



# Jashn-e-Azadi

## How we celebrate freedom



Written and directed by **Sanjay Kak**  
photography **Ranjan Palit**  
edited by **Tarun Bhartiya**

The 15<sup>th</sup> August, India's Independence day, this past year, witnessed as with every passing year, the Indian flag ritually going up at Lal Chowk in the heart of Srinagar, Kashmir. The normally bustling square was eerily empty - a handful of soldiers on parade, some more guarding them, and except for the attendant media crews, no Kashmiris.

For more than a decade, such sullen acts of protest have marked 15th August in Kashmir, and this is the point from where Jashn-e-Azadi begins to explore the many meanings of Freedom-of Azadi-in Kashmir.

In India, the real contours of the conflict in Kashmir are invariably buried under the facile depiction of an innocent population, trapped between the Terrorist's Gun and the Army's Boot. But after 18 years of a bloody armed struggle, after 60,000 civilians dead (and almost 7,000 enforced disappearances), what really is contained in the sentiment for Azadi-for freedom?

Amidst the everyday violence and ever-present fear in Kashmir, there are no easy answers to such questions. Where truth has been an early victim, all language-speech, poetry, even cinema-becomes inadequate to describe what we know and feel here. So we reshape our curiosity, and point ourselves at what we can see, what we are allowed to see. The film then combines several forms and modes of expression to evoke the past as well as unravel the present:

We are witness to an ageing father in the Martyr's Graveyard; we are with a group of men as they survey the dead in the mountain villages of Bandipora; we sit quietly in the Out Patients Ward of the Govt Psychiatric Hospital in Srinagar.

But we look elsewhere too, in the satirical farce of Bhand folk performers as they play in a village square; in the tense undercurrents of an Army Sadhbhavna (Goodwill) camp in north Kashmir; and in the images conjured up by the work of contemporary Kashmiri poets.

Shot and edited between August 2004-2006 Jashn-e-Azadi engages us with the idea of Azadi in Kashmir.

In 2007, as India celebrated it's 60th anniversary of Independence, this is also a conversation about Freedom in India.

