:17) and the officers complete it by yelling *–Balidaan Parmo Dharm||* (00:47:24) (sacrifice is the ultimate dharma). This shows the indoctrination of war and its significance even in the minds of children. According to Hinduism, dharma is the essence of life and purpose. The death of the soldier is equated with the sacredness of sacrifice in order to acquire the highest means of dharma, hence the political indoctrination works from the root level of human conscience. It controls the national, religious, as well as psychological sentiments of its subjects. A senior army officer in the movie concedes, *–Ankhein bandh karta hoon to bachon ki nahi Kashmir ka territorial map dikhayi detha hai||* (When I close my eyes, I do not see my children's faces, I see Kashmir's territorial map instead) (00:57:34-00:57:40). Even the deepest conscience of an ordinary man has been replaced by the divides of territories so profoundly that he cannot sense his obligation towards family or loved ones. The millions of fathers and mothers who see their sons swept into the maelstrom of war have been schooled to overlook conflict with their consciences.

*–Pakistan jo basha samachtha hai, ussi basha mein Pakistan ko samjane ka samay ab aagaya hai||* (It is the time we send a message to Pakistan in the language they understand) (00:48:50 – 00:48:55), here *Basha* (language) is a metaphor used to signify the aspect of rightful killing. Death is the language they are implying to use as a messenger to convey their stand to Pakistan. *–vishwas ud jayenaga logon ko hamare sarkar sel* (People will lose the faith in our government) (00:49:05). Here it is explicit that in order to restore the power of the authority, they must exercise the right to kill. Hence, death serves as a powerful tool professing to satiate the power of the authority.

–*vo apne logon ko bookha pyasa chod dhenge marne keliye lekin aathankavadh ka funding nahi rukhenge* (Pakistan might let their people starve to death, but never stop funding terrorism) (00:49:28- 00:49:33). This explicates the agency of terrorism, which has the potential to exercise power by distorting another’s freedom of life.

When the protagonist Vihaan faces a moral dilemma regarding his participation in the war, he recollects the idea of a lecture given by the senior officer during his training period, –*farz or farzi mein ek mathra ka anthar hota hai mein vo mathra nahi banhna chatha hoon, agar mein apne desh apne bhayen keliye ab nahi lada, tho apne hi nazron mein farzi banker reh jaogel* (There exists a thin line between responsible and irresponsible. I do not want to be on the other side of that line. If I do not fight for my men, my country, then I will be irresponsible in my own opinion) (00:56:05 - 00:56:20). Therefore, it is evident that the nation instills such kind of commitment in the minds of the soldiers and they teach them how to surrender mentally and emotionally to their duty. The protagonist of the movie who is also an army head challenges the military troop members with his psychologically wrapped nationalistic conscience. –*kya badle keliye aapke khoon fod raha hai* (Is your blood boiling for revenge?) (01:00:28). Such questions stimulate the emotional reprisal in the psyche of the soldiers because –the effusive motivational speeches delivered by leaders to their armed forces during wartime aim to boost morale and unite the troops to fight to the bitter end for their leader’s cause (Calhoun 333). There are so many such instances in the film, which made them inured to violence and detach them from the individual reasoning. The strong mental indoctrination acquired by the soldiers during the training period desensitizes their emotional quotient as well as physical inhibitions, which is ostensible in the line –*mein lad jaana hai laho mein ek chingari* (The fire in my blood makes me want to fight) (1:16:48). The ‘fire

mentioned here is an emotionally empowered political installation of ethnocentricity done by the ideological indoctrination of power which is conducive to the confirmation of an enslaved as well as loyal 'subject' who helps in formulating the concealed consciousness of nationality that is inherently subjective and absurd.

Courage also functions as a dominant instillation when the battlefield demands fatal bloodsheds that are subtly delineated in the movie by these lines –*challa sirte banke kafan jad tureya tankell* (–A passionate soul wears a shroud on his head and is ready to die) (1:16:58). Hence, a soldier is ready to die for his country, he is fearless, and a brave heart is ready to die for his country. He is heroic. Here comes the conjugation of the nation's multiple agenda of creating 'heroic' as well as 'compassionate souls' concurrently. Every probable tactic of socio-political manipulation is evident in such ideologies. Similar beliefs are no more subjective now. We cannot assert that such conceptions are the deliberate ingestion of a few minds. However, these ideals of power and politics have been involuntarily indulging the cognition of the populace.

The patriotically designed morality of martyrdom or homicide is not only a product of political indoctrination; it has also an active analogy with one's religious persuasion. When it comes to the notion of 'Indianness,' the influence of Hinduism is indeed dominant. Hindu ideas on war have often been seen as following a completely contrasting rational inference from other world religions. This alien rationality has been summed up in one word: *karmayoga*. The core classic *Bhagavadgita*, which is part of the *Mahabharata* and the most famous text of the epic literature of Hinduism imparts several pragmatic precepts on war. In the *Bhagavadgita*, Krishna tells the warrior Arjuna to see the fighting itself as the end of the war. He should not think about the fruits of the battle. Fighting is a goal in itself for Arjuna because he is a warrior and by carrying out his duty, he lives in accordance with dharma. Every soldier who advances against the enemy in battle takes part

in the sacrifice of battle (*yuddhayajna*). *Mahabharata yudha* was one of the bloodiest wars recorded in the history of Hinduism. However, according to Bhishma, it had a profound purpose and the battle itself was a sacrifice. –The flesh and the blood of the dead become oblations and mutilated bodies, bones hair, severed heads, weapons, elephants and even the sounds of cutting and piercing have precise functions in the sacrifice of battle (qtd in Brekke 115). Such references have made scholars conclude that the *Mahabharata* war really is a sacrifice. Just as the bloodiest visuals in the *Mahabharata* war have been delineated as something admirable, the movie *URI* also exalts the ugliness of violence which is evident from this dialogue by the protagonist that states, –*vakth aagaya hain Khoon ka badla khoon se lene keliye , unhe Kashmir chahiye hamein unka sirr* (—time has come to make them bleed for their deeds. They want Kashmir and we want their heads) (1:27:48- 1:27:55). Here the ugliness of violence has been shrouded with the prestige of patriotism.

In short, the concept of war, that we find in the great epics of classical Hinduism, does not distinguish between the private and public war. Unlike the systematic warfare, the world of the Hindu epics is a world of individual heroes. Great warriors go to heaven when they die, whereas the warrior who dies in bed or runs away from danger goes to hell. The ethos of this world is summed up in the verse: "There is nothing higher in the three worlds than heroism (*Saurya*)" (Shanti Parva 100-18). It is quite apparent that the

Indian psyche has been infected with this so-called glory of heroism, which is palpable in the film *URI* also. Any chance to prove their heroism was considered a worthy deed –*Unka sirr gardhan se alag karne ka moka de raha hoon* (—A chance to behead them) (1:00:12). They perceive homicide as a –*moka* (chance) to prove their loyalty and nationality. Because this act of extreme loyalty by dismissing the intrusion of any personal moralities would make them ‘heroic.’

The spirited nationalism that has been instilled in the first half of the film vaguely counterposes the glorified jingoistic morality in the second half of the film. Certain dialogues in the film distinctly depict the inhumane approach of justifying homicide on account of political intolerance and egoistic revenge. —*mere ghar mein guss kar mere bayon ko mara tha na , aaj mein tere ghar mein guss kar tere bayoon ko maar raha hoon, indian army kehte hai hamein* (—You barged into my home and killed my brothers, today I barged into your home, and I am killing your brothers. We are the Indian army) (1:57:38-1:57:48). This statement convenes the central theme of the URI mission in India as well as the motive of the movie. It is based on the Prime Minister’s stern message—*ghar mein ghuss kar marenge*, (we will enter their home and hit them) (00:51:06) to Pakistan as a reaction against their terrorist attacks. Furthermore, the strong articulation of ‘*we are the Indian army*’ in the film indirectly signifies the notion that homicide may be legitimized or desensitized on the account of extreme patriotism. It also shows the indifference of human ethics against violence which drifts between the passivity of approval and practicality of disapproval.

The film talks about a new ‘Hindustan’ that has the capability to —infiltrate them (Pakistan) and hit them where it hurts| this idea of revenge is indeed an outcome of strategic violence. Such incidents justify the propagation of violence. These instincts are perceptible in the lines, —*Jalti laption ko humne hathon mein hai thaam liya, hai woh kar jaana ke saara zamanaa phir dega misaala yaroon sabko apne naam diyaan*” (lighting up the fire in our heart with our passion. We have held the burning flames in our hands. We have to do something memorable, so the world remembers as for our deeds) (1:17:45- 01:18:03). They are not afraid of holding the ‘flames’ in their hand. They call their deed admirable and want to set a good example for the world. Here the meaning of goodness and morality has blurred. The honor of patriotism fades when acts of violence such as homicide have been misinterpreted as a good deed that can set a fine example for society.



In this sense, the film *URI* also petrifies the stereotypes of power structure without probing the narratology of dominant discourses in society.

The narration of the movie parades a slow progression, where it starts with the compassion of humanity and ends with the passion for ‘patriotism.’ This passion often propagates a legitimate exercise of violence in order to stabilize power within the notions of boundaries.

The political correctness of art has been problematic over the decades. Even the notion of being politically correct is itself dubious. Hence, it is perceivable that each artistic endeavor proposes a certain politics of ethical correctness. In an unbiased critique, it is indeed coherent to consider *URI* as a politically subservient piece of art. However, *Hamid* poses a different frame of mind when it comes to the ethical uncertainties of nationalism. Hence, the film can neither be perceived as a query on patriotism nor as a response to nationalism, but simply as a projection of the prevalent socio-political simulation.

*Hamid* is an achingly beautiful portrayal of loss, love, and longing in one of the world’s most troubled and militarized zones, Kashmir. What is interesting and praiseworthy is that the writers do not pander to jingoism, as is the case in most Hindi films about Kashmir, but stick to the point. Rehmat (Sumit Kaul) is missing, who is father to seven-year-old Hamid (Talha Arshad Reshi) and husband to Ishrat. While Ishrat tries to find her husband, like how thousands of Kashmiri women do; by going to the police and later to the morgue, little Hamid has his own, brilliant way. He calls God directly and inquires about his father’s whereabouts. He figures out a way to dial Allah, and the call is routed to a CRPF Jawan, who gets involved in the boy’s life, albeit from a distance. The movie shows what art is here for; to pose resolute questions and to show a true reflection of society.

The movie juxtaposes the narratives of humanity and politics. Whether it is a child missing his father or a Jawan weighed down by unexpressed guilt and the frustration of not being able to visit home and family, both are victims of political mechanisms. *Hamid* portrays an auto-destructive mechanism of democracy, especially on the outskirts of Kashmir. It effectively chronicles the tension between civilians and the government. In the film, military forces are portrayed in a manner to establish their representation in the manoeuvring of authority. Therefore, the movie shares a mental as well as physical tug of war between the ordinary people and military forces. The film conceives the self-destructive relationship between the forces and the stone-pelters and how both are injured in the process of opposing each other. Both the soldiers and the commoners get affected in such a dispute, which positions power over life. Henceforth, a strong instrument is needed to turn up the inequalities of political hierarchies and art is indeed a bold platform, which cultivates a sense of realization with the proper implementation of linguistic modalities.

A language is an important tool that helps to portray the function of art in society. Films use language as a medium of political correctness. In *Hamid*, we can see the influence of language. The pure composition of Urdu poetry in the movie also exemplifies the cultural purity of the inhabitants and it delineates their linguistic identity. They use this linguistic identity to represent their political as well as ethical concerns. –Here, one fights with a gun in his land, to gain access to the heavens above, while the heaven on earth lies in shambles (Hamid 1:03:23-1:03:33). In the film, Hamid recites these lines from his father’s poem to the Jawan. The moment of silence that follows on hearing these lines is an explication justifying the soldier’s ethical concerns regarding his deeds of violence. Hamid’s father in the film taught him –*zubaan saaf hoti hai toh seerath bhi saaf hoti hain* (your language reflects your character) (00:11:09). In addition, his father stubbornly

wants Hamid to master language, because he knows that language is the only powerful metaphor that has the sovereign power to question the politics of language itself:

Language is the sovereign who, in a permanent state of exception, declares that there is nothing outside language and that language is always beyond itself. The particular structure of law has its foundation in this presuppositional structure of human language. It expresses the bond of inclusive exclusion to which a thing is subject because of the fact of being in language, of being named. To speak [dire] is, in this sense, always to—speak the law. (Agamben 20)

If the nationalistic doctrines urge someone into a war that inevitably will bring death and injury to human beings, then it is a sheer policy of aggression. Such an aggressive initiative may dismantle the balance of human nature. The Jawan in the movie is a perfect example to conceive the dilapidating psychological trauma of a military man who is fed up with the inscrutable violation of humanity in the guise of national security. It is evident when he says, —*Thak chuke hai hum* (—I am sick of it) (00:37:52) hence, the arrogance of the soldier was waning with his guilty conscience. Social Democrats like Carlo Schmid, who opines that the citizen must be able to state for moral reasons—*I wish to serve my fatherland in its crisis in a manner other than by killing someone* (qtd in Bucerius). As per the conventions of constitutionalism, it is very much translucent that no person shall be compelled against their conscience to render military service involving the use of arms. In that case, compulsion is not the instinct that propagates the vindication of homicide but something else. The movie *Hamid* is indeed layered in the sense that it does question and answer every ideological instigation regarding a political homicide in a very subtle manner, which may not be comprehended superficially. There is a scene in the movie where Hamid asks the Jawan —*aap bhi karti hai kya shayari?* (Do you write poetry as well) (1:03:51) he retorts:

I don't know how to, but I will recite one...The Himalayan mountain peaks speak for our glorious land, they motivate us to take a stand to be a nation, proud and free as its immortal son, stay steadfast to the path you have chosen... march on march on... Thunderbolts may strike you, son of our motherland, do not wave, be brave...like a raging fire, conquer what is in your way; there will be triumph over all brave, march on...(1:04:03- 1:04:50)

From these lines, it is evident that he has been indoctrinated with the presumption of pride over his conscience regarding the sacredness of his mother nation. Therefore, the tactics of militarization are to cultivate the spirit of nationality in such a way that it supersedes the ethical distress of homicide itself. However, the film has shown that every individual has a triggering situation that finally leads him to the path of self-identification: *–mein Allah nahi hain ek jawan hain* (I am not Allah, I am a soldier) (1:29:30). When the soldier admits to Hamid that he is not Allah but a mere officer in the army, he implicitly admits the fact that he does not have the freedom to take lives. In the first half of the film, he says that he is Allah. Moreover, he may consciously or unconsciously ingest the belief that he has the right to take lives. However, in the end, he realizes that he does not have the power to take someone else's life. *–jaan lene ka haq sirf allah ko hain* (Only Allah has the right to take lives) (1:11:51) as Hamid's father taught him. The movie culminates with the inequitable objective that no one has the right to take anyone's life on any grounds. The moral dissection of *Hamid's* theme would undermine the unprincipled ethical concealment of a homicide, at the same time it inquests about the ambiguity of patriotic morality in the realm of militarization.

Both movies show the advocacy of nationalism in the guise of patriotism. The military missions of a nation operate with the highest patriotic conscience. The ethical concerns have been

sidelined while viewing the glorious progress of political success in the nation. *URI* deliberately shows the conception of fanatic nationalism that glorifies the infinities of patriotic fallacies. The political façade over the spirit of nationalism has been

involuntarily unveiled through the film. Even though the movie is a representation of the intolerance of Pakistan's terrorism in India, it unconsciously circulates the propaganda of violence. Hence, *Uri* portrays the necropolitical side of any established power, which considers it appropriate to control lives inside as well as outside boundaries. Violent initiations such as a surgical strike propagate the idea that it is ethical to be killed and kill for the country. These conceptions of an ethical fallacy have been visible in the movie even though it portrays the humanistic approach toward the life of soldiers. The realistic portrayal of the plot has been undermined by the ethical voidity of glorifying violence.

In contrast, *Hamid* questions the patriotic disorientations in society. The projection of Kashmir has been deliberately designed in order to deepen the effects of an unanswered democratic rule. *Hamid* neither glorifies the patriotic violence nor undermines the nationalistic concerns of territory. It subtly coordinates the ill effects of patriotic nationalism, which further creates an ambiance of a narcissistic as well as jingoistic attitude and entails an impartial democratic recognition of rights and respect. The movie also identifies the guilty conscience of an ordinary soldier who battles between familial and national obligations. *Hamid* presents a different view of a soldier's inner psyche. Films like *URI* show the glory of sacrifice and exaltation of killing the enemies, but *Hamid* portrays the guilt of violence and the loss of sacrifice.

In this matter of concern, both movies delineate paradoxical perspectives on the ethics of war and militarization. When *URI* shows the extreme loyalty of soldiers towards the patriotic

doctrines, *Hamid* shows the extreme sense of guilt because of their (soldier's) disloyalty towards one's conscience. Hence, it is evident that both movies show the dual ethics of nationalism. On that account, it infers the ideological dilemma of military morality. As far as ethics is concerned, the sociopolitical dimensions of any established discourses predominantly play a crucial role in the comprehension of such moral implantations of the society. All this refers to the idea that the twenty-first century indeed demands a defensive step for national security, which is apparent in the movie *URI*. However, the increasing moral apprehensions of living in a global world invigorate the need for psychological well-being, which is a byproduct of national well-being. The film *Hamid* investigates such psychological implications for people regarding morality.

Hence, it is evident that both movies exemplify a paradoxical narrative of ethics with a foundation in national ethics that itself is dubious in nature. In relation to the doctrines of various philosophical schools such as Meta-ethics, Emotivism, Relativism, Naturalism, and Objectivism, it is evident that the morality of military homicide does not incur any pre-established value system or ethical genealogy. Conforming to the Meta-ethical cognitivism, ethics can exist with or without having truth values. Emotivism argues that ethical claims are simply an emotional disposition towards particular statements. Realism or objectivism claims that there are real objective facts of the matter about ethical issues that were independent of our beliefs about them. Relativists or subjectivists claim that moral statements are not separate from beliefs. Naturalists think moral facts are reducible to some scientific facts about the world. Consequently, it is perceptible that any philosophical research on morality confers the degrees of relativism. The meta-ethical concerns of homicide do not petrify the true or false notions of moral understanding, rather it creates an air of ambiguity that can be subjectively interpreted based on an objective moral cognition.

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