

Paradise Lost?

Memorializing Kashmiri Pandit Loss in *Ghar ka Pata*

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ABSTRACT This article examines the memorial aesthetics of loss in Madhulika Jalali's documentary film *Ghar ka Pata* (*Home Address*, 2021). The article examines the documentary as a memory project made by a Kashmiri Pandit filmmaker of the "1.5 generation"—a woman who left Kashmir with her family at the age of six in the wave of Kashmiri Pandit migrations that followed the beginning of armed rebellion in Kashmir. The article examines the film's memorial aesthetics and politics by attending to the archival features of the film, and shows how the film, in a conventional diasporic mode, reconstructs idealized memories of Kashmir as a "lost paradise," animating a fading sense of home for the filmmaker and future generations of her family (and, by extension, for future generations of Kashmiri Pandits). But while *Ghar ka Pata* mobilizes the family's visual archive to document familial loss with great emotional and pedagogical impact, its fixation on vertical genealogical descent at the level of both blood and memory leads it to enshrine a bordered and vulnerable Kashmiri Pandit family, obscuring the violence of the family itself, ruling out a horizontal examination of Kashmiri Pandits' historical relationship to Kashmiri society at large. This in turn curtails other modes of affiliation outside the family that could be much more generative for a future of coexistence in Kashmir.

KEYWORDS Kashmiri Pandits, memory culture, family photography

Madhulika Jalali's 2021 documentary film *Ghar ka Pata* (officially translated as *Home Address* but also translatable as "Knowing Home") begins with footage from a video taken by the filmmaker's Kashmiri Pandit family as they return to Kashmir on holiday in 2014.¹ In the footage of that trip, taken twenty-four years after Jalali's family's departure from Kashmir, Jalali points the camera at various family members, asking them to speak, to say something about coming to Kashmir. In response, her father speaks, in Kashmiri, not to Jalali herself but to the driver of the car in which the travelers rode, presumably a Kashmiri Muslim. A raw confession from the father: "When I'm here, I feel my heart has turned upside down." The driver, perhaps picking up on a subtle complaint in the utterance, replies, also in

Kashmiri: “You have experienced one part of it. We have been drowned by the sea. You had a place to restart your life from.” Despite the clear differences implicit in the exchange, Jalali ruminates, in the first voice-over segment of the film: “This was the first time I had heard my dad speak to a stranger so freely about his feelings. How did they open up so easily to each other?”

This opening sequence immediately lays out several of the documentary’s main preoccupations, threaded throughout the film: the imperative for diasporic Kashmiri Pandits like Jalali to recover and preserve a fading memory of Kashmir as home; the particular capacity of photography and film to archive and transmit a personal history of loss; and Jalali’s interest in the question of how Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims might mutually acknowledge each other’s pain and loss (“How did they open up so easily to each other?”)—ostensibly a gesture that reaches across the entrenched Pandit-Muslim divide and perhaps holds the promise of future coexistence on land beloved by both. Beyond this opening moment, the film also represents Jalali’s own effort to register and enshrine in memory Kashmiri Pandit belonging and loss: the loss of a house, of land, of an environment, of weather, of intimacies with Kashmiri Muslims who were once neighbors, and of a way of life that vanished along with the mass departure of Pandits from the Kashmir Valley in the 1990s.²

Appearing on a charged representational landscape, *Ghar ka Pata* seems to diverge sharply from some strains of the now-proliferating body of cultural productions that take up the experience of Kashmiri Pandits who fled their homes in the midst of an armed uprising against the Indian state that was popularly supported by the Muslim majority in the Kashmir Valley.³ The documentary was released only a few months prior to *The Kashmir Files* (dir. Vivek Agnihori, 2022), the Bollywood film that purported to tell the “true story” of Kashmiri Pandit displacement from Kashmir at the height of the militancy. That film, openly patronized by the right-wing government of Narendra Modi, had Hindu audiences chanting for the murder of Muslims in movie theaters, in the name of avenging the plight of Kashmiri Pandits.⁴ In contrast, Jalali’s film strikes a very different note—and not only by virtue of its genre difference as a documentary rather than a blockbuster Bollywood production. The film seems to offer a more searching examination of the losses suffered by Kashmiri Pandits after their displacement from Kashmir. In the current climate of rising authoritarianism in India, many would celebrate Jalali’s film as one that mourns Pandit losses without relying on unidimensional caricatures of Kashmiri Muslims such as those found in *The Kashmir Files*. At the same time, it is also worth asking: What are the terms on which Pandit losses are registered in cultural productions like Jalali’s, which speak in the name of mutual understanding? What historical frames organize the telling of Kashmiri Pandit losses as a loss of paradise?

As the film moves forward from the open exchange of feelings between Jalali's father and the driver, Jalali's camera places us in Kashmir, this time through the genre of the tourist photograph. We are shown a series of snapshots of the family on this particular trip, with Jalali both behind and in front of the camera, as she introduces herself to the viewer between the amplified sounds of a clicking camera: "That's me," we hear her say, reflecting back on her own overexcitement as she poses at the ruins of the Martand temple, or seated under a tree in an open field. Soon she explains: "Actually, this wasn't an ordinary family holiday. Twenty-four years. That's how long it took us to go back to Kashmir." From here, the photographs switch to black and white, going back in time as Jalali now presents us with old family photographs from the past: of her parents Pran and Nancy Jalali in their youth; her sisters Urvashi and Neetu as children; herself at age two; and, once again, her parents with a child, possibly her, in what appears to be an outdoor garden space.

The move from of the full-color tourist photograph to the sepia-toned photographs visually relays returning Kashmiri Pandits' familiar complaint that they have become "tourists in their own land," removed from their roots and now able only to return as outsiders. Underscored by an elegiac soundtrack, the photographs are presented with contextualizing text that for most Indian and Kashmiri viewers is by now all too familiar: "In 1989, a violent insurgency erupted in Kashmir, completely paralyzing it. Many of the minority Hindu community or 'KPs' were killed or forced to flee due to religious persecution. More than 400,000 KPs were displaced and continue to live in exile. *We were one of them [sic]*" (emphasis added). We are given, then, a commemoration of Pandit loss that is built on a particular understanding of Kashmiri history, one that posits the Kashmiri struggle for self-determination as an "insurgency" against the Indian state, to which Kashmiri Muslim loyalties are properly owed; and which smoothly amalgamates into a shared collective memory the experiences of the Jalali family unit ("we" as "one" of "them") with the community of four-hundred-thousand displaced Kashmiri Pandits.⁵ Further, this understanding of history sees the displacement and suffering of Pandits as the result of "religious persecution" rather than a range of factors including political differences rooted in a historically hierarchical social order wherein Kashmiri Pandits came to be tightly integrated with structures of state power.⁶

Photography and Family Life

If *Ghar ka Pata* deviates in some ways from mainstream Bollywood productions like *The Kashmir Files* or Ashok Pandit's 2004 film *Sheen (Snow)*, it also marks a significant shift from the memorial efforts of an earlier generation of displaced Kashmiri Pandit writers and filmmakers like Siddharth Gigoo, Rahul Pandita, and documentary filmmaker Ajay Raina, who lived through their family's displacement as young men. Jalali instead approaches these events as a Kashmiri Pandit filmmaker of the

“1.5 generation”—as a woman who had left Kashmir with her family at the age of six. While her predecessors frequently used mechanisms like historical timelines and snippets from the news archives to establish the historical causes for Kashmiri Pandit displacement, Jalali largely takes this mainstream Kashmiri Pandit history of the 1990s for granted. In this historical narrative, Kashmiri Pandits were driven out of Kashmir as a result of ethnic persecution of Kashmiri Hindus by Kashmiri Muslims who supported armed militancy against Indian rule in favor of self-determination. This, as I have cowritten elsewhere, is a narrative “that has displaced every other analysis of these tragic departures, offering up Kashmiri Pandits as singular and exclusive victims in the violent modern history of Kashmir.”⁷⁷ Taking this history as a starting point, Jalali moves past the historiographic burden shouldered by her male compatriots of an earlier generation and turns to focus primarily on the sensibility and texture of loss, as she reconstructs and documents *felt* life in Kashmir from the standpoint of Kashmiri Pandit émigrés, particularly the women in her family.

To do this, Jalali turns to an archive of family photographs and videos, lovingly compiling these materials and tapping into the unique capacity of photography as a mnemonic medium that can bring the past into the present. The film’s camera broods over photographs of her parents, siblings, and Jalali herself, all taken prior to their departure from Kashmir. Blurred, damaged, and sometimes drawn over by the hand of a child, these photographs from the Jalali family’s archive play a key role in reconstructing and mourning the family’s lost past in Kashmir. “*We were there,*” the photographs seem to say, “*and now we are not.*” Wedding photographs, in particular, figure prominently in the family’s photographic archive, reminding us of photography’s role in cohering rather than merely representing the heteronormative family. As the family’s “primary means of self-representation,” Marianne Hirsch writes, the family photograph “both chronicles family rituals and constitutes a prime objective of those rituals.”⁷⁸ Hirsch notes that, notwithstanding its constructedness, the emotional power of photography must be taken seriously, particularly given its authenticating function. Jalali’s photographic images, too, channel the affective power of sepia-toned family photographs to authenticate and assert Pandit belonging in Kashmir. Looking out of these photographs are subjects who could not have known what was to come, invested with a retrospective innocence that heightens the tragic fact of their displacement.

In this way, *Ghar ka Pata* participates in the work of what Hirsch has termed “postmemory,” a form of intergenerational transmission of memory that is marked not by direct recollection (though that is also mediated) but “through imaginative investment and creation.” It is the experience of those who have “grown up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated.”⁷⁹ In this sense, Jalali herself, who was

six when her family left Kashmir, is a paradigmatic carrier of postmemory. In one of the earlier segments, she talks about not remembering much but seeking to remember: “I was six years old when we left Kashmir. But I don’t remember any of it. Growing up, I kept hearing stories about our house in Rainawari. The land, the neighborhood, and gardens full of apple and walnut trees.” The lack of her own memories of Kashmir motivates a quest to retrace such memories through images, coalescing around her hunt for a single image, that of the storied family house in Rainawari. The documentary takes shape around her pursuit of this image of the family house through a tour of the family albums.

Ghar ka Pata taps into the Jalali family’s archive of photographs and videos in order to transmit the memory of the family’s lost past in Kashmir across generations and to reconstruct a fading sense of home, not only for Jalali the filmmaker but also for future generations of Kashmiri Pandits within and beyond her own family. In this process, *Ghar ka Pata* performs both familial and affiliative post-memory work, preserving memory intergenerationally within the family, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, making memory available intragenerationally to a wider community of Kashmiri Pandits who have grown up in the shadow of the Pandit flight from Kashmir. Crucially, as Hirsch reminds us, “affiliative postmemory is no more than an extension of the loosened familial structure occasioned by war and persecution.”¹⁰ The documentary features several scenes of multigenerational viewing of photographs and videos: Jalali views the family photos with her mother and aunts, who have their own direct memories of Kashmir, and also views them with the younger children in her family, who have grown up entirely outside Kashmir and are introduced to their Kashmiri roots through Jalali’s archival lens. As the children look over family photographs together with Jalali, she prompts: “Can anyone tell me who this is?” Or: “Do you know what this is in her hand? A kangri.” And: “This is our house in Rainawari, in Kashmir.” Reflecting on her own pedagogical role in this scene, Jalali observes in voice-over: “After a long time, I was not simply a spectator but a teller of stories.” And so, she asks the children: “Do you know why we left Kashmir?” The youngest replies: “Many reasons. Something bad was happening there.” An older child returns: “It wasn’t safe anymore.” And a third recounts: “Yeah, otherwise they had to convert to Muslim [*sic*] or something. So they left.” Jalali nods, neither confirming nor correcting their view, at least not on camera. What is visible here is a process of memorial construction in which Jalali clearly is not the first pedagogue: the children already believe that the threat of violence and conversion to Islam is what drove the Pandits out of Kashmir. And viewers are invited to share in this understanding, deeply entrenched in Kashmiri Pandit political consciousness, through the act of empathizing with the children.

In addition to showing family photographs, *Ghar ka Pata* renders Pandit memories of loss through a series of interviews with Jalali’s family members,

particularly women in the family, who also contribute fond and pained recollections of Kashmir. These memories, relayed by Jalali's mother, sisters, cousins, and aunts, are conveyed particularly through a focus on lost objects. Jalali's sisters Neetu and Urvashi talk about the apple and almond trees around the house, the blooming white rose bush, and the report card that they made sure to bring along, as well as the toy train that was left behind and the games they played with other children in the neighborhood. Urvashi remembers fondly her mother's favorite double-shade silk sari that was lost in the journey from Srinagar to Jammu. Ration cards and papers were left behind too. "I had washed clothes that night!" Jalali's mother recalls with some amusement. "I thought we'd be tired upon returning home. Little did I know that we'd left everything for *them*" — one of many oblique and direct references to Muslim others who are seen as having "driven out" Pandits from Kashmir. A cousin recounts the smell of open drains combined with smells of cooking and songs sung late into the night in the company of family. With these minutiae, the film implicitly taps into feminism's investment in personal lives as historically significant, foregrounding the narratives of women in the family. At the same time, it mourns the father and his own losses, functioning in the process as a memorial for his life as well.

Entrapped in the Family Frame

Jalali's aesthetic reliance on the family photograph to anchor the film's postmemorial work embeds within the documentary a reliance on the family as a frame for understanding the displacement of Pandits. In centering the family album, the documentary as a whole remains bound to the scaffold of the Kashmiri Pandit family and its extended community, mobilizing the conventions of the family photograph to construct affiliation across generations and "reinforce the power of the notion of 'family.'"¹¹ In the case of families like the Jalalis, it naturalizes the endogamous Brahminical norms undergirding the Kashmiri Pandit family, inhibiting an examination of the contradictions of the upper-caste family itself, as a space that is both loving and violent and that demands affiliation and the maintenance of boundaries, often at the expense of oneself and even one's own life. This is particularly true when it comes to the place of women in the family and community.

Early in the documentary, Jalali's sister Urvashi recounts, almost with pride, her father's willingness to kill his own daughters to keep them from falling into "another's hands" (her words). Urvashi recounts:

Behind our house was a canal, and on the other side that was a Muslim *mohalla*. My father started sleeping in the room that faced that side, and he had a gun. He told my mother, "If anything happens, the first thing I'm going to do is kill my daughters. I don't want my daughters to be in the hands of someone else. That is what I'm going to do first." Through that night, I remember, I wept and I wept and I wept.

Urvashi's trembling face brings us into an intimate relationship with the fear she recollects in retrospect. Here the threat of violence—what made Urvashi weep and weep and weep—is notably displaced entirely onto Kashmiri Muslims (“someone else”), while the father's intended violence toward his daughters is redescribed as an act of love. The Kashmiri Pandit father emerges not as a potential agent of violence but rather as a vulnerable victim of the Muslim-supported movement for *azadi*. There was of course no question of Pran Nath Jalali asking his daughters if falling into the hands of “someone else” would be worse than death. The violence of the family itself is thus entirely naturalized.

A generation of feminist scholarship about the 1947 partition of India has examined the violence within the family that came to the fore during the cataclysmic communal violence of partition. As feminist oral historians such as Ritu Menon, Kamala Bhasin, and Urvashi Butalia have detailed, alongside the bloodshed of intercommunity violence, there took place several documented instances when men killed women in their own families in order to “protect their honor” and keep them “safe” from rape. As Butalia writes in *The Other Side of Silence*, community accounts of violence only acknowledged the violence of men of the “other community,” but “there is no record of the numbers of women and children who were killed by men of their own families, their own communities.”¹² Such women were often projected as offering their lives up willingly. While in most Kashmiri Pandit accounts the family did not eventually have to make such a choice in actually killing women within the family, Pandit women were frequently enjoined by their family members to kill themselves “if something happens.” In his ethnography of Pandit migrants in Jammu, Ankur Datta recounts the case of a man who had instructed his daughter to wear two layers of clothing in order to deflect rape and to jump to her death from the terrace roof if all else failed. Another mother spoke about hastily marrying off her daughter, presumably in order to keep her safe from abduction.¹³

These forms of family control in the name of protection remain valorized by Jalali's film, untouched by two decades of feminist critiques that have interrogated the manner in which the investment of family and community “honor” in women's bodies has always rendered women vulnerable to violence both within and outside the family. Across the family albums through which Jalali now seeks to recover a lost world, the Pandit family appears repeatedly as an idealized entity defined by its vulnerability, an entity that must be preserved rather than interrogated at any cost. Meanwhile, the tight focus on the family album forbids a complex horizontal examination of Kashmiri Pandits' relationship to Kashmiri society at large up until their mass flight in the 1990s. It is only in the latter part of the documentary, when Jalali and her sister return together to Kashmir, that the film breaks out of the family frame to engage an extended community of Kashmiris.

Beyond the Family Frame

Jalali's father's death comes once again to the fore during the return trip to Kashmir undertaken by Jalali with her sister Urvashi to their old neighborhood in Kashmir, in pursuit of a sighting of their lost home. This sequence, one of the most emotionally loaded parts of the film, features a number of interactions with Kashmiri Muslims, who begin to appear in the film for the first time, broadening the frame beyond the Pandit family. (To be sure, the "Muslim friend" appears occasionally in the Pandit family album, pointed out, for example, by Jalali's uncle as they peruse photographs of his youth, but in being marked as such, the Muslim outsider only reaffirms the family's own boundaries.) Jalali's sister Urvashi leads the trip, navigating the old neighborhoods, retracing memories in the area around their old house in Rainawari.

As they walk through the city, Jalali's cameraman (also a Kashmiri Muslim who appears periodically on-screen) captures signs of Kashmiri disaffection for India. Walls and shutters bear slogans like "Go India Go" and "Alive Burhan," purposefully captured in the cinematic frame, even as Urvashi recounts: "This used to be Samud's shop. We used to get curds and milk from him." Casually, the sisters reflect as they move through the city: "I think encounter *chal raha hai na?* [I think an encounter is on, right?]" People in the area help them retrace where the houses of Pandits once stood as Urvashi chats with them in Kashmiri, recounting where she once attended tuition, joining her memories to those of the onlookers. "I remember everything," she says in Kashmiri, wiping away tears as a shopkeeper in the area responds sympathetically: "You have been brought here by love of your land." Finally they arrive at the location where their house once stood, where they are welcomed by Muslim neighbors who were once close friends of their father. Here they break the news of Pran Nath Jalali's death, first to the elderly Muslim friend of their father and then to his wife, eliciting an outburst of emotion as the woman breaks into grieving sobs, folding both Jalali and her sister into a deep embrace. The intimacy of this moment is palpable, captured on film and replayed later in the film when Jalali shares the clip with her niece Sanaa back in Delhi, telling her of the relationship that existed between them, explaining the woman's grief: "Your grandfather was like her brother."

Kashmiri Muslims — whether the shopkeepers and neighborhood residents or the family friends the sisters visit — appear in this sequence with great emotional impact, attesting to the mutual affection and shared grief over the loss of community that once existed between Pandits and Muslims. As the sisters are welcomed into the home of their onetime neighbors, the woman gathers news of Pran Nath Jalali's death, continuing to sob openly with the sisters. "I would give my life for you," she says to them; "he was not a neighbor, he was a brother." The sisters accept these words sincerely, sharing their own tears as they sit with the woman in the interior of her home.

In light of the extreme bitterness and suspicion voiced by many migrant Pandits of their Muslim neighbors and indeed all Kashmiri Muslims, these on-screen intimacies matter. Perhaps they carry some potential to challenge entrenched affective divides furthered by the Hindu state that positions itself as a benefactor to Kashmiri Pandits. Notably, however, nested within the very intimate frame of the sibling relationship (“He was not a neighbor, he was a brother”) is the built-in distance necessitated by the boundaries of caste. Accepted by both Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims, it serves to hold in place the endogamous strictures whereby Kashmiri Pandits would rarely, if ever, marry across religious lines. Further, in acknowledging these intimacies, *Ghar ka Pata* also, perhaps unwittingly, rehearses a familiar conceit that has become something of a trope in many accounts offered by Kashmiri Pandit writers, filmmakers, and activists, wherein bonds with Muslim friends and neighbors are affectionately acknowledged at an individual level, but within a larger framework of “Islamic terrorism” that fails to acknowledge the political causes of the largely Muslim-supported movement for *azadi*. Belying this framework is the voice of the Muslim neighbor, who offers a different understanding of loss as she weeps with the sisters in remembrance of their father: “Here a lot of people died of bullets. Which bullet did he take?” Pran Nath Jalali’s death, understood as a result of yet another bullet: here the Jalalis’ Muslim neighbor calls upon other Kashmiri imaginaries that integrate Kashmiri Pandit suffering into a catalog of the general vulnerability of Kashmiris, particularly throughout the 1990s.¹⁴

In the final moments of the documentary, Jalali offers a closing meditation on loss: “Loss is a strange thing. Whether it’s loss of a person or a place or a memory, it’s inevitable. But sometimes loss can push you hard, and sometimes push you down. Either way it does something to us, it is transformative. It has a strength that can make you do unimaginable things. . . . love for land is true and belonging is from within. It can’t and shouldn’t be proven to anyone.” These words are heard over a montage of images, from the wedding video in which Jalali at last spots the house that once was, to the tearful embrace with the Muslim neighbor (replayed now for a third time), to images of family elders and young ones watching sequences from the film that we now rewatch with them.

The culminating image of this montage is also the final image of the film itself: Jalali’s hand holds open her father’s passport on a page that echoes the film’s title, *Home Address*. Listed on the page under “Permanent address in India” is her father’s address, handwritten as “Rainawari Srinagar (J&K).” Between Jalali’s parted fingers, as she underscores the word “Rainawari” with her index finger, appears the English word “Father,” a reminder that this film featuring the voices primarily of women is also an homage to the deceased father. His presence lingers throughout the film and anchors Jalali’s own sense of belonging to Kashmir, traced through the paterfamilias and through the state to which he had pledged his loyalties. Beneath

this is the name of Pran Nath Jalali's own father—the option for “husband” struck out but lingering visibly as a reminder of the patriarchal norms of citizenship that determine affiliation through husbands and fathers, and the continuities between the family patriarch and the state as patriarch. While Jalali declaims that belonging “should not be proven to anyone,” the Indian government-issued passport appears as final evidence and anchor: It is the document that visually authenticates and intimately mediates a belonging that Jalali offers narratively as coming “from within.” It is clear that Jalali is unable to move outside the frame of the Pandit family or that of the Indian state, to imagine belonging to Kashmir on any other terms. Despite the moving reunion with her father's Muslim neighbors earlier in the film, there is little sense here of a belonging to Kashmir that might be in any way predicated on a larger relationship to other Kashmiris outside the fold of the Kashmiri Pandit family and community.

Reframing Belonging

Eventually, *Ghar ka Pata* lapses into a familiar problem with postmemory projects: with their artistic and affective reliance on familial artifacts, such projects often obscure larger historical contexts and privatize traumatic individual or familial experience, offering the latter as historical evidence.¹⁵ But, to recall Joan Scott's argument, “It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience.” Rather than serving as the origin of historical explanation, experience is better approached as “that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced.”¹⁶ Instead of assuming Kashmiri Pandit experiences of trauma, betrayal, fear, and pain—as conveyed by multiple family members in Jalali's film—as straightforward evidence of their Muslim neighbors' treachery and betrayal, or alternatively to be dismissed as false or exaggerated, we might more fruitfully historicize the conditions of political subject formation under which the “critical event” of the Pandits' fear-filled flight from Kashmir took emotional form as an experience of betrayal.¹⁷

One avenue for such an examination lies in the strange history of Article 370, which until recently secured Jammu and Kashmir's semiautonomous status within the Indian union. Opposed from the very beginning by right-wing Hindu organizations in Kashmir and subsequently by the Bharatiya Janata Party,¹⁸ Article 370 was scrapped summarily by the Indian government on August 5, 2019. Putatively, the abrogation would secure Kashmiri Pandits' ability to return safely to Kashmir by enabling Indians to purchase land in Kashmir, where previously only Kashmiri state subjects could. In the celebration around its suspension, including by many migrant Kashmiri Pandits, it was a fact little remembered that Article 370 was a provision that, ironically, Kashmiri Pandits had agitated for in the 1920s under the banner of “Kashmir for Kashmiris” in a moment when Punjabi Hindus were being heavily recruited into administrative positions by the Hindu Dogra state, threaten-

ing the dominance Kashmiri Pandits had until then enjoyed in state employment. This campaign led to the implementation by Maharaja Hari Singh in 1927 of the State Subjects Rule, whereby nonstate subjects were barred from acquiring land or entering public service.¹⁹ Although the Kashmir for Kashmiris movement launched by Pandits nominally spoke for all Kashmiris, including Kashmiri Muslims, historian Mridu Rai shows how the limits of this framing were tested when Kashmiri Muslims themselves began to lay claim to education and government jobs as an underrepresented majority, threatening the regional hegemony of Kashmiri Pandits. As Rai details, “Confronted for the first time with an assertive Muslim population mobilizing for a share of the same pie, the comfortable adherence by the Pandits to a common regional cause evaporated and they began to speak increasingly in the language of an endangered religious minority.”²⁰ At the same time, Rai notes, Kashmiri Pandits cast Muslim mobilization demanding state redress for the backward condition of Muslims as “communal.” Here lies an early articulation of the claim to secularism that inflects Kashmiri Pandit self-representation to this day, whereby Kashmiri Muslim political mobilization is cast as “Islamist” and “communal” rather than political, as opposed to the avowedly “secular” politics of Kashmiri Pandits.²¹ An understanding of this history of political mobilization by Kashmiri Pandits allows us to see how such preexisting narrative frames may have shaped Kashmiri Pandits’ experience of the moment of their flight from Kashmir in the 1990s.

In *Ghar ka Pata*, Jalali notes that this momentous event of the abrogation of Article 370 occurred just as she was wrapping up her documentary. For her, the moment gives rise to some ambivalence, as she reflects: “Overnight everything had changed. . . . The constant struggle with my sense of belonging as a Pandit suddenly felt invalid. And I kept thinking that all of us who shared the same land, slept under the same sky for centuries. . . . How did we come to this point where we stopped acknowledging each other’s pain?” The promise of mutuality—an acknowledgment of the other’s pain across the Pandit-Muslim divide—is enticing indeed. As I have noted above, it is not an infrequent feature of Pandit representations to encounter a yearning for the passing of what some saw as a composite Kashmiri society bound together by Kashmiriyat,²² or to see friendly and benign Kashmiri Muslims who are harnessed to the work of mourning Pandit losses. But perhaps the more interesting question here is: Why does the abrogation render Jalali’s search for belonging invalid?

Although this moment is a fleeting one in the documentary, it is worth pausing over, for it calls subtly but surely into question the terms of belonging offered to Kashmiri Pandits by the Indian government’s dissolution of Article 370. Is there a struggle here, an acknowledgment that the revocation, by throwing open Kashmiri land to Indians, would change the character of Kashmir altogether? This moment of tension between Jalali’s regional and national identities—Kashmiri and Indian—quietly recognizes the assimilationist logic of the abrogation, which

subordinated Kashmiri Pandit claims of belonging as “original inhabitants,” opening the doors to outsiders. If at the beginning of the film Jalali’s self-introduction through the tourist photograph replicates the exiled Kashmiri Pandit’s complaint of being a “tourist in one’s own land,” this moment of ambivalence toward the end registers that an influx of Indians will certainly not produce the sense of belonging she hopes to find in Kashmir. It opens up the question of how Pandits might forge new terms of belonging to Kashmir. What memorial frames and aesthetics might Pandits want to cultivate in order to do so?

Jalali’s invocation of centuries-long intimacies between Kashmiri Pandits and Muslims also points to the questions posed by sociologist Pushpendra Johar: “Why did [Kashmiri Pandits] choose a nationalism which neither emerged from their cultural moorings nor from an ethnicity/linguistic based assertion as has been seen in different parts of the world? What kind of grouping did they choose over a nationalism that emerged from the people who have lived alongside them for hundreds of years?”²³ Johar further suggests that this preference is “rooted not simply in a religious identity but in their identification with the larger Brahmin group that, in 1947, ensured its control over India as a political unit for the first time in the history of the subcontinent.” And indeed, as Ankur Datta notes in his study of displaced Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu, it is “the history of having possessed a high status in relation to other communities that renders their sense of loss [after their departure from Kashmir] as particularly distinctive.”²⁴ At one point, Jalali asks her grandaunt Kanta Raina to recount some incidents or memories from her youth, and the exchange unfolds as follows:

Madhulika: Tell me some stories [about Kashmir]. . . . What would you do all day?

Kanta: We just sat around.

Madhulika: How is it possible you did nothing? . . . Didn’t you do any work in the village?

Kanta: What work in the village? We had so many servants.

Madhulika: How many servants did you have?

Kanta: Many servants. Some would get rice, some would cut wood.

An uncle interjects: “Some would get water from the streams.”

Madhulika: And what did you do?

Kanta: We would do nothing.

Madhulika: Just enjoy? [*Aish?*]

Kanta: Yes, we would enjoy. [*Aish ais as karan.*]

While such loss of status is deeply felt and mourned by many Kashmiri Pandits, there is little room to question the larger hierarchies within which many Pandits maintained such a standard of living.

Rather than mourning Kashmir as lost object through recollections of snow, food, apple trees, and family rituals, is it possible for Kashmiri Pandits to memorialize their losses differently, allowing for new ways of relating to Kashmir that go beyond a desire to reinstate the relations of the past? What this will call for, as Mona Bhan, Ather Zia, and I have written elsewhere, is for Kashmiri Pandits to envision “a collective future based on interrelationships between communities, rather than a military infrastructure that purports to secure Kashmiri Pandits at the expense of Muslims.”²⁵ Perhaps, as Suvir Kaul writes of the losses suffered by all Kashmiris, “there [may be] something in the shared, yet dissimilar, histories of Kashmiris that might yet contain the hope of a more viable future, with all its challenges and difficulties.”²⁶ Thinking of and memorializing Pandit loss as shared with other Kashmiris (namely, Kashmiri Muslims) rather than inflicted by them may open up the possibility of reimagined interrelationships in the future.²⁷ These alternate modes of remembering loss must also be accompanied by a willingness among Kashmiri Pandits to engage in a critical examination of the past that moves beyond an attachment to familial loss and on to an honest consideration of the stratified social order in which Kashmiri Pandits, Muslims, and other Kashmiris have related to each other, historically and in the present.²⁸ Such a reckoning would by no means understate the devastation entailed by Pandits’ loss of Kashmir and perhaps to Kashmir, nor would it minimize the depth of their grief about losing a home they experienced as paradise. It might lead, on the contrary, to a more honest account of what exactly was left behind, what of it is worth seeking to recuperate, and what is worthy of letting go in the service of collective social and political justice for all those who call Kashmir home.

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Notes

1. *Ghar ka Pata* was screened at a number of Indian film festivals internationally, including the Dharamshala International Film Festival, the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne, the Chicago South Asian Film Festival, the Tasveer Festival in Seattle, and the Indian Film Festival of Cincinnati.
2. The majority of Kashmiri Pandits left the Kashmir Valley in 1989, following the mass protests in which predominantly Kashmiri Muslims demanded their right to self-determination, and the Kashmiri movement for *azadi* (self-determination) took an armed turn. Many Kashmiri Pandits left owing to a widespread sense of fear following a series of

- assassinations, particularly of Kashmiri Pandit men who were part of the state apparatus, although Kashmiri Muslims working for the state were also targeted by militants. Datta, *On Uncertain Ground*, 4. Against the popular will of the Kashmiri Muslim majority, Kashmiri Pandits in the main supported integration with Hindu-majority India. Today it is rarely remembered that some prominent Kashmiri nationalists active in the 1950s, such as Rughonath Vaishnavi and Prem Nath Bazaz, were Kashmiri Pandits who supported the movement for an independent Kashmir.
3. Prominent in this memorial archive are the fictional, cinematic, and editorial works of Siddhartha Gigoo and his father Arvind Gigoo; Rahul Pandita's memoir *Our Moon Has Blood Clots*; the documentary films of filmmaker Ajay Raina; and Bollywood films such as Ashoke Pandit's *Sheen* (2004) and Vidhu Vinod Chopra's *Shikara* (2020, based on Pandita's memoir). Gigoo, in particular, has been among the most prolific in this vein: as the author of a novel (*The Garden of Solitude*) and a book of short stories (*A Fistful of Earth, and Other Stories*), and as director of films like *The Last Day* (2013) and *Goodbye Mayfly* (2015) and editor of a number of volumes of fictional and nonfictional writings that have framed Kashmiri Pandit loss within a larger narrative of "ethnic persecution" of Kashmiri Hindus by Kashmiri Muslims agitating for self-determination. Beyond these cultural productions, there is an active memorial culture taking shape on social media platforms like Twitter and Facebook.
 4. See Kak, "Dangerous 'Truth.'"
 5. As historian Mridu Rai cautions,

A collective memory is an ideological and affective fiction. It masks the historical reality that in fact communities do not "remember" collectively, democratically or uniformly. Within them, there are divergent understandings of the past with some members appropriating the right to shape what and how others must remember. . . . The idea of a collective past also assumes the continuous, unchanging existence of the remembering community. In fact, neither the community (or community identity) nor its relationship with the past is beyond historical process. ("Narratives from Exile," 91)
 6. See Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*; Accardi, "Orientalism." Historians Rai and Accardi both detail how Kashmiri Pandits came to hold a disproportionate influence in the Dogra state bureaucracy that far exceeded their miniscule numbers and status as a demographic minority, an influence that persisted in the postcolonial state as well.
 7. Misri and Bhan, "Kashmiri Pandits Must Reimagine." See also historian Mridu Rai's nuanced account of the multiple factors leading up to the forced migration of the Pandits; Rai, "Kashmir."
 8. Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 7.
 9. Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 22.
 10. Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 36.
 11. Hirsch, *Family Frames*, 47.
 12. Butalia, *Other Side of Silence*, 165.
 13. Datta, *On Uncertain Ground*, 27.
 14. Elsewhere, too, I discuss Kashmiri Muslim cultural production that situates Kashmiri Pandit loss as part of the larger suffering of Kashmiris rather than as a result of persecution among Kashmiris. See Misri, "Dark Ages and Bright Futures," 543.
 15. Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory*, 39.
 16. Scott, "Evidence of Experience," 779.
 17. Das, *Critical Events*.

18. See Sökefeld, "Secularism and the Kashmir Dispute."
19. This rule was later ratified under Article 370, which was introduced in 1954 to secure Jammu and Kashmir's special status within the Indian union.
20. Rai, *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects*, 257.
21. Such "secularised imaginations of the self," as Ramesh Bairy argues, are entirely consistent with Brahmin self-conceptions in India, although they "stand in sharp contrast to the non-Brahmin recuperation of the Brahmin persona, which insists on seeing the Brahmin as primarily a caste-self" (*Being Brahmin, Being Modern*, 31).
22. For a detailed discussion of the discourse of *Kashmiriyat*, see Bhan, Misri, and Zia, "Relating Otherwise."
23. Johar, "Hierarchization of Victimhood," 58.
24. Datta, *On Uncertain Ground*, 22.
25. Here we refer specifically to long-standing Kashmiri Pandit demands for separate securitized townships, putatively to keep them feeling safe from the larger Kashmiri Muslim population.
26. Kaul, "Kashmir."
27. Such memorial frameworks already do exist, though they are rarely articulated by Kashmiri Pandits in the construction of public memory. See, for instance, my discussion of the Wandhama massacre as it appears in a recent "resistance calendar" from Kashmir in Misri, "Dark Ages and Bright Futures," 543.
28. Bhan, Misri, and Zia, "Relating Otherwise," 287.

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