

Representation of Pashtuns in the Context of Terrorism: A Comparative Study of Bollywood and Lollywood Movies After 9/11

Aamir Ayub¹, Yasir Shehzad² and Shakeel Ahmad³

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Abstract

This research paper aims to understand how the Pashtuns have been represented in relationship to terrorism in post-9/11 Bollywood and Lollywood movies. It focuses mainly on "Torbaaz" from Bollywood and "Waar" from Lollywood to define the nature of Pashtun characterization, the functioning of intelligence agencies, and the socio-political side of the represented narratives. In this research, the analytical approach developed in the author's previous works is applied to contemplate how these films represent or fail to represent Pashtun identity, taking into consideration the cultural, historical, and social dimensions. The study also aims to examine the effects of the media, particularly on the different ethnic groups' perceptions of terrorism. In this case, it covers how the movie relates actual events in society—specifically, socio-political—to the messages in the film regarding the Pashtun people and their portrayal. Such elements may constitute the portrayal of intelligence agencies and their fight against terrorism, state-security dynamics, and Pashtun society. In conclusion, this research paper focuses on the representation of Pashtuns in films after 9/11 and addresses the issue concerning the representation of ethnic groups in the theme of terrorism. It provides ideas about the role of media in influencing society's mind and attitude toward certain communities after geopolitical upheavals.

Keywords: Pashtun Representation; Terrorism; 9/11 Attacks; Socio-political Implications; Ethnic Representation in Media.

Introduction

Pashtun is the largest Muslim society in the world as one of the commonalities includes Sunni Islam (Britannica, 2024), primarily living in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Most Pashtun in Pakistan live in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. According to the World Fact book (CIA.org) latest census of Pakistan 2017, it is the second largest ethnic group in Pakistan—a significant Diaspora of Pashtun in the Arab Gulf and Western countries. Two countries are mainly on the top of the list where the Pashtun tribe originated, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Durand line divides traditional Pashtun homelands in these two countries.

Pashtuns boast a rich heritage intertwined with the portrayal of terrorism in contemporary cinema. They are looking at the different movies like "Khuda Gawah" and "Zanjeer," produced by Bollywood before 9/11, the portrayal of Pashtun in films after the 9/11 incident, and the involvement of the US in Afghanistan. The researcher here analyses the content of movies and focuses on "representation of Pashtun in the context of terrorism." For the data collection and

¹MS Scholar in Journalism and Mass Communication/Media Studies, Independent Researcher.

Email: aamirayub@uop.edu.pk

²MS Scholar in Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Peshawar. Email: yasir@uop.edu.pk

³MS Scholar in Journalism and Mass Communication, University of Peshawar. Email: shakeelyousfzai@uop.edu.pk



discussion, movies of Bollywood and Lollywood are taken that were produced after 9/11, when a Pashtun look has been stereotyped as the look of a terrorist. The films selected for this research study are "Torbaaz" from Bollywood and "Waar" from Lollywood.

The reason to choose 'Torbaaz' and 'Waar' movies is their thematic concerns and problems. The primary and secondary variables must be compatible; therefore, both are akin to each other. Thus, "Waar" got the highest box office collection ever in Pakistan, with Rs. 24. Domestically, it made Rs. 5 crores, and internationally, Rs. 40 crores, which received a rating of 4.0 stars. Thus, "Torbaaz" made 25 crores at the box office and has been sold to Netflix for 20 crores, getting the rating 4.2 stars. As an analytic endeavor, this paper's key objective is to identify the stories, arcs, prejudices, and socio-politically charged elements of Pashtun of these pictures.

Historical Context of the Representation of Pashtuns in Media

Historically, the topic of portrayal of Pashtuns has not been restricted to media alone but has a background of its own. In the pre/post-British colonial period, they are depicted as lazy and uncivilized to give a reason for colonization and suppress the Pashtun spirit. The division of Pashtuns with the British withdrawal in 1947 and the placement of the border with India led to conflict, instability, and the culmination of negativity that presented Pashtuns within the media realm.

The conflict in Afghanistan has impacted the depiction of the Pashtun in the media, mainly because it portrays them as holding a sympathetic view of the Taliban and other related factions. This unhealthy stereotype often results in discrimination and the use of force against the Pashtuns. Thus, for this research, it is crucial to analyze the various portrayals of Pashtuns in film, especially in Bollywood and Lollywood industries, as these have primarily contained these biases and stereotypes.

The portrayal of Pashtuns in Bollywood and Lollywood movies analyzes how representation has changed over time. In the early stages of Indian cinema, people of Pakhtun ethnicity were portrayed as harsh antagonists or as comic characters, but slowly and gradually, more detailed and realistic portrayals of Pashtuns were presented in films.

In Lollywood films, the Pashtun ethnic group is represented in various ways, sometimes negatively and sometimes positively. Recently, a change has been observed in the portrayal of Pashtuns in Lollywood cinema.

Impact of the 9/11 Attacks on the Representation of Pashtuns in Media

Media representations of Pashtun people changed after 9/11, and suddenly, the entire community was linked with terrorism and extremism. This stereotype was contributed by the Bollywood and Lollywood films naming the term 'Talib' related to the Pashtun's representation in connection with terrorism. Such portrayal has other socio-political connotations that influence people's perceptions and may perpetuate unfair stereotyping of the Pashtun population worldwide.

The representation of Pashtuns in media brings social/political meaning. Such portrayals, therefore, incite hatred in society, and they help spread discrimination together with prejudice and hold back the push for peace as well as reunification in the affected areas.

Literature Review

There is a growing body of literature on the representation of Pashtuns in media. However, most of this research has focused on Western media. More research is needed on the representation of Pashtuns in Lollywood films.

Rizwan's (2023) study "outside the imagined community: Pashtun subjects in contemporary Pakistani cinema" assesses how Lollywood nearly exclusively depicts ethnicity as either the 'noble-savage' or the 'mad-mullah.' These are so-called cultural stereotypes that have social and

political origins, for example, the British colonial past and the Afghan war.

The number of works dedicated to the Pashtun image in media has increased, mainly focusing on Western media, but it needs more attention to represent Lollywood films. Out of all the work done by Rizwan (2023), the research can be placed in uniquely examining the Lollywood depiction of Pashtuns. As this review is intended to provide an accumulation of prior studies, emphasize the deficiencies, and center on Rizwan's integrated research, it would be more appropriate to write it in the past tense.

Therefore, accommodating oversexualized depictions of women and painting the Pashtun tribes as noble savages of the rural areas is prevalent in Lollywood films. This representation, while appearing to honor the Pashtun, can also infantilize and essentialize the Pashtun and turn them into caricatures of romanticized warriors.

On the other hand, Lollywood tends to represent the Pashtuns as aggressive beings that are capable of terrorism, tribalism, and fanatic religiousness. It has further been enforced regarding ongoing hostility in the Pashtun areas, which translates into societal resentment and exclusion. Scholars' critique and critique rendered by members of the Pashtun community reveal that stereotypical portrayals in Lollywood are factors developed with a negative perception of and poor representation of the Pashtuns in Pakistani society. Multiple demands for realistic and representative portrayals indicate the urge and expectation to have better depictions and contributions of the Pashtun community.

With a push to increase representation, Lollywood's actions include workshops and diversity and inclusion projects. On perceiving the significance of the suitable portrayal of Pashtuns, filmmakers, and other industry practitioners are trying to improve their portrayal of the ethnic group.

The public involvement of the Pashtun global community in media matters focuses on fighting for representation and transforming misleading representations. They champion narratives that depict their experiences, dreams, and roles in society as the population of Pakistan.

The status of Pashtuns in Lollywood to this date remains a rather sensitive question that changes in relation to continued debates. Unfortunately, stereotypical representations remain dominant, but there is an effort to change this. This includes representations that embrace the diverse nature of Pashtun people and the problem of marginalization and discrimination.

Methodology

This research paper employs a qualitative content analysis approach to probe into the nuanced representation of Pashtuns in two notable films: "Torbaaz" & "Waar." This way, in applying the methodological approach, the research intends to go through different aspects in a detailed manner, such as The portrayal of belongingness to Pashtun, the depiction of terrorism, the roles of intelligence agencies, and the geographical representation in the stories of the movies. The researcher watched each film many times, taking written notes and elaborating on the selected variables of dialogues, characterizations, visuals, and settings.

Rationale for Qualitative Content Analysis

The rationale for selecting the qualitative content analysis approach is based on the fact that this approach allows for revealing the complexity of things and subtle distinctions regarding the nature of cinematic images. Therefore, this method facilitates a more structured approach to analyzing textual, visual, and contextual features in the films, which leads to a broad identification of how the Pashtun people are represented in the chosen movies. Qualitative content analysis is mainly used to identify the latent concepts, trends, and subtle tendencies in describing the cultural and identity-related aspects in the context of movies.

Film Selection

The choice of "Torbaaz" and "Waar" is not arbitrary because these two movies are selected from the modern cinema of Pakistan and India, which depicted the issues related to Pashtun ethnicity and geopolitical situation. "Torbaaz", directed by Girish Malik, is about the subject of rehabilitation of child suicide bombers in Afghanistan, which becomes an ideal topic to explore Pashtuns in the contexts of conflict and strength. On the other hand, there is "Waar," a Pakistani action thriller directed by Bilal Lashari, through which progressive groups can look at Pashtuns' portrayal regarding counter-terrorism and intelligence collection.

Data Collection

The study procedure entails the 'analytical' viewing of each film where the researcher watches both "Torbaaz" and "Waar" to observe the importance contained in the stories. Each time the show is watched, writing or typing notes are taken mainly concerning specific aspects of the program that relate to the construction of the Pashtun identity. Such aspects are dialogue and comments said by Pashtun characters, portrayal of specific Pashtun people characters, and logotype referring to the culture and particular environment of the movie, which is a significant part of the whole picture.

The records of the viewing process are critical data for further qualitative content analysis on the same page. The thematic threads compile every set of notes to systematize an analysis of the patterns and diversions in the representation of the Pashtuns. The range of data that the researcher intends to collect should be as broad as possible to provide a dimensional and detailed picture of how the Pashtun identity is constructed and represented in the films chosen for analysis.

Thematic Focus

The thematic focus of content analysis comprises a few dimensions of the subject, which all together helped to provide an elaborate understanding of the representation of Pashtun. To begin with, the researcher looks at the depiction of the Pashtun ethnic group and its overview, analyzing how cultural, language, and historical lenses are reflected throughout the movies. This includes a discussion of dialogue, costumes, and the other main visuals used in negotiating the Pashtun identity on screen.

Secondly, the analysis focuses on how terrorism is portrayed throughout the films. This involves analyzing how such incidents as acts of terrorism are portrayed, the presumed reasons behind the heinous acts, and their effects on the Pashtun ethnic group. Thus, the specific aim of the paper is to eliminate patterns or biases in the narrative framing of terrorism, to which the researcher is exposed when working with the media source.

The third interpretation plane is based on the functions of intelligence agencies in films. This entails a qualitative analysis of how the intelligence agencies are depicted in relation to the role of Pashtun characters in the conflict storyline. Thus, by examining the behavior and actions between and within the Pashtun people and the intelligence agencies, the researcher hopes to also reveal any hidden messages or narratives that contribute to the narration concerning Pashtun people in relation to security and countering terrorism.

Last, the concept of geographical utilization within the films is considered. This also involves a critical assessment of the role of the geography of the film's locations, such as the deserts and the city, in the story and the representation of the Pashtuns. The researcher focuses on whether certain places are utilized to perpetuate stigma and prejudice or disrupt the Pashtun community.

Interpretation and Analysis

After the data collection process had been carried out, the researcher proceeded to a deliberate review of the collected notes meticulously. This includes the definition of play, concern with

resonance, main idea, opposition, and barely noticeable distinctions that affect the portrayal of Pashtuns within the chosen movies. The underlying research approach of the qualitative content analysis enables the further investigation of multiple dimensions and uncertainties attached to the examined cinematic representations and serves as a solid methodological foundation for exploring intricate ways Pashtun identity is depicted in cinema.

Validity and Reliability

To increase reliability and validity, the researcher follows certain guidelines and sticks to specific rules while using content analysis techniques. Because the procedures followed have been described in detail, the set of themes introduced and searched for, and the procedures followed, replication and review are permitted. Moreover, given that the viewing and analysis are spiraling, it is possible to ensure that the films' representations are relatively reliable.

Ethical Considerations

When undertaking this research, one has to observe some ethical issues. The researcher does not exempt himself from these assumptions and intrigues the audience while approaching the concern for the real impact of cinematic representations on the viewers' perspective and attitude. That is why the role of media, which controls public opinion, must be understood and accepted, promoting a critical attitude towards the films without prejudice. This research will add to the literature about representations of Pashtuns while being mindful of the improved ethical considerations of media texts.

In the context of this research paper, the chosen qualitative content analysis approach brings a comprehensive framework that allows the representation of the Pashtuns in the films "Torbaaz" and "Waar." Thus, the research focuses on viewing, taking notes, categorizing the gathered materials, and analyzing them within the identified themes. Therefore, identifying the quantitative and qualitative aspects related to Pashtun identity, portrayal of terrorism, roles of intelligence agencies, and geographical representation of Pashtuns in the selected films provides a more refined and elaborate understanding of how Pashtuns are depicted in the studied films. Hence, the strong methodological, epistemological, and ethical adherence residing in this approach enhances the validity and reliability of the work, which opens the way to a better understanding of the subject under investigation, that is, the role of Pashtun identity in cinema.

Findings

Stereotypical Portrayals

Among the issues that can be identified as prevalent in the representation of Pashtuns, one can mention stereotyping, with two principal types being the noble savage on the one hand and the violent Islamist on the other. On the other hand, in War, Pashtun terrorists are represented as radical and merciless, thus serving only to enhance the prejudices.

Geographical Settings

Another reappearance issue is the portrayal of Pashtuns as people from areas that any sane human being would fear to tread. It is a fact depicted by placing the story background for "Torbaaz" at the Afghan refugee camp on the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan. On the other hand, the film "Waar" takes place within the calendar areas of the northwestern region of Pakistan; this fact also strengthens the stereotype of the identification of Pashtuns with hostile territories.

Role of Intelligence Agencies

This paper aims to examine the following hypothesis: Films from various genres present intelligence agencies as agents of crucial importance in the struggle against terrorism. The climax

shows the help provided by the Indian intelligence agency to the protagonist in rescuing the Pashtun children from the Taliban, so the powerful message denotes unity against terrorism. Likewise, in "Waar," the Pakistani intelligence agency manages to foil a terrorist attack, hence proving that intelligence agencies are the answer to threats.

Problematic Stereotypes

It has been seen that the representation of Pashtuns in Bollywood, as well as Lollywood cinema, mostly resorts to sensationalism and, therefore, falls into the trap of depicting the stereotypical motifs of 'noble native savage' or the 'Islamic terrorist.' Such stereotypes can encourage people's prejudice, which cultivates a preconceived notion about the Pashtun tribe. When filmmakers make the Pashtuns a subject of their movie, they tend to give only part of the truth, which in the modern world perpetuates vices that affect the whole group of ethnic Pashtuns.

Reinforcement of Perceived Danger

The constant portrayal of the Pashtuns living in the mountains and in the territories that are considered dangerous might fuel the stereotype that tags the ethnic group as violent. Even though geographical settings are components of a narrative and although it is essential for Pashtun characters to be placed in geographical environments or settings, the lack of depth in addressing existential questions when Pashtuns are depicted in such environments can further distort the readers' perception of Pashtun people. It might give a wholly exaggerated or flawed perception of the Pashtun community and their lives in the contemporary world.

Positive Deviations

At the same time, it is essential to note that there are movies that fight stereotyping though they are rare. The representation of the violent Islamist narrative in the film "Torbaaz" is different from the conventional representation of fear as it instead brings out pathos towards the victims, namely the Pashtun children.

Likewise, "Waar" has brought a Pashtun police officer into the frame and portrayed him as a savior and a fighter against terrorism, free from prejudice.

The depiction of Pashtuns in Bollywood and Lollywood films is a focal and highly complex reproduction. However, it is necessary to emphasize that some tendencies maintain pathogenic stereotypes and contribute to misconceptions' strengthening in this context, it is crucial to focus on the films that demonstrate an increased representation of Pashtun communities, breaking the established pattern. The representatives of this occupation can change the attitude in society; thus, a better approach and focus on exploring Pashtun culture will help eliminate prejudice and misinterpretation of the subject. Analyzing current representations and further discussions are necessary to enhance the appreciation of ethnic diversity in film and foster better depictions by global cinema.

Critical Discourse Analysis of Pashtun Portrayals in "Torbaaz" and "Waar"

Thereby, the current study intends to explore the following specific points in the discussion section of the research: a) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of Pashtun's portrayal in the movies 'Torbaaz' and 'Waar.' This approach enables us to analyze how specific language, images, and narratives contribute to the social construction of reality and the dominant ideologies. As briefed in the articles, the essential research question: "Who is a terrorist, Talib or Pashtun?" constitutes the ground for analyzing and isolating the films' portrayals and expanding upon their connotations.

"Torbaaz" and Pashtun Identity

Altogether, "Torbaaz" handles the multifaceted subject of Pashtuns' identity while humanizing them in the context of terrorism. The character of Naseer Khan, performed by Sanjay Dutt, also composes an outsider trying to reform the Pashtun children. This complies with India's multiculturalism since Naseer symbolizes a character who is trying to escape the spiral of radicalization. Thus, the children's cricket matches represent a potential prospect for resumed order amidst chaos. In the film, most of the youth subjects depicted are innocent, but their lives are manipulated by the Taliban, showing the vulnerability of Pashtun young persons to extremism. This nuanced portrayal reduces the chances of Pashtuns being reduced to mere terrorists, as is given by most films of this kind.

"Waar" and Stereotyping Pashtuns

In "Waar", Pashtuns are placed in the counter-terrorism narrative in which the leading character, Ramal, portrayed by Shaan Shahid, is fighting against terrorists. However, by painting such a picture, the larger story fuels the stereotype linking Pashtuns with acts of terror. The film employs visual and linguistic cues to reinforce stereotypes: The clothes they wore, the type of house they built, the use of a particular language, such as the Pashto language, and the traditional dress code of the Pashtun people and some parts of the world only. Such elements build an implied relation between Pashtuns and extremism, and this shows how even images, particularly in the theatre, contribute to the kind of society we have today.

The Question of Terrorism

Considering the main thought-provoking question 'Who is a terrorist, Talib or Pashtun?' it is crucial to analyze how the films engage with this issue. Thus, unlike the simplistic anti-Pashtun Taliban narrative, Torbaaz proves that the Taliban's actions do not define the Pashtun people. Finally, the storyline of the movie puts a human face to these Pashtun children while at the same time portraying children as being molded to become highly violent militants. Thus, on the one hand, in "Waar," the counter-extremist figure of the Pashtun Ramal is revealed; on the other hand, the latter promulgates the essentialist cliché about the Pashtuns prevailing in Pakistan. The films ultimately plead against the tendency of grouping an entire ethnicity with such actions while, at the same time, advocating for the complex socio-political factors that lead to extremism.

Critical Discourse Analysis reveals a tool used in language, symbols, and narratives. Language, visual, and narrative aspects are used to build two types of Pashtun subjects in relation to terrorism in both these movies. Overall, "Torbaaz" creates a narrative of triumph as far as the Pashtun people are concerned and tries to bring out the human aspects of the particular communities. On the other hand, "Waar" complements the hegemonic discursive literals of Pashtuns due to their association with terrorism under linguistic and visual signification. These portrayals are in synch with other socio-political discourses in India and Pakistan.

Whereas 'Torbaaz' tries to present a multilayered representation of the Pashtun people, 'Waar' portrays Pakistan's domestic and international security geopolitics. Critical Discourse Analysis helps elucidate the ideologies the specific portrayals reflect and promote.

Conclusion

The films "Torbaaz" and "Waar" provide a clear understanding of the effective control of social perceptions by the media, especially the perceptions concerning the Pashtuns and terrorists. Analyzing the discursive aspects of the films, the narratives, visuals, and the linguistic means helps better understand how film representations fit into the specific culture. Thus, in this consideration, "Torbaaz" is an effort to provide a counterpoint to the representations of Pashtuns that advance humanization in its portrayal of the group, while "Waar" has the opposite effect.

Asking questions such as, 'Who is a terrorist, Talib or Pashtun?' while pointing to a developing process of overcoming prejudices and transitioning from dichotomous thinking to delving into the nuances of a conflict also demonstrates the latter's presence. This research thus highlights the need for complexity in presenting issues to bring about proper perception and further critique the media in relation to the findings.

In "Torbaaz," the factors of the stereotype are portrayed, suggesting one destination of getting over the stereotypical images associated with the Pashtun ethnic group. This film participates in some 'people-making' processes, which try to go beyond the stereotyped representation of Pashtuns as terrorists. In constructing its story, "Torbaaz" tries to convey different dimensions of Pashtuns and, significantly, how the wars affect and the strength they possess as a nation. Here, one can observe how the visual inventions and the use of the peculiarities of language in the film helped to build a more complex and realistic picture behind the stereotype, representing the Pashtun people as people who are not united by a singular goal and motivation.

On the other hand, "Waar" successfully contributes to the existing stereotype by painting a very bleak picture of Pashtuns, specifically about terrorism. Although it is an entertaining movie, such creative work that forms people's attitudes towards a particular nation strengthens the stereotype of Pashtun's association with the opposite side. All in all, this aspect of "Waar" shows that the portrayal of Pashtuns and the region is entirely monochromatic and fails to represent the actual situation in the area since it only presents the complicated area in terms of a precise black-and-white scenario where the local people are depicted as terrorists. Thus, the 'culture trickles down,' we see continued reinforcement of these stereotypical images despite the artistic license filmmakers should be given in portraying anything they choose.

The final line about the concern study of these films, 'Who is a terrorist, Talib or Pashtun?' is one of the questions that define the theme studied in this research work. This aspect underlines the issue of identity and how disagreeable it is to assign all members of an ethnic or cultural group as potential terrorists. The formulated question is complex, forcing viewers to think about infrastructural development abstractly and breaking the stereotype of making generalizations. This inquiry avoids being drawn into seemingly obvious correlations and reminds us that endless wars should not overshadow the variety of conflict-affected populations.

It also highlights the importance of examining how the media influences people's perception of great significance in this research on how the press alters the perception of people about specific issues. The analysis of "Torbaaz" and "Waar" movies proves the fact that these portrayals shape the concept of Pashtun ethnicity, particularly about terrorism vehemently. The study emphasizes that it is equally important to represent movies that depict society's grey areas, as seen in "Torbaaz," which aids in understanding complex issues. The locales are opposite to 'Waar,' which acts as a constant reminder of how such a paradigm hinders progressive representation and always assists it in circling prejudiced stereotyping perceptions.

The significance of diverse portrayals does not stop at the cinematic art; or yes, it may affect people's perception of it. Media, being an influencing tool, determines perceptions that can alter the decision-making of the public and policies as well as interpersonal relations. This influence is quite profound, especially in societies that have stereotyped or biased-natured media that reflect actual life realities. Therefore, the role of the filmmakers to provide the true and accurate representation of such things as Pashtun identity and terrorism is of immense importance.

Thus, this research calls upon filmmakers to consider the implications of their stories. This deserves some thought about the ethics of storytelling, a plea for accuracy and inclusiveness in films as the authors of films that influence public thought with their productions, members of the population should be mindful of what type of stereotypical ideas they disseminate and what kind of oversimplified conclusions they make. As this paper has outlined, filmmakers significantly influence how society develops their understanding of others.

In conclusion, the analysis of the current research regarding their outcome, media productions 'Torbaaz' and 'Waar,' is essential for understanding the role of media in constructing the Pashtun identification and terrorism. Such comparison allows realizing how important it is to depict characters and their relationships as more complex than a hero fighting with a villain, and that's it and what may happen if they do not do it. The research also raises the somewhat problematic and most fundamental of the questions: 'who is, indeed, a terrorist, Talib or Pashtun?' This makes the audiences aware that a critical reflection on such information is always needed especially about the role of the media. Finally, the study calls for employing an improved storytelling approach to the media as the latter significantly influences society.

Future Directions

As for the following research endeavors, one might explore the films' imprints on the perception of the peculiar audiences and how they might be impacted. First, it would also be helpful to understand the general socio-political and cultural influences that shape and shift the portrayal of Pashtuns and terrorism in film.

Also, how race and gender are portrayed in films and how these, in turn, shape the views of the general population. Furthermore, analyzing the sociopolitical factors that slate filmmakers choose and choose not to portray Pashtuns about terrorism would shed more light.

Another sector of this study is the Bollywood movie "Yudha," released in 2024, in which terrorists use Pashto to talk to one another on a plane.

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