SILENCED HISTORIES ON SCREEN: A CINEMATIC STUDY OF DISPLACEMENT NARRATIVES OF KASHMIRI PANDITS

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submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours with Research) in English, to MIER College of Education (Autonomous), is an authentic record of my own research work carried out under the supervision of Dr Sahil Bhagat.

I further declare that the work embodied in the present dissertation:

a) Is my original work and has not been copied from any research journal, dissertation, thesis, or book; and

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ABSTRACT

The forced displacement of Kashmiri Pandits in the late 1980s and early 1990s remains one of the most under-acknowledged injustices in modern Indian history. Confronted with targeted killings, threats, and destruction of property, the community endured not only physical violence but also the erasure of identity, cultural belonging, and collective memory. Families faced the indignity of refugee camps, economic dislocation, and loss of educational opportunities, while women experienced heightened vulnerability and trauma. Decades later, these struggles persist through generational displacement and fractured cultural continuity. Yet, despite its magnitude, this tragedy has remained inadequately represented in mainstream scholarship and cultural discourse. This research proposes to examine the injustices faced by Kashmiri Pandits through the lens of film studies, focusing on *The Kashmir Files* (2022) and *Shikara* (2020). These films, though differing in narrative strategies and aesthetics, both serve as cultural texts that bring suppressed voices and contested memories to the forefront. The *Kashmir Files* adopts a direct, confrontational style to foreground silenced atrocities, also presents an unflinching portrayal of mass violence and silenced suffering, while *Shikara* uses intimate storytelling, personal memory, love to depict exile and resilience. By analyzing these cinematic portrayals, this study aims to investigate how film functions as a counter-archive of violence, identity, and suppressed history. The research not only addresses a critical gap in the academic exploration of Kashmiri Pandits' struggles but also highlights cinema's role in shaping memory, identity politics, and discourses of reconciliation. Ultimately, it underscores the importance of film in giving voice to marginalized struggles and framing demands for justice.

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

"What is your place of origin?"—a seemingly insignificant yet deeply embedded inquiry posed without hesitation. Nevertheless, for displaced communities, this question bears the immense burden of loss, memory, and longing. For those irrevocably severed from their homeland, the response transcends mere geography, assuming an emotional dimension; it articulates a fractured identity and an unhealed wound. Among such communities are the Kashmiri Pandits, who were compelled to abandon the Kashmir Valley during the late 1980s and early 1990s amidst escalating targeted violence, political turbulence, and religious extremism. Their displacement signifies not merely the forfeiture of physical territory but the systematic erasure of an entire lifeworld—encompassing culture, language, and belonging.

The tragedy of the Kashmiri Pandits constitutes one of the most underrepresented and silenced chapters of post-independence Indian historiography. The exodus was not an abrupt occurrence but rather the culmination of prolonged dramatic tensions, conflicting belief systems, and political failures. As Rahul Pandita recounts in his memoir *Our Moon Has Blood Clots* (2013), pervasive fear and persecution engulfed the Valley as Kashmiri Pandits were systematically subjected to threats, murder, and forced migration (Pandita 45). The slogans that reverberated throughout the region—"Raliv, Galiv ya Chaliv" (Convert, Die, or Leave)—rendered their exclusion unequivocally clear. Approximately 3,50,000 individuals were forcibly uprooted, relinquishing centuries of cultural patrimony, ancestral dwellings, and sacred spaces. This displacement fractured not only their geographical belonging but also their collective consciousness, leaving behind a community haunted by exile, enforced silence, and pervasive nostalgia.

Scholarly and literary works by authors such as Rahul Pandita and Siddhartha Gigoo have meticulously documented this trauma and has captured both the personal and collective dimensions of loss. In Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude* (2011), the fear and alienation inherent in exile are depicted as a form of psychological imprisonment when he says, "Fear ruled the hearts of the Pandits, and they became suspicious of the Muslim neighbours and friends with whom they had shared close bonds for years" (Gigoo 32). Such narratives underscore that the exile of the Kashmiri Pandits

constitutes not merely a political tragedy but fundamentally a human and affective one—rooted in ruptured relationships and the erosion of the syncretic coexistence that once characterized the Valley's cultural ethos of Kashmiriyat.

While literary discourse has extensively engaged with the memory of displacement, cinema, as a mass medium, offers a potent site for visualizing, contesting, and reclaiming silenced histories. Indian cinema, however, maintained a conspicuous silence regarding the plight of the Kashmiri Pandits for several decades. When the subject ultimately entered the cinematic imagination, it manifested through two markedly divergent yet complementary representational frameworks: Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Shikara* (2020) and Vivek Agnihotri's *The Kashmir Files* (2022). Both films introduce the issues into public discourse, albeit through contrasting aesthetic registers and ideological orientations.

Shikara, subtitled "The Untold Story of Kashmiri Pandits," adopts an elegiac, nostalgic tonality and the romantic narrative of Shiv and Shanti to explore the affective devastation of displacement. Rather than foregrounding the political or religious motivations underlying the exodus, Chopra emphasizes the subjective cost such as the profound longing for home, the quiet despair pervading refugee camps, and the gradually fading aspiration of return. The film transforms historical events into lived experience, and invokes poetic aesthetics and deliberate silences to articulate how memory functions simultaneously as burden and solace.

On the other hand, *The Kashmir Files* adopts a more explicitly confrontational and politically charged methodology. It presents viewers with the unmediated brutality of the events and positions the Pandit tragedy as an act of genocide that the Indian state and mainstream media apparatus deliberately suppressed. Through its visceral imagery and quasi-documentary realism, the film demands national acknowledgment and juridical redress for the victims, catalyzing widespread public debate and controversy. While certain critics interrogate its ideological framing, others commend it for rupturing the silence surrounding this systematically suppressed historical narrative.

Collectively, these cinematic texts exemplify two distinct approaches to representing cataclysmic displacement: elegiac remembrance and political revelation. Despite their methodological and ideological differences, both contribute substantially

to reclaiming a silenced narrative, restoring to public consciousness a community that has long occupied a marginal position within historical and representational discourse. Cinema thus emerges as a critical instrument—it possesses the capacity to either reinforce selective memory or critically interrogate it, and both *Shikara* and *The Kashmir Files* demonstrate how filmic representation can function as a repository of suffering, resilience, and testimonial truth.

To examine how these silenced histories are not only narrated but *felt* and *experienced*, this study turns to the language of cinema itself. The trauma of displacement in *Shikara* and *The Kashmir Files* is not communicated solely through dialogue or plot but is profoundly shaped by formal cinematic choices— mise-en-scène—encompassing setting, lighting, costume, spatial arrangement, and performance—colour palettes that evoke nostalgia or terror, soundscapes that oscillate between oppressive silence and auditory excess, camera angles that position the viewer as witness or participant, and editing patterns that structure memory, violence, and loss. Elements such as muted and desaturated colours in refugee spaces, the contrast between warm and cold tonal schemes, the strategic use of close-ups and long shots, and the rhythmic deployment of montage function as visual and aural metaphors for exile, rupture, and historical erasure. Editing, particularly through shot-to-shot transitions and montage, becomes crucial in shaping how time is compressed, expanded, or fractured, mirroring the psychological dislocation experienced by the displaced subject. Sound design— whether through the absence of narratively extended sound, exaggerated effects, or contrapuntal audio—further intensifies affect and realism, drawing the spectator into the emotional aftermath of violence. By foregrounding these formal strategies, the analysis moves beyond what is represented to *how* representation operates, demonstrating that cinematic form itself becomes an ideological and affective site where memory is constructed, contested, and reclaimed. It is through this convergence of narrative content and filmic technique that cinema emerges not merely as a medium of storytelling, but as a powerful apparatus for articulating historical trauma and restoring visibility to marginalized histories.

Film Studies

Film studies, as an academic discipline, examines cinema as a complex system of representation that focuses on how meaning is constructed through visual, auditory,

and narrative techniques. Rather than treating films merely as sources of stories or reflections of reality, film studies approach them as carefully structured texts in which elements such as cinematography, mise-en-scène, editing, and sound function together to produce specific interpretations and responses.

Within this framework, films such as *The Kashmir Files* and *Shikara* cannot be understood solely through their thematic concerns or political narratives. A comprehensive analysis requires attention to the formal mechanisms through which these narratives are shaped and communicated. In other words, what a film conveys is inseparable from the cinematic techniques it employs. The camera, in particular, plays a central role in this process. It does not passively record reality but actively constructs it by selecting, framing, and organizing visual information. As Teddy Thaddeus Hannakuygh observes:

> Film is a universally acknowledged medium of entertainment and one's knowledge of film analysis increases his enjoyment, appreciation and understanding of the way film uses images or shots to tell a compelling story. The camera is one of the most vital equipment used in film production… The human eye is selective, focusing on what it wants to see, overlooking many details and unimportant distractions. The camera however, sees everything and those distracting elements will show up in your picture unless care is taken while composing the shots (104).

This distinction between human perception and the cinematic gaze underscores the constructed nature of filmic representation. Every frame is deliberately composed, and elements of mise-en-scène—such as setting, lighting, costume, and spatial arrangement—are organized to guide the viewer's attention and interpretation. Furthermore, the experience of watching a film differs significantly from that of other performance forms such as theatre. Cinema possesses the unique ability to manipulate perspective and reposition the viewer through editing and camera movement. As Thomas Caldwell explains:

> When watching a play, we see events on a fixed stage from a stationary seat; from the same position. However, when viewing a film, we are placed in a different position relative to the action each time one shot finishes and another

> one begins. For every shot in a film, the cinematographer has to decide on the angle, level, height and distance of the camera in relation to the subject filmed (59).

Through this constant shifting of perspective, cinema actively directs the viewer's gaze and structures their engagement with the narrative. The spectator is guided through a sequence of visual positions, making the viewing experience dynamic and constructed rather than fixed. Therefore, in analyzing *The Kashmir Files* and *Shikara*, it becomes essential to move beyond narrative content and examine the formal strategies that shape meaning. Elements such as cinematography and music do not merely accompany the story; they play a crucial role in constructing its emotional intensity and interpretative framework. It is within this analytical perspective that the following discussion is situated.

Mis-en-scène

Mise-en-scène serves as the essential entrance point into Film Studies, since it offers the most direct and thorough means of comprehending how films visually generate and convey meaning. As Ed Sikov explains, mise-en-scène includes "everything in the filmed image: settings, props, lighting, costumes, makeup, and figure behavior" (Sikov 5). This definition becomes essential for any methodological study of cinema because it establishes the film frame not as a neutral container of events but as a composed field in which every object, every gesture, and every visual decision carries meaning. Sikov goes on to say that the fundamental premise of cinema academics is that "all representations have meaning" (Sikov 5), indicating that nothing that appears on screen is coincidental. This concept is important because it moves study beyond merely characterizing what is seen to comprehending how visibility is created.

The origins of the term in theatre where mise-en-scène referred to the staging of action, the arrangement of actors and objects, and the manipulation of lighting help demonstrate why cinema inherits a similar logic. Sikov asserts, "the term was first used in the theatre to describe the staging of an action" (Sikov 6). In film, this staging becomes even more deliberate because cinema has total control over the frame, perspective, and visual emphasis. Thus, the director's task is not merely to capture events but to orchestrate visual meaning. Even when a film attempts for realism, the

picture is still created. Sikov argues, "It's important to note that mise-en-scene does not have anything to do with whether a given scene is "realistic" or not" since filmmakers build scenes according to the emotive impression they wish to produce (Sikov 6). A realistic scene is nonetheless a deliberate arrangement—light falls in specific ways, items are strategically placed, and performers are staged to lead the viewer's emotional response.

This understanding is strongly aligned with André Bazin, who insists that cinema's power lies in the richness of the image. For Bazin, the screen is a space where meaning emerges from the real arrangement of elements, not through manipulation after the fact. Bazin famously argues for the integrity of the image and maintains that a film shot should allow the viewer to explore the depth of the frame rather than be forced into a single interpretation. His statement that cinema achieves truth "by respect for the continuity of dramatic space" supports the idea that mise-en-scène is not decoration but a philosophical commitment: the world inside the frame must be coherent, expressive, and alive (Bazin 35). By emphasizing long takes, deep focus, and unbroken spatial relations, Bazin reinforces Sikov's belief that meaning emerges from how the scene is staged, not merely from how it is cut or edited.

In contrast but still relevant to mise-en-scène, Sergei Eisenstein—though primarily associated with montage—recognizes that visual arrangement within the frame generates emotional and ideological tension even before editing begins. His notion that cinema can "conflict one piece with another" to produce meaning implies that mise-en- scène itself can stage internal conflicts: contrasting lighting, oppositional compositions, or symbolic objects (Eisenstein 34). Eisenstein's emphasis on visual tension reveals that mise-en-scène is not static; it is dynamic, charged, and capable of creating ideological force. Even without invoking montage, his insight that every visual component participates in meaning supports Sikov's point that filmmakers "direct our gaze through composition, colour, and focus" (Sikov 5). Eisenstein's theory thereby strengthens the methodological argument that analysing mise-en- scène is necessary to understand how images produce emotional and political effects.

Bringing these perspectives together, mise-en-scène becomes the methodological anchor for film analysis because it treats the film frame as a complete and deliberate composition. Sikov emphasizes that the viewer appears to take in the

entire image at once, but in reality, filmmakers guide our vision through careful arrangements of light, color, and focus. On the other hand, Bazin amplifies this by arguing that the power of cinema lies in allowing viewers to engage deeply with the spatial reality of the frame. Similarly, Eisenstein reveals how conflict within the frame can intensify meaning even before editing intervenes. Lastly, Hutche on demonstrates that visual arrangement is itself an act of adaptation and interpretation.

Thus, mise-en-scène is not simply one component of film technique; it is the primary locus where visual meaning is created, contested, and communicated. Every detail that is costume texture, shadow placement, spatial distance between characters, or the symbolic charge of a prop functions as part of a larger interpretive system. The strength of mise-en-scène lies in how even a single shot can convey "expressive power" through what it shows and how it shows it. (Sikov 8)

The Shot

In film studies, the concept of the shot becomes the foundation for every formal and interpretive decision made by the filmmaker. Sikov defines the shot as "an uninterrupted run of the camera; an uninterrupted image on film" (Sikov 8). This simple gesture of turning the camera on and off creates cinema's most basic structural unit—the building block out of which all cinematic expression emerges. Before editing, before sequencing, and before narrative coherence, the film exists as a series of shots, each carrying its own expressive weight. Sikov emphasises that even though the word scene appears in mise-en-scène, the expressive content that makes cinema meaningful "describes the content not only of a sequence of shots but of an individual shot" (Sikov 8). Meaning therefore begins at the level of the single shot, where composition, framing, performance, lighting, and spatial arrangement combine to shape interpretation.

A crucial aspect of understanding the shot lies in recognizing its relationship to distance and framing. In film analysis, different shot types offer different degrees of intimacy, narrative information, and emotional access. Shots vary across a spectrum of seven basic distances: extreme close-up, close-up, medium close-up, medium shot, medium long shot, long shot, and extreme long shot.

Each of these contributes a different expressive and methodological function.

The close-up, for instance, tightly frames the subject—often a character's face or an object—and highlights details that would otherwise be lost in wider framing. In filmmaking, close-ups display the most detail and are frequently used to emphasize emotions, facial reactions, or intricate gestures. They become a tool for psychological proximity: a means of allowing the audience to enter the character's interiority. It is the close-up shot that does the magic by bringing the viewer and the character on the screen into an interactive relationship. Film theorist and cinematography scholar Joseph V. Mascelli, in his seminal work *The Five C's of Cinematography*, argues that

> The close-up may transport the viewer into the scene; eliminate all non-essentials, for the movement and isolate whatever significant incident should receive narrative emphasis. A properly chosen, expertly filmed, effectively edited close-up can add dramatic impact and visual clarity to the event. Close-ups are among the most powerful story telling devices available to the filmmaker (173).

Yet, Sikov warns that because "every detail matters" the close-up can also mislead or overwhelm if overused (Sikov 8). The absence of surrounding space may create uncertainty or emotional intensity that the filmmaker must handle carefully.

Medium shots, by contrast, strike a balance between context and intimacy. Although definitions vary, the medium shot generally frames the body from the waist up and is commonly used to see what kind of expressions they are using. Medium shots offer enough proximity to observe performance while still providing awareness of the environment. This balance reflects Sikov's assertion that every composition in a shot carries meaning, because the medium distance still includes elements of mise-en-scène—background objects, spatial relationships, costume, posture—all of which communicate narrative information. The long shot, sometimes referred to as a full or wide shot, frames the entire body of the subject and situates it in its surroundings. Long shots are described as a way of relating the figure to the environment and are often compared to the distance between stage and audience in theatre. This framing allows viewers to understand spatial relationships, geography, and physical movement, aligning with Sikov's point that mise-en-scène "is the totality of expressive content within the image" (Sikov 8). The long shot communicates environment and spatial logic, helping the viewer grasp how characters inhabit their world. Long shots

frequently serve as establishing shots, preparing the audience for the narrative space they are about to enter.

At the farthest extreme, the extreme long shot positions the camera at a considerable distance, sometimes from as much as a quarter of a mile away, used primarily to set scenes in exteriors such as landscapes, cityscapes, or large-scale action. The extreme long shot is an extremely wide angle shot filmed from a high vintage point, an establishing shot which depicts the vastness of a setting; revealing the setting or the geography of the locale where the action takes place. Mascelli explains further that,

> Such massive shots set the scene for what follows by putting the audience in the proper mood and providing them with the over-all picture before introducing characters and establishing the story line... whenever possible, extreme long shots should be filmed to open up the picture on a grand scale and capture the audience interest from the start (25-26).

This shot type privileges the environment over individual detail, offering a broad impression rather than specific information. In methodological terms, this creates a different mode of spectatorship: the viewer becomes aware of scale, geography, or threat, rather than facial expression or personal emotion.

Central to Sikov's understanding of the shot is the idea that accidental or unexpected elements recorded by the camera also become part of the film's expressive structure. He describes how a bird flying through an outdoor shot—an unplanned intrusion—immediately gains interpretive meaning simply by being captured on film. As Sikov writes, once included, "that bird is now part of your film's mise-en-scène, and it's expressing something—whether you want it to or not" (Sikov 9). This idea expands the significance of shot types by reminding the analyst that even the broad framing of a long shot or extreme long shot contains the potential for symbolic accident: the environment is not merely a backdrop but an active field of visual possibility.

The concept of takes reinforces the intentionality behind the shot. Sikov says, "A take is a single recording of a shot… 'Take 22'… 'Take 35'… until she is ready to call 'print!'" (Sikov 8). A shot is therefore not inevitable; it is chosen among many possibilities. This selection shapes rhythm, tone, and expressivity. Even when the shot type remains constant—a medium shot or a close-up—the chosen take carries a specific

emotional charge, gesture, or detail. The director's choice to include or exclude an accidental moment becomes a critical methodological consideration: meaning depends not only on what the camera sees but on which version the filmmaker preserves.

André Bazin speaks meaningfully to shot distance only when discussing realism and the integrity of physical space. While he does not categorically define shot types, his belief that cinema reveals truth through "the continuity of dramatic space" reinforces the importance of long takes and long shots, where spatial relationships remain visible and uninterrupted (Bazin 35). Bazin's insight supports the methodological significance of shot choices: a long shot or extreme long shot allows the real world to unfold without manipulation, offering the viewer genuine interpretive freedom.

Sergei Eisenstein, on the other hand, does not explicitly theorize shot distance in the same way. His focus remains primarily on montage and the collision of shots to create meaning. He does acknowledge that the internal framing and composition of a shot must contain strong visual material for montage to function, but he does not meaningfully comment on specific shot categories. Since he does not make major contributions to shot-distance theory, his inclusion here is unnecessary and therefore omitted. Ultimately, the study of shot types—close-up, medium shot, long shot, and their variations—reveals that the shot is both a technical and expressive unit. Each distance establishes a different relationship between viewer, character, and environment, producing particular emotional and interpretive effects. As Sikov repeatedly emphasizes, the shot is not merely a fragment of film but a complex field of meaning in which every visible detail "has a meaningful consequence." (Sikov 8)

Camera Angle

Camera angle is one of the most expressive components of film form and shapes how viewers emotionally and psychologically respond to characters and situations. It is not merely the position of the camera but the entire visual attitude from which the audience is invited to perceive the world on screen. A change in angle can alter meaning as dramatically as lighting, acting, or dialogue. In fact, camera angles often work silently, influencing viewers even before they consciously register what the frame is doing. This is why film scholars insist that angles are never neutral choices—they are deliberate

visual decisions that create specific effects. Sikov repeatedly stresses this idea by reminding readers that what appears “normal” is, in fact, a carefully crafted viewpoint designed to position the audience in relation to the characters (Sikov 13).

One of the most common placements is the eye-level shot, where the camera remains at the height of an average adult’s eyes. Sikov explains that this angle places the viewer “at the character’s height,” creating a sense of balance and equality between spectator and subject (Sikov 13). It is used when filmmakers want to avoid stylistic intrusion and maintain a naturalistic relationship between the camera and the world of the film. Because of its neutrality, the eye-level angle works well in scenes driven by dialogue, everyday interaction, or emotional subtlety. It refuses exaggeration and therefore keeps the audience grounded in a realistic viewing position.

However, the moment the camera shifts upward or downward, the emotional meaning of the scene changes. A low-angle shot, where the camera looks up at the subject, can make the character appear more dominant, powerful, or imposing. Sikov describes it simply: “we’re looking up at her,” which already gives the subject a sense of visual influence (Sikov 13). This angle can exaggerate features, increase the character’s scale within the frame, and make them seem almost monumental. Depending on the context, it may express authority, threat, confidence, or emotional strength. Even when used subtly, the upward gaze creates a psychological shift in perspective—the viewer is positioned below, literally and symbolically. In contrast, the high-angle shot, taken from above and looking down, has the opposite effect. According to Sikov, this angle often makes the subject appear “slightly diminished,” as if reduced in significance or emotionally distanced (Sikov 14). The character may seem vulnerable, overwhelmed by circumstances, or dwarfed by their environment. High-angle shots can reduce the power of even the strongest character, reminding viewers of the fragility inherent in the cinematic world. In dramatic scenes, this angle is used to evoke sympathy, highlight defeat, or emphasize emotional isolation.

Sikov also draws attention to more expressive or exaggerated angle choices, such as the bird’s-eye shot, filmed from directly overhead. He describes this as a view taken from “the highest possible angle,” often positioning the scene as part of a larger pattern rather than an intimate encounter (Sikov 1). This viewpoint can make characters appear small, anonymous, or absorbed into an overwhelming landscape. It is frequently

used to establish geography, show movement patterns, or create a sense of fate watching from above. Because the perspective is unfamiliar in everyday life, it introduces a stylistic distance, prompting viewers to interpret the shot more analytically.

Similarly, the Dutch tilt or canted angle occurs when the camera is tilted to one side so that the horizon appears slanted. Sikov points out that this angle makes the image look "off- kilter," often used to express imbalance, tension, or psychological disturbance (Sikov 13). Even if the audience does not consciously identify the tilt, they feel the instability it communicates. This angle is especially effective in moments of confusion, inner turmoil, anxiety, or stylistic exaggeration. It breaks the visual order of the film and invites viewers to question the stability of the character or situation.

Camera angles are connected to the number of people and the framing of the shot. A two-shot frames two characters together and visually equalizes them. The balance within the frame emphasizes relationship, dialogue, or solidarity. As Sikov explains through his visual examples, the two-shot allows both characters to share "the same visual weight" (Sikov 14). A three-shot expands this balanced relationship to include a third person, while still maintaining clarity and group identity. These shots rely heavily on eye-level or slight variations in angle to maintain their compositional symmetry. In a broader context, the master shot uses a wider angle to encompass the entire setting and all its characters. Sikov describes this as a shot capturing "the whole set" and everyone in it (Sikov 14). The master shot establishes spatial relationships and serves as the foundation upon which closer angles later build emotional emphasis. By beginning with this wider, more neutral angle, the director allows the audience to understand the space before breaking it into dynamic parts through different angles and distances.

The camera angle is one of the most powerful techniques which enables the film maker to express the emotion and psychological content of a scene. The position of the camera determines the area and viewpoint of the lens. The use of a subjective camera angle which allows the action to be seen through the eye of one of the characters is another effective means of expressing the state of mind of a character. Using the subjective angle as the eyes of the audience makes the spectator a participant, and the filmmaker evokes the spectator's emotions through his involvement in the action.

Mascelli postulates that;

> The subjective camera films from a personal viewpoint. The audience participates in the screen action as a personal experience. The viewer is placed in the picture, either on his own as an active participant, or by trading places with a person in the picture when anyone in the scene looks directly into the camera lens- thus establishing a performance – viewer eye – to – eye relationship (14).

Taken together, these camera angles illustrate how film constructs meaning not merely through what is shown, but from where it is shown. Every angle shapes audience perception—whether it is the neutrality of eye-level framing, the power suggested by low angles, the vulnerability evoked by high angles, the stylistic detachment of a bird's-eye view, or the psychological tension of a Dutch tilt. As Sikov continuously reminds us, "every detail has a meaningful consequence," and camera angle remains one of the most immediate and emotionally effective visual choices available to filmmakers (Sikov 8). In film studies methodology, understanding camera angles is essential because they operate as the lens through which narrative, character, and emotion are filtered, turning the simple act of pointing a camera into a complex system of visual communication.

Camera Movements

In film studies, mise-en-scène is never complete without understanding camera movement, because movement determines how the viewer experiences space, emotion, and narrative tension. Sikov repeatedly emphasises that film as an art form is unique because "films offer shifting positions and perspectives" that no other visual medium can reproduce (Sikov 25). This shifting perspective—created through mobile framing—allows cinema to extend far beyond the fixed frame of painting or theatre. Where theatre sets remain static and paintings are bound by their canvas, cinema has the power to move through space, creating a dynamic visual language that becomes central to its expressive system.

Sikov notes that earlier discussions of film often assume a static camera, but this assumption is misleading because "the camera can move from side to side, up and down, backward and forward" (Sikov 25). This ability fundamentally transforms the

viewer's position inside the shot. Unlike the spectator in theatre, who sits anchored in a seat, the cinematic spectator can be carried through space, guided by a moving lens that acts almost like an embodied observer. As Sikov writes, camera movement reveals "a sense of spatial coherence and expressive fluidity that no static shot could ever achieve" (Sikov 25). This is why camera movement is considered one of the most vital components of mise-en-scène.

A central feature of camera movement is what Sikov calls mobile framing. It refers to the capacity of the camera not only to record action but to actively travel through the world of the film. Sikov explains that a painting might simulate different perspectives—such as Cubism presenting multiple viewpoints—but the picture still remains fixed. Sculpture may allow the viewer to walk around it, yet the object itself does not move. Film alone, however, offers the possibility that "a single shot may begin from a position so high no human being could achieve it and then proceed to lower itself to the level of a person" (Sikov 25). This ability to descend, rise, follow characters, alter direction, and break away creates a constantly shifting viewpoint that shapes the viewer's relationship with the narrative.

This mobility is crucial to the spectator's emotional connection. Sikov notes that camera movement "can express emotions" through movement alone (Sikov 26). A slow descent might suggest contemplation or unease, while a sudden forward movement may imply urgency or aggression. These emotional registers align closely with Andrew Bazin's belief that cinema's power lies in preserving the "continuity of real time and space." Although Bazin primarily spoke about depth of field and realism, his ideas support Sikov's claim that camera movement enhances the viewer's immersion. By allowing the camera to move freely within the scene, filmmakers produce what Bazin called a more "democratic" spectator position—one in which the audience can experience space organically rather than being manipulated through excessive cutting. While Bazin valued the integrity of real space, Sergei Eisenstein approached cinematic movement differently. Eisenstein saw movement—including camera movement—as a tool for affect, rhythm, and ideological impact. His theory of expressive movement aligns with Sikov's remark that camera motion is not merely technical but deeply artistic. Eisenstein believed that motion within the frame or by the camera itself generates emotional charge and intellectual meaning. This resonates

strongly with Sikov's explanation that even the direction or speed of movement becomes a visual signifier that shapes the viewer's perception.

Sikov's discussion of the different types of camera movement also contributes to a deeper understanding of mise-en-scène. He explains that when the camera is fixed but turns horizontally, it is a pan, and when it pivots vertically, it is a tilt. Sikov compares pans and tilts to move one's head while staying physically in the same place: you expand your view, but you do not change your physical location. This analogy highlights how camera movement can mimic human perception, making the viewer feel grounded in the film's physical world.

However, when the camera itself moves through space, Sikov argues that the effect becomes "one of the most beautiful and underappreciated" visual experiences in cinema (Sikov 26). Whether mounted on a moving vehicle, a dolly, or a crane, the camera acquires the capacity to travel parallel to the ground, rise upward, descend, or move in any direction. With these techniques, cinema achieves what no other art form can—a smooth passage through space. This connects to Bazin's interest in preserving the integrity of spatial relations as well as Eisenstein's fascination with motion as a form of visual storytelling. Sikov also identifies technological advancements that changed the language of movement, such as the invention of hand-held cameras in the 1960s. He explains that the natural shakiness of hand-held shots was widely interpreted as "a convention of realism" (Sikov 26). Even though hand-held images are stylistic rather than inherently realistic, audiences tend to read them as immediate, raw, and unfiltered. This supports Eisenstein's argument that movement—whether smooth or shaky—carries symbolic meaning, shaping the viewer's emotional reaction.

Later, Sikov discusses the Steadicam, which produced fluid movement while maintaining the mobility of a hand-held camera. It provided cinematographers with the ability to follow characters through tight spaces or uneven terrain without the instability associated with hand-held shots. The Steadicam represents, in Bazin in terms, a more "faithful" continuity of space without sacrificing the flexibility of modern cinematography. One of Sikov's most insightful points concerns the difference between tracking shots and zooms. He emphasizes that a zoom is "a kind of artificial movement" because the camera does not physically move through space (Sikov 27). Instead, the lens changes focal length to create the illusion of movement. Sikov explains that a

tracking shot “penetrates space,” reinforcing the viewer’s sense of depth, while a zoom “does nothing to alleviate the screen’s flatness” (Sikov 27). This distinction is important in mise-en-scène because it shows how different movements communicate different visual experiences. Bazin supported the expressive potential of real space, which aligns with Sikov’s preference for physical camera movement over optical manipulation. Eisenstein, conversely, embraced artificiality when it served expressive purpose; thus, he would appreciate how zooms can intensify psychological meaning despite their spatial flatness.

Finally, Sikov introduces the concepts of motivated and unmotivated camera movement. A movement is motivated when prompted by a character’s action—for example, the camera tracking alongside a moving character. It is unmotivated when the movement expresses something independent of the character’s behavior, such as the camera pushing forward while the character remains still. As Sikov notes, calling such a movement “unmotivated” is misleading, because the motivation comes from the director’s expressive intention rather than the character’s action (Sikov 28). This distinction highlights the interplay between narrative realism and authorial control—two concerns central to Bazin and Eisenstein respectively. Bazin valued motivated movements that aligned with the character’s reality, while Eisenstein embraced unmotivated, expressive motion that reflected the filmmaker’s ideological voice.

Cinematography

Cinematography refers to the art and technique of creating images for motion pictures. At its most basic level, it is concerned with how a film looks — how light is captured, how space is framed, how movement is recorded, and how visual elements are organized within the image. Unlike still photography, cinematography unfolds over time; it does not simply record objects but actively shapes the spectator’s perception of movement, depth, rhythm, and emotional tone. Through cinematography, the camera does not merely observe the world but constructs a cinematic version of reality. The term itself makes this function clear. As Sikov explains, cinematography derives from the Greek *kinesis* (movement) and *grapho* (to write or record), suggesting that cinema is fundamentally about “writing with movement and light” (Sikov 38). This definition immediately distinguishes cinematography from other visual arts. Painting and photography capture static compositions, but cinematography records changing

relationships between bodies, space, and time. It is therefore not a neutral recording device but an expressive system that organizes how viewers encounter the filmic world.

Cinematography is the photographic writing of cinema so it situated itself at the very heart of mise-en-scène. The cinematographer's choices about frame shape, film stock, lenses, lighting and the treatment of depth and movement determine not merely what the audience sees, but how the audience sees it: they determine the film's texture, its field of vision, and the expressive logic that links image to meaning. As Sikov argues, cinematography "brings together all the strictly photographic elements that produce the images we see projected on the screen," and this includes "lighting devices and their effects; film stocks and the colors or tones they produce; the lenses used to record images; the shape of the image, how it is created, and what it means—these all constitute the art of cinematography" (Sikov 38). Treating these elements as neutral technique is therefore a mistake; instead they must be read as deliberate aesthetic and semantic decisions.

One of the most foundational of those decisions is the film's aspect ratio — the relation of width to height of the projected rectangle — because the very shape of the image organizes compositional possibility and audience attention. Sikov traces the historical movement from the near-square silent frame (about 1.33:1) to the Academy ratio (1.37:1) and then to the widescreen technologies developed in response to television. He explains how Cinema Scope's anamorphic process and later Panavision (roughly 2.35–2.40:1), Vista Vision, Cinerama and other formats widened the composer's horizontal field and therefore changed the kinds of compositions, rhythms and visual strategies available to filmmakers (Sikov 39–41). The practical upshot is simple but essential: "the shape of every film is basic to its expressive meaning" (Sikov 42). A wide frame invites lateral compositions, the possibility of holding a figure at one side while revealing action on the other; a narrow frame concentrates attention and favors vertical relationships or intimacy. For analytical work, then, the aspect ratio must be regarded as a semantic constraint: it is part of the grammar by which visual arguments are formed.

Sikov is emphatic that the preservation of that shape matters. Letterboxing, masking and uncropped presentation are not mere technicalities but conditions for correct interpretation: when widescreen material is chopped to fit a near-square

television screen, the resulting crop can excise meaningful visual information and thereby "ruin" compositional intent (Sikov 42). Thus, in methodology, the original aspect ratio is a primary datum to preserve when analyzing any shot or sequence.

Lighting, for Sikov, is not mere illumination but a means of signifying mood, moral stance and psychological emphasis. He warns the reader that film-studies analysis should not obsess over the mechanics of how an effect was achieved but should instead interrogate "the way in which that effect bears meaning" (Sikov 44). The basic three-point system (key, fill, backlight) remains the analyst's shorthand for reading tone and depth: proportion of fill to key distinguishes "high-key" (bright, even, convivial) from "low-key" (shadowy, contrasty, ominous) lighting, which in turn indexes genres, moods and ideological signals (Sikov 45–47). Lighting choices thus function rhetorically: high-key lighting often supports spectacle, cheer or transparency; low-key setups encourage suspicion, mystery and ambiguity. Sikov's courtroom example shows how an ostensibly neutral location can bear diametrically opposed meanings depending on the lighting scheme chosen (Sikov 44–45). Lighting is used by both filmmakers and artists to get the required color and tone: to convey mood and atmosphere, to disclose a person's character, to unite the structure of his work, and to create a surface realism via a sense of depth. Lighting may provide an enigmatic, lifeless, and dismal appearance. It makes it possible for the camera lens to perceive and capture a picture, and it plays a significant role in the reactions of the audience. Filmmaking educators Kenneth H. Roberts and Win Sharples Jr., in *A Primer for Filmmaking,* observe:

> Generally speaking, the filmmaker will use dark illumination to establish a somber, tragic mood; bright illumination to establish a happy, gay atmosphere, or any variation of these two extremes to fit a variety of moods. Such uses of light will invest the scene with an emotional tone that will affect the spectator and evoke in him the proper feeling for appreciation and understanding of the filmmaker's purpose (61).

Closely related to lighting and aspect ratio are film stocks and gauge, which Sikov treats as contributors to the image's tactile qualities. Gauge (70mm, 35mm, 16mm, Super-8) determines the physical surface available for emulsion and therefore affects grain, resolution and the impression of pictorial richness: "the wider the gauge, the better the picture quality" (Sikov 48). The choice of stock and processing (negative,

internegative, print) also affects tonal range and contrast; film speed (exposure index) governs sensitivity and therefore the degree of contrast or grain. In short, stock choices are expressive: grain can connote documentary immediacy or nostalgia; ultra-clean 70mm resolution can signal spectacle or transcendence. Historically, Sikov reminds us, processes such as Technicolor or the later Eastman systems remade possibilities for saturated palettes and for narrative strategies that rely on color as argument (Sikov 50).

Sikov also insists on the centrality of lenses and depth of field to cinematic attention. Different lenses yield different depths of field: wide-angle lenses tend toward greater depth (foreground and background in focus), telephoto lenses tend to flatten depth and isolate distant planes. The analyst's vocabulary that is deep focus versus shallow focus, rack focus, zoom allows us to describe how films direct attention among planes. Sikov notes that deep focus allows the spectator to read multiple planes at once, creating a field where simultaneous actions can be observed and related, whereas a narrow depth of field isolates a single plane and privileges selective attention (Sikov 51–52). This is not a neutral optical fact but a story about agency: deep focus invites a more exploratory spectator, while shallow focus compels us to follow an editorially or narratively sanctioned center.

Related to lenses is the vital distinction Sikov makes between tracking (physical camera movement) and zoom (optical change of focal length). A tracking shot — the camera actually moving through space — "penetrates space," reinforcing the illusion of three-dimensional depth by carrying the spectator through a scene; a zoom alters focal length without moving the camera, producing a visual flattening and an artificial sense of movement (Sikov 27–28, 52). The difference matters analytically: tracking movement invites a phenomenological response to spatial continuity; zooms more often register as rhetorical gestures or shorthand for psychological emphasis. Sikov's insistence that one must call a movement a "zoom" only when a zoom lens is actually used is a methodological caveat: technical accuracy matters because different devices convey different meanings (Sikov 28).

To situate Sikov within classical film theory, it is useful to quote two canonical voices. André Bazin argued that the cinema's ethical and aesthetic strength lies in preserving spatial and temporal continuity — especially through the long take and deep focus — because these devices respect the integrity of the scene and invite active

spectator interpretation. Bazin's well-known remark that "depth of focus brings the spectator into a relation with the image closer to that which he enjoys with reality" places the issue of focus squarely at the center of the debate about realism and interpretation (Bazin). Bazin's point supports Sikov's valorization of deep focus and long-distance composition as strategies that open interpretive space rather than foreclose it.

Sergei Eisenstein, conversely, emphasized the dialectical power of montage and the capacity of cinematic devices to generate meaning through conflict. While Eisenstein's primary preoccupation is editing, he famously argued that cinematic space is made cognitive by the juxtaposition of shots: "It is montage that produces the sense of the three-dimensional in the cinema…how they become rounded and acquire volume…as soon as you begin juxtaposing in montage their individual aspects shot from different angles" (Eisenstein). Reading alongside Sikov, Eisenstein's insight warns us that cinematographic choices — lenses, aspect, depth —are always in a dialectical relationship with editing: the way a shot is photographed will shape its later syntagmatic power once it is cut against other shots.

Taken together, Sikov's technical and historical exposition and these theoretical touchstones show why cinematography is not a background craft but a principal site of meaning-making in film. From the rectangle's proportions to the grain of a film stock, from a key-light's angle to a rack focus's displacement, cinematography composes the film's expressive world. Methodologically, then, any rigorous reading of mise-en-scène must begin with the camera's photographic choices: they are the primary text the spectator decodes.

Colour

In cinematography, colour is not simply an added visual attraction but a fundamental expressive element that shapes meaning, perception, and emotional response. Early cinema functioned without colour as we know it today, relying instead on light, shade, form, and movement recorded through black-and-white photographic emulsions. These images translated the luminous intensity of the physical world into shades of grey, allowing cinema to represent reality, but only in tonal rather than chromatic terms. With the introduction of colour processes, cinema acquired the ability to record not only how

bright an object is, but also what colour it is, thereby significantly expanding the expressive potential of the medium.

From a technical perspective, early colour cinematography developed through additive colour systems, such as those patented by Edward Raymond Turner at the end of the nineteenth century and later refined in George Albert Smith's Kinemacolor. These systems worked by photographing and projecting multiple black-and-white images through coloured filters, usually red and green. Although innovative, additive systems suffered from visual problems such as fringing and instability, revealing the difficulty of synchronizing multiple colour records. Despite these limitations, they demonstrated that colour could fundamentally alter cinematic perception and realism.

As colour technology evolved, subtractive colour systems emerged as more stable and commercially viable. Processes such as Kodachrome and Prizma analysed light into separate colour regions—typically red, green, and blue—and recorded them within layered emulsions on a single strip of film. Modern colour cinema continues this principle through multi-layered colour-negative stocks, such as Eastman Colour (ECN-2 and ECP-2), which allow luminance and chromatic information to be captured simultaneously. What is crucial here is that colour is no longer an external addition to the image; it is structurally embedded within the photographic process itself.

Before the widespread adoption of naturalistic colour, filmmakers used tinting, toning, and stencil colouring as expressive tools. Tinting involved dyeing the film base or emulsion to create a uniform colour across the image, while toning replaced the dark areas of the image with colour. These practices were not arbitrary; they followed narrative and emotional conventions—blue for night, red for fire or danger, sepia for nostalgia. This historical use of colour demonstrates, as Sikov points out, that colour in cinema has always been symbolic and expressive rather than merely realistic. Even when colour was technically limited, it functioned as a coded language.

With the establishment of modern colour cinematography, the concept of the colour palette became central to film style. A colour palette refers to the dominant range and organisation of colours within a film or sequence. Rather than using all colours equally, filmmakers carefully select palettes to produce coherence, mood, and thematic consistency.

Warm colour palettes, dominated by reds, oranges, yellows, and browns, tend to evoke intimacy, passion, vitality, or violence. These colours appear to advance toward the viewer, intensifying emotional engagement. Warm palettes are frequently used in scenes of love, conflict, or heightened psychological states. From a perceptual standpoint, such colours stimulate the viewer's senses, aligning with Eisenstein's broader idea that cinematic form— whether montage or colour—should produce emotional impact rather than passive observation. In contrast, cool colour palettes, composed mainly of blues, greens, and greys, create a sense of distance, detachment, calm, or alienation. Cool colours visually recede, producing emotional restraint and psychological coldness. They are often used to convey loneliness, surveillance, control, or emotional suppression. André Bazin's realist aesthetic finds resonance here, as cool and balanced palettes tend to avoid overt emotional manipulation, allowing the image to retain a sense of observational credibility.

Alongside warm and cool schemes, filmmakers often rely on dark or low-key colour palettes, where shadows dominate and colours appear subdued. Such palettes emphasise mystery, fear, moral ambiguity, or psychological tension. Darkness in colour cinematography does not imply the absence of colour, but rather its containment. Colour exists within shadow, shaping depth and atmosphere without drawing attention to itself. Similarly, muted or desaturated palettes reduce colour intensity to evoke realism, historical distance, memory, or emotional exhaustion. These palettes are frequently associated with realist or art cinema, where excess visual stimulation is avoided. Bazin's emphasis on realism supports this approach, as muted colour maintains a close relationship with the textures of lived experience rather than spectacle.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are distorted or highly stylized colour palettes, where colours appear exaggerated, unnatural, or symbolic. Such palettes deliberately break from realism, foregrounding cinema's constructed nature. In these cases, colour functions ideologically and psychologically, externalizing inner states or abstract themes. Sikov's discussion of colour reinforces the idea that these choices are not decorative but expressive, forming part of the film's overall mise-en-scène.

Colour in cinema thus operates at the intersection of technology, aesthetics, and meaning. Whether through historical processes like tinting and toning or through

modern colour palette schemes, colour shapes how viewers perceive space, time, emotion, and narrative. As Sikov suggests, colour must be understood as an integral part of cinematic language—one that works silently yet powerfully to organise meaning within the moving image.

Sound

Sound in cinema refers to everything that can be heard within a filmic text, including dialogue, music, sound effects, ambient noise, silence, and voiceover. While early cinema functioned as a silent visual medium, sound has since become a central component of cinematic meaning, shaping narrative comprehension, emotional response, realism, and ideology. Sound does not merely accompany the image; it actively structures how images are perceived and interpreted.

Historically, motion pictures began without synchronized sound, relying instead on live musical accompaniment or narration. Early attempts to combine image and recorded sound, such as Edison's Kinetophone and other sound-on-disc systems, faced major technical problems, particularly synchronization, volume, and recording fidelity. Because sound and image were recorded and played back separately, even minor mechanical inconsistencies could disrupt alignment. As a result, sound cinema remained impractical until the development of sound-on-film technology, where sound was photographically recorded directly onto the film strip. This innovation ensured reliable synchronization and marked a turning point in film history.

The commercial breakthrough of sound cinema occurred in the late 1920s, most notably with *The Jazz Singer* (1927). Although early sound films initially used dialogue sparingly, the success of talkies rapidly transformed global cinema. By the early 1930s, synchronized sound had become the dominant cinematic norm, reshaping performance styles, narrative structure, editing rhythms, and audience expectations. In countries such as India, sound proved especially transformative, facilitating the rise of music-driven storytelling and mass popular cinema. From a formal perspective, sound in film is commonly divided into diegetic and non- diegetic sound. Diegetic sound originates within the world of the film—dialogue spoken by characters, footsteps, environmental noise, or music played on a radio within the scene. Non- diegetic sound, by contrast, exists outside the film's story world, such as background music or an external narrator.

This distinction is crucial because it determines how sound contributes to realism or emotional manipulation. Realist filmmakers often minimize non-diegetic sound to preserve the illusion of reality, whereas mainstream cinema frequently uses music to guide audience emotion.

Sound also functions narratively through its components. Dialogue conveys character, relationships, and plot information, while its delivery—tone, rhythm, and silence—adds psychological depth. Music establishes mood, genre, and emotional intensity; it can build tension, signal danger, or provide emotional release. Sound effects enhance physical actions and spatial awareness, sometimes in exaggerated or pleonastic ways to heighten dramatic impact. Voiceover, whether subjective or omniscient, offers access to memory, commentary, or interior thought, often shaping how the audience interprets events.

Silence, too, is a powerful sonic strategy. The absence of sound can heighten realism, suspense, or emotional discomfort. As noted in realist cinema, the refusal of background music—such as in *The Blair Witch Project*—forces viewers to confront the rawness of the image without emotional cushioning. This aligns closely with André Bazin's realist philosophy, which values sound that emerges naturally from the filmed world rather than imposed meaning.

A key theoretical contribution to the understanding of sound comes from Sergei Eisenstein, who rejected the idea that sound should merely duplicate the image. Along with Pudovkin and Alexandrov, Eisenstein argued for contrapuntal sound—sound that works in tension with the image rather than in simple harmony. For Eisenstein, sound, like montage, should create meaning through conflict. When sound contrasts with what is shown visually, it produces intellectual and emotional shock, encouraging active interpretation rather than passive consumption. This approach treats sound as a dynamic, dialectical force within cinematic structure. In contrast, parallel sound reinforces the emotional tone of a scene by matching sound and image. While effective, Eisenstein viewed this as a more conventional and less intellectually engaging use of sound. His theory emphasizes that sound should not enslave cinema to theatrical realism but expand its expressive possibilities through controlled disjunction.

From an analytical standpoint, scholars such as Sikov emphasize that sound,

like colour and lighting, is an essential part of mise-en-scène and cinematic style. Sound organizes space, directs attention, and constructs mood even when it remains unnoticed by the viewer. Exaggerated or unmotivated sounds—such as heightened footsteps or symbolic audio cues— demonstrate how sound often functions psychologically rather than realistically. Sound in cinema thus is not a secondary or supportive element but a structural component of film language. Through synchronization, contrast, silence, and rhythm, sound shapes narrative meaning, emotional response, and ideological effect. Whether used realistically in Bazinian fashion or dialectically in Eisensteinian terms, sound operates as a powerful expressive system that transforms moving images into fully immersive cinematic experiences.

Editing and Montage

Film editing is the fundamental mechanism through which cinema organizes time, space, and meaning, and it is through editing that individual shots are transformed into a coherent cinematic experience. As Ed Sikov emphasizes, films, particularly narrative films are constructed from "a series of individual shots that filmmakers connect in a formal, systematic, and expressive way" (Sikov 55). This process is not merely technical but deeply creative, since editing involves decisions about what to include, what to exclude, and how images should relate to one another. Sikov makes it clear that editing is a human activity rather than a mechanical one, stating unequivocally that "cameras can only record; directors and editors cut" (Sikov 57). This distinction underlines the idea that meaning in cinema does not arise automatically from recorded reality but is actively produced through editorial choices.

Shot-to-shot editing allows filmmakers to compress, expand, or rearrange time in ways that would be impossible in real life. Sikov explains that without editing, cinema would be forced to reproduce the entirety of lived experience, including actions that are dramatically insignificant, noting that "narrative films generally compress time considerably by leaving out the boring parts of the stories they tell" (Sikov 55). Editing thus becomes the means by which cinema avoids monotony and instead directs attention toward narratively and emotionally meaningful moments. Even films that attempt to minimize cutting, such as Hitchcock's *Rope,* ultimately rely on concealed edits and internal reframing, reinforcing Sikov's assertion;

> Exactly two hours to tell on film—generally require the filmmaker to carve up the action into discrete shots and reassemble them coherently, if only to hold the audience's visual interest, let alone to make expressive points by way of close-ups, long shots, high- and low-angle shots, and so on. (Sikov 56)

Within film theory, the concept that most powerfully explains how shot-to-shot relationships generate meaning is montage. Sikov explicitly states that montage is "one of the key terms in film studies," derived from the French verb *monter*, meaning "to assemble" (Sikov 57). Crucially, he identifies three distinct but related meanings of montage, a formulation that is central to your research and must be quoted directly.

First, montage refers simply to editing itself. As Sikov writes, "In France, the word montage simply means editing—any kind of editing" (Sikov 57). In this sense, montage describes the basic act of joining shots together, regardless of style or intention. This definition emphasizes montage as a technical and formal process, grounded in the physical or digital joining of film strips.

Second, montage in the American context refers to a specific narrative device used to manipulate time and space. Sikov explains that "in the United States, the term montage refers more specifically to a film sequence that relies on editing to condense or expand action, space, or time" (Sikov 58). Through rapid juxtaposition of images, American-style montage can compress long journeys into seconds or stretch brief moments into prolonged sequences of suspense. What is important here is that montage alters temporal experience not through slow motion or real-time duration, but through the accumulation and sequencing of shots.

The third and most theoretically complex understanding of montage emerges from Soviet cinema of the 1920s. Sikov notes that during this period, filmmakers engaged in "a fierce debate about the nature and effects of montage," seeing it not merely as a storytelling tool but as cinema's primary means of producing ideas (Sikov 58-59). Among these filmmakers, Sergei Eisenstein occupies a central position. Eisenstein rejected smooth continuity in favor of conflict, arguing that shots should not blend seamlessly but instead collide. As Sikov summarizes Eisenstein's position, "for Eisenstein, shots were meant to collide," and meaning was generated through this collision rather than through narrative smoothness (Sikov 59).

Eisenstein's theory of montage was explicitly dialectical. Drawing on Marxist philosophy, he believed that opposing images could generate a new idea in the viewer's mind. Eisenstein himself famously argued that montage produces meaning through conflict, not continuity, insisting that "the juxtaposition of two separate shots by splicing them together resembles not so much simple addition as it does multiplication" (Eisenstein 59). This principle is vividly illustrated in the "Odessa Steps" sequence from *Battleship Potemkin*, where rapid cutting, violent contrasts of light and shadow, and unstable compositions intensify the ideological conflict between the people and the state. As Sikov observes, "there is nothing static about this sequence—not in its editing, not in its individual shots" (Sikov 59).

This understanding of montage is further clarified through the Kuleshov experiment, which demonstrates that meaning and emotion are created through shot relationships rather than performance alone. Sikov explains that audiences attributed hunger, grief, or joy to the same neutral facial expression because "it was the audience members who provided the emotional content of the sequence simply by making associations in their own minds from one shot to the next" (Sikov 61). Montage, therefore, does not merely arrange images; it activates the spectator as a co-creator of meaning.

In contrast to Eisenstein's confrontational montage, Classical Hollywood cinema developed continuity editing, a system designed to conceal the act of cutting altogether. Sikov describes this as a style that aims "to keep audience members so wrapped up in the fictional world created onscreen that they cease to be conscious of watching a movie" (Sikov 61). Techniques such as matching on action, eye-line matching, graphic matching, the 180-degree system, and shot/reverse-shot patterns function to maintain spatial and temporal coherence while effacing the visibility of editing itself. This approach stands in direct opposition to Soviet montage, yet both systems confirm the same foundational truth: meaning in cinema is created through the relationship between shots.

French critic André Bazin famously articulated this principle when he wrote that montage produces "the creation of a sense or meaning not proper to the images themselves but derived exclusively from their juxtaposition" (Bazin 88). Whether embraced, as in Eisenstein's work, or viewed with skepticism, as in Bazin's realism,

montage remains central to film language. As Sikov makes clear throughout his discussion, editing is not an invisible necessity but "a fundamentally creative act—the product of artistic decision-making" (Sikov 60).

This research, titled "Silenced Histories on Screen: A Cinematic Study of Displacement Narratives of Kashmiri Pandits," seeks to examine how these cinematic texts represent displacement, loss, and remembrance through their narrative structures, visual vocabularies, and representational strategies. It will analyze how cinematic discourse constructs, distorts, or recuperates collective identity; how silence and speech operate as aesthetic choices; and how cinematic storytelling contributes to ongoing discussions concerning belonging, loss, and justice. By analyzing these films as contested sites of memory and collective expression of Kashmiri Pandits, the research aims to interrogate how cinema can simultaneously document and reshape shared experiences, rendering silenced histories into visible narratives.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Understanding the silenced histories of Kashmiri Pandits requires engaging with a range of scholarly voices that have traced the evolution of displacement narratives across literature, media, and cinema. The study begins with Anusha A. J. 's article "Media Narratives: The Kashmiri Pandit Story" (2018), which examines how media discourses construct public perception of the Pandit exile. She notes that early representations largely "turned a blind eye" to their suffering, while new media and cinema have "given them a voice" (Anusha 45). Her insights highlight how visual media function as cultural archives that shape collective memory and redefine belonging—an understanding that provides a foundation for analyzing displaced identities on screen.

Deepti Misri's paper "Paradise Lost? Memorializing Kashmiri Pandit Loss in *Ghar ka Pata*" (2023) employs Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory to explore how Madhulika Jalali reconstructs Kashmir as a 'lost paradise' through family archives and nostalgia. Misri argues that such narratives, while deeply personal, remain confined within patriarchal and nationalist frames. Similarly, Aditi Mishra and Sthitaprajna's article "The Unforgettable Plight: Bollywood's Wilful Amnesia Towards Kashmiri Pandits" (2023) critiques mainstream Hindi cinema's selective remembrance of Pandit

suffering. They reveal how Bollywood's tendency to romanticize or exaggerate violence reflects broader patterns of cinematic silence and ideological framing.

Javaid Iqbal Bhat's study "The Personal and the Collective: A Study of the Exile of Kashmiri Pandits Through Multiple Genres" (2024) investigates how poetry and documentary films merge individual grief with collective trauma. By contrasting emotional and politicized framings of exile, Bhat demonstrates how personal narratives evolve into shared cultural memories of loss and estrangement. Finally, Dinesh Prakash Patil's paper "Narration of Displacement and Belonging: An Investigation of Siddhartha Gigoo's *The Garden of Solitude"* (2025) delves into the psychological experience of exile, emphasizing the protagonist's struggle between "memory and forgetting." His assertion that "home exists only in remembrance" encapsulates the essence of displacement, providing critical insight into how nostalgia and belonging are cinematically and emotionally constructed (Patil 37)

Engaging with academic works that analyze displacement via political, social, and cultural lenses is necessary to comprehend the repressed histories of Kashmiri Pandits. Inam Ul Haq's article "Insurgency and Displacement: A Study of Kashmiri Pandits" (2021) offers a significant socio-political account of the circumstances that led to the Pandit exodus from the Kashmir Valley in the early 1990s. Haq cites the displacement within the rise of militancy, political instability, and the breakdown of Kashmir's pluralistic ethos, arguing that the migration was not merely communal but deeply rooted in the failure of governance and security mechanisms. His study foregrounds themes of loss, insecurity, and prolonged marginalization, highlighting how displacement continues to shape Pandit identity in exile. Haq's analysis resonates with earlier studies that examine how conflict restructures minority identities and erases lived histories. Scholars have pointed out that while the Kashmiri conflict has been widely discussed, the Pandit experience has often remained peripheral within dominant political and media discourses. This selective visibility has contributed to what Haq identifies as a *prolonged silence* around their trauma, rehabilitation struggles, and cultural dislocation. His work thus challenges homogenized narratives of the conflict by emphasizing the uneven distribution of suffering and recognition.

The critical *study "*The Voices of Agony and Resilience of Displaced Kashmiri Pandits: A Critical Analysis of Rahul Pandita's *Our Moon Has Blood Clots"* (2024) by

Dinesh Prakash Patil offers a focused scholarly engagement with *Our Moon Has Blood Clots* (2013), emphasizing the memoir's role in articulating the lived realities of violence, displacement and identity loss experienced by Kashmiri Pandits. Patil situates Pandita's work within conflict memoir traditions, arguing that the text "serves as a powerful reminder of the human cost of aggression and displacement" by documenting both collective trauma and personal anguish in first-person narrative form (Patil 95).

Patil's analysis highlights how *Our Moon Has Blood Clots* moves beyond historical reporting to explore the emotional and psychological dimensions of exile, portraying displaced Pandits' struggles with marginalization, alienation, and the search for belonging. The study underscores the memoir's effectiveness in giving voice to a community that has often been "marginalized and dislocated by the havoc caused by violence and political unrest," suggesting that storytelling becomes a method of preserving memory and asserting agency amidst historical erasure (Patil 95).

Abhinav Tripathi's paper *"*Kashmiri Pandits: The Lost Identity" critically examines the historical, political, and cultural forces that have shaped the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits and the resulting identity crisis. The study traces Kashmir's past from its mythological origins to medieval invasions and modern political conflicts, emphasizing that the Pandit community has faced repeated marginalization across centuries. Tripathi argues that the 1990 exodus was not a sudden event but the outcome of prolonged political failure, militant intimidation, and administrative breakdown, which collectively rendered Pandits "refugees in their own land" who can "visit their homeland but cannot settle there again" (Tripathi 1).

A key focus of the paper is the erosion of cultural identity following displacement. Tripathi highlights that the loss extended beyond homes and property, asserting that "it was not just the property that the Pandits were losing, but their identity too" (Tripathi 6). Through references to slogans, eyewitness accounts, and Rahul Pandita's *Our Moon Has Blood Clots*, the study demonstrates how fear and exclusion forced the community into exile. The paper also underscores the role of governmental apathy, particularly during the imposition of Governor's Rule, in accelerating the migration.

By incorporating personal narratives, interviews, and poetic expressions,

Tripathi effectively illustrates the psychological trauma and generational alienation experienced by displaced Pandits. The study concludes that prolonged exile has weakened linguistic, cultural, and emotional ties to the homeland, making identity preservation increasingly fragile over time.

The research paper *"*The Kashmir Files: No Reel, Only Real Representation*"* critically examines Vivek Agnihotri's film *The Kashmir Files* as a cinematic text that foregrounds the long-silenced trauma of Kashmiri Pandits. The study argues that the film departs from conventional Bollywood representations by adopting a realist and testimonial mode to depict the 1990 exodus. It emphasizes that the film functions as a counter-narrative to decades of cultural silence, asserting that cinema can act as a powerful medium for historical truth-telling. The paper highlights how graphic visuals, survivor testimonies, and direct dialogue challenge sanitized or evasive portrayals of the Kashmir conflict. Rather than treating displacement as background politics, the film centres Pandit suffering as lived experience, memory, and loss. The study also acknowledges debates surrounding the film's political reception but maintains that its primary significance lies in restoring visibility to marginalized voices. Overall, the paper positions *The Kashmir Files* as an intervention in cultural memory, using cinema to reclaim suppressed histories of displacement and identity loss.

Collectively, these scholarly works chart a nuanced intellectual progression—from the early neglect of Kashmiri Pandit suffering to contemporary efforts at reclamation—offering essential theoretical and interpretive ground for understanding how cinema transforms historical trauma into visual memory and cultural identity.

Although much has been written on trauma, memory, and postcolonial cinema, specific scholarly attention to the cinematic representation of the Kashmiri Pandit displacement remains scarce. Most studies neglect the nuances of exile, belonging, and community loss. Through film studies, Films like *Shikara* (2020) and *The Kashmir Files* (2022) brings this silenced history to screen, yet their role in reconstruction, cultural identity has received limited cultural attention. This study aims to fill this gap by exploring how these films reinterpret silenced histories on screen and engages with the questions of displacement, longing, and cultural identity in contemporary Indian cinema.

JUSTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH

The cinematic representation of relocation of Kashmiri Pandits is an understudied subject in Indian film studies. While literary and historical texts describe the migration, cinema's role in molding public knowledge and cultural involvement with this period of history has gotten little attention. Existing study frequently ignores how narrative structure, visual language, and cinematic approaches convey feelings of dislocation, grief, and belonging. By focusing on *Shikara* and *The Kashmir Files*, this research addresses this gap by examining how filmmakers transform historical events into emotionally compelling and socially significant narratives. It highlights contrasting approaches—elegiac reflection versus confrontational realism—and demonstrates how these strategies influence audience perception and engagement.

OBJECTIVES

1. To explore how cinema serves as a medium for representing experiences of displacement, cultural recollection, and identity.

2. To analyze how Indian films engage with silenced or marginalized histories through their storytelling and visual form.

3. To examine how *Shikara* and *The Kashmir Files* portray the displacement and loss experienced by the Kashmiri Pandit community through distinct narrative and interpretative approaches.

4. To assess how these films contribute to recovering erased histories and shaping public understanding of the Kashmiri Pandit experience.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research adopts a qualitative approach to examine how the displacement of the Kashmiri Pandit community is represented in Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Shikara* (2020) and Vivek Agnihotri's *The Kashmir Files* (2022). The study focuses on how these films reconstruct, reinterpret, and communicate the historical experience of forced migration and cultural loss.

To strengthen the critical dimension, the study will incorporate insights from

film critics and theorists whose perspectives illuminate the representational techniques of cinema. André Bazin famously remarked, "cinema is a mirror with delayed reflection," (Bazin 25), suggesting that film reflects the truth of life and emotion. His concept of cinematic realism helps in understanding how *The Kashmir Files* uses handheld camerawork, crowded frames, and natural lighting to create documentary-like intensity, while *Shikara* employs long silent shots and soft illumination to capture loneliness and nostalgia.

Sergei Eisenstein's *Montage Theory* adds another layer to this analysis by emphasizing that editing creates meaning. In the context of cinema, he emphasises, "montage is conflict — the conflict of one shot with another" (Eisenstein 45). In *The Kashmir Files*, quick cuts between scenes of violence and emotion produce shock and tension, while *Shikara* uses soft cross- dissolves and flashbacks to evoke nostalgia and sadness. Eisenstein's idea shows how editing becomes a language of emotion, shaping how the audience experiences trauma. (Eisenstein 47)

According to Brian McFarlane, a noted film critic, "novels are verbal systems, while films are visual, aural, and symbolic systems" (McFarlane 15). His view guides the analysis of how both films construct meaning visually—through sound, colour, and editing—rather than through words alone. Similarly, Leo Braudy also states that "the film actor's body and face become a site of emotion", which supports an interpretation of performance as a vehicle for collective and personal grief. (Braudy 312)

The methodology is based on detailed textual and visual analysis, which is a fundamental approach in film studies. Each film will be studied in terms of its narrative structure, mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, and sound design to explore how these technical elements shape the depiction of displacement and its effects. For instance, *Shikara* employs soft lighting, nostalgic music, and lyrical imagery to convey feelings of longing and loss, while *The Kashmir Files* relies on stark visuals, handheld camera work, and unfiltered dialogue to produce a sense of urgency and confrontation. By examining how each director's stylistic choices guide the audience's emotional and intellectual response, the study seeks to show how cinematic form functions as a means of recounting and interpreting the experiences of the Kashmiri Pandit exodus.

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The scope of this research extends to the cinematic representation of displacement through the focused analysis of two major Indian films—*Shikara* (2020) and *The Kashmir Files* (2022)— that address the forced exodus of the Kashmiri Pandit community. The study situates these films within the broader context of Indian political cinema, exploring how filmmakers employ narrative structures, cinematography, music, performance, and symbolism to articulate experiences of loss, identity, and belonging. The research also engages with critical discourses in film studies, including theories of representation, ideology, and spectatorship, to understand how these cinematic texts reconstruct historical events and influence public perception. By bringing together film criticism, audience reception, and theoretical analysis, the study contributes to ongoing academic discussions on how cinema functions as both an artistic and political medium for recovering marginalized histories.

While this study offers an in-depth examination of *Shikara* and *The Kashmir Files*, it acknowledges certain limitations. The research focuses exclusively on these two cinematic interpretations of the Kashmiri Pandit displacement and does not encompass the broader corpus of films or documentaries that touch upon the Kashmir conflict from other perspectives, such as those of Kashmiri Muslims or the Indian state. The study's qualitative nature also means that its conclusions are interpretive rather than empirical, relying on close textual and thematic analysis rather than audience-based data or box-office metrics. Additionally, the ideological polarization surrounding both films may influence critical readings, as *Shikara* is often critiqued for its restraint while *The Kashmir Files* is celebrated or condemned for its political assertiveness. The study therefore aims to maintain scholarly balance, recognizing that no single cinematic text can fully encapsulate the complexity of historical displacement or the diversity of Kashmiri experience.

CHAPTERIZATION

INTRODUCTION

The introduction chapter will outline the historical, cultural, and political context of the Kashmiri Pandit displacement while establishing the rationale, objectives, and scope of the study. It will discuss how cinema serves as a record of past experiences and a tool for recovering silenced histories, situating the research within broader debates in film

studies and cultural representation. This chapter will also introduce the two primary films—*Shikara* (2020) and *The Kashmir Files* (2022)—and the theoretical frameworks used to analyze them, revolving cinematic study.

CHAPTER 1: ECHOES OF A LOST HOME: NOSTALGIA, LOSS AND THE CINEMATIC LANDSCAPE OF *SHIKARA*

This chapter explores Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Shikara* as a sensitive and evocative cinematic exploration of displacement, in which nostalgia and loss emerge as central emotional forces shaping the idea of home. Rather than foregrounding political conflict, the film turns its attention to personal and emotional dimensions of life - love, memory, and belonging. Through a careful examination of visual and auditory elements such as lighting, camera movement, music, silence, and the recurring presence of landscape, this chapter shows how *Shikara* creates a mood of longing that gives form to the pain of exile. It argues that the film reshapes the historical displacement of Kashmiri Pandits into a deeply human narrative of endurance and cultural absence, where lived experience takes precedence over factual chronicle and history is remembered through emotion. The chapter considers how *Shikara* has been received as a quiet elegy of love and loss, while reflecting on the strengths and limitations of its restrained cinematic approach to representing suffering and violence.

CHAPTER 2: VOICES OF EXILE: A CINEMATIC EXPRESSION OF VIOLENCE AND DISPLACEMENT IN *THE KASHMIR FILES*

This chapter examines *The Kashmir Files* as a cinematic text that engages with violence and displacement. It argues that the film does not merely recount the historical experience of the Kashmiri Pandit exodus but constructs its narrative through specific cinematic strategies that shape how these events are communicated to the viewer. By foregrounding survivor accounts and situating them within a carefully structured visual and narrative form, the film positions itself as a medium through which experiences of violence are articulated and made accessible. Through a close analysis of cinematic techniques such as cinematography, editing, sound design, mise-en-scène, and performance, this chapter explores how the film transforms individual experiences of

displacement into a broader cinematic discourse, thereby demonstrating the role of cinema in conveying histories of violence and forced migration.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion will synthesize the findings of the previous chapters, reflecting on how both *Shikara* and *The Kashmir Files* reconstruct the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits through contrasting cinematic strategies—one grounded in remembrance and the other in revelation. The conclusion will argue that cinema not only preserves silenced histories but also reshapes public understanding of displacement, identity, and belonging. By juxtaposing the elegiac tone of *Shikara* with the assertive narrative of *The Kashmir Files*, the study will demonstrate how filmic discourse can mediate between personal loss and collective memory, transforming private pain into shared historical consciousness.

CHAPTER-I

Echoes of a Lost Home: Nostalgia, Loss and the Cinematic Landscape of *Shikara*

CHAPTER 1

ECHOES OF A LOST HOME: NOSTALGIA, LOSS AND THE CINEMATIC LANDSCAPE OF *SHIKARA*

This chapter explores Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Shikara* as a sensitive and evocative cinematic exploration of displacement, in which nostalgia and loss emerge as central emotional forces shaping the idea of home. Rather than foregrounding political conflict, the film turns its attention to personal and emotional dimensions of life - love, memory, and belonging. Through a careful examination of visual and auditory elements such as lighting, camera movement, music, silence, and the recurring presence of landscape, this chapter shows how *Shikara* creates a mood of longing that gives form to the pain of exile. It argues that the film reshapes the historical displacement of Kashmiri Pandits into a deeply human narrative of endurance and cultural absence, where lived experience takes precedence over factual chronicle and history is remembered through emotion. The chapter considers how *Shikara* has been received as a quiet elegy of love and loss, while reflecting on the strengths and limitations of its restrained cinematic approach to representing suffering and violence.

Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Shikara* (2020), produced by Vinod Chopra Films in association with Fox Star Studios, enters the fraught terrain of Kashmiri Pandit displacement with a deliberate emphasis on displacement, culture, and emotional continuity rather than overt political dramatization. From a cinematic angle, the narrative announces its representational ethics through a carefully structured cinematic opening that relies on textual framing and montage even before the fictional world fully unfolds. The initial written declarations function as paratextual images that interrupt the flow of narrative time, compelling the spectator to read before watching and thus positioning historical awareness as a prerequisite for cinematic engagement. By stating that the film is "a work of fiction, based on real events" and clarifying that the refugees portrayed are not actors but real Kashmiri Pandits living in exile, *Shikara* situates itself at the intersection of cinematic storytelling and lived testimony (Chopra 1:34– 40). The film juxtaposes fiction with reality and reminds the viewer that the images to follow are grounded in collective memory rather than cinematic illusion. This framing is further strengthened through the dedication to over 4,00,000 Kashmiri Pandits who

were forced out of their homes in the Kashmir Valley three decades ago and who, even today, continue to live as refugees in their own country (Chopra 1:41–48). Cinematically, this moment extends the function of montage beyond shot transitions to the level of meaning-making, where text, silence, and anticipation work together to establish displacement as an unresolved historical and emotional condition that exceeds the temporal limits of the film itself.

Shikara unfolds through the life of Shiv Kumar Dhar, a Kashmiri Pandit schoolteacher whose personal journey becomes a lens through which collective displacement is articulated. The film opens not in Kashmir but in a refugee camp, immediately foregrounding exile as the present reality from which memory unfolds. From a cinematic standpoint, this opening is constructed through long shots and high-angle framing that visually diminish individual figures within overcrowded spaces, reinforcing the anonymity and precarity of refugee life. In line with the film critic Ed Sikov's argument, Shiv's voice-over letter addressed to the American President functions as the film's emotional anchor and reflects the narrative information and emotional access through this shot. In this letter, he writes, "I have lived in refugee camps for 28 years… I have written 1664 letters… a man who can't find hope anywhere else pins it on a miracle" (Chopra 1:51–3:10). The use of voice-over narration layered over observational imagery creates a reflective distance between sound and image, allowing personal memory to coexist with collective experience. This statement introduces several key concerns that structure the film: prolonged waiting, institutional abandonment, and the fragile persistence of hope. The cinematic choice to combine voice-over with a montage of everyday refugee life— crowded buses, temporary shelters, and shared communal spaces, often captured through static framing and restrained camera movement—situates the spectator within a lived experience of displacement rather than a retrospective historical account, emphasizing endurance over dramatic spectacle.

As Sikov argues, montage is the basic act of joining shots together, which is well reflected in the movie wherein the montage of the refugee camp, including the high-angle shot of a newspaper announcing the visit of the U.S. President and Shiv reading it while travelling in a bus, visually contrasts global political spectacle with the marginality of refugee existence. The conductor's casual announcement—"Master ji,

aa gayaaapka refugee camp"—collapses hope back into routine, underscoring how displacement has been normalized within everyday life (Chopra 3:23–29). The subsequent courier scene, where Shiv receives confirmation of a stay in a "Presidential Suite," momentarily disrupts this routine, allowing collective joy to surface within the camp. The celebratory cries of "Mubarak, Mubarak, Master ji" and the assertion that perseverance can take one "step-by-step… even to Mount Everest" foreground endurance as a shared cultural value among the displaced. From the outset, the film establishes community, not isolation, as the emotional texture of exile (Chopra 4:04–32).

Shikara moves backward into memory through extended flashbacks that reconstruct pre-exodus Kashmir as a space of cultural richness, inter- community coexistence, and everyday normalcy "establishing a closeness of culture that is indistinguishable really. The same food, the same music, the same celebrations and a synthesis that really constituted what the world knew as Kashmiriyat" (Mustafa). These flashbacks are not merely narrative devices but cinematic acts of preservation. Chopra devotes significant visual attention to Kashmiri cultural practices, allowing them to function as repositories of identity. Wedding sequences, traditional music, dance forms, clothing, and communal rituals are filmed through close-ups and medium shots that emphasize texture and rhythm. The Kashmiri wedding scene, with its traditional instruments, coordinated dance movements, and women dressed in customary attire, visually asserts cultural continuity.

The relationship between Shiv and Lateef occupies a central place in *Shikara*'s articulation of Kashmiriyat, not as an abstract ideal but as a lived, everyday practice rooted in shared customs, language, and emotional intimacy. From the very beginning of the film's remembered Kashmir, Lateef is introduced not as a religious or ideological counterpart but as Shiv's closest companion—someone who moves seamlessly between domestic, social, and ritual spaces. This closeness is most vividly established in the wedding sequence, where Kashmiriyat is enacted through. The exchange surrounding the family photograph, in which Shiv urges Lateef's father to join—"Lateef! Abba, please join in," to which he responds, "Take the family photograph first, son," and Shiv insists, "It's incomplete without you, Abba" (Chopra 15:48–16:06)—becomes emblematic of a social world in which belonging is defined through emotional

bonds rather than religious identity. The use of the term *Abba* across communal lines, coupled with the visual composition of the family photograph, dissolves rigid identity boundaries both visually and sonically. Importantly, these moments are not framed as exceptional acts of tolerance; rather, they are presented as ordinary cultural behaviour, normalized through familiarity, repetition, and everyday social practice.

Cinematically, this intimacy is reinforced through medium two-shots and fluid blocking, where Shiv and Lateef are consistently framed together within the same visual plane. The camera rarely isolates them in these early sequences; instead, it allows their bodies to occupy shared domestic and public spaces, emphasizing relational proximity. In the wedding scene, the mise-en-scène—traditional attire, folk music, communal dancing, and collective laughter—creates a textured cultural environment in which religious difference is subsumed within shared social belonging.

Andrew Bazin, a film critic, asserts that the power of cinema lies in allowing viewers to engage with the spatial reality of the frame. This is very much reflected in the film when the sense of shared life is further extended through everyday interactions, such as the apple orchard scene, where Lateef is shown eating an apple—a recurring symbol of Kashmiri rootedness and sustenance. The moment is interrupted by the arrival of a truck, introducing movement and sound into an otherwise calm frame. Lateef's father, Abba, responds not with suspicion but with quiet care, handing Shiv a *pathar* (stone) on his own land as a gesture of protection (Chopra 24:43-25:16). The exchange is brief, understated, and filmed through a close-medium shot, allowing the object to carry symbolic weight without verbal explanation. The *pathar* here operates as a culturally loaded prop, signifying guardianship, trust, and shared vulnerability. This moment exemplifies how *Shikara* uses objects within the mise-en-scène to encode emotional and cultural meaning.

Throughout these sequences, sound design plays a crucial role in sustaining intimacy. Laughter, casual speech, and ambient village sounds dominate the auditory field and create a sense of warmth and continuity. Editing remains unhurried allowing conversations to unfold without abrupt cuts, thereby reinforcing the naturalness of these relationships. The absence of dramatic background music in such scenes further grounds Kashmiriyat in realism rather than sentimentality. Collectively, these cinematic choices—framing, blocking, props, sound, and pacing—construct Shiv and

Lateef's friendship as foundational to the film's emotional world. Their bond represents a form of social cohesion that precedes political rupture, making its later erosion not only a narrative development but a cultural loss that the film mourns through its visual language.

As political tensions intensify, the transformation of this relationship becomes one of the film's most significant narrative and visual strategies. Lateef's gradual withdrawal is not marked by a single dramatic rupture but by subtle shifts in behaviour, tone, and framing. The camera begins to separate the two men spatially; conversations become shorter, silences longer. Where earlier scenes used shared soundscapes—music, laughter, ambient neighbourhood noise—later sequences introduce disruptive sounds: slogans, gunshots, and curfew announcements. Kashmiriyat, in this sense, is not presented as suddenly broken but as slowly eroded under ideological pressure and fear.

Domestic life in Kashmir is similarly fore grounded through culturally specific details. The apple orchard, repeatedly framed through close-up shots, functions as a symbol of rootedness, fertility, and future-making. Conversations around building a home, cooking traditional food, and sharing apples situate identity within land and routine rather than ideology. Shanti's preparation of Rogan Josh, casual exchanges in Kashmiri-inflected Hindi, and references to local food and customs collectively create a sensory map of Kashmiri Pandit life that precedes displacement. The film transforms ordinary objects— bricks, stones, utensils, books, musical instruments—into carriers of cultural memory.

As the film progresses, this culturally rich and emotionally stable world begins to fracture under the pressure of political unrest, curfews, and violence wherein there is "metamorphosis from the rhythm of simplicity and togetherness in an amazingly beautiful landscape to the heart-breaking noise of bombs and guns" (Pathak). Importantly, *Shikara* depicts this rupture gradually, allowing fear to seep into everyday life rather than erupting as sudden spectacle. Election rallies, police crackdowns, and media rhetoric are juxtaposed with domestic scenes through cinematic montage, exposing the widening gap between political discourse and lived experience. Statements such as "ham yha election nhi sirf jang jeet skte h" *("Elections are meaningless in Kashmir. War is the answer!")* and assertions of failed democracy are

followed by images of injury, hospital corridors, and grieving families, allowing meaning to emerge through juxtaposition rather than exposition (Chopra 27:12-36). In this way, montage becomes central to the film's representational strategy, producing emotional truth through contrast.

As *Shikara* progresses, fear does not erupt suddenly but infiltrates everyday Kashmiri life through repeated sonic, visual, and spatial cues. One of the earliest markers of this shift is the public circulation of militant slogans such as "Pindi, Pindi, Rawalpindi," shouted openly at bus stops and in crowded streets (Chopra 36:48–37:40). In the Batmaloo bus sequence, this chant—historically charged and politically suggestive—functions less as dialogue and more as an auditory assault, signalling the normalization of extremist sentiment within shared public spaces. Chopra frames this moment through handheld movement and tightly crowded compositions, placing Shanti alone within the bus as men enforce diktats—"Women must wear the hijaab"—forcing her to cover her head and remove her bindi (Chopra 37:44–38:56). The camera lingers on Shanti's frightened reaction rather than the aggressors themselves, using close-ups, uneven framing, and ambient street noise to convey terror as an internalized, bodily experience. This scene marks a crucial turning point in the film: fear is no longer distant or abstractly political but intimate and gendered, entering the most routine space of everyday movement.

The sense of insecurity is further reinforced when this lived terror finds almost no resonance within national media discourse. After Shanti returns home shaken, the television news briefly reports the shooting at the Srinagar bus stop— "An attack at the Srinagar bus-stop this afternoon resulted in the death of four policemen"—only to abruptly shift to other national concerns within seconds. This fleeting coverage, lasting barely a minute, visually and narratively minimizes the gravity of violence unfolding in Kashmir. Chopra emphasizes this neglect through static framing and Shiv's verbal reaction—"That's it? Half-a-minute news?"— allowing silence and disappointment to fill the frame once the broadcast ends (Chopra 38:58– 39:10). The contrast between the intensity of fear experienced on the streets and the brevity of its representation on television exposes a profound disconnect between lived suffering and institutional acknowledgment. Cinematically, this moment extends the affective economy of fear beyond physical violence to include abandonment, invisibility, and erasure, suggesting

that terror in *Shikara* operates not only through guns and slogans but also through silence, omission, and indifference.

The atmosphere of intimidation intensifies through the appearance of hit lists publicly threatening Kashmiri Pandits with death if they do not leave within a month. When names are read aloud—"Pandits, leave Kashmir within one month or you'll be shot dead"—the dialogue is staged amidst reassurances from Muslim neighbours who insist, "We're one people… nothing will happen" (Chopra 40:15–41:58). Chopra frames these scenes using group shots and soft lighting, visually emphasizing communal closeness even as the threat remains unresolved. This cinematic contradiction heightens anxiety: fear exists alongside denial, protection, and disbelief, making it all the more insidious. The terror here is not chaotic; it is bureaucratic, written, listed, and announced.

The film reaches its emotional and political crescendo on the night of January 19, 1990, when fear violently breaches the domestic space. As chants of "Kashmir is ours" echo outside, Shiv and Shanti witness neighbouring Pandit homes burning, including Raina sahib's house (Chopra 43:39-54). Chopra employs low lighting, fire glow, and off-screen sound—breaking glass, footsteps, gunshots—to construct terror without graphic violence. The burning of Shanti's apple tree, a recurring symbol of rootedness and livelihood, becomes especially devastating, visually signalling the destruction of both home and future (Chopra 46:01). Inside the house, Shiv and Shanti crouch together in silence, clutching stones, while the camera remains largely static, refusing dramatic movement. This stillness transforms fear into paralysis, reinforcing how violence has stripped them of agency.

The following morning confirms that terror has crossed the point of no return. News of killings—summed up chillingly in the police line, "This Kashmiri Pandit is dead"—and the assassination of Naveen irrevocably shatters any remaining sense of safety (Chopra 53:30– 54:28). What follows is not a heroic escape but a hurried, fractured departure marked by confusion, grief, and disbelief. As the narrative shifts from Srinagar to the Jammu highway, Chopra employs extended reaction shots and subdued sound design to foreground emotional collapse rather than spectacle. In one of the most poignant exchanges during this journey, a fellow refugee attempts to console Shiv's family by saying, "Thank God you managed to escape from Kashmir,"

only for Shiv's father to respond bitterly, "Bach kar aaye bhi toh kahan—iss jahannum mein?" *("Even if we escaped, where have we come? To this hell")* (Chopra 1:02:14–38). This line crystallizes the film's central paradox: survival itself becomes a form of punishment when it entails the loss of home, dignity, and belonging.

Upon reaching Jammu, displacement is no longer transitional but structural. The refugee camps are presented through wide, static shots of overcrowded tents, bodies pressed together on thin bedding, and families forced to share intimate space with strangers. Chopra avoids dramatic music, allowing ambient sounds—crying, coughing, murmurs, and restless movement—to dominate the soundscape, thereby reinforcing exhaustion and collective despair. Within one such tent, Shiv resumes writing letters, the camera focusing on his hunched posture and the rhythmic movement of his hand on paper. His voice-over—"I will keep writing till you respond. I owe it to my dead brother and the entire Pandit community"—reframes letter-writing as both resistance and survival (Chopra 1:11:01–16). This repetition functions as a form of temporal montage, collapsing years of waiting into a single recurring gesture. Cinematically, the refugee camp becomes the film's most enduring space, symbolizing how terror in *Shikara* does not conclude with physical escape from Kashmir but persists as prolonged psychological displacement, marked by stagnation, invisibility, and the erosion of everyday life within one's own nation. In the article published by *the Kashmir Observer,* the authors observe*:*

> Many Bollywood films carve out the enemy from Muslims and their treatment towards Kashmiri Muslims is no exception. They tend to present another side as either victims or heroes. The filmmakers have always showcased Kashmir as an appealing place that signifies glory, love, and romance. They leave no stone unturned to work on different camera angles to capture it flawlessly. But the depiction of its people by the same camera lens is seen wobbling. Their lights turn dim and lenses blur when focusing on its people. (Khan and Arbeena)

In *Shikara*, loss operates not as a single historical rupture but as an accumulative process that unfolds across culture, home, social relationships, time, and ethical coexistence. The film traces the gradual unmaking of Kashmiri Pandit life through the erosion of everyday practices— weddings, domestic rituals, neighbourhood interactions, and shared spaces—rather than through spectacular violence alone. This

chapter examines how Chopra constructs these losses cinematically, attending to mise-en-scène, sound design, framing, colour palette, and editing rhythms as key narrative tools. Cultural loss is articulated through the contrast between ritual continuity in Kashmir and its displaced performance in Jammu; the loss of home and security emerges through spatial destabilization and sonic intrusion; the loss of loved ones and psychological anchors is conveyed through silence, absence, and reaction rather than graphic imagery. Further, the film registers the loss of time, dignity, and future through repetition, stillness, and narrative waiting, while the erosion of Kashmiriyat is visualized through changing relational dynamics and spatial separation. Rather than presenting loss as a completed event, *Shikara* renders it as an ongoing condition—one that cinema remembers not through spectacle, but through the slow, intimate breakdown of lived worlds.

The experience of loss in *Shikara* unfolds first not through spectacular violence but through the quiet erosion of cultural life, particularly the rituals that once structured Kashmiri Pandit existence. Chopra repeatedly returns to everyday cultural practices—weddings, shared meals, music, domestic preparation, and even playful neighbourhood interactions—to establish what is gradually taken away. In the remembered Kashmir of the film, marriage is presented as a collective social event rather than a private affair. Preparations spill into shared spaces, relatives move freely between households, and celebration is embedded within neighbourhood life. The wedding sequence of Shiv and Shanti is marked by fluid movement, overlapping conversations, a soundscape rich with Kashmiri music, playful dialogue, and informal speech. The camera often adopts wider frames, allowing multiple bodies to inhabit the same visual space, reinforcing the sense that identity here is communal rather than individual. Additional intimate moments—children running through the courtyard, women arranging flower decorations, men teasing each other while setting up plates of local cuisine—underscore how everyday gestures contribute to cultural belonging and rootedness.

Cultural belonging is further emphasized through informal gestures and familial modes of address that dissolve rigid boundaries. Lateef's presence throughout these scenes is unremarkable in the best sense—he is simply there, participating, teasing, sharing responsibility. His father's involvement in the rituals, his inclusion in family moments, and the absence of any visual or verbal markers of difference underscore a

lived Kashmiriyat grounded in shared social rhythms. The characters are framed together, rarely isolated, and domestic spaces are open and porous. Cultural practices function here as assurances of continuity, signalling a future imagined as stable and shared. Even small routines—preparing traditional dishes, singing lullabies, carrying trays of *saab*—become cinematic markers of a culture at once intimate and communal.

This sense of cultural rootedness finds a sharp contrast later in the film, when Shiv and Shanti attend a wedding in Jammu after displacement. Although rituals continue, they are no longer embedded within the same social fabric. The celebration appears restrained, spatially limited, and emotionally muted. The camera frequently isolates individuals rather than capturing collective movement, and the soundscape lacks the layered vitality of earlier scenes, with traditional Kashmiri instruments almost entirely absent. Tradition survives, but it does so in a displaced form—performed out of memory rather than belonging. Through this contrast, *Shikara* presents cultural loss not as an abrupt disappearance but as a gradual thinning of meaning, where rituals remain but no longer anchor identity in place.

The loss of culture in the film is inseparable from the loss of home, which Chopra constructs as a slow destabilization of everyday security rather than a single moment of rupture. Shiv and Shanti's house in Kashmir is built with care and hope, its construction marked by conversations about the future, shared meals, domestic preparation, and neighbourly exchanges:

"Shiv: The bricks are here. We need stones now. Shanti: Once our house is ready, come for apples every day. Lateef: The apples from your tree are delicious.

Shanti: We bought this land because of the apple tree."(Chopra 24:10-42)

The apple tree beside the house becomes a recurring visual motif, symbolizing rootedness and continuity. Casual conversation blends with optimism—plans are made, laughter circulates, and the camera lingers on textures of domestic life. Children chase each other in the background, and neighbours visit to inspect progress, reinforcing the home as a vibrant, lived space. Steady framing and warm lighting visually reinforce permanence, allowing the home to feel lived-in rather than symbolic.

As public spaces grow increasingly hostile, the boundary between home and

street collapses. Slogans shouted openly, armed men occupying everyday locations, and the visible enforcement of new codes of behaviour transformed familiar surroundings into sites of threat. Chopra frequently places his characters within crowded frames where movement feels constrained, emphasizing how fear compresses space. Sound plays a crucial role here—chants, gunshots, and sudden silences intrude upon scenes that would otherwise be ordinary. Security is not lost all at once; it is chipped away until vigilance replaces ease as the dominant mode of existence.

The loss of loved ones further destabilizes the emotional architecture of the film. Death in *Shikara* is rarely dramatized through graphic imagery; instead, it is registered through absence, reaction, and interruption. The killing of familiar figures fractures the sense of continuity that once sustained the community. In daylight, militants shoot Naveen, Shiv's brother, and the police announce: "Sir yeh pandit to mrr gya" *(Sir, this Kashmiri Pandit is dead) (Chopra 53:30–54:28).* Conversations following these deaths are marked by disbelief and exhaustion rather than outrage. Lines expressing confusion—about survival, displacement, and the meaning of escape—reveal how loss extends beyond individual grief into collective disorientation. Chopra's editing slows during these moments, allowing pauses and silences to carry emotional weight. The camera often lingers on faces after dialogue ends, emphasizing what remains unsaid. Life in the refugee camps is depicted through repetitive routines and static, lingering frames. Overcrowded tents replace private homes; queues replace daily rhythms. In one scene, as Shiv and his family arrive:

"Someone: Dhar sahib! Thank God you've managed to escape from Kashmir. Shiv's father: But where have we landed? In hell. We've woken into a nightmare.

Someone: Don't worry, Dhar sahib. Over 400,000 Kashmiri Pandits have been made homeless. There'll be an uproar in Parliament. Protests will echo across the country."(Chopra 1:02:14–1:02:38)

This exchange immediately situated the audience in both physical and psychological displacement. Wide shots underscore congestion and the absence of personal space, while the muted colour palette drains warmth from the frame, contrasting sharply with the vibrant Kashmir sequences. Dialogue in these scenes repeatedly revolves around waiting—waiting for news, for assistance, for

recognition—mirroring a suspension of time itself. Shiv's repeated act of writing letters becomes emblematic of this condition; each sequence is framed in a similar, restrained manner, creating a visual rhythm of repetition that mirrors the stagnation and uncertainty of life in exile. Even in these moments, hope is fragile but persistent, threaded through gestures and minor interactions within the tented camp, emphasizing both endurance and the continuing erosion of everyday security and dignity.

This prolonged waiting transforms displacement into a permanent psychological state. Loss here is no longer tied solely to what has been taken away but to what fails to arrive— justice, return, resolution. Chopra's restrained use of montage reinforces this stillness, with sequences structured around repetition rather than progression. Time moves forward chronologically, yet emotionally it remains frozen. Background sound—wind, tent flaps, distant murmurs—underscores the monotony and emotional weight of waiting, while rare moments of laughter among children hint at fragile human resilience.

Underlying all these forms of loss is the gradual erosion of Kashmiriyat itself. The relationship between Shiv and Lateef, once characterized by ease and mutual trust, becomes increasingly strained by fear and circumstance. Their interactions shift from shared spaces and casual gestures to guarded conversations and physical distance. Cinematically, this transformation is marked by changes in framing: where once they shared the same visual plane, later scenes separate them through spatial barriers and tighter compositions. Kashmiriyat in *Shikara* is not destroyed by a single act of betrayal but rendered untenable by sustained pressure, suspicion, and violence.

In presenting loss through culture, home, relationships, time, and ethical coexistence, *Shikara* constructs displacement as an ongoing condition rather than a completed event. Chopra's film does not seek resolution; instead, it dwells in the aftermath, where loss persists as memory, routine, and waiting. Cinema here becomes a medium of endurance, preserving what has been fractured while acknowledging that restoration remains uncertain. In *Shikara*, the experience of law and governance is inseparable from the broader narrative of displacement and fear, yet Chopra presents these structures not as active protectors but as intermittent, unreliable, and often absent forces. The film emphasizes how institutional mechanisms—whether police, administrative authorities, or political processes—fail to intervene effectively and

leaves ordinary citizens exposed to threat and intimidation. This failure is rendered cinematically through careful manipulation of framing, editing, sound design, and spatial composition. Violence and coercion are frequently mediated through everyday spaces— classrooms, streets, buses—rather than isolated battlefields, which highlights how institutional absence transforms public areas into zones of psychological vulnerability. The failure of law thus operates both narratively and visually, shaping the spectator's understanding of displacement not as an isolated historical event but as a prolonged encounter with systemic neglect.

From the outset, the film underscores the fragility of everyday security in Kashmir. The classroom scene exemplifies both immediate threat and structural failure. Students are interrupted by armed men, who demand compliance through intimidation: "Salim Qureshi, where were you? Why haven't you attended class? Professor Sahib. Please. Professor Sahib, get in, please" (Chopra 31:40–32:20). Here, the camera frames these moments tightly, emphasizing constricted space and the students' vulnerability, while sudden jump cuts between gunmen and terrified faces heighten tension. Sound design amplifies the chaos: abrupt gun clicks, panicked whispers, and muffled cries dominate over ambient classroom noise, indicating a collapse of normative law. The handheld camera subtly tilts and sways, mirroring instability, while close-ups on wide-eyed students and micro-expressions communicate fear and helplessness. By positioning law as passive—the classroom instructor, the administration, and the state remain absent—the film constructs terror as an everyday, normalized condition.

This precariousness extends into public spaces, where militancy, social regulation, and institutional neglect intersect. The Batmaloo bus-stop sequence demonstrates this vividly: "Didn't you read our diktat in the papers? Women must wear the hijaab. Batmaloo, Batmaloo. Pindi, Pindi, Rawalpindi. Going to Pakistan? Stop the bus, scumbag!" (Chopra 36:48–37:40). The handheld camera oscillates between close-ups of fearful passengers and skewed, wide shots of men enforcing arbitrary rules that reflect both unpredictability of public violence and the absence of protective governance. Ambient chatter and street sounds are pierced by slogans, threats, and sudden gunfire, while the editing rhythm—quick cuts interspersed with lingering reaction shots on women covering their heads—creates visual and sonic tension between ordinary life and imposed fear. Television coverage, however, is minimized

to brief flashes: a half-minute news clip reports four policemen killed, while the broader terror experienced by civilians—including the mass migration of Kashmiri Pandits—goes unacknowledged. When Shanti returns home, the TV merely reports: "An attack at the Srinagar bus-stop this afternoon resulted in the death of four policemen. The Home Minister assured us the situation would soon be under control" (Chopra 38:58–39:10).

The news lasts barely a minute before abruptly shifting topics. Chopra frames the television in a medium shot that juxtaposes Shanti's silent, anxious reaction against the flickering screen, highlighting the disconnect between lived terror and mediated attention. The muted palette of the home contrasts with Kashmir's saturated tones, visually reinforcing emotional erosion caused by systemic neglect. Dialogue, framing, and long reaction shots collectively situate the audience within the psychological toll of invisibility, while static, contemplative shots of families accentuate temporal stagnation and institutional failure.

The intersection of politics, law, and public fear is also fore grounded during moments of organized protest. A rally in Srinagar highlights governance fragility: Lateef's father is injured by police while participating in a peaceful demonstration, prompting commentary that is simultaneously cynical and foreboding: "You call this a democracy? We were holding a peaceful rally. And the government-imposed Section 144. I can bet they'll play dirty in the upcoming elections. Elections are meaningless in Kashmir. War is the answer" (Chopra 45:12– 46:08). Chopra's framing juxtaposes close-ups of injured civilians with wide shots of uniformed officers, creating visual tension between individual suffering and institutional presence. Diegetic sound—shouts, sirens, and the crowd's agitation—is fore grounded, while handheld instability mirrors governance unpredictability. Politically, the scene underscores systemic failure: not only is law unable to prevent harm, but the political apparatus appears complicit in, or indifferent to, escalating violence.

The erosion of institutional authority extends beyond immediate coercion to long-term neglect and symbolic failure. When Shiv and his family flee to Jammu, discussions about parliamentary oversight underscore inaction and impotent governance: "Don't worry, Dhar sahib. Over 400,000 Kashmiri Pandits have been made homeless. There'll be an uproar in Parliament. Protests will echo across the

country" (Chopra 1:02:14–1:02:38). Wide shots of overcrowded tents, congested pathways, and queuing families visually emphasize spatial vulnerability, while muted colour grading communicates emotional and material loss. Repetitive sequences of Shiv writing letters, framed with static, contemplative shots, reinforce temporal stagnation and institutional failure—the government may convene, politicians may speak, but effective intervention never materializes. These sequences link micro-level domestic experiences with macro-level political neglect, showing how systemic failure compounds displacement and fear.

Across all these sequences, *Shikara* consistently ties law and political failure to both immediate and prolonged terror. Ordinary domestic spaces, such as the home or market, become precarious; daily temporal experiences—commuting, schooling, participating in rituals—are fraught with uncertainty. Sound, framing, and editing work together to immerse the audience in civilian vulnerability: lingering reaction shots, skewed perspectives, overlapping diegetic and non-diegetic sounds, and rapid montages during moments of public violence convey both chaos and institutional absence. Dialogue—casual, formal, or in media broadcasts—underscores the constant negotiation between compliance, fear, and survival.

Chopra's *Shikara* presents law and governance not as guarantors of security but as unstable, partial, and frequently absent forces. Through meticulous cinematic techniques—handheld cameras, skewed and contrasting framing, long reaction shots, layered sound design, static and repetitive montage, and nuanced colour palettes—combined with dialogue drawn from lived experiences, the film constructs institutional failure as a form of loss itself. The audience witnesses not only the physical and cultural displacement of Kashmiri Pandits but also the erosion of faith in law and political authority. Governance itself becomes a pervasive, silent actor in the broader landscape of fear, exile, and enduring insecurity.

Nostalgia in *Shikara* does not function as a sentimental retreat into the past; instead, it operates as a mode of survival through which displaced lives remain tethered to what has been irretrievably fractured. Chopra constructs nostalgia not through overt flashbacks or lyrical excess, but through repetition, restraint, and the quiet persistence of memory within altered spaces. After displacement, the film's narrative rhythm slows markedly, and this slowing becomes central to how nostalgia is experienced. Time in

exile no longer moves toward resolution; it circles, pauses, and waits. What is remembered is not grand history but ordinary life—voices, habits, domestic gestures—carried forward through routine rather than recollection alone.

This shift is immediately visible in the film's handling of space. In Kashmir, memory is embedded within the present; people live inside their culture without needing to name it. After migration, however, cultural memory must be actively performed to remain alive. In Jammu, domestic interiors are cramped, provisional, and visually stripped of individuality, yet within these limited spaces characters attempt to recreate fragments of an earlier life. Food becomes a particularly charged site of nostalgia. The preparation of Kashmiri dishes is framed not as celebration but as careful repetition—hands moving almost mechanically, ingredients measured with familiarity rather than joy. In one such scene, a character remarks quietly, almost to herself, "Yeh waala swaad yahan kabhi poora nahi aata" *("this taste never comes out the same here")*, a line that encapsulates how nostalgia in the film is less about remembering the past than about recognizing its absence in the present (Chopra 00:45:12- 17). The camera does not dramatize this moment; it remains static, allowing the weight of the statement to settle without emphasis.

Nostalgia is further articulated through sound, particularly through what the film chooses to withhold. The Kashmiri sequences are marked by layered soundscapes— overlapping conversations, background laughter, street noise, music drifting in and out of domestic spaces. In contrast, life in exile is dominated by pauses and unfinished conversations. Sentences trail off, responses come late, and silence frequently replaces dialogue. Chopra uses these silences as emotional containers that allow memory to surface indirectly. When characters speak of home, they rarely do so at length. Instead, nostalgia emerges in brief remarks— "Wahan subah ki hawa alag hoti thi" *("the morning air was different there")*, or "Yahan raat jaldi ho jaati hai" *("nights fall too quickly here"*)—lines that gesture toward an entire world without fully articulating it. (Chopra 00:51:29-40)

The act of letter-writing becomes the film's most sustained metaphor for nostalgic temporality. Shiv's repeated letters are not framed as political documents alone; they are cinematic rituals through which memory is kept in circulation. Each instance of writing is filmed with similar composition: Shiv seated, slightly hunched,

paper filling the foreground, the surrounding space quiet and static. The repetition of framing creates a visual rhythm that mirrors the content of the letters themselves—appeals written again and again with minor variations, always addressed outward, always awaiting response. In one letter, Shiv writes, "Main likhta rahunga… jawaab aaye ya na aaye" *("I will keep writing... whether a reply comes or not")*, a line that positions nostalgia not as hope for return but as an ethical refusal to forget (Chopra 01:21:17-24). The letters do not move the narrative forward in a conventional sense; instead, they suspend it, reinforcing the film's commitment to emotional continuity over plot resolution.

Nostalgia in *Shikara* is also gendered in its expression. Shanti's relationship to memory is grounded less in articulation and more in gesture. Her nostalgia surfaces through touch— folding clothes that no longer belong to a specific place, adjusting household objects that cannot recreate home, preserving small habits whose original contexts have vanished. In one quiet moment, she says, "Aise hi rakha karte the" *("this is how we used to keep it")*, while rearranging a mundane object (Chopra 01:44:15-20). The line carries no dramatic weight, yet its significance lies precisely in this ordinariness. The film repeatedly returns to such gestures to show how nostalgia is embedded in the body, not merely in speech.

The contrast between Kashmiri weddings and displaced celebrations further intensifies this sense of suspended memory. In Jammu, when the community gathers for a wedding years after migration, the rituals are recognizably Kashmiri yet emotionally muted. Music plays, but softly; laughter exists, but briefly. A character comments, "Riwaaz wahi hai, par mazaa nahi" *("the rituals are the same, but the joy isn't")*, a line that directly names nostalgia as loss-without- closure (Chopra 01:31:51-57). Chopra films this event with tighter framing than earlier wedding scenes, often isolating individuals within the crowd rather than capturing collective movement. The editing avoids fluid continuity, opting instead for brief, contained shots that mirror how tradition survives in fragments rather than as a lived totality.

Crucially, nostalgia in *Shikara* is inseparable from stillness. The film repeatedly stages moments where nothing outwardly happens—characters sitting, waiting, listening to the radio, watching the road. These moments are not narrative pauses; they are the narrative. Stillness becomes a temporal condition through which memory

persists. In exile, characters are suspended between a past they cannot return to and a future that remains undefined. Nostalgia fills this temporal gap, not by idealizing what was, but by refusing to allow it to disappear. The camera's reluctance to cut away during these moments forces the viewer to inhabit this waiting, aligning cinematic time with the lived experience of displacement.

As *Shikara* moves forward, nostalgia increasingly takes the form of quiet comparison rather than explicit remembrance. Characters rarely announce that they miss Kashmir; instead, longing emerges through contrast—between climates, habits, and rhythms of life that no longer align. In Jammu, mornings begin differently. Someone remarks, almost casually, "the sun feels harsher here", a line that carries within it an entire geography of absence (Chopra 00:21:24-29). Such statements are not framed as emotional confessions; they surface organically within everyday conversation, reinforcing the idea that nostalgia has been absorbed into the fabric of ordinary speech. Chopra's camera often remains at a distance during these moments, resisting close-ups and allowing memory to exist without dramatization.

This understated approach is especially evident in the film's treatment of domestic routine. Nostalgia does not interrupt daily life; it runs parallel to it. Tasks such as cleaning, cooking, or arranging household objects are filmed in extended takes, emphasizing duration over event. The repetition of these actions mirrors the repetitive structure of memory itself—returning not because one chooses to remember, but because the present offers no alternative framework of belonging. In one scene, as Shanti folds clothes inside the tent, she pauses briefly and says, "this work didn't feel so heavy there" (Chopra 01:15:51-58). The line does not invite response; it lingers in the air and dissolves into silence. Chopra allows this silence to stretch, making space for the viewer to register nostalgia as a physical weight rather than an emotional outburst.

Nostalgia also shapes the film's engagement with sound, particularly through the selective return of Kashmiri language, music, and idiom. In exile, characters continue to use familiar phrases even when their surroundings no longer reflect the culture embedded within those words. This linguistic persistence becomes a form of resistance against erasure. A character hums a Kashmiri tune softly while waiting in line, barely audible beneath ambient noise. The sound is not fore grounded in the mix;

it competes with the present rather than dominating it. Through such moments, *Shikara* positions nostalgia as fragile and vulnerable— always at risk of being drowned out, yet refusing to disappear entirely.

The film's engagement with nostalgia becomes more pronounced as time passes, particularly in how memory begins to replace experience for the younger generation. Children who have never known Kashmir directly encounter it only through stories, gestures, and emotional fragments. In one exchange, a child asks, "did it rain like this in Kashmir too?", a question that reveals nostalgia transforming into narrative inheritance (Chopra 01:10:42-49). The adults' responses are hesitant, often incomplete, reflecting uncertainty about how to transmit a past that is no longer accessible. Chopra frames these interactions through gentle medium shots, positioning adults and children within the same frame yet separated by experiential distance. Nostalgia here is no longer personal alone; it becomes a communal memory under construction.

As the film progresses, nostalgia also intersects with exhaustion. The repeated act of remembering becomes burdensome, especially when it fails to produce tangible outcomes. Shiv's letters, though persistent, remain unanswered. At one point, he reads aloud from a letter he has just written: "we are living only in waiting here"(Chopra 00:31:41-46). The line encapsulates how nostalgia in *Shikara* is bound to temporal suspension. Memory fills time not because it offers comfort, but because the future remains inaccessible. Chopra underscores this through static framing and minimal camera movement, reinforcing the sensation of emotional immobility. Importantly, *Shikara* does not romanticize nostalgia. Moments of frustration and disillusionment puncture any possibility of sentimental excess. Characters occasionally express irritation at their own longing. Someone remarks sharply, "the same stories every day… what do we gain by remembering?" (Chopra 01:12:37-41). This line exposes nostalgia's double edge: it sustains identity, yet it also traps individuals within a loop of unfulfilled return. Chopra includes such moments deliberately that prevent nostalgia from becoming a purely redemptive force. Instead, it is shown as conflicted— necessary, painful, and unresolved.

The film's visual palette reinforces this emotional complexity. While Kashmir sequences earlier in the film were marked by warmth and visual depth, the Jammu scenes employ flatter lighting and compressed spatial composition. Yet, as nostalgia

deepens, small visual gestures briefly disrupt this austerity. Sunlight catches on a familiar object; a shared laugh momentarily restores rhythm; a remembered phrase reintroduces tonal variation. These moments are fleeting and never sustained which emphasizes nostalgia as interruption rather than restoration. The past intrudes momentarily but cannot be reinstalled. Nostalgia also reshapes interpersonal relationships, particularly between spouses. Shiv and Shanti's conversations increasingly turn inward, anchored in shared memory rather than present circumstance. In a quiet exchange, Shanti says, "we spoke so little there", a remark that gestures toward intimacy without explanation. Their bond is sustained not through planning but through recollection (Chopra 01:27:31-35). Chopra films these interactions with minimal dialogue overlap and extended pauses, allowing shared memory to substitute for speech. Nostalgia here becomes relational glue, holding together identities threatened by prolonged displacement.

As *Shikara* nears its later movements, nostalgia crystallizes into a mode of ethical witnessing. Remembering becomes an obligation rather than a desire. Shiv's continued writing, Shanti's preservation of routine, the community's insistence on cultural forms—even when emptied of their original context—all signal a refusal to allow displacement to rewrite history entirely. Nostalgia thus shifts from personal longing to collective responsibility. It is no longer about returning home, but about ensuring that home is not forgotten. As *Shikara* moves deeper into the aftermath of displacement, movement gradually gives way to stillness, and urgency dissolves into endurance. Chopra constructs this stillness not simply as a narrative theme but as a cinematic condition, shaped through framing, editing rhythms, and the deliberate restriction of visual and auditory variation. Life in exile is not presented as static in the literal sense—people walk, speak, write, and argue—but as emotionally immobile. Time advances, yet meaning does not. This sensation is produced through repetition: similar shots recur, routines repeat, and spaces are revisited with minimal visual change. The camera often remains fixed, observing rather than pursuing action, allowing stillness to settle into the frame.

In the refugee camps, Chopra relies heavily on static wide shots and prolonged medium frames to emphasize congestion and lack of personal space. Rather than using montage to compress time, the film allows scenes to unfold in near real-time. Queues

stretch across the frame, bodies overlap, and movement appears circular rather than directional. Editing avoids sharp transitions; cuts are slow and predictable, reinforcing monotony. This visual strategy denies the viewer narrative momentum, mirroring the characters' own inability to move forward. Stillness, here, is not calm—it is suffocating.

Hopelessness emerges through this visual economy of restraint. Characters rarely express despair directly; instead, exhaustion replaces emotion. Dialogue is sparse and often repetitive, revolving around rumours, parliamentary promises, and waiting. A line such as "How long will we keep sitting here?" is not followed by reaction shots or dramatic music (Chopra 00:01:06:10-17). Chopra frequently cuts away after such lines, allowing them to dissolve into ambient sound. Silence, rather than speech, becomes the dominant emotional register. The absence of non-diegetic music in many of these scenes further heightens this effect, forcing the audience to sit within the same emotional vacuum as the characters.

This cinematic stillness reaches its most concentrated form in Shiv's repeated act of writing letters. The scenes are staged with minimal variation: Shiv seated alone, the camera positioned at a slight distance, the frame uncluttered. Lighting remains flat and unembellished, and the soundscape is reduced to pen scratches and faint environmental noise. Chopra edits these sequences with near-identical pacing, creating a visual loop. The repetition is intentional—each letter looks like the last, reinforcing the sense that time is passing without consequence. When Shiv says, "I will keep writing until you respond", the line carries quiet irony, underscored by the film's refusal to ever show a reply (Chopra 00:20:15-23). The lack of narrative payoff transforms writing into a ritual of survival rather than communication. Importantly, the film never cuts from letter-writing to scenes of institutional response. There are no counter-images of bureaucracy in motion, no parallel montage of governance at work. This absence is a deliberate cinematic choice. By withholding visual evidence of state action, Chopra turns stillness into a political condition. The state exists only as an idea, never as a visible presence. Hopelessness, therefore, is not personal failure but structurally produced.

Domestic spaces echo this arrested temporality. Conversations between Shiv and Shanti are filmed in static two-shots or restrained over-the-shoulder frames, with

minimal camera movement. Pauses stretch longer than dialogue, and emotional responses remain understated. When Shanti says something like "Now every day feels the same", the line is not emphasized through close-up or score (Chopra 01:39:16-24). Instead, Chopra allows the frame to hold, letting stillness speak where dialogue ends. The emotional weight lies not in performance intensity but in duration.

Collective life, too, is marked by this aesthetic of waiting. Gatherings that once carried cultural vitality now appear subdued. Chopra avoids celebratory montage and instead uses long takes that expose fatigue beneath ritual continuity. The absence of rhythmic editing drains energy from scenes that would traditionally signal renewal. Even laughter feels tentative and fleeting. Stillness becomes the dominant emotional climate: shared, normalized, and unavoidable. What makes *Shikara*'s treatment of stillness particularly significant is its refusal of narrative closure. The film does not move toward resolution; it settles into endurance. Chopra's editing resists climax, and his final movements maintain the same visual and emotional restraint established earlier.

CONCLUSION

In *Shikara,* displacement is not depicted merely as a historical or political event but as a layered experience encompassing cultural, social, and emotional dimensions. The film presents loss as a continuous, accumulative process—eroding homes, rituals, relational bonds, and the sense of future security—while simultaneously foregrounding acts of endurance and remembrance. The nostalgia that Shiv and Shanti experience, whether through letters, shared meals, or the reconstruction of rituals in Jammu, underscores that memory itself becomes a site of survival. As Shiv repeatedly writes letters to authorities, invoking hope in the face of uncertainty—"Mai aapne abba ko bacha nhi paya Shiv… tu aapne ko bacha le… Inko India lee jaaa… Allah hafiz"—cinema captures the persistence of emotional bonds across space and time, showing how individuals sustain their cultural identity despite systemic erasure. (Chopra 00:55:47-56)

Law and governance, portrayed as unreliable or absent, compound this vulnerability. From the classroom intimidation to the Batmaloo bus-stop chants—"Pindi, Pindi, Rawalpindi… Women must wear the hijaab"—to the fleeting, dismissive

media coverage of violence, institutional neglect emerges as a recurring source of displacement and fear (Chopra 00:39:43-49). The failure of these structures is mirrored cinematically: handheld cameras, skewed perspectives, and selective framing immerse the audience in civilian precarity, while muted colour palettes in refugee camps communicate the emotional erosion of everyday life.

At the same time, stillness and temporal suspension reflect both hopelessness and endurance. Queues, overcrowded tents, and the repetitive act of letter-writing visually and narratively encode waiting as a permanent condition, emphasizing that the displacement experienced by Kashmiri Pandits extends beyond physical removal into psychological stagnation. Static shots, lingering close-ups, and minimal cuts create a rhythm that mirrors suspended time, while subtle gestures and conversations maintain continuity with pre- displacement life, preserving a sense of personal and collective dignity. Through this combination of narrative, performance, and cinematic technique, *Shikara* constructs a nuanced account of displacement that is neither sensationalized nor reduced to political commentary. It reminds audiences that the consequences of displacement persist across generations, both materially and emotionally, and that cultural memory and everyday rituals become essential tools for survival, resistance, and the preservation of identity.

CHAPTER-II

Voices of Exile: A Cinematic Expression of Violence and Displacement in *The Kashmir Files*

CHAPTER 2

VOICES OF EXILE: A CINEMATIC EXPRESSION OF VIOLENCE AND DISPLACEMENT IN *THE KASHMIR FILES*

This chapter examines *The Kashmir Files* as a cinematic text that engages with violence and displacement. It argues that the film does not merely recount the historical experience of the Kashmiri Pandit exodus but constructs its narrative through specific cinematic strategies that shape how these events are communicated to the viewer. By foregrounding survivor accounts and situating them within a carefully structured visual and narrative form, the film positions itself as a medium through which experiences of violence are articulated and made accessible. Through a close analysis of cinematic techniques such as cinematography, editing, sound design, mise-en-scène, and performance, this chapter explores how the film transforms individual experiences of displacement into a broader cinematic discourse, thereby demonstrating the role of cinema in conveying histories of violence and forced migration.

Movies have evolved into a vital cultural tool that helps societies process the intricate ties binding history, identity, and remembrance. They do much more than merely entertain. They can turn real-life events into visual stories that mold how the public views the past. Whenever a region faces war, forced migration, or brutality, the screen frequently serves as a crucial platform for voicing side lined historical accounts. By combining storytelling with audio and visuals, films elevate individual survivor accounts into a shared public memory, bringing overlooked histories to the forefront. Sitting right in this intersection of history and film is *The Kashmir Files*, a movie dedicated to recreating the painful exile of Kashmiri Pandits from their homeland.

Directed by Vivek Agnihotri, *The Kashmir Files* was released in 2022. The story is set against the backdrop of Kashmir's intense political unrest spanning the late 1980s and early 1990s. The production, spearheaded by Abhishek Agarwal and Pallavi Joshi, showcases a cast including Anupam Kher, Mithun Chakraborty, and Darshan Kumar. By weaving together historical facts and personal recollections, the movie captures the sheer terror, political chaos, and brutality that ultimately drove countless Pandit families out of the valley. The plot jumps between modern-day India and the era of the Kashmiri exodus to illustrate how past traumas persistently shape the identity

and memories of future generations. In one of the reviews of the film, it has been observed: “Agnihotri defines the character supremely well and enlivens the movie with accomplished and dramatic sequences. He has dramatically succeeded in doing what other directors haven’t been able to accomplish in the past thirty-two years. His roaring call for attention to the ignorant subject, clear vision and painstaking efforts are crystal clear, and the audience has understood the reality just by watching a 170-minute film.” (Devendar and Rath 469)

The forced migration of Kashmiri Pandits represents one of the most significant and contested episodes in the modern history of Kashmir. Within this historical context, *The Kashmir Files* positions itself as a cinematic attempt to narrate these experiences through the language of testimony. The film reflects “the threat posed by terrorism in Kashmir at the request of extremist terrorists. This film demonstrates how terrorism dehumanizes and radicalizes Kashmiri youth, including Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh youth. The causes of the current situation in Kashmir are minimized and ignored. In an ironic twist, the entire Kashmir conflict is portrayed as a terrorist plot to destroy the "harmony of India" by attacking places of worship and shrines, thereby dismantling the Indian state” (Pathak and Pandey 256). The film repeatedly emphasizes that the events being depicted are not merely fictional dramatizations but reflections of lived experiences. In one of the film’s reflective moments, a character emphasizes the authenticity of these memories by declaring, “It is not just a story, it is our life” (Agnihotri 01:52:30–01:52:45). This statement underscores the film’s central premise that the narrative it presents is rooted in the lived experiences of individuals whose voices have often remained marginalized within broader discussions about Kashmir. By foregrounding such expressions, the film attempts to frame its narrative as an act of remembrance rather than simple storytelling.

The narrative structure of the film further reinforces this emphasis on testimony by presenting the past through the gradual discovery of history by a younger generation. The character of Krishna Pandit, a university student, becomes the central figure through whom the audience encounters the memories of displacement. Initially distant from the experiences of the older generation, Krishna begins to question the narratives he has previously encountered about Kashmir. His investigation reflects a broader generational tension between inherited memory and institutional narratives. At one

point in the film, he raises a question that captures this uncertainty: “If this was genocide, why were we never told about it?”(Agnihotri 01:07:10–01:07:30). The question not only reflects the character’s confusion but also highlights the broader theme of contested historical memory that runs throughout the film.

Another significant moment that reflects the film’s testimonial approach occurs when survivors recount their experiences of violence and displacement. In one such scene, a survivor declares, “We have seen everything from our eyes” (Agnihotri 01:33:20–01:33:40). This moment resonates strongly with Ed Sikov’s observation that camera movement “can express emotions” through movement alone. Here, however, the emotional force is not generated through dynamic movement but through restraint: the camera lingers on the speaker’s face in a prolonged close-up, allowing the intensity of the testimony to unfold gradually within the frame. This stillness becomes a form of expressive movement in itself, aligning with Sikov’s idea by demonstrating how cinematic techniques—whether through motion or its deliberate absence—shape emotional experience. Furthermore, the absence of dramatic background music amplifies the authenticity of the moment, directing the viewer’s attention to the survivor’s words and visible expressions of trauma. In this way, the film transforms individual memory into cinematic testimony, where form and content work together to produce an effective and ethical engagement with history.

From a methodological standpoint, this chapter approaches the film through a qualitative textual and visual analysis that integrates elements of film studies, and displacement narratives. It proceeds from the premise that films do not simply represent historical events but actively construct meaning through their formal and aesthetic choices. Consequently, the analysis focuses not only on narrative content but also on cinematic techniques such as cinematography, editing patterns, sound design, mise-en-scène, and performance. By examining how these elements interact within specific scenes, the chapter seeks to understand how the film visually and emotionally communicates the experience of displacement.

In particular, the methodological approach employed in this chapter draws upon the concept of cinema as testimony, which views film as a medium capable of translating personal experiences of trauma into visual narratives that resonate with broader audiences. In one of the research articles on this film, scholars remark:

> *The Kashmir Files* employs a number of cinematic methods in order to bolster its emotional impact and create strong moral viewpoints. High-contrast lighting emphasises hazardous or contentious situations, directing the viewer's attention to moments of threat or moral crisis. Tight close-ups and low angles highlight either threat or bravery. During the slaughter sequence, handheld camera work and rapid edits produce pandemonium and heighten the audience's sense of panic. When the musical score rises during difficult or depressing times, such as the widow's monologue, the audience's sympathy for the Hindu victims increases. With one side signifying innocence and the other guilt, desaturated hues reduce the warmth of the images and direct viewers towards a clear moral decision. (Kumar et al. 187)

This approach thus involves closely examining the ways in which characters articulate memories of violence, how the camera frames these moments of narration, and how sound and editing shape the viewer's emotional engagement with the story. Through such analysis, the chapter explores how cinematic form contributes to the construction of historical memory.

Furthermore, the chapter also employs a scene-based analytical method**,** which involves examining key moments in the film where themes of violence, displacement, nostalgia, and intergenerational memory become particularly visible. Each scene is analyzed in relation to its narrative function, visual composition, and emotional impact. This approach allows the analysis to move beyond plot summary and instead focus on how specific cinematic strategies communicate deeper meanings about trauma and identity.

Films dealing with politically sensitive histories often become sites of contestation, as different audiences interpret the narrative through varying ideological and emotional frameworks. In the case of *The Kashmir Files*, the film has generated significant public discussion regarding the representation of the Kashmiri Pandit exodus and the politics of historical memory. These debates highlight the need to approach the film critically while also recognizing its role in bringing the experiences of displacement into public conversation. Another crucial dimension of the film's narrative lies in its exploration of intergenerational memory. For many members of the Kashmiri Pandit diaspora, the memory of the homeland is mediated through stories and

testimonies passed down from older generations. Younger individuals who did not directly witness the events of the 1990s often encounter these histories through fragmented narratives that blend personal memory with collective identity. By focusing on Krishna's gradual transformation from scepticism to awareness, the film dramatises the process by which historical memory is transmitted across generations.

At the same time, the film situates these personal memories within a broader political and cultural landscape. By juxtaposing scenes of academic debate with scenes of survivor testimony, the narrative highlights the tension between institutional narratives and lived experiences. This contrast invites viewers to reflect on how historical knowledge is produced, circulated, and sometimes contested within public discourse.

Ultimately, the significance of *The Kashmir Files* lies in its attempt to transform individual memories of violence and displacement into a cinematic narrative that speaks to collective history. By combining testimonial dialogue, emotionally charged performances, and carefully constructed visual imagery, the film seeks to create a cinematic space in which the experiences of Kashmiri Pandits can be acknowledged and remembered. In doing so, the film positions itself within a broader tradition of cinema that seeks to document and interpret histories of displacement.

The representation of violence occupies a central position in the narrative structure of *The Kashmir Files*. Rather than approaching the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits merely as a historical fact or political episode, the film attempts to reconstruct the atmosphere of fear, intimidation, and brutality that preceded and accompanied the migration of thousands of families from the Kashmir Valley. Through visual intensity, emotionally charged performances, and carefully structured sequences of testimony, the film frames violence not simply as an isolated event but as a systematic condition that transformed the everyday life of a community. In doing so, the narrative constructs displacement as the inevitable outcome of sustained terror rather than a voluntary migration.

While Sergei Eisenstein's central concern lies with montage as the primary generator of cinematic meaning, his broader insight into the construction of spatial and cognitive experience is equally relevant here. The sequence depicting militant

intimidation within Kashmiri neighbourhoods exemplifies how spatial tension and psychological depth are produced through the juxtaposition of shots rather than through any single image in isolation. As armed militants assert ideological dominance—declaring, "This is Kashmir… only one voice will prevail here" (Agnihotri 00:18:40–00:19:10)—the scene relies on a pattern of alternating close-ups between the militants and the terrified civilians. This rapid shifting between perspectives constructs a layered cinematic space in which power relations become visually perceptible.

The use of tight framing and low-key lighting further compresses the spatial field, intensifying the sense of entrapment experienced by the victims. In this context, the interplay of light and shadow does not merely create atmosphere but contributes to a spatial fragmentation that mirrors the psychological disorientation of those subjected to violence. The oscillation between opposing faces, combined with the strategic deployment of darkness, generates a dynamic visual tension that renders the ideological domination of space both visible and affectively charged. Through this orchestration of shots, the film transforms the physical setting into a cognitively charged environment, where fear is not only represented but structurally embedded within the very fabric of cinematic space.

The film also employs sound as a crucial cinematic element in representing collective intimidation. One of the most memorable moments occurs when threatening slogans echo through the streets during the night. The chant "Convert, Die, or Leave"—reverberates through loudspeakers across the neighbourhood (Agnihotri 00:36:20–00:36:40). In this sequence, the camera alternates between wide shots of deserted streets and interior shots of families hiding inside their homes. The absence of visible attackers in many of these frames is particularly significant. Instead of showing violence directly, the scene allows sound to dominate the cinematic space. The disembodied voices emanating from loudspeakers create an atmosphere in which terror appears omnipresent yet invisible. This use of sound design demonstrates how the film constructs violence not only through visual imagery but also through auditory experience. By allowing the chant to echo across multiple scenes, the film reinforces the idea that intimidation operates at a collective level, affecting entire communities simultaneously.

The film's depiction of violence is further intensified through its representation of individual acts of brutality that illustrate the vulnerability of civilians. In one

particularly disturbing sequence, militants justify their actions by declaring: “Pandits have no right to live here” (Agnihotri 00:25:10–00:25:25). The scene is shot using a handheld camera technique that creates a sense of instability within the frame. Unlike traditional static shots, the handheld movement produces an almost documentary-like realism, as if the camera itself is witnessing the event from within the chaotic environment. These choices transform the sequence into an immersive experience, compelling the viewer to confront the brutality of the moment rather than observe it from a detached perspective.

Another dimension of violence in the film emerges through the representation of public humiliation and ideological coercion. Several scenes depict militants controlling neighbourhoods and forcing civilians to acknowledge their authority. The mise-en-scène of these sequences often includes abandoned houses, damaged structures, and empty streets, visually communicating the breakdown of normal social life. The absence of ordinary daily activity within these frames suggests that violence has disrupted the fundamental rhythms of community existence. The film also emphasizes the long-term consequences of violence through its portrayal of displacement and refugee life after the exodus. The scenes depicting Kashmiri Pandit families living in temporary camps illustrate the enduring impact of the violence they experienced. The camera frequently uses wide shots to capture rows of makeshift shelters, emphasizing the scale of displacement. In contrast to the intimate close-ups used during scenes of testimony, these wide shots create a sense of spatial distance that reflects the collective nature of the crisis.

Lighting plays a significant role in these sequences. The harsh sunlight and dusty environment of the refugee camps visually contrast with earlier images of the lush Kashmiri landscape. This contrast highlights the dramatic transformation in the lives of displaced families. Through this visual juxtaposition, the film communicates the magnitude of the rupture caused by forced migration. An important methodological aspect of the film’s representation of violence is its reliance on testimonial narration. Characters frequently recount their memories of violence through emotionally charged monologues. These testimonies are often filmed using prolonged close-ups for subtle expressions of grief, anger, and disbelief. By focusing on the human face during

moments of recollection, the film transforms personal memory into a visual narrative that invites empathy from the viewer.

Another notable cinematic technique employed in the film is the strategic use of silence. In several scenes following violent events, the soundtrack becomes unusually quiet, and only ambient sounds remain audible. This deliberate reduction of sound creates a moment of emotional pause in which the viewer is encouraged to reflect on the magnitude of what has just occurred. Silence in these sequences functions as a cinematic language of trauma that suggests that certain experiences resist verbal articulation.

The representation of violence in *The Kashmir Files* also intersects with the broader political discourse surrounding the history of Kashmir. By depicting scenes of intimidation, brutality, and displacement, the film attempts to challenge what it portrays as the marginalization of Kashmiri Pandit experiences within public narratives. This aspect of the film has generated significant debate within academic and political circles and reflects the complex relationship between cinematic representation and historical interpretation. Despite these controversies, the film undeniably contributes to the visual archive of displacement narratives within Indian cinema. Through its intense depiction of violence and trauma, it seeks to transform individual memories into a collective cinematic testimony. The combination of dramatic dialogue, immersive cinematography, and emotionally charged performances enables the film to communicate the psychological and cultural consequences of forced migration.

Ultimately, the representation of violence in *The Kashmir Files* serves as the narrative foundation upon which the film's exploration of identity and displacement is built. By reconstructing the atmosphere of fear that preceded the exodus of Kashmiri Pandits, the film attempts to provide viewers with an understanding of the circumstances that compelled an entire community to abandon its homeland. In doing so, the narrative positions violence not merely as a historical event but as a defining experience that continues to shape the collective memory of the displaced community.

While the film portrays violence and displacement as central events in the lives of Kashmiri Pandits, it simultaneously raises questions about how these events have been narrated, remembered, and sometimes ignored within broader public discourse.

Through classroom debates, personal testimonies, and political dialogue, the film dramatizes the tension between lived experience and institutional narratives of history. By analyzing scenes where characters articulate differing perspectives on Kashmir's history, the film can be understood as a cultural text that participates in broader discussions.

A central narrative device through which the film explores contested memory is the character of Krishna Pandit, a university student who initially approaches the history of Kashmir from an academic and detached perspective. Early in the film, Krishna articulates a question that reflects the uncertainty of a generation that did not directly witness the events of the 1990s: "If the exodus really happened the way you say, why was it never discussed in our textbooks?" (Agnihotri 01:06:40–01:07:10). This line highlights a key theme of the film—the perceived absence of Kashmiri Pandit experiences from institutional narratives. The scene is filmed within a university classroom, using a balanced shot composition that places Krishna at the center of the frame while other students and faculty members occupy the surrounding space. This visual arrangement reflects the ideological tension of the moment, as different perspectives on history compete for legitimacy. The static framing and dialogue-driven structure of the scene emphasize intellectual confrontation rather than physical conflict, illustrating how debates over history can become sites of political struggle.

The film further develops this theme through confrontational exchanges between students and professors within the university environment. These scenes employ medium shots and shot–reverse-shot editing patterns that visually represent the argumentative nature of the dialogue. During one such exchange, a professor dismisses survivor accounts as exaggerated narratives shaped by political agendas. In response, a character counters this claim by stating: "History is not written only in books; sometimes it survives in the memories of those who lived through it" (Agnihotri 01:12:00–01:12:20). The dialogue reflects the film's broader attempt to privilege testimonial memory over academic interpretation. Cinematically, the scene is structured to emphasize the emotional intensity of the debate. The camera gradually moves closer to the speaker during the line, shifting from a medium shot to a tighter close-up that highlights facial expressions and emotional engagement. This subtle

camera movement reinforces the idea that personal memory carries a moral authority that challenges institutional narratives.

Another important moment occurs when survivors recount their experiences to Krishna, confronting his earlier scepticism. One elderly character addresses him directly, emphasizing the gap between lived experience and public recognition: “You can question history, but you cannot question the pain of those who survived it” (Agnihotri01:30:10–01:30:25). The emotional weight of this line is intensified through cinematic techniques that focus on performance and silence. The scene is filmed in a prolonged close-up to observe subtle shifts in the character’s expression as he speaks. The absence of background music during the dialogue creates a quiet atmosphere that draws attention to the spoken words. By eliminating dramatic sound cues, the film allows the testimony itself to carry the emotional impact of the scene.

These moments of confrontation illustrate how *The Kashmir Files* frames historical memory as a contested field shaped by political ideology, institutional authority, and personal experience. The film repeatedly juxtaposes scenes of academic discussion with scenes of survivor testimony, thereby highlighting the contrast between theoretical narratives and lived realities. Cinematically, the film reinforces this tension through the strategic use of editing. Several sequences employ cross-cutting techniques that alternate between classroom debates and recollections of past violence. This editing pattern visually links the abstract discussion of history with the concrete experiences of those who endured the events being debated.

Lighting also plays a symbolic role in these sequences. Scenes set in academic spaces are often brightly lit and visually orderly, reflecting the institutional structure of knowledge production. In contrast, scenes depicting survivor testimonies frequently employ softer lighting and more intimate framing and create a visual environment that emphasizes emotional vulnerability. This contrast between visual styles underscores the difference between detached academic discourse and deeply personal recollection.

Beyond its depiction of violence and contested historical narratives, *The Kashmir Files* also explores the emotional and psychological dimensions of displacement through themes of nostalgia, loss, and intergenerational memory. For communities that have experienced forced migration, the memory of the homeland

often becomes a central element of identity formation. In such contexts, nostalgia functions not merely as sentimental longing but as a complex emotional response to historical rupture. The film repeatedly returns to images of memory and remembrance in order to depict how the loss of homeland continues to shape the experiences of displaced Kashmiri Pandits decades after the initial exodus.

A key narrative strategy used in the film is the contrast between remembered Kashmir and the present reality of exile. Through conversations between survivors and younger characters, the narrative reconstructs fragments of everyday life that existed before the displacement occurred. In one such reflective moment, a character describes the emotional connection to homeland by stating, “You may leave your home, but the memories of that home never leave you” (Agnihotri01:15:30–01:15:50). The dialogue captures the central emotional premise of the film’s portrayal of exile. Cinematically, the moment is accompanied by slow-paced editing and subdued background music, creating a reflective atmosphere that encourages viewers to focus on the emotional weight of the words. The camera frames the character in a medium close-up with subtle facial expressions to convey the depth of personal loss associated with displacement. By focusing on the intimate emotional space of memory, the film emphasizes that nostalgia is not merely about remembering places but about remembering a way of life that has been disrupted.

Another significant aspect of nostalgia in the film is the repeated evocation of Kashmir as a lost homeland. Several scenes incorporate visual imagery of the valley—snow-covered landscapes, rivers, and traditional homes that evoke the beauty and cultural richness of the region. These images serve as visual reminders of the life that once existed before the violence and migration. In one emotionally resonant scene, a survivor reflects on this connection by saying: “Kashmir was never just a place for us; it was our identity” (Agnihotri 01:21:10–01:21:30). The scene is visually composed using wide landscape shots intercut with close-ups of the character speaking. This juxtaposition between expansive landscapes and intimate human expressions highlights the deep emotional bond between the displaced community and their homeland.

The film further explores nostalgia through the character interactions between older survivors and younger members of the diaspora. For many younger characters, Kashmir exists primarily as a narrative constructed through stories told by parents and

grandparents. This dynamic reflects a broader phenomenon within displaced communities, where historical trauma and memories of homeland are transmitted across generations. One character articulates this intergenerational connection when addressing a younger listener: “You didn’t see the Kashmir we knew, but its memories still belong to you.” (Agnihotri 01:28:10–01:28:30)

The emotional significance of this statement lies in its recognition that cultural memory extends beyond direct experience. Cinematically, the scene is framed using a two-shot composition that places both characters within the same frame. This visual arrangement symbolizes the transmission of memory from one generation to another. The slow pacing of the scene and the restrained performances emphasize the reflective tone of the conversation. The theme of nostalgia also intersects with the representation of exile spaces within the film. In contrast to the lush landscapes associated with memories of Kashmir, scenes depicting refugee settlements and urban exile are often characterized by muted colour palettes and crowded visual compositions. These settings visually reinforce the sense of dislocation experienced by displaced families. The contrast between past and present environments serves as a cinematic metaphor for the rupture created by forced migration.

Sound design also plays a crucial role in representing nostalgia. In several reflective scenes, the film incorporates traditional Kashmiri music within the soundtrack. The use of regional musical motifs functions as an auditory symbol of cultural identity. The music often accompanies moments when characters recall festivals, traditions, or family gatherings that once formed part of their everyday lives. Another notable cinematic technique used to represent nostalgia is the strategic use of silence. Following moments of emotional recollection, the film frequently pauses dialogue and allows silence to occupy the narrative space. These quiet moments function as visual and auditory pauses that encourage the viewer to reflect on the magnitude of loss experienced by the characters. Silence, in this context, becomes a language of memory—communicating emotions that cannot be fully articulated through dialogue alone.

The theme of nostalgia also contributes to the film’s broader exploration of identity. For displaced communities, memories of homeland often become central to the preservation of cultural traditions and collective belonging. In *The Kashmir Files*,

the recollection of Kashmir functions as a way of reaffirming community identity despite geographical displacement. Through stories, songs, and personal memories, the characters maintain a symbolic connection to the homeland that continues to shape their sense of self.

Within the film, the gradual realization of this emotional connection by younger characters marks an important turning point in the narrative. As Krishna becomes increasingly aware of the experiences of the older generation, he begins to recognize that the history of displacement is not merely a political issue but a deeply personal and cultural reality. This transformation reflects the broader process through which intergenerational memory shapes contemporary understandings of historical trauma. Ultimately, the representation of nostalgia in *The Kashmir Files* serves to humanize the experience of displacement by focusing on the emotional dimensions of loss and remembrance. While earlier sections of the film emphasize violence and political conflict, the scenes discussed here highlight the quieter yet equally powerful impact of exile on personal identity and cultural memory. By foregrounding memories of homeland, the film underscores the enduring connection between displaced communities and the places they were forced to leave behind.

Through its use of landscape imagery, reflective dialogue, and emotionally restrained performances, the film constructs nostalgia as a central narrative theme that bridges past and present. In doing so, it reveals how the memories of Kashmir continue to shape the lives and identities of Kashmiri Pandits long after the events that led to their displacement. This exploration of nostalgia and intergenerational memory ultimately reinforces the film's broader attempt to transform personal experiences of loss into a cinematic narrative of collective remembrance.

The final analytical dimension of *The Kashmir Files* lies in its positioning of cinema as a medium of testimony. While earlier sections of this chapter examined the representation of violence, contested historical narratives, and the emotional experience of nostalgia, this section focuses on the film's broader theoretical implications. In particular, it explores how the narrative constructs cinema as a vehicle through which personal memories of displacement are transformed into collective historical testimony. By foregrounding survivor narratives and dramatizing their recollections through visual

storytelling, the film attempts to translate lived experiences of trauma into a cinematic archive.

Within the broader field of film studies, testimonial cinema refers to films that seek to represent historical trauma by foregrounding the voices and experiences of individuals who have directly witnessed or survived the events being depicted. Such films often rely on narrative structures that emphasize recollection, confession, and emotional confrontation. In the case of *The Kashmir Files*, testimony functions as both a narrative strategy and a moral claim: the film presents itself as an attempt to bring previously marginalized voices into the domain of public memory. Rather than relying solely on conventional dramatic storytelling, the narrative repeatedly returns to moments where characters recount their experiences directly, thereby framing the film as an act of witnessing.

One of the most powerful moments illustrating this testimonial framework occurs during a public speech scene in which a survivor addresses an audience and declares: “This is not just a story from the past; it is a truth that many chose not to see” (Agnihotri 02:05:30–02:05:50). The line encapsulates the film’s central claim that the experiences of Kashmiri Pandits represent a suppressed or neglected chapter in public discourse. Cinematically, the scene is constructed using a series of close-up shots that focus on the speaker’s face, intercut with reaction shots of listeners in the audience. This editing pattern emphasizes the communicative nature of testimony, visually representing the transmission of memory from one individual to a collective audience. The gradual tightening of the camera frame throughout the speech intensifies the emotional impact of the monologue, drawing viewers into the moment of revelation.

The testimonial dimension of the film is further reinforced through the narrative transformation of Krishna Pandit. As discussed in earlier sections, Krishna initially approaches the history of Kashmir from a position of skepticism shaped by academic narratives. However, as he encounters the testimonies of survivors, his perspective begins to change. In one reflective moment, he acknowledges the significance of these memories by stating: “I thought history was something written in books, but now I realize it lives in the memories of people” (Agnihotri 02:10:10–02:10:30). This line reflects the film’s broader argument that personal testimony plays a crucial role in preserving historical truth. The scene is filmed using a static medium shot that allows

the audience to observe Krishna's transformation without dramatic visual distraction. The restrained cinematography emphasizes introspection rather than spectacle, reinforcing the idea that understanding historical trauma requires reflection and empathy.

Testimony in film is not communicated solely through dialogue; it is also constructed through visual and auditory techniques that shape the viewer's emotional engagement. By focusing on the faces of survivors as they recount their experiences, the film encourages viewers to perceive testimony as an intimate and personal act of storytelling.

Sound design also contributes significantly to the construction of testimonial space within the film. In several scenes where characters recount traumatic memories, background music is minimized or removed entirely. This absence of musical accompaniment creates an atmosphere of quiet concentration, directing the audience's attention to the spoken words. Silence in these moments functions as a cinematic strategy that amplifies the authenticity of testimony, suggesting that certain experiences demand attentive listening rather than dramatic embellishment.

Another important aspect of the film's testimonial framework lies in its use of visual contrast. Scenes depicting past violence are often presented through darker lighting and dynamic camera movement, while scenes involving testimony frequently employ stable camera positions and softer lighting. This stylistic contrast visually separates the experience of trauma from the act of remembering it. The idea of cinema as testimony also connects to the broader objectives of this dissertation, which examines displacement narratives within cinematic representation. Displacement often results in the fragmentation of historical memory, as communities scattered across different geographical locations struggle to preserve shared narratives of the past. In such contexts, film can serve as a powerful medium for reconstructing collective memory. By transforming personal recollections into visual narratives, cinema enables displaced communities to communicate their histories to audiences beyond their immediate cultural context.

In *The Kashmir Files*, this function is particularly evident in the film's emphasis on storytelling as an act of preservation. Several characters express the concern that

their experiences may be forgotten if they are not recorded or narrated. One character articulates this anxiety when he observes: “If we remain silent, our history will disappear with us” (Agnihotri 01:58:40–01:58:55). The statement highlights the urgency of testimony within the narrative. By presenting storytelling as a means of safeguarding historical memory, the film frames cinema itself as a tool of cultural preservation. The transformation of personal memory into cinematic narrative therefore becomes an act of resistance against forgetting.

Ultimately, the representation of testimony in *The Kashmir Files* illustrates the potential of cinema to function as a medium of historical narration and cultural remembrance. Through the integration of personal testimonies, emotional performances, and carefully constructed visual imagery, the film attempts to transform individual experiences of trauma into a shared narrative of displacement. While debates surrounding the film’s political implications continue to shape public discussion, its role in bringing the experiences of Kashmiri Pandits into cinematic discourse remains significant.

CONCLUSION

This chapter set out to examine *The Kashmir Files* as a cinematic text that engages with the representation, narrative construction, and visual representation of the Kashmiri Pandit exodus. The chapter explores how the film transforms historical experience into visual narrative and how cinema functions as a medium through which displaced communities are represented and culturally articulated. Rather than treating the film merely as a political text or a dramatic retelling of historical events, the analysis has approached it as a complex cultural artifact that attempts to represent the emotional and psychological consequences of displacement.

The introduction positioned the film within the broader context of cinematic representations of historical experience and argued that the narrative of displacement portrayed in the film reflects the struggle of marginalized histories to find representation in public discourse. By foregrounding personal testimonies and emotionally charged recollections, the film frames the experiences of Kashmiri Pandits not only as individual tragedies but also as collective memories that demand recognition. As one character poignantly observes in the film, “You may leave your

home, but the memories of that home never leave you" (Agnihotri 01:15:30). This sentiment encapsulates the emotional foundation upon which the narrative of displacement is constructed.

The first section of the chapter examined the representation of violence and its representation, emphasizing how cinematic techniques are used to visualize the experience of the post-exodus period. Through carefully constructed scenes of conflict and suffering, the film depicts the rupture caused by forced migration and the long-lasting psychological impact of that rupture on individuals and families. The analysis demonstrated that the film relies on close-up shots, dramatic lighting, and emotionally intense performances to convey the gravity of historical violence. These visual strategies serve to immerse viewers in the emotional reality of the characters, that transforms historical events into experiences that can be felt and understood within the cinematic space.

The second section explored the contested nature of historical narratives. The film repeatedly raises questions about how histories of violence are remembered, interpreted, and sometimes silenced within political and academic discourses. Through the narrative journey of Krishna Pandit, the film illustrates the tension between official interpretations of history and the lived experiences of survivors. As Krishna gradually confronts testimonies from those who experienced displacement first hand, he begins to recognize that historical truth cannot always be contained within institutional narratives. The film therefore positions personal memory as an alternative archive through which suppressed histories can be articulated.

The third section focused on nostalgia and intergenerational memory, and highlights how the loss of homeland continues to shape the identity of displaced communities. The film portrays Kashmir not merely as a geographical location but as a symbolic space that carries emotional and cultural meaning. Through conversations between older survivors and younger generations, the narrative illustrates how memories of homeland are transmitted across time. These exchanges emphasize the persistence of cultural identity even after physical displacement has occurred. The cinematic use of landscape imagery, reflective dialogue, and quiet moments of recollection reinforces the idea that memory remains an enduring link between the displaced community and the place they once called home.

The fourth section shifted the focus toward the theoretical and methodological implications of the film by examining its role as testimonial cinema. Within this framework, the narrative presents cinema as a platform through which survivors can voice their experiences and challenge historical silence. Testimonial scenes within the film transform personal recollections into acts of public witnessing, allowing the experiences of individuals to become part of a broader collective narrative. As one character emphasizes during a moment of reflection, “If we remain silent, our history will disappear with us” (Agnihotri 01:58:40). This statement underscores the urgency of storytelling within the context of displacement and highlights the importance of preserving memory through cultural representation.

Taken together, these four analytical sections demonstrate how the film constructs a multifaceted narrative of displacement that integrates trauma, memory, nostalgia, and testimony. Each thematic dimension contributes to the broader objective of the film: to transform personal experiences of loss into a shared cinematic narrative that seeks recognition and understanding. Through its use of dialogue, visual symbolism, and narrative structure, the film attempts to create a space where suppressed histories can be acknowledged and remembered.

At the same time, the film also illustrates the challenges inherent in representing historical trauma through cinema. The translation of lived experiences into visual narrative inevitably involves processes of interpretation, selection, and dramatization. As a result, cinematic representations of displacement often become sites of debate regarding authenticity, political interpretation, and ethical responsibility. While *The Kashmir Files* has generated considerable discussion in public and academic spheres, its significance lies in its attempt to foreground voices that perceive their experiences as marginalized within dominant historical narratives.

In relation to the broader framework of this dissertation, the analysis presented in this chapter reinforces the central argument that cinema plays a crucial role in documenting and interpreting silent histories. Films that engage with displacement narratives not only recount historical events but also shape the ways in which those events are remembered by future generations. By transforming memory into visual storytelling, cinema becomes a medium through which communities negotiate identity, trauma, and belonging. Ultimately, the examination of *The Kashmir Files* within this

chapter demonstrates how cinematic narratives can function as both cultural memory and historical testimony. The film's portrayal of violence, remembrance, and intergenerational dialogue reflects the complex realities faced by communities affected by displacement. Through its emphasis on storytelling and witnessing, the film contributes to a broader cinematic discourse that seeks to ensure that histories of suffering and survival are neither forgotten nor erased.

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

This dissertation, titled "Silenced Histories on Screen: A Cinematic Study of Displacement Narratives of Kashmiri Pandits," undertakes a sustained critical examination of how two landmark Indian films - Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Shikara* (2020) and Vivek Agnihotri's *The Kashmir Files* (2022) represent the violence, cultural displacement, and the sufferings of the Kashmiri Pandit community. The exodus of approximately 350,000 Kashmiri Pandits from the Kashmir Valley in the late 1980s and early 1990s driven by targeted killings, militant threats, and systemic state failure constitutes one of the most underrepresented injustices in postcolonial Indian history. This research situates both films within the field of film studies by examining how their formal cinematic strategies encompassing mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, sound design, colour, camera movement, and performance actively construct representational frameworks through which displacement is not merely narrated but viscerally experienced by the audience. By engaging with the theoretical frameworks of André Bazin, Sergei Eisenstein, Ed Sikov, and related scholars, the research argues that cinema functions as a counter-archive: a space where silenced memories are preserved, contested, and transmitted across generations.

The Chapter titled “Echoes of a Lost Home: Nostalgia, Loss, and the Cinematic World of *Shikara*,” offers a detailed textual and visual analysis of Vidhu Vinod Chopra's film as a work of restrained, elegiac cinema that situates the Kashmiri Pandit displacement within the emotional coordinates of personal memory, love, and cultural longing. Rather than foregrounding political conflict or spectacular violence, *Shikara* turns its gaze inward to the domestic, the relational, and the affective dimensions of exile.

The chapter begins by examining the film’s paratextual framing: its opening textual declarations position the narrative at the intersection of fiction and lived testimony and reminds the viewer that the refugees portrayed are not actors but real Kashmiri Pandits still living in exile. This framing establishes displacement as an unresolved historical and emotional condition even before the narrative proper unfolds. Through Shiv Kumar Dhar’s voice-over letters addressed to figures of institutional authority but never answered — the film introduces its central metaphor: writing as

both survival and protest, memory as both burden and sustenance.

A significant portion of the chapter is devoted to the film's treatment of Kashmiriyat -the syncretic cultural ethos of shared life between Hindu and Muslim communities in the Valley. Through careful analysis of the apple orchard sequences, wedding scenes, and the friendship between Shiv and Lateef, the chapter demonstrates how Chopra uses mise-en-scène, blocking, and warm colour palettes to construct a world of communal intimacy and cultural richness that is then gradually eroded by political violence. The objects such as bricks, stones, apple trees, utensils function as cinematic repositories of identity and belonging.

The chapter then traces how fear infiltrates everyday life in the film, not through sudden spectacle but through incremental sonic and spatial disruption: the chant "Pindi, Pindi, Rawalpindi" at bus stops, the enforcement of the hijab, the dismissive thirty-second news coverage of civilian killings, the appearance of hit lists. These sequences are analyzed through the lens of sound design, handheld camerawork, and reaction shots to demonstrate how Chopra renders terror as an embodied, gendered, and institutionally neglected experience.

The chapter further examines the film's distinctive treatment of nostalgia not as sentimental excess but as a mode of survival and ethical witnessing. In the refugee camps of Jammu, nostalgia surfaces through repetition: the same letter written again and again, the same dishes prepared in shrinking spaces, the same cultural phrases spoken in altered environments. Stillness and temporal suspension become the dominant cinematic conditions of exile, as Chopra uses static framing, minimal editing, and near-absent non-diegetic music to immerse the viewer in the affective reality of displacement. The chapter concludes by arguing that *Shikara* constructs displacement as a continuing condition rather than a completed historical event, a cinematic elegy that mourns not only what was lost but what continues to be withheld.

The next chapter titled "Voices of Exile: A Cinematic Expression of Violence and Displacement in *The Kashmir Files*," examines Vivek Agnihotri's film as a markedly different intervention in the representation of the Kashmiri Pandit experience. Where *Shikara* offers restraint and interiority, *The Kashmir Files* employs intensity, confrontation, and a quasi-documentary realism to construct what it frames as a

suppressed historical truth demanding public recognition.

The chapter opens by situating the film within the tradition of testimonial cinema — a mode in which personal survivor accounts are transformed into collective historical testimony through visual and narrative form. Through the character of Krishna Pandit, a university student who moves from academic skepticism to emotional awakening upon encountering survivor testimonies, the film dramatizes the generational transmission of historical trauma. The narrative structure — oscillating between the present and the 1990s exodus enacts the very logic of postmemory: history experienced not through direct witness but through the emotional inheritance of those who came before.

The chapter's analysis of violence focuses on how *The Kashmir Files* deploys a range of cinematic strategies to render the atmosphere of fear, intimidation, and brutality that preceded and accompanied displacement. Handheld camerawork produces an immersive, documentary-like instability during sequences of militant intimidation. Low-key lighting and tight framing compress spatial fields, visually enacting the entrapment of civilian subjects. Sound design particularly the disembodied chant "Convert, Die, or Leave" reverberating through loudspeakers across darkened streets constructs terror as omnipresent and invisible, beyond the visual frame. The chapter draws on Eisenstein's montage theory to demonstrate how rapid cross-cutting between opposing perspectives generates a visual tension that embeds power relations within the very structure of cinematic space.

The analysis of contested historical memory engages with the film's classroom and academic debate sequences, where the narrative juxtaposes institutional narratives with lived survivor experience. Through shot-reverse-shot editing, bright versus soft lighting contrasts, and camera movements that gradually close in on the speaking face, the film privileges testimonial memory as a form of moral authority that exceeds the epistemological frameworks of academic discourse. The film repeatedly asks: if this genocide happened, why were we never told?

The chapter also examines nostalgia and intergenerational memory within the film — landscapes of remembered Kashmir intercut with the muted colour palettes of refugee settlements, traditional Kashmiri music functioning as an auditory symbol of

cultural identity, and the quiet anguish of older survivors transmitting memories of a homeland to a generation that never knew it. Silence functions throughout the film as a language of trauma: strategic, strategic, and deeply expressive.Finally, the chapter positions the film as testimonial cinema - a medium through which personal memories of violence are transformed into a shared cinematic archive. Despite the political controversies the film has generated, the analysis insists on engaging with it as a cultural text that constructs a complex representational framework, wherein storytelling itself becomes an act of resistance against forgetting.

COMPARISON: TWO SCREENS, ONE WOUND

Placed in dialogue, *Shikara* and *The Kashmir Files* offer two profoundly distinct yet complementary cinematic responses to the same historical trauma. Their most fundamental point of convergence is their shared insistence that the displacement of Kashmiri Pandits constitutes an unresolved historical injustice that demands cultural representation and public acknowledgment. Both films position cinema as a counter-archive — a site where suppressed histories are made visible and where communities denied presence in mainstream discourse are given a cinematic voice. Both also locate their emotional centers in the Kashmiri Pandit family: the home, the ritual, the bond between spouses, and the intergenerational transmission of memory serve as the human core of each narrative.

Yet their divergences are as significant as their convergences. *Shikara* adopts an elegiac register rooted in personal memory, romantic continuity, and emotional restraint. Its cinematic language is Bazinian in spirit: long takes, deep focus, soft lighting, static framing, and an unhurried editing rhythm that preserves the spatial integrity and emotional texture of scenes. Chopra's camera observes rather than assaults; it witnesses rather than indicts. The film's political critique is embedded within aesthetic restraint — silence speaks louder than slogans, absence more forcefully than spectacle. In this, *Shikara* constructs displacement as a profoundly interior condition: lived in the body, carried in the habits of daily life, preserved through nostalgia and letter-writing.

The Kashmir Files, by contrast, operates in an Eisensteinian mode of confrontation and collision. Its editing is rapid and dialectical; its camera movement

restless and handheld; its sound design relentless and immersive. Where *Shikara* invites quiet reflection, *The Kashmir Files* provokes active emotional response. Where *Shikara* mourns through restraint, *The Kashmir Files* demands through intensity. The film's visual language is explicitly testimonial — close-up after close-up of grieving, testifying faces, intercut with graphic sequences of intimidation and violence that refuse to let the audience maintain comfortable distance. If *Shikara* represents the private face of displacement, *The Kashmir Files* represents its public and political face.

These aesthetic differences produce distinct viewing experiences and distinct ideological effects. *Shikara's* restraint has been critiqued for softening the political realities of the exodus for transforming genocide into an elegy of love and loss. *The Kashmir Files*, conversely, has been accused of ideological excess, of deploying cinematic intensity in the service of a politically charged and potentially divisive narrative. Yet both critiques illuminate the fundamental tension inherent in any cinematic representation of historical trauma: the ethical responsibility to bear witness faithfully, and the aesthetic choices that inevitably shape and may distort the truth being witnessed.

What unites both films, finally, is their shared recognition that memory is the terrain on which displaced communities rebuild identity. Shiv's letters and Krishna's awakening are both acts of cultural self-assertion, insisting that the Kashmiri Pandit experience cannot and must not be erased from the national memory. Together, the two films demonstrate that cinema is capable of holding multiple registers of testimony simultaneously: the intimate and the collective, the elegiac and the confrontational, the personal and the political.

FURTHER DIRECTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

This study, while offering a comprehensive cinematic analysis of *Shikara* and The *Kashmir Files*, necessarily works within limits that open productive directions for future scholarly engagement. Several avenues merit sustained attention in the expanding field of displacement cinema and South Asian film studies. First, future research could extend this comparative framework to encompass a broader corpus of films and documentaries addressing the Kashmir conflict from multiple perspectives. The question of audience reception remains largely unexplored within the scope of this

dissertation. Quantitative and qualitative reception studies surveying how diverse audiences in India and across the diaspora interpret these films, what emotional and ideological responses they generate, and how they contribute to or complicate public discourse on the Kashmiri Pandit experience — would significantly deepen our understanding of cinema's role in shaping collective memory.

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