

EXPLORING TRAUMATIC MEMORIES OF THE KASHMIRI PANDITS DURING THEIR GENOCIDE THROUGH SELECTED DOCUMENTARIES

Aditi Mishra ^{*1}, Dr. Sthitaprajna ²

¹*Ph.D. Scholar Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (Deemed to be University), Bhubaneswar, Odisha Email Id: aditimishra19nov@gmail.com, Orcid Id: - 0009-0001-8952-4710

² Associate Professor Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Siksha 'O' Anusandhan (Deemed to be University), Bhubaneswar, Odisha Email Id: sthitaprajna@soa.ac.in

ABSTRACT

The 5,000-year-old Kashmiri Pandits are a community of Brahmin Hindus who were among the first people to live in the northern Indian Kashmir Valley. The 1990 Genocide of Kashmiri Pandits was the result of violent armed organisations that had been active in the region throughout the 1990s and demonstrated a connection between pro-Islamist and anti-Hindu violence. Scholars have started writing about literature and movies based on the Genocide of Kashmiri Pandits, but there are many classic documentaries based on the same that need to be explored. Forgetting the Genocide of Kashmiri Pandits is a great betrayal of them. While there are a lot of movies on terrorism in Kashmir, not many people are aware of the genocide of Kashmiri Pandits. This topic appears to be highly controversial, which is why individuals are reluctant to discuss it. Therefore, this study will explore the traumatic memories faced by the Kashmiri Pandits during their Genocide through selected documentaries like *Uprooted: Stories of Kashmiri Pandits in Exile*, *The Diary of a Kashmiri Pandit*, *And the world remained silent*, *Ghar ka Pata*, *23 Winters*. Raising awareness of the suffering during the genocide of the Kashmiri Pandits among Indians and the rest of the world is another key objective of this study.

KEYWORDS: Memory, Kashmir, Genocide, Kashmiri Pandits, Trauma, Exile

INTRODUCTION

Kashmiri Pandits are one of the oldest cultural lineages that have existed continuously in the Himalayan region, which has been well known in regard to their intellectual practices, rituals, and their role in governance and scholarship. They are characterised by a unique school of thought through Shaivism and Sanskrit studies and syncretic cultural mixing in the Kashmir Valley (1). Generation after generation of Pandits followed a well-cultured knowledge delivery model comprising literature, ritual proficiency, and such governmental service, which constituted a part of the socio-cultural life of the valley. Even their engagement with the memory, elements of rituals, and belongingness has been very strong, as this aspect has enabled the community to maintain cultural coherence even during the time of chaos (2). The latest academic publications indicate that the collective memory of the community represents a complex interaction between the experience of displacement and the trauma passed down, especially the history of displacement, which has gradually become significant in their comprehension of themselves (3). Diasporic studies also indicate that recollection of homeland remained one of the key elements of emotional and cultural identification of the displaced Pandits that bolstered and cemented communal affiliations despite geographical barriers (4). Research on minority groups highlights the fact that past experiences of marginality tend to instil a sense of extreme attachment to the continuity of culture that serves as a crucial source of maintaining identity in new surroundings (5). The literary and philosophical discourses about Kashmir give a lot of weight to memory as a form of resistance and also as an expression of longing, loss and belonging (6). The culture niche of the Pandits, represented by the sacred writings, oral tradition and intergenerational narratives, is therefore critical to grasp their role in the South Asian history and overall resilience forces in conflict-prone areas.

The 1990 events produced a dramatic break in the centuries-old history of the Kashmiri people, a population that had been one of the most prominent episodes of directed displacement in modern India (7). The increasing rebellion of the late eighties and political instability and radicalisation of ideology presented a condition where minority groups experienced increasing threats (8). Critical scholarship suggests that the upsurge in armed militancy and institutional protections was broken, which promoted a context in which Pandit families were becoming less secure (9). The merging of extremist ideologies and political violence led to mass fear and blackmail of people and specific attacks, leading to thousands of people fleeing their areas within a few weeks (10). As it has been discussed by scholars who have studied the crisis, it was a larger trend of discriminatory structures that predisposed the community to systematic intimidation. The consequent mass movement not only altered the demographic make-up of the region but also caused a massive psychological and cultural crisis among survivors (11). The literature about war zones indicates that years of experiencing violence have devastating impacts on the collective memory in that they result in fragmentation of memory, emotional discontinuity, and intergenerational trauma. This priming was further added by altering political discourses in Kashmir, which commonly

challenged or obscured the experiences of the Pandits (12). Anthropological approaches note that the significance of these contentious histories is that they are significant means by which communities seek to determine identity, belonging and justice in the aftermath of conflict situations. Exodus is not a strictly political phenomenon but also a cultural and psychic discontinuity that still tends to influence the story of communities (13). According to scholars undertaking studies on marginalised groups, it is a common fact that displacement contributes to socio-economic inequalities and preconditions the establishment of permanent obstacles towards self-integration of younger generations within new surroundings (14). This trend is echoed in the Pandit experience, in which material displacement from homeland is compounded with mental displacement as people fight to hold on to their culture in the face of displacement.

The suffering and suffering of Kashmiri Pandits has been given selective coverage by the mainstream media despite the magnitude of the genocide in 1990. Popular cinema has been inclined toward anticipating geopolitical drama or conflict in general, leaving a narrative of minority trauma underrepresented (15). These representations form a biased cultural history that focuses more on spectacle and less on experience. The works of literature and culture have shown that the voices of minorities are usually suppressed and overwhelmed by the narratives of dominant groups, and that the history of minorities may hardly find a reflection in the popular discourse (16). The visual cultures of conflict contend that cultural production may either shed more light on the experiences of marginalisation or, conversely, support political silence on an eventual basis, depending upon the terms in which they conceptualise the memory and violence (17). Documentaries, instead, provide a different platform, whereby the testimonies of survivors, past footage and eyewitness accounts can be presented without the ideologies that are oftentimes involved in commercial documentaries (18). They give the viewer a first-hand experience of a trauma by providing raw voices to give a window into the emotionality and the historical intricacy of displacement. Critiques of gendered representation in conflict have also indicated that documentary narratives tend to document the daily weaknesses and voices unheard to such an extent that the popular cinema seldom portrays them (19). The regional artistic practice is able to demonstrate that the labour of memory, activism and visual testimony tend to bind forcefully in the situations characterised by a long-term conflict. The documentaries that have sprung up as a result of or concerning conflict zones have hence become potent instruments of truth-telling in that they bring meaning to the stories that the institutional accounts have so often pushed to the periphery (20). Their worth especially comes into play when displaced groups have difficulties in demanding historical acknowledgement or fighting against the selective silence of historical memory. The concept that these visual stories contribute to global knowledge by interfering with the prevailing modes of power that decide the visibility of whose suffering. Documentaries both conserve endangered pasts but at the same time, serve as interferences that reinstate agency in the survivors and solidify the collective memory. To some communities, such as the Kashmiri Pandits, whose trauma has been in turn denied or politically disputed, the documentary is a vital medium in which repressed discourses could be voiced and experiences located within greater discussions of human rights, memory, and justice.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

It is qualitative research where an interpretative approach was adopted in the methodology in the exploration and examination of the traumatic memories of the Kashmiri Pandits in the form of documentaries. The non-experimental, descriptive methodology was geared towards the revelation of the details that are related to lived experiences and narrative representations. It went more into subjective meanings, survivor interviews, and thematic trends instead of numerical information. Through this, the study would be able to explore the emotional, historical, and cultural aspects of trauma expressed through visual media. The design was also such that it placed every documentary within its own socio-political context so as to understand displacement and collective memory better.

Selection Criteria of Documentaries

This selection was made based on preset criteria to make sure that it is relevant and deep into analysis. Only the films that addressed the 1990 Kashmiri Pandit genocide or displacement, memory, or long-term trauma directly were included. They were all films created by reputable filmmakers who were able to reach out to the communities of survivors and original testimonies. The priority was also on the works offering details on the first-hand accounts of the exile or those addressing the socio-political background of the genocide. The selection was based on narrative clarity, representations regarding ethics and the presence of verifiable sources. This served as an assurance that all the chosen documentaries were pertinent and helped in the realisation of the history and the emotive experiences of the community.

Analytical Framework

The analysis was guided by established ideas of trauma studies and memory studies. The framework indicated the manner in which traumatic events were told, recalled and passed through generations. Both of the documentaries were observed regarding graphics and verbal indicators in the manner in which survivors talked about pain, loss and displacement. It was also this structure that assisted the study in analysing silences, emotional disruptions, and disjointed narrations as the psychological imprint of trauma. The interpretation was corroborated through memory studies in terms of collective memory, continuity in culture and re-creation of identity. Combined, the theoretical lenses enabled an organised exploration of the way the documentaries turned the personal suffering into the collective historical consciousness.

Data Collection and Interpretation

The data collection occurred via repeated watching of the chosen documentaries, which were supplemented by an intensive recording of the narrative themes, accounts of the survivors, and visual symbolism. Observational cues and transcribed

dialogues were employed to determine patterns that recurred concerning trauma, exile and memory. Thematic coding was used to interpret them and put similar narrative components into larger analysis categories. Some of the contextual factors that were analysed were historical references, emotional expressions, and cultural markers. This interpretive strategy enabled a micro-level comprehension of the manner in which each of these documentaries conveyed the experienced reality of genocide and how collective memory was created by the Kashmiri Pandit community.

RESULTS

Dominant Thematic Patterns across the Documentaries

Thematic analysis of all five documentaries showed that there was a high rate of representation of the fundamental Kashmiri Pandit survivor experiences. Fear was introduced in all the films and was aimed at violence as an immediate cause of displacement, which is also justified by its frequency score of 100%. Displacement of homeland also became a universal phenomenon that gained images through the depiction of deserted houses and ruined temples, as illustrated in Table 1. Institutional silence was observed in four films, whereas social breakdown was observed in three films depicting broken relations in neighbourhoods. Memory preservation was evoked consistently across all films, confirming that reclaiming erased histories remained a core concern expressed through testimonies, family photographs, and archived material.

Table 1: Frequency of Major Themes Across Selected Documentaries

Theme	Frequency (No. of Documentaries)	Percentage (%)
Fear and Targeted Violence	5	100%
Loss of Homeland	5	100%
Institutional Silence	4	80%
Social Breakdown	3	60%
Memory Preservation	5	100%

Trauma Patterns Documented in Survivor Accounts

The documentaries represented trauma as a layered and long-lasting process of impact on survivors, well beyond the genocide. Psychological trauma was present in two films, wherein individuals faced emotional instability and intrusive memories. Cultural trauma was evident in scenes with abandoned temples and disrupted rituals, as shown in Table 2. Social trauma emerged in two documentaries in the fragmentation of community life in exile. Economic trauma appeared in narratives of poor living conditions among refugees and precarious employment. At 100%, intergenerational trauma was the most common category, to be found in all films, where unresolved fear, fragmented identity, and partial memories were passed down to younger generations through the experiences of their displaced families.

Table 2: Distribution of Trauma Categories in the Documentaries

Trauma Category	Frequency (No. of Documentaries)	Percentage (%)
Psychological Trauma	2	40%
Cultural Trauma	2	40%
Social Trauma	2	40%
Economic Trauma	2	40%
Intergenerational Trauma	5	100%

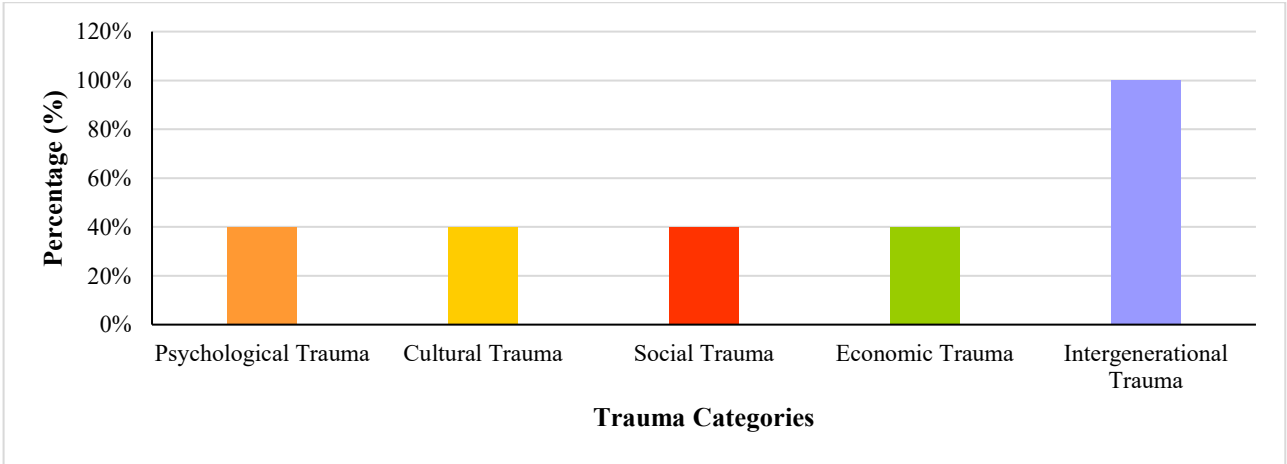


Figure 1: Distribution of Trauma Categories Identified in the Documentaries

The distribution of trauma categories depicted across the five selected documentaries on the Kashmiri Pandit genocide is shown in Figure 1. The visual comparison showed that psychological, cultural, social, and economic trauma each appeared in 40% of the films, indicating that these forms of suffering were represented with similar emphasis. Intergenerational trauma, however, appeared in all five documentaries, reaching 100%, which suggested that the effects of displacement

extended beyond the original survivors to younger family members. The figure illustrated how trauma manifested in multiple dimensions and highlighted the patterns through which the documentaries conveyed enduring emotional and cultural disruption.

Identity Disruption Due to Forced Exile

These documentaries beamed across cultural, linguistic, spatial, social, and emotional dimensions of how exile reshaped Kashmiri Pandit identity. Cultural identity loss was evident when displaced families fought hard to keep traditional practices, recorded in two films. Linguistic decline was seen where successive generations took to the languages of their new surroundings, as shown in Table 3. Spatial identity loss, common to all documentaries, was thus the most striking, picturing a snapped connection with the homes of their ancestors. The identity crisis in society happened in the environments where the community networks collapsed during migration. Concerning emotional identity loss, it was also at 100%, encompassing unresolved grief, nostalgia, and longing, which still define the perceptions of the survivors of themselves and their country.

Table 3: Indicators of Identity Loss Identified in the Documentaries

Identity Dimension	Frequency (No. of Documentaries)	Percentage (%)
Cultural Identity Loss	2	40%
Linguistic Decline	2	40%
Spatial Identity Loss	5	100%
Social Identity Rupture	2	40%
Emotional Identity Rupture	5	100%

DISCUSSION

The results of this study have shown that the chosen documentaries presented a long-lasting and multimodal insight into the traumatic memories of Kashmiri Pandits that have been informed by genocide, forced displacement, and intergenerational trauma on the lived and inherited experiences of the community. The prevailing themes in Table 1 revealed that the themes of fear, targeted violence and loss of homeland were present in all five documentaries, thus revealing that the three factors were the basis of emotion and the narrative core of the survivor testimony. The sense of abandonment that was passed through the four films was an institutional silence that was portrayed by the displaced families. This is consistent with claims that political warfare usually results in fractured or partial truth accounts, which deprive stakeholder groups of narrating their lives without any institutional recognition. The further development and breadth of these experiences were further substantiated by the categories of traumas identified in Table 2 and represented in Figure 1. Although the frequency of the occurrence of psychological, cultural, social, and economic trauma was equal (40%), intergenerational trauma was present in the entirety of the documentaries, which made it the most widespread. The discovery aligns with the literature on second-generation migrant identity, which suggests that inherited displacement experience can tend to influence the development of emotion and the transmission of culture in many significant ways. The same dynamic can be traced in the documentaries in which the younger Kashmiri Pandits are taught about their history by stories, photos and symbolic spaces, which gives the impression that memory transmission is a vital process in maintaining identity in the face of displacement. Another finding was that identity was reformulated via exile, as explained in Table 3. The loss of spatial identity was also present in all documentaries, which means that the cutting off of the physical connection with ancestral land was the most disturbing element of displacement. Emotional identity rupture, which also occurred in all 100 films, implied that the community still refers to its identity through the notion of nostalgia, grief, and longing. Such results can be explained by the research on autobiographical memory that holds that displacement tends to result in emotional recollection where identity is not distinguishable from the desire to go back to a lost homeland (21). It also highlighted that the marginalised voices tend to turn to narrative reconstruction to make agency when the formal structures cannot render their lived realities (22). This is the same role played by the documentaries analysed in this article, as they reclaimed silenced histories and expressed emotional truths that tend to be absent in mainstream political rhetoric. The reflection on work on Kashmir also reveals the importance of documentary storytelling in disputed political scenes by making a comparative reflection. The historical and political histories of Kashmir have often been shaped by selective memory and institutional framing (23). The five documentaries presented in this study opposing such discriminatory portrayals were focusing on the voices of survivors and foregrounding daily suffering in such a way that they provided alternative archives of memory based on the lived experience and not state narratives (24). The testimonies, archival footage and symbolic imagery used in the documentaries helped create a visual record that was supplementary and opposed official versions of what happened, showing how documentary cinema can be used as a sort of grassroots truth-telling. The assumptions stemming from this work are not only limits to documenting trauma, but also demonstrate the possibilities behind documentary films as ethical memory-work, cultural preservation and historical intervention. These documentaries not only help in raising awareness in the populace but also assist in the long-term aspects of the people of the society to maintain the cultural identity, take a stand in history and be vindicated in justice by capturing the subjective accounts of violence, displacement and loss (25). They also act as a pedagogical tool to scholars, policymakers and educators who want to learn about the genocide, displacement, trauma and minority rights in South Asia. This study was limited in a number of ways in spite of its strengths. The five documentaries were a small sample that did not provide a wide enough scope of representation. Free access to films was a crucial factor in the analysis, and it might not cover the less popular regional or independent films that might cover similar experiences. The research was based on the interpretation analysis, instead of direct interviews, which implies that the opinions of survivors could be recovered only

through mediated accounts. It can lead to a biased portrayal of the experience of the larger community. Future studies would widen the data to cover more documentaries, oral histories, and interviews with survivors to develop a more holistic picture of the long-term impacts of the genocide. Tentative comparisons with other community groups that have undergone displacement, like the survivors of Partition or internally displaced tribal groups, may help shed light on larger indicators of trauma and memory transmission. It can also be further developed through investigation into the role digital media, virtual archives, or new forms of narration have to play in the preservation of the endangered cultural identities.

CONCLUSION

The study examined the traumatic recollections of the Kashmiri Pandits in the 1990 genocide in the form of 5 chosen documentaries, and provided a suppositional insight into the persistence of the community identity in terms of displacement, violence, and cultural discontinuity across generations. The results proved that the themes of fear, targeted killings, and the loss of homeland were universal, which supported the fact that the genocide had a lasting psychological and emotional impact on the survivors. The trauma was manifested in various dimensions that are psychological, cultural, social, economic, and intergenerational, where the latter proved to be the most enduring of all dimensions. This spoke of how the younger generations still acquired anxiety, fragmented identity and partial memories of a land that they had never lived in personally. The analysis also revealed that the exile greatly transformed the identity of Kashmiri Pandits. Spatial loss proved to be the most prevailing type of identity disruption, whereas emotional rupture revealed the intensity of unresolved sorrow and nostalgia. The research asserted the importance of documentaries as cultural memory, ethical memory-work, and symbolic voices of the minorities. These films helped to bring a more subtle insight into the general knowledge of the genocide and served to provide a reminder of how current trauma literature could be used to analyse the experience of forced migration and historical injustice.

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