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The Kashmir Files: A Personal Reflection

All through the 7 years that I studied in Vishwa Bharati, neither my pandit teachers nor pandit classmates even had happened to them.

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The Kashmir Files: A Personal Reflection

From 1998 to 2005, I was a student at Vishwa Bharati Public School in Noida. Vishwa Bh Welfare Institution, founded in Srinagar in 1951, had set up the school in 1989. I am not a institution's history, and I am sure most of my classmates were not aware of it either. M know what role it played in the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. But what we did at least at that point in time, all the core members of the institution and many of our tea Kashmiri Pandits. This fact had no bearing on how we were taught, or how we were exp We did not have any special classes on the history of the Pandits or Kashmir, no mourn January 19, nothing to distinguish it from any other school not run by Kashmiri Pandits like teenagers do in any other good public school across the country. In our limited worl Pandits were the administration. We were the young rebels fighting the good fight. As o such scenarios, many of us directed disrespectful words towards the Pandits as a comm

Unfortunately, sometimes the nastiness extended to our classmates who were the child in the administration. Little did we, or at least I, know that this was a community struggle its way of life alive.



It is not as if we were completely unaware of what had happened in 1990. Most of us had and aunts talk about it in politically charged conversations at home. But at least in my understanding, I had suffered too. I was a young Bihari who had come to Delhi, oblivious with which people in the capital viewed people from my part of the country. People were nice, and so I had little time from others who were competing with me for the limited sympathy that was going around. I had also come into a hostile environment and made myself. Why then should I give any leeway to anyone? They may have been forced to leave but I came from a desperately poor part of the country. They may have become refugees in the country and hunted because of their identity. But I also belonged to a community that was so desperate, nameless and perceived to be worthless daily wage workers to all parts of the country. I was not wise nor empathetic, I am ashamed to admit. But an expression of regret would be meaningless self-recrimination.

As the years rolled on, the story of Kashmiri Pandits was relevant to me only to the extent of points in debates with colleagues or competitors. No matter how I approached the issue was merely to show that the other person was wrong. Maybe some others did better on but I was unable to engage with the story of the pandits at an emotional level. In graduate school debates of the college hostel died out. But for me, as a student of economics, people had data points or players in a game-theory model. I neither had the ability nor the inclination to do what my school teachers had gone through several years ago.

So what changed in the last week? The Kashmir Files. I am not a historian or a scholar of Kashmir. I am not even a movie enthusiast. On the rare occasion that I watch one, it would be a fantasy movie like the Lord of the Rings. I have no expertise to determine the quality of the movie, I do not know if the movie gets all the facts right. All I know is that I saw people aged 60 and over crying uncontrollably during and after watching the movie. I do not believe that anyone can fake an emotional response. Many movies make people cry. But this experience was different, the tears were different. It was almost as if many found catharsis in watching it. Maybe, at times there was a sense of relief, no better way to finally start healing than having your story told, have your story heard and have other people join you in your grief, share your sadness.

This got me thinking that many of my former teachers would have likely cried in the last few days. I cried too. I cannot share in their emotion, and I cannot provide any comfort to them. But by expressing my thoughts here, I can express my solidarity. Maybe I can convey that I finally



The Kashmir Files has, of course, fuelled a debate across the country. Which is great. People should debate, even if it is 30 years too late. Maybe when the dust settles, we can better understand the nuances of what happened in 1990. But until then, here is my takeaway: a life lesson 17 years in the making. A lesson that I do not think my teachers at Vishwa Bharati want to thank them for. All through the 7 years that I studied in Vishwa Bharati, not my pandit teachers, not my pandit classmates or their parents or their grandparents ever spoke about what had happened to them. No one ever tried to school me in their history. No one ever offered an ounce of sympathy for being a Kashmiri Pandit, let alone any pity. In a world in which there is no incentive to proclaim victimhood as loudly as possible, they pretended not to be victims. Others like me, who have spent time and energy figuring out our position in the hierarchy, have been wronged, this is the final lesson from my teachers at Vishwa Bharati. They were rebuilding their lives the best they could. No complaining, no moaning about the injustice. Start from scratch. It is time I took this lesson to heart.

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