



Research Paper

## Homebound: Homeland, Belonging, and the Poetics of Everyday Life

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**Abstract:** This article reviews and examines the movie, *Homebound* (2025), directed by Neeraj Ghaywan, as a cinematic script of contemporary India that reframes the politics of homeland and belonging through the poetics of ordinary and mundane life. The article opens with Langston Hughes's poem opening lines and the notion of the deferred dream, the article aims to locate the film within the existed and day-to-day realities of marginalized communities whose ambitions are consistently deferred by structural inequities ingrained in caste and class, rural unemployment, unequal mobility, and climate-linked vulnerability. The review contends that the film defies the conventions of linear narrative and instead adopts a collage-like storytelling form that reflects shattered rhythms of subsistence, harmony, and subjugated desire. *Homebound* depicts "home" not as an emotional space but as an embodied, material, and interpersonal experience shaped by friendships, memory, and communal precarity through the traversing journeys of its protagonists. The work positions Bollywood cinema as a social document that both reveals and challenges the anxieties of contemporary culture by construing rustic and pastoral terrains, silence, labour, and cross-class unities as cultural descriptors. The article underscores how popular culture, when critically engaged, becomes a site for repossessing deferred hopes, aspirations and imagining unconventional and marginal grammars of belonging.

**Keywords:** Migration, Marginality, Homeland, Belonging, Caste-Class Solidarity, Everyday Precarity, Survival.

Received 14 Jan., 2026; Revised 28 Jan., 2026; Accepted 30 Jan., 2026 © The author(s) 2026.

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### Movie Review

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

Or fester like a sore—

Maybe it just sags

like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?"

— Langston Hughes, "Harlem" (1951)

Every deferred dream carries its own slow-burning ache, an ache that the marginalized know intimately. A dream postponed is not merely delayed; it transforms. It hardens into silence, ferments into anger, or settles into the quiet resignation of everyday survival. For those pushed to society's edges, the deferral of aspiration becomes a continuous condition of existence: dreams are negotiated, repressed, reshaped, or carried like invisible burdens. Hughes's lines therefore do not function as a distant poetic prelude but as an emotional vocabulary through which *Homebound* must be read. They frame the film's world, a world where longing, displacement, and longing-for-home become entwined with the constant question: *What becomes of those whose dreams are allowed to wither before they ever fully bloom?*



*A still from **Homebound**, where the road becomes a metaphor for delayed mobility, friendship, and the silent negotiations of survival.*

**Courtesy:** Still from **Homebound** (2025)

## I. Introduction

*Homebound* is a Bollywood film released in September 2025, directed by Neeraj Ghaywan and written by Neeraj Ghaywan, Basharat Peer, and Sumit Roy. Its nomination for the Academy Awards 2026 accentuates the film's global significance, even as it remains rooted in local affective settings.

One of the most profound themes in *Homebound* is the love for one's homeland a love that is not sentimental but embodied, material, and deeply rooted in everyday life. Home in this film is not merely a physical structure; it is an animate presence, almost a living being with whom the characters share an intimate relationship.

The film features Ishaan Khatter, Vishal Jethwa, Janhvi Kapoor, Harshika Parmar, Shalini Vatsa, Pankaj Dubey, and Sudipta Saxena in main roles. Every actor has given the equal footage according to his/ her role in the film and as per the relevance to the script. *Homebound* unfolds like life itself smooth, effortless, unpredictable, and splendidly layered, problematizing the linear story-telling structure. It creates and beautifully weaves a tapestry of multiple narratives that explore social realities, human relationships, emotional experiences, family dynamics, love, and friendship. These threads come together like a collage genuine, rare, and deeply relevant.

One of the most profound themes in *Homebound* is the love for one's homeland a love that is not sentimental but embodied, material, and deeply rooted in everyday life. Home in this film is not merely a physical structure; it is an animate presence, almost a living being with whom the characters share an intimate relationship. The unpainted and rough walls speckled with moss, the partially damaged roof that leaks during rains, the mud-floor courtyard, the charpai in the angan, the clay stove, the steel utensils stacked on an open and small kitchen shelf, all of these are not markers of poverty alone but symbols of belonging, continuity, and memory. The village rustic and serene setting is condensed with poetic exactness, evocative of the countryside sensibility of William Wordsworth, who immortalized the life of the rural poor and the emotional truth entrenched in their day-to-day struggles. The voices of the marginalized in *Homebound* rise through simple conversations, gestures, silences, and the buzz of rural life austere yet deeply meaningful just like Wordsworth's lines rumbling through the dales and meadows of England.

The river that runs through the village becomes a recurring metaphor a site where Shoaib and Chandan sit on stones to talk about their hopes, heartbreaks, arguments, and the small but defining failures of life. It is a place of refuge and reflection, where their dreams meet the horizon of their reality. The village lanes and by-lanes narrow, dimly lit, sometimes haunting become cinematic corridors of memory. The entire narrative of the film is deepened by the symbols, both animate, and inanimate present throughout the film. Shoaib's cap, hung on the wall of his modest room, stands as a silent reminder of his aspiration to enter the

police force. The day he fails the examination, his act of abruptly throwing away the cap is not just an expression of his loss but a crack in his relationship with hope a moment in which the home itself seems to sigh with him.

Silence, too, becomes a language in the film. The silence of Shoaib's mother, the silence of Chandan's sister, Vaishali and the shared silences between friends often convey more than voice could. The camera lingers on their stillness characters sitting together looking at the floor, watching the flowing river, or gazing at the sky and these moments articulate the heaviness of dreams deferred and dignity denied.

The imagery wavers between the rural and the urban. The corporate office where Shoaib works is shot in cold, sterile tones that starkly contrast the warm, earthy palette of the village. This visual dissonance amplifies the alienation he feels in spaces where his identity is always under suspicion.

A haunting symbolic motif runs through the film the image of bruised, cracked feet. Chandan's mother's feet, hardened by years of physical labour, recur as a visual reminder of generational struggle.

"Nangey paon insan zameen se juda hota hai. Yeh pair nahi hai hansiyehai and yahi hai sirf jo hamko virasat mei miley hai." ("Bare feet keep a person rooted to the earth. These are not just feet, they are a sickle, and this is the only inheritance we have received.")

Chandan's mother utters one of the most haunting lines in the film. Her words crystallize the central metaphor of *Homebound*. For the marginalized, the body becomes both burden and legacy the only tool passed down through generations. The image of bare, bruised, cracked ankles reappears throughout the film, symbolizing labour, strength, resistance, and the persistent struggle for dignity. These feet bring the weight of history, of displacement, of arduous journeys made in despair during the pandemic. Yet they also carry the soil of home, a perpetual relationship to the land that shapes identity. In this way, *Homebound* speaks to a contradiction: they are bound to their homeland through love, memory, and belonging, yet compelled to move away from it by the very structures that deny them security. Feet become the cinematic motif of misery, labour, relocation, strength, and the impossible journeys of the poor.

The title *Homebound* is not merely geographic, it is bodily, emotional, ancestral. The mother's words transform "homebound" into both an emotional anchor and an ache, a reminder that for the poor, home is not a house, but a tired body forever pulled back to the soil that made it.

Later, during the pandemic migration, Shoaib and Chandan arrive in another village desperately searching for water. The villagers, fearful of infection, refuse to help. Only one woman approaches her face covered with her saree and her bruised, swollen ankles are revealed as she pours water for them. In that moment, Chandan sees not a stranger, but an echo of his mother. Her feet become a spectral presence of care in a hostile world, offering him a brief, aching reprieve from despair.

These visual and emotional threads weave a fabric of belonging a reminder that homeland is not simply the space one inhabits but the history one carries in the body, the memory one breathes in daily gestures, and the soil one refuses to abandon despite the world's repeated betrayals.

Even without a strong, traditional script structure, the film flows smoothly like a river guiding its audience along its course. There is an on-going curiosity to know where these intersecting lives are headed. Viewers remain fully engaged as the narrative quietly builds toward resolution.

## **II. A Narrative without Noise**

There are no dramatic monologues or exaggerated portrayals in the movie. The film resists sensationalizing harsh realities such as caste hierarchies, social exclusion, and the discrimination faced by Muslim minorities. Instead, these themes are entwined impeccably into the script silent yet powerful.

The subtlety is the film's strength. Its realism invites viewers to engage and reflect, rather than react to explicit and overt messaging.

## **III. Characters Who Lead the Story Forward**

The characters are the true engine of *Homebound's* narrative. Neeraj Ghaywan's directorial vision ensures that no actor overshadows the role they inhabit; instead, each performer dissolves into the mundaneness of everyday life. Their gestures are unpolished, and organic their emotional expressions controlled, their communications subtle yet piercing. The film's emotional emphases rely not on dramatic events but on the steady accumulation of their everyday struggles, unspoken desires, quiet disappointments, and fragile bonds.

This method echoes closely with Henry James's argument in his seminal essay *The Art of Fiction* (1884), where he insists that it is characters not plot/ script that actually drives a narrative. For James, the "character is the house," and the plot merely "a string the characters pull", not the other way around. When characters breathe with psychological complexity, he asserts, the story unfolds naturally, shaped by their inner lives rather than external contrivances. Ghaywan's film seems to adopt this Jamesian aesthetic with extraordinary loyalty.

Like James's own novels, which foreground the moral consciousness, hesitation, desire, and interiority of figures such as Isabel Archer (*The Portrait of a Lady*) or Maggie Verve (*The Golden Bowl*), *Homebound* privileges character over event. Shoaib's quiet dignity, Chandan's diffused frustration, Sudha's clarity and

courage, the mothers' silent endurance, these are the forces that generate the rhythm and movement of the film. There is no superimposed plot architecture; instead, the story unfolds because the characters' lives demand that it unfolds.

This is why the film feels almost lived rather than scripted. The characters embody the ordinary in such an extraordinary way that the audience does not simply watch their experiences, they inhabit them. Ghaywan's characterization emerges as the film's greatest triumph. He renders his characters with the same seriousness and moral attention that Henry James accorded his fictional creations: as full, breathing human beings who carry entire worlds within them.

The characters are the true engine of the narrative. Ghaywan's direction ensures that no actor overshadows the role they represent. Performances by all the characters remain grounded, controlled, and impeccably authentic. The film's emotional burden is carried through their everyday struggles, unspoken emotions, and fragile bonds.

The characterization stands out as the greatest victory of *Homebound*. Each actor embodies the ordinary in such an extraordinary way that the film feels like a slice of lived experience.

#### **IV. Plot: Dreams, Disillusionment, and the Weight of Social Identity**

*Homebound* follows the journey of two childhood friends, Shoaib Ali and Chandan, portrayed captivantly by Ishaan Khattar and Vishal Jethwa. They belong to poor, rural working-class families but fostering the same aspiration to become constables in the Indian police force. For them, the police uniform symbolizes dignity, authority, and a shield against caste-based and religious marginalization that has disturbed them since childhood.

This narrative becomes a moving rumination of the struggles of India's socially and economically oppressed citizens. Despite being hardworking and deserving, their lives seem like an endless Sisyphean cycle every small step forward is met with an institutional push backward. The film sharply exposes how systems of oppression caste hierarchies, religious discrimination, bureaucratic inaccessibility remains deeply embedded not only in society but in governance and administration as well.

#### **V. Gender and Modern Aspirations**

At a crowded railway station, the boys meet Sudha confident, independent, and unexpectedly traveling alone. When questioned, she replies with playful defiance:

*"Kyun larki akele safar nahi kar sakti?" (Why a girl cannot travel alone?)*

Her remark, light on the surface, carries a deeper reverberation. In that moment, the film quietly contests embedded rural gender norms, asserting that young women in contemporary rural India are progressively asserting agency over their choices, mobility, and futures.

But *Homebound* does not present gender as a singular moment of insubordination; it is an undercurrent that flows through the entire narrative. Sudha's self-assurance becomes a contrast to the constrained lives of other women in the village, especially Chandan's sister, whose life is shaped by toil, obligation, and systemic neglect. In a touching conversation, she tells Chandan that she was never given the choice to pursue schooling or imagine a future beyond domestic labour.

*I didn't want to do all this; I'm exhausted. I, too, wished to go to college like you. But among all of us, you are the only one who was given the right to choose, Chandan.*

— Vaishali (Chandan's sister)

Vaishali's words cut through the film with subtle but shocking clarity, revealing the gendered architecture of deprivation that structures rural life. When she tells Chandan that he alone was given the "right to choose," she reveals the deep inequity in opportunities between sons and daughters within the same marginalized household. Her exhaustion is not merely physical; it is the weight of dreams she was never allowed to enunciate.

In *Homebound*, caste and class shape the horizon of possibility, but gender further narrows it, women like Vaishali inherit not only poverty but also the denial of choice, education, and autonomy. While Chandan is encouraged, however precariously, to pursue exams, jobs, and aspirations, Vaishali's life is predetermined: labour, domestic duties, sacrifice. Her unsentimental confession lays bare the profound contradiction of male marginality, Chandan suffers under caste oppression, yet within the home, he is still the privileged one.

Through Vaishali, the film establishes that gender is not an isolated axis but an intensifier of structural inequality, showing how women at the fringes often are double marginalized: the burden of caste and the burden of being the woman.

Her statement is a powerful commentary of gendered privilege. In that moment, the film illustrates how patriarchy, like caste and class, determines one's limit of possibility. Chandan, who himself encounters oppression due to caste and poverty, suddenly realizes that even he possesses certain privileges by virtue of being male, a revelation that confounds his self-image and presents gender as yet another axis of marginality.

By foregrounding these gendered experiences alongside caste and religious marginality, *Homebound* positions itself within a broader discourse on intersectionality. It invites viewers to identify that oppression is never singular: it is layered, relational, and deeply embedded in the social structure.

Sudha, Chandan, and Shoaib take the constable exam, but months pass with no results. Love quietly blossoms between Sudha and Chandan, while Shoaib takes a job as an office peon to support his injured father, humiliated repeatedly for his Muslim identity. His dignity remains intact, but the everyday microaggressions are brutal demands for additional ID proof, taunts about loyalty, and cricket-match nationalism that turns malicious. Despite showing exceptional talent in sales and earnings medical insurance for his father's surgery, Shoaib finally resigns after one humiliation too many a subtle condemnation of how prejudice erodes even hard-earned opportunities.

## **VI. Caste: The Silent Violence That Shapes Their Lives**

Caste-based discrimination runs through *Homebound* like an invisible thread sometimes loud and explicit, at other times internalized and unspoken. The oppression comes not only from the outside world institutions, bureaucracy, and upper-caste individuals but also from within the consciousness of the marginalized.

This dualism resonates Dr. B. R. Ambedkar's understanding of caste as a system that functions both externally through social structures and internally through psychological conditioning, producing a continual "state of humiliation" for those at the bottom of the hierarchy.

Chandan deliberately avoids mentioning his surname and always applies under the general category. His silence is shaped by fear, a fear of rejection, humiliation, and of being reduced to a "caste status" rather than a full human identity. When he travels to follow up on the police recruitment results, the official questions him through thinly veiled questions about caste. His dissecting gaze strips Chandan of dignity long before his words do. The examination of Chandan at the recruitment cell is not overtly violent, yet it is covertly punitive. The official's gaze, trimmed gestures, and administrative language reduce Chandan to a body seeking permission rather than a citizen demanding answerability. In this moment, dignity is not denied through power but through system. Frantz Fanon's insight in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) becomes uncannily resonant here: dignity is not about assimilation into the master's world, nor about being allowed a seat at his table, but about remaining oneself in the face of a system intended to rupture selfhood. As Fanon notes, when the marginalized subject enters the dominant world, "his ego collapses, his self-esteem evaporates." Chandan's timid posture and stumbling speech mirror exactly this psychic unscrambling—where caste, like race, is read immediately and punished silently.

This moment mirrors what Frantz Fanon describes in *Black Skin, White Masks*, the politics of the gaze as a tool of power. Fanon recounts how a white man, surprised at hearing a Black man speak fluent French, responds with patronizing disbelief, "*How long have you been in France? You speak French so well.*" a remark that pretences as admiration but in truth underpins racial hierarchy and covert racism. The police officer's cynicism suggests that "people like Chandan" benefit from caste quotas, functions similarly. It is not an inquiry; it is a declaration of where the officer believes Chandan belongs.

This scene also echoes deeply with Om Prakash Valmiki's *Joothan*, where Valmiki explains the humiliation of Dalit children being singled out, interrogated, and controlled differently in the classroom, their bodies and activities constantly seen through a caste-marked lens. The teacher's gaze, like the officer's here, works not as an unbiased look but as a reminder of contamination, subservience, and dishonour. In *Jhoothan*, Valmiki recalls being pushed out of the classroom to sweep the school grounds because of his caste status, an act that is spoken, without words, that merit could never protect him from being seen as "other." This is the same psychological violence Chandan faces at the recruitment office: a seemingly regular inquiry that becomes an avowal of dominance, reducing ambition to audacity. Fanon and Valmiki reveal how structures of oppression function stealthily through everyday gestures, gazes, and tones. *Homebound* captures this with aching authenticity, showing how caste humiliation does not always arrive through slurs or corporeal violence, but through subtle reminders of "place" delivered with a smile, a raised eyebrow, or a sarcastic remark, only the person facing it can only understand and feel that humiliating experience.

This moment reflects what sociologist M. N. Srinivas terms the "everydayness of caste," where oppression is not always aggressive and have a corporeal presence but woven into interactions, gestures, and the tone of conversation. The interaction exemplifies what Gopal Guru later theorizes as "ritualized humiliation"—the normalized, procedural ways in which dominant caste power asserts itself through tone, gesture, and asserts power and fortifies hierarchy rather than overt violence and resentment.

While Srinivas helps us see how caste authority is normalized through everyday institutional encounters, Fanon allows us to understand its psychic consequences.

*Homebound* powerfully portrays how oppressed individuals internalize disgrace, recoiling themselves to avoid being seen. Shoaib persistently confronts Chandan on his inferiority complex, insisting that hiding one's identity serves the oppressor's intentions. In one heated moment, he reminds Chandan that even he holds certain

privileges as a man while his mother and sister bear the burden of physical labour without choice or opportunity. Chandan's sister expresses this truth clearly when she says she was never allowed to dream or decide her future.

Sudha's perspective adds another dimension. Coming from a modest background her father a lineman, her family living in a government quarter she urges Chandan to pursue higher education rather than settling for a low-rank police job. Her remark,

"Isi tarah hum unse kursi se kursi sata kar baith sakte hain,"

(Only through education can we sit beside them as equals) echoes Ambedkar's famous assertion that education is the only weapon powerful enough to challenge caste hierarchy. Yet the irony remains, equality is imagined not through the annihilation of caste, but through achieving proximity to those placed above. This desire for recognition is, as Ambedkar notes, one of the deepest psychological wounds castes inflict. Caste's brutality becomes even more visible when Chandan's mother finally secures a respectable job as a school cook only to be rejected by upper-caste parents who object to food prepared by a "lower-caste" woman. The principal cites constitutional ideals of equality, but his words feel hollow against the social reality. It is Chandan's mother who delivers the sharpest critique: When her daughter, also of a lower caste, cleans bathrooms or tends to their sick children, caste poses no problem so why does caste suddenly matter when she cooks food?

This instance echoes Ambedkar's concept of caste as a system of "graded inequality," where purity and pollution are selectively implored to assert authority. The upper-caste parents' reaction is not about hygiene but hierarchy.

## **VII. Religious Identity: Belonging and the Burden of Being Marked**

The film also confronts the discrimination faced by religious minorities in India with remarkable honesty. Shoaib becomes the embodiment of this injustice a young Muslim man constantly forced to prove his loyalty, his innocence, and even his right to belong.

Even in everyday spaces, he is othered and attacked.

In a local cricket match, when he tries to help his team win but is deliberately declared "out," he is beaten with sticks by Hindu boys a chilling reminder that the field is rarely level for people like him. The humiliation continues in the workplace an environment that should operate on merit and professionalism. He is asked not only for his identity card but also for his parents' Aadhar cards. His father, weary of such scrutiny, understands exactly why suspicion is the default lens through which Muslims are seen.

When Shoaib earns, a promotion based on his talent, he is asked to obtain a certificate from the police station to prove he is not involved in criminal activities. Success, for him, becomes another checkpoint where he must justify his existence.

At the farmhouse party, he is mocked as "Pakistan side," during a cricket match between India and Pakistan, reduced to a national stereotype because of his faith. Even when he brings halwa to share an act of warmth and cultural celebration it becomes the object of ridicule:

"*Dekho Lahore se halwa lekar aaya hai.*"

The casualness of such remarks reveals a deeper systemic prejudice, Muslims are often referenced as *they* or *them*, linguistically pushed out of "us."

## **VIII. A Pandemic that Exposed the Nation's Fault Lines**

The pandemic section of *Homebound* is not merely an episode within the narrative; it becomes the film's most searing indictment of structural abandonment. After finding work in Surat's textile mills, Chandan sends money home to rebuild his mud dwelling into a cemented house and to buy sandals for his mother a small but profound gesture of care, dignity, and protection.

When COVID-19 strikes and India announces a sudden nationwide lockdown, the mill shuts down instantly, and the fragile stability of migrant workers collapses overnight. With no wages, no transport, and no social security, Shoaib and Chandan join millions of internal migrants forced to walk hundreds of kilometres back to their villages not out of choice, but out of a desperate longing for the only place where they feel they still matter. The film's depiction of this journey is deeply faithful to the trauma embedded in the collective memory of 2020. The roads become spaces of desolation and despair. Migrant families trudging along highways are beaten by policemen for "violating" lockdown rules, their bodies punished for trying to reach home. Shoaib and Chandan witness trucks overloaded with people entire families standing pressed against one another in suffocating proximity. In one chilling moment, when a woman coughs, she and her family are thrown off the truck in a mood of suspicion and panic, as if her breath itself were a threat. Later, when Chandan falls ill during the journey, both friends are abandoned on the highway by a truck driver who curtly returns the money they had paid. Illness becomes a reason for expulsion, not compassion.

Hunger becomes another silent killer. Shops with metal shutters remain firmly closed, and the few grocery stores that open have long queues snaking outside, with limited supplies that run out before everyone is

served. The landscape turns into one of desperation: deserted factories, police barricades, crying infants, blistered feet, and empty water bottles rolling along the highway. The film reminds us that thousands did not die of the virus, but of the circumstances born out of the lockdown hunger, dehydration, heat exhaustion, and sheer neglect. In one of the film's most devastating scenes, Chandan collapses due to severe heatstroke. When Shoaib searches through his belongings, he finds the pair of sandals that Chandan had bought for his mother a dream of dignity that outlives him. His police joining letter arrives only after his death, turning opportunity into irony, and hope into mourning. Shoaib eventually steps into that role, walking in his friend's footsteps, carrying forward the dream that Chandan was denied.

This section of *Homebound* captures a national wound with extraordinary sensitivity. It does not dramatize suffering; it documents it. It becomes a cinematic archive of a time when the nation's most marginalized citizens bore the heaviest burden walking, starving, carrying children on hips, sleeping under flyovers, dying on roads that led everywhere except home.

### **IX. Homeland: The Only Space They Truly Own**

Despite the persistent marginalization, the film beautifully portrays a deep and an emotional attachment to homeland. In one of the poignant scenes, Shoaib asks his uncle why he refuses opportunities abroad. The uncle replies:

I was tempted once to settle in Dubai, but then I thought:

“Hamarey purkhey yahin pe jiye, yahin dafan hue, unki duaen inhi hawaon mein hai.”

(Our ancestors lived here, they were buried here, and their blessings still linger in this very air.)

“Shayad yahan reh kar andar se kuch badal doon.”

(Maybe by staying here, I can help change things from within.)

These lines capture the intense emotional geography of *Homebound*: a love for the homeland that is not anchored in land ownership, but in memory, ancestry, and breath itself. For the marginalized, home is inseparable from lineage, a place where the air carries the voices and blessings of those who came before, binding the present generation to their soil with tenderness and grief. Shoaib's reluctant and a poignant response is: “Hamari mitti, hawa, rastey, dostiyan, apni zaban, yahi sab to ghar hai hamara. Is sab ko chor kar kaise jayein.” (Our soil, our air, our roads, our friendships, our language — this is what home is for us. How can we leave all of this behind?)

“Apni gali ki azaan sun kar aisa lagta hai jaise kisi buzurg ne sar par haath rakh diya ho.” (The azaan in my street feels like an elder blessing me by placing their hand over my head.) Shoaib's words to his uncle bloom with a quiet, aching poetry: “Hamari mitti, hawa, rastey, dostiyan, apni zaban — yahi sab to ghar hai hamara. Is sab ko chor kar kaise jayein?” And when he speaks of the azaan in his street as a blessing placed gently on his head, he reveals a truth often lost in the noise of suspicion that Indian Muslims carry a love for their homeland that is intimate, ancestral, and unwavering. Yet this love is constantly questioned, as Muslims today live under an unrelenting scrutiny that demands proof of loyalty at every turn. A Muslim cricketer missing a catch becomes a national betrayal; a young man like Shoaib becomes “Pakistan side” in a moment of mockery. *Homebound* captures this pain with haunting tenderness: the humiliation of being asked to prove over and over again that your soil is your own, that your breath belongs here, that your love for your watan is not conditional. In a time when Muslims face the harshest of violences, social, political, and psychological, Shoaib's reflections remind us that belonging is not granted by the state or by majoritarian approval; it is carried in memories, in language, in prayer, in the air that feels like an elder's blessing, and in the unbreakable bond that ties a person to their home.

### **X. Conclusion**

*Homebound* refuses the comfort of impartiality. The scenes that involve castes, religious minorities, state power, and the ambitions and aspirations of marginalized communities create a seething angst that dawdles long before and after the frame dissolves. The discomfort and certain uneasiness in the film are deliberately inculcated; they are so present with subtlety that the viewers get engaged with them deeply. As Fanon reminds us, “civilized society” resists naked reality and uncomfortable truths because it reveals the systemic violence rooted in everyday order for the marginalized sections of the society. The film's depiction of marginalized lives does not seek empathy; it strives for recognition. In confronting viewers with bureaucratic humiliation, delayed dreams, and the silent corrosion of dignity, *Homebound* insists that uneasiness is not a fault or failing but a political necessity.

The last scene of *Homebound* evolves without dialogue, and yet it speaks the loudest. There is a complete silence enveloped the entire scene with only the sound of nature, the bustling sound of flowing river, and the pigeons flapping their wings. Shoaib sits alone by the river, the very place where he once laughed, debated, dreamed, and shared the unconditional warmth of friendship with Chandan. The river, in this instant, becomes a living metaphor. It symbolizes time, memory, and the inevitability of loss. Its flowing water reflects the persistent movement of life, carrying away what we cannot hold, yet eternally resonating what has been lived. Like the river,

human relationships change form; people depart, but their presence lingers in the currents of memory. When the white pigeon lands nearby, the symbolism becomes even more tender and intense. A soaring pigeon often signifies freedom perhaps Chandan's spirit released from a life of never-ending struggle. The second pigeon that comes and perches beside Shoaib brings a different energy: companionship, continuity, the silent promise that he is not entirely alone. Together, the two birds symbolize both absence and presence, retreat and return, loss and the fragile hope that survives it.

In the context of the film's title, *Homebound*, these pigeons personify the longing for home that runs through the narrative. Pigeons are birds known to return reliably to their nests, a symbol of innate belonging. Their gentle arrival suggests that Chandan's spirit has found peace, and that Shoaib, now wearing the uniform his friend once longed for, carries forward Chandan's dream with an earnest tenderness. The scene also induces the idea that home is not merely a physical space, but an assemblage of memories, friendships, and heirlooms carried within the heart.

Director Neeraj Ghaywan ends the film with silence, water, and birds because some truths cannot be spoken; they can only be felt. The river remembers. The pigeons witness. And Shoaib, in his meditative stillness, becomes the curator of a friendship that has transcended death.

*Homebound* is a brave and dauntless work encrusted with cultural nuance, local dialects, and everyday architecture that builds an intuitive genuineness. The cinematography is striking yet understated, allowing lived reality to take the spotlight.

There are no melodramatic speeches, no rhetorics, no background songs guiding emotions only characters traversing life with quiet strength. The performances by the entire cast are exceptional, natural, grounded, and deeply human.

The film asks uncomfortable questions about who gets to belong, who gets to dream, and who is denied dignity. It invites viewers not just to watch, but to reflect and hopefully, to feel compelled toward change. It also invites viewers to cry through their brain.

*Homebound* stands out as a powerful and an obligatory piece of contemporary Indian cinema. Without sensationalism or preachy rhetoric, it courageously exposes the social fault lines that define the lives of millions caste, religion, economic marginalization, and the struggle for dignity. Neeraj Ghaywan's direction ensures that every frame feels lived-in, every silence speaks, and every character carries the weight of a collective history. What makes the film extraordinary is its refusal to lose sight of humanity amid hardship. It reminds us that hope persists in friendship, in resilience, and in an unbreakable bond with one's homeland. This is cinema that questions, cinema that cares, and cinema that insists we look around with more empathy and honesty. A must-watch film not for entertainment alone, but for awareness, reflection, and a renewed faith in the stories that truly matter.