



The Unforgettable Plight: Bollywood's Wilful Amnesia Towards Kashmiri Pandits

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Article History	Abstract
Received: 06 June 2023 Revised: 05 Sept 2023 Accepted: 18 Nov 2023	<p><i>The delineation of Kashmiri Pandits in Bollywood cinema has been a subject of both intrigue and controversy. Bollywood has always been apathetic towards the Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. To understand the significance of Bollywood's portrayal of Kashmiri Pandits, it is crucial to grasp the historical context. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a wave of violent insurgency swept through the Kashmir Valley, leading to the displacement of thousands of Kashmiri Pandits. The paper will make an attempt to show how Bollywood has been extremely apathetic to the trauma and suffering of the Kashmiri Pandits, reflecting the bias and political agenda in not portraying the Multiple Exoduses of the Kashmiri Pandits at different points in time. The paper will compare different cinematic works revolving around the primary theme of Kashmir. The paper also attempts to analyse how most of the Bollywood movies centre around the other issues of Kashmir like insurgency and terrorism, and how they have deliberately blindfolded themselves towards the cause of the Kashmir Pandits.</i></p> <p>Keywords: Exodus, Kashmiri Pandits, Bollywood, Trauma, Loss of Identity, Cinema, Cultural Conflict, Mass Migration.</p>
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1. Introduction

Bollywood, the world's largest film industry, has played a significant role in shaping India's cultural narrative. Bollywood, formerly referred to as Bombay Cinema, refers to the movie enterprise that produces Indian films primarily based in Mumbai. The popular word "Bollywood" is a combination of "Bombay" (the old name of Mumbai) and "Hollywood." The industry is part of the larger Indian film industry, which also includes the South Indian film industry and other smaller industries. Over the years, it has produced countless movies that reflect the diverse aspects of Indian society. One such subject that has found its way onto the silver screen is the tragic exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir Valley. This article explores how negligibly Bollywood has depicted the plight of the Kashmiri Pandits, without shedding much light on their struggles, resilience, and the need for greater awareness and empathy.

This article provides a concise overview of the minimal historical and cinematic context of how this community has been depicted in Indian films. Kashmiri Pandits, a minority community in the Kashmir Valley, has a rich cultural and historical heritage. However, their presence in Bollywood narratives has been relatively limited, and often, contentious. It discusses the various ways in which Bollywood has not properly represented Kashmiri Pandits, from romanticizing their culture to highlighting the tragic exodus of the community in the 1990s. It is essential to comprehend the historical background to appreciate the significance of Bollywood's portrayal of Kashmiri Pandits. A wave of violent insurgency swept through the Kashmir Valley in the late 1980s and early 1990s, forcing thousands of Kashmiri Pandits to flee their homes. They were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in other parts of India, leaving behind their ancestral land, cultural heritage, and a sense of belonging.

Bollywood movies always neglect to show the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, but there is still some connection between Bollywood and the Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits:

Contextual Background: Some Bollywood films set in Kashmir or dealing with the Kashmir conflict indirectly provide context for the exodus by depicting the volatile atmosphere in the region during that period. These films often show the fear, violence, and instability that prevailed.

Impact on Characters: Characters in Bollywood films set in Kashmir may include Kashmiri Pandits who are portrayed as victims of the conflict or as part of the larger narrative. Their stories can help shed light on the experiences of the community during those troubled times.

Human Rights and Political Themes: Some Bollywood movies explore themes related to human rights abuses, political turmoil, and the Kashmir conflict. While they may not specifically focus on the exodus, they contribute to a broader understanding of the issues faced by Kashmiri Pandits.

Awareness and Advocacy: Bollywood films, by reaching a wide audience, can help raise awareness about historical events like the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. They can serve as a platform for advocacy and discussion on the plight of the community.

2. Literature Review

1. *A Movies that Actually Get History: The Case and a Half of Kashmir Files: A Study in Social Blogging* by Dr. Venkat Rao Pulla, the article explores why making a film inspired in part by true events can be a difficult task. To make a film like *The Kashmir Files*, directors have to figure out how to balance historical facts and drama. Truth and authenticity appear as two important concepts in historical films. This article follows the guidelines and presents the thematic structure of the analysis. The entire article examines two main points regarding the authenticity and authenticity of the Kashmir Archives and further explains the CDA methodology used in the methodology section.
2. *Digital footprints of Kashmiri Pandit migration on Twitter* by Farzana Gulzar, Sumeer Gul, Midhat Mehraj, Shohar Bano, and Mike Thelwall. This article explores the online activism of the Kashmiri Pandit movement on Twitter in the 1990s. Even though 10 years have passed, social problems in India are still not solved. By examining changes in the content of the news, public opinion's tendencies regarding events can be discovered. Download tweets from Twitter using the application programming interface (API) and free chat application Mozdeh. A set of 1000 tweets was selected for content analysis using Mozdeh's random generator. Using Mozdeh's random number generator, a collection of 1000 tweets was chosen for content analysis. The findings show that over time there has been an increase in tweets on the topic, mostly from Indian users, often triggered by the posting of videos such as *Shikara* and *Kashmir Files*. The tweets appeared to show broad support for Pandits, but they also often express strong views or criticize political policies and suggest that migration is an extension of pain and suffering. The findings also show that social analysis can easily include the international perspective needed to understand complex immigration issues, as well as provide an understanding of important political issues before the internet.
3. *The reception to 'Shikara' exposes the biases of critics* by Vikram Zutshi. The e-paper discusses the analysis of the film *Shikara*, which criticizes the lack of politics of the conflict in Kashmir and shows the lack of understanding of the new phenomenon from real events and written records. He mentions that Indian critics also seem skeptical about the distinction between fiction and non-fiction works stemming from real events – although the former is fiction in the public domain. Many famous romantic comedies with tragic backstories focus on the love story, and history is just a prop to the love story.

Research Gap:

1. The article will show Bollywood's negligibility in portraying the Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits.
2. The comparison between *Shikara* and *The Kashmir Files* as movies based on the Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits has not been done academically.

3. Materials And Methods

The article will undertake a close analytical, and descriptive study of the chosen movies based on the Exodus story of Kashmiri Pandits. It will also use the comparative study method of research to compare various movies based on Kashmiri Pandits specifically the movies *Shikara* and *The Kashmir Files*. Through the analytical study, it will define the impact of various movies based on Kashmiri Pandits and will provide personal critical views on the same.

3. Results and Discussion

Historical Context:

To understand the significance of Bollywood's portrayal of Kashmiri Pandits, it is crucial to grasp the historical context. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a wave of violent insurgency swept through the Kashmir Valley, leading to the displacement of thousands of Kashmiri Pandit families. They were forced to flee their homes and seek refuge in other parts of India, leaving behind their ancestral land, cultural heritage, and a sense of belonging.

Cinematic Representations:

Several Bollywood films have attempted to bring the story of the Kashmiri Pandits to the forefront, shining a spotlight on their struggles and the human tragedy they endured. Movies like *The Kashmir Files* (2022) by Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri, *Shikara* (2020) directed by Vidhu Vinod Chopra and *Haider* (2014) directed by Vishal Bhardwaj provide poignant narratives that depict the suffering and loss experienced by the community.

Evoking Empathy and Awareness:

By incorporating the Kashmiri Pandits exodus into their narratives, Bollywood films have been instrumental in raising awareness about the plight of the community. These movies offer a window into the emotional turmoil, the pain of separation, and the challenges faced by those displaced from their homeland. By evoking empathy in the hearts of the audience, these films catalyse conversations and discussions surrounding the issue.

Criticism and Controversies:

While Bollywood's portrayal of the Kashmiri Pandits has garnered praise for shedding light on an often-overlooked topic, it has also faced criticism and controversies. Some argue that the cinematic narratives oversimplify the complexities of the Kashmir conflict, reducing it to a binary of victims and villains. Others claim that the films tend to focus more on the romantic aspects of the story rather than delving deeper into the socio-political realities faced by the Kashmiri Pandits community.

The Need for Authentic Representation:

As Bollywood continues to explore the subject of Kashmiri Pandits, there is a growing demand for authentic representation. Filmmakers must ensure that they depict the stories with sensitivity, accuracy, and a nuanced understanding of the historical context. By giving voice to the voices of the displaced community, Bollywood can play a significant role in fostering dialogue, understanding, and reconciliation.

The negligible depiction of Kashmiri Pandits in Bollywood can be categorized into three main approaches:

Idealization and Romanticization: Some Bollywood films have celebrated the vibrant culture and traditions of Kashmiri Pandits, showcasing their music, dance, and scenic landscapes in a picturesque manner. These films tend to portray an idyllic, often utopian image of the community.

Historical and Political Context: In contrast, several Bollywood films have addressed the turbulent history of the Kashmiri Pandits, especially focusing on their forced migration in the early 1990s due to militancy in the region. These movies often depict the pain and suffering experienced by the community during that period.

Stereotypes and Misrepresentation: Regrettably, there have been instances of Bollywood perpetuating stereotypes or misrepresenting Kashmiri Pandits. This may include inaccuracies in their language, attire, or customs, which can be detrimental to the community's image.

The following are some films that depict the Kashmir issue and the Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits:

1. *“Kashmir Ki Kali”* (1964) - Although not directly about the exodus, this classic Bollywood film directed by Shakti Samanta showcases the beauty of Kashmir and its cultural diversity, which includes the presence of Kashmiri Pandits.
2. *“Bhagwaan Dada”* (1986) - This film features themes related to the plight of Kashmiri Pandits in a dramatic context.
3. *“Roja”* (1992) - Mani Ratnam is the writer and director of the Tamil romantic thriller *Roja*. Madhoo plays the lead role while Arvind Swami plays the lead actor. The film tells the story of a Tamil woman who is desperate to find her husband, who was kidnapped by the army during a suspicious operation in Jammu and Kashmir.

4. “*Pinjar*” (2003) - Directed by Chandraprakash Dwivedi, this film is based on the novel of the same name by Amrita Pritam and focuses on the experiences of a young Pandits woman who is kidnapped during the partition of India and Pakistan, highlighting the turmoil faced by Kashmiri Pandits.
5. “*Haider*” (2014) - The film, which is based on William Shakespeare's play “Hamlet” and is directed by Vishal Bhardwaj, depicts the challenging circumstances faced by Kashmiri Pandits in relation to the Kashmir dispute.
6. “*Shikara*” (2020) - Directed by Vidhu Vinod Chopra, this film tells the story of a Kashmiri Pandit couple who are forced to leave their home during the exodus in the 1990s.
7. “*The Kashmir Files*” (2022) - The film, which was directed by Vivek Ranjan Agnihotri, tells a fictional story about the 1990 exodus of Pandits Kashmiris from Indian-administered Kashmir. It asserts that an alliance of silence hides these particulars. It can be said that *The Kashmir Files* is one of the first Indian movies that became successful in showing the real incidents of the Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits.

***Shikara* which is not up to the mark.**

Shikara is a 2020 Indian Hindi-language film directed by Vidhu Vinod Chopra. The movie portrays the story of the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir Valley in 1990 due to escalating violence and political turmoil. It focuses on the love story of a couple, Shanti, and Shiv Kumar Dhar, who witness and survive the atrocities faced by the Kashmiri Pandit community. It offers a poignant portrayal of the plight of Kashmiri Pandits during their forced displacement. The movie successfully captures the emotional journey of the lead characters, Shanti, and Shiv Kumar, as they navigate through the turmoil and uncertainty of their lives. The love story serves as a vehicle to depict the larger tragedy faced by the entire community.

The film's cinematography is commendable, beautifully capturing the scenic beauty of Kashmir and contrasting it with the chaos and destruction caused by the conflict. The visuals effectively immerse the audience in the atmosphere of fear and despair experienced by the characters. The performances by the lead actors, Aadil Khan and Sadia, are compelling and heartfelt. They bring authenticity to their roles, portraying the trauma, resilience, and determination of their characters. Their chemistry adds depth to the love story, providing a human touch to the larger narrative.

One of the strengths of *Shikara* is its focus on the human aspect of the tragedy. It sheds light on the personal stories, emotions, and struggles of the Kashmiri Pandit community, aiming to create empathy and awareness among the viewers. The film also highlights the importance of preserving one's cultural identity and the power of hope even in the face of adversity.

However, some critics argue that the film lacks a strong narrative structure and fails to provide a comprehensive historical context for the events portrayed. It also faces criticism for oversimplifying the complexities of the Kashmir conflict and not delving deeper into the political aspects surrounding the exodus. Overall, *Shikara* is a visually appealing and emotionally engaging film that attempts to shed light on an important chapter in history. While it may not be a definitive account of the Kashmiri Pandits exodus, it succeeds in bringing attention to a significant issue and reminding us of the human cost of conflict.

***The Kashmir Files* is a masterpiece.**

The movie sets out to shed light on the 1990s Kashmir conflict but falls short of providing an impartial view. Despite Vivek Agnihotri's claim that the series is based on his research. Watching *The Kashmir Files* was not simple. It was not simply another film. It is no small achievement that Pallavi Joshi and Vivek Agnihotri spent four years producing the film, with meticulous attention to detail and nearly seven hundred intense interviews featuring testimonies from the first-generation victims of the 1990s genocide against the Kashmiri Pandits community.

The protagonist of the tale is Krishna Pandit (Darshan Kumar), a JNU student who, according to his grandfather Pushkar Nath (Anupam Kher), believes his parents perished in an accident. However, the reality is even more dismal. It is torn between two divergent accounts of the 1990 exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. Pallavi Joshi, a pro-Azaad professor at JNU, is one side's representative; she is garnering a lot of support on campus for her cause in Kashmir. Nath, whose side the professor says is a hoax, has been fighting for justice for the exodus for thirty years. Pushkar Nath passes away, and Krishna goes back to Kashmir to carry out his final desires. While there, he meets four of Nath's friends: a journalist, a doctor, an ex-police officer, and an ex-civil servant. The fact that Krishna is unaware of his father's true cause of death astounds them. Krishna then follows the Kashmiri writings as a means of discovering the truth.

Comparing *Shikara* and *The Kashmir Files*

The movie *Shikara* received mixed reviews from both critics and audiences and did not perform as well as expected at the box office. While some praised its cinematography and emotional depth, others criticized its pacing, screenplay, and portrayal of historical events. Additionally, there were many controversies surrounding the film, with certain groups arguing that it did not accurately represent the complex political and social issues leading to the Kashmiri Pandits exodus. There were several reasons behind its underwhelming performance:

Controversial Subject Matter: The film deals with a sensitive and controversial subject matter – the forced exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. This topic is politically charged, and some viewers might have been hesitant to watch a film that could potentially reignite debates and tensions.

Limited Commercial Appeal: *Shikara* was a more realistic art-house film, which did not have the commercial appeal of big-budget Bollywood blockbusters. It targeted a niche audience interested in serious, issue-based cinema, which can limit its box office prospects. **Lack of Star Power:** The film did not feature well-known Bollywood stars, which can affect its marketability. While the lead actors, Aadil Khan and Sadia, received praise for their performances, they were not widely recognized by mainstream audiences.

Timing and Promotion: The film's release date and marketing strategy could have played a role in its failure. It was released in February 2020, and the competition from other films and a lack of effective promotion might have impacted its box office performance. **Narration Style:** Some viewers and critics found the film's narration style and pacing to be a bit slow or disjointed, which can be a turn-off for mainstream audiences looking for more engaging storytelling.

Political and Cultural Factors: The film's portrayal of the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits and its treatment of the historical and political context might not have aligned with the views of all viewers, leading to polarized opinions. **Mixed Reviews:** While some critics praised the film for its storytelling and performances, others criticized it for various reasons, including its historical accuracy and portrayal of events. Mixed critical reviews can impact a film's performance.

But on the other hand, the movie *The Kashmir Files* is a masterpiece by Vivek Agnihotri. The film shows the trauma experienced by Kashmiri scholars and continues to haunt them. The country needs to know this. It is still difficult for many to imagine the horrors faced by Kashmiri Pandits. It is considered a direct fear. But this is a tragic event that involves human violence, bloodshed, and the displacement of families. The following are the several reasons behind the success of the movie *The Kashmir Files*. **Controversial Subject Matter:** The movie shows one of the greatest controversial socio-cultural-political subject matter of India i.e., the Exodus of Kashmir Files, which was screened beautifully. The only Bollywood movie that touched all the socio-political issues of the Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits.

Mentioned the abolition of Articles 370, and 35A: “The Kashmir Files” is the only Bollywood movie that talks about the abolition of Articles 370 and 35A. The Kashmir Files actor Anupam Kher raised the abolition of articles 370 and 35A, which brought about historic changes in the country and great impact on the audience.

Plenty of Powerful Star Cast: The movie has plenty of highly experienced superstars who played vital roles in making the movie a success. Due to their great courage and hard work, they received many accolades and appreciation from all over the world. Anupam Kher is happy and proud that his film *The Kashmir Files* won the National Award for Best Ethnic Integration Feature Film at the 69th National Film Awards. Pallavi Joshi won the Best Supporting Actress award for the film. (Fatima, *Anupam Kher would've 'loved to win National Award for my acting too,' calls it one of his best performances*)

Narration Style: On the topic at hand, Agnihotri has not produced a documentary. *The Kashmir Files* was written and filmed with a cinematic aesthetic. It is beginning and ending. Despite not being just characters, the people in the movie have a purpose. These are stories of the agony endured by the Pandits after they were forced to abandon the place, they called home. The story is not always told from one perspective. Radhika Menon, portrayed by Pallavi Joshi, is a passionate follower of the 'Azad Kashmir' story, but she faces competition from Darshan Kumar's Krishna Pandit. Even as these two points of view are stoic in their attempt to sell you their 'truth,' Agnihotri manages to get actors like Mithun Chakraborty, Puneet Issar, and Anupam Kher to show you every possible argument and counter-argument so you can navigate this emotionally scarring experience. Agnihotri gets performers like Mithun Chakraborty, Puneet Issar, and Anupam Kher to show you every argument and counterargument so it can navigate this emotionally taxing experience, despite the fact that these two points of view are stoic in their attempt to sell you their “truth.” (Barton, *'The Kashmir Files' Uses Kashmiri Pandits for Propaganda and Hates Muslims*)

Power Dialogues: There are many powerful and important *The Kashmir Files* dialogues that have stayed with the audience, and will give goosebumps. Like, *Politics ka bas ek hi ant Hai. Vinash... Maut*, that means “There is only one end to politics. destruction... death.” *Exodus Nahi... Genocide* that means “Not Exodus... Genocide,” *Desh ki taqdeer wahi badal sakta hai jiske paas power hai, Political power...* that means “The destiny of the country can be changed only by the one who has power, political power...” *Kya Kashmiri Panditon ko waapas apne ghar jaane ka mauka milega? Is this justice?* That means “Will Kashmiri Pandits get a chance to go back to their homes? Is this justice?” *Jahan Shiv, Saraswati, Rishi Kashyap hue, wo Kashmir humara tha. Jahan panchtantra likha gaya, wo Kashmir humara tha. Log mar rahe hain sir, Kashmir Jal raha hai... Kashmir Jal raha hai...!* That means “The Kashmir where Shiva, Saraswati and Rishi Kashyap lived was ours. Kashmir, where Panchatantra was written, was ours. When Panchatantra was written, he was Kashmir. The people are dying sir, Kashmir is flowing... Kashmir is flowing...!” (Beyoung, *Top 10 Impactful The Kashmir Files Dialogues*)

Main Target of the writer cum director: In his movie, Agnihotri fires a gun from the government over the heads of the Kashmiri refugees. Apart from the typical terrorists and Pakistanis, his targets also include the media, left-leaning academics at JNU and other universities, and anyone who is against Article 370 being read down. His true target, of course, is the Muslim militants of the past, present, and future. (Barton, ‘*The Kashmir Files*’ uses Kashmiri Pandits for Propaganda and Hates Muslims).

4. Conclusion

The success or failure of a film can be influenced by a combination of factors, and it is not always easy to pinpoint a single reason. *Shikara* faced challenges due to its subject matter and niche appeal, which contributed to its less-than-stellar performance at the box office. However, it is still important to recognize the film's efforts to shed light on an important but often overlooked chapter of history. The tragedy of the Kashmiri Pandits community has long been a sensitive subject in the Indian subcontinent, and for that reason alone, this film merits your time and consideration. In contrast, *Shikara* was so far from reality that it was more appropriate to refer to it as fiction. The dark side of the Indian state's dawn and the lives lost to carelessness are topics covered in *The Kashmir Files*, though, without holding back. Such brave filmmaking is deserving of praise.

Therefore, it can be said that there are a lot of reasons behind the success of *The Kashmir Files*. The film is not just a movie but rather a historical representation of the Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits. The film became popular because of the strong impactful scenes which are looking like real and the powerful dialogues that helped it to become a masterpiece. The movie is only focused and talks about the Trauma and suffering of Kashmiri Pandits. Whereas in the other hand, the *Shikara* movie also tries to show the Exodus of Kashmiri Pandits but lacks a strong narrative technique and the writer only focuses on the love story of the Kashmiri Couple and distracts the audience from the trauma and suffering of Kashmiri Pandits.

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