"What is happening in Kashmir?"

This book explores this question through a site-adaptive 24-hour theatrical performance.

Developed between 2013 and 2018 by the Ensemble Kashmir Theatre Akademi and Nandita Dinesh, the play uses a duration, promenade format to immerse its audience within a multitude of perspectives on life in Kashmir. From a wedding celebration that is interrupted by curfew, to schoolboys divided by policing strategies, and soldiers struggling with a toxic mixture of boredom and trauma,

"Chronicles from Kashmir" uses performance, installation and collaborative creation to grapple with Kashmir's conflicts through the lenses of outsiders, insiders, and everyone in between.

Due to varying degrees of censorship and suppression, the play has not been performed live since 2017. This book is, therefore, an attempt to keep "Chronicles from Kashmir" alive by including filmed scenes, a script, contextual questions, a glossary, and an illuminating introduction by Nandita Dinesh and EKTA founder Bhawani Bashir Yasir. A valuable Open Access resource for practitioners, educators and students of performance and conflict, this book is also stimulating reading for anybody who has asked, 'What is happening in Kashmir?'

This playscript includes:

- Twenty filmed scenes of the play in performance
- A range of contextual questions to stimulate discussion on staging site-adaptive theatre in places of conflict
- A helpful glossary

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher's website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com
Scene 0
Framing the Experience

Throughout the 24-hour experience, the azaan — the Muslim call to prayer — must occur at appropriate times. There should be a designated actor, or recording, giving the call to prayer. Actors who are not performing in that instance, or who are in scenes where the context allows, should pray...if they want to.

When they disembark from the bus, audience members are taken to a space that is designed as a tour operator’s office and is filled with paraphernalia that the “mainstream” tourism industry might tell outsiders to expect in Kashmir. It is important that this space, at the beginning, is “touristy” — that it extolls the natural beauty of the Valley and her peoples; that it reinforces stereotypes, if you will. This is important so as to highlight the layers that will be added to the design of this same space by the end of the 24-hour experience.

There are refreshments that are served here; music is playing (perhaps the same instrumental music that was played on the bus). It is important that there is an air of something akin to celebration.

When audience members arrive at this space, actors at a reception table meet them. The actors wear labels that say INSIDER. Spectators are asked to line up in rows, in front of individual actors. Each audience member is handed the OUTSIDER card below and is asked to fill their card at the table, while the actor watches over them to answer any queries.
What might be reasons underpinning the particular prompts that OUTSIDERS (spectators) need to complete on their identification badges?

*Hint: look into adult learning theories.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>OUTSIDER</th>
<th>PLEASE KEEP THIS CARD WITH YOU AT ALL TIMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My name is:</td>
<td>If you need anything over the course of the day, please approach one of the GUIDES for assistance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to be here because:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>________________</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once audience members have finished filling out their individual cards, they are asked to place them in lanyards and to hang the lanyards around their necks at all times. The actors at the table then direct each audience member to an area that is designed to be a green room.

In this green room, with mirrors, other performers wearing INSIDER tags meet the audience members and guide them towards a range of costume items. Some are extremely specific to the context of Kashmir: pherans, hijabs, kurtas, dupattas. Other elements are not so relevant to Kashmir: safari hats and vests, masks, brightly coloured short/sleeveless clothing, clearly ill-conceived clothing vis-à-vis the codes of the local context in which the play is being performed.

As each audience member enters this green-room area, they show an actor their OUTSIDER card. The actor reads the card and chooses a costume item that the audience members will have to wear, in addition to their existing clothing, over the course of the day-long journey. The actor can choose the item based on something the spectator has written on their card. The actor can choose the item completely at random. Of course, audience members can choose not to wear the clothing given to them, in which case, something else can be chosen by the INSIDER. Alternatively, the spectators can choose their own costume. However: each audience member must wear a costume item.

**Pheran**  
A type of tunic that is particular to Kashmir

**Hijab**  
Scarf worn by Muslim women

**Kurta**  
A tunic

**Dupatta**  
A type of scarf

Let’s say you are creating an immersive experience that seeks to give your audience an insight into income inequality, as it manifests in your local context.  

Who would be the target audience?
While the exact costume item handed to each audience member can be different, what is important is that all spectators are given — in addition to an individualized costume item — a bag.

The bags can be of different sizes or colours or shapes, as long as they are big enough to carry the stone souvenirs that are given to them throughout the experience, and have a legible label sewn on them. The label reads:

This bag belongs to

_______________________________

(the name of the OUTSIDER, as on their card, is written here by the actor).

All audience members will have to carry these bags with them over the course of the 24-hour journey. The actors should tell them this. Most bags need to be strong; resilient. Others can be intentionally crafted with less finesse.

While audience members are getting dressed for their journey and are receiving their bags, GUIDES #1 and #2 walk in and begin to meet each spectator informally. They welcome each individual audience member, introduce themselves as the GUIDES, and establish through these informal conversations that the audience members are, in fact, in the “Valley.”

Once all the audience members have their OUTSIDER cards, costume item, and bag — and once the GUIDES have met everyone in the group informally — the music fades; all the other actors leave; there is silence.

And in that silence, the GUIDES step forward:

GUIDE #1: Welcome, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to this “tour.” We are —

GUIDE #2: Is “tour” the right word?

GUIDE #1: Isn’t it?

GUIDE #2: Sounds so... touristy.

GUIDE #1: Chalo, suggest something else, then.
GUIDE #2: “Journey” might be better, no?

GUIDE #1: (Smiles). So, let’s start again.

Welcome to this journey (emphasizes the word), ladies and gentlemen. We are so very glad to have you with us.

This journey... it’s something special. Something unique. A journey during which you will become part of a conversation between an ordinary Kashmiri (points to himself), and an ordinary non-Kashmiri (points at GUIDE #2).

There are no diplomats here; no agencies; no NGOs — just two people from the “inside” and the “outside;” two people who have chosen to come together to explore if, and how, they might be able to walk together.

What is the place for an outsider in the face of our struggles in Kashmir today? This is the question that lies at the heart of this journey.

GUIDE #2: I look at Kashmir through the eyes of guest; a foreigner; an outsider. And today, with the support of my friend here, I will be sharing some of the stories that I have encountered in my journeys through Kashmir.

GUIDE #1: I have heard my friend here speak of these experiences before, but this is the first time that I will be witnessing the stories in this form. This journey (both GUIDES smile at each other) — is as new for me as it is for you...

As someone who has grown up here and has witnessed the highs and lows of Kashmir’s struggles, I have always wondered what outsiders experience when they come to my home. Do they simply see the beauty of the land? Or do they only see the hartals and the protests and the voices of dissent? Do they speak to the aam aadmi and aurat and get a sense of what is actually happening here? Or do they only sit on houseboats and drink copious amounts of kehewa, oblivious to what’s happening around them? I have always wondered what outsiders see when they come to Kashmir...
GUIDE #2: Over the course of the next day, you will walk around different spaces with us. In some of them, you will be asked to watch and listen. In others, you will be invited to become part of the action. In all of them, you have a choice to be involved as much as you wish.

Please always wear your ID cards and please, always carry the bags that have been given to you.

Before we start our journey, are there any questions?

Audience members are given the opportunity to ask the GUIDES questions about practical matters: When will they get to use the toilet? When will they get to eat?

If questions go beyond practicalities to the content or intent of the work, the GUIDES simply smile and say: “We hope you will find an answer to that question over the course of our time together.”

When the spectators have asked all their questions, the GUIDES lead them to the next space.

The path to the next space is incredibly pristine; clean; a well-manicured lawn, for instance. Perhaps it even has a lake. There are flowers in full bloom. The GUIDES and the audience stroll through this space; relaxed — taking their time to arrive at the next setting.

If we were to consider audience configurations in theatre (proscenium, thrust, the round) as symbolic elements, what might be the symbolism of using the promenade (where spectators move from one space to another)?

How can the physical placement of an audience in the theatre function as an allegory for the content of the work?

Devise two scenes, about a topic of your choice, which are performed in two different rooms.

The audience must be taken from space A to space B, without breaking the world of the performance.

Then, try to stage same two scenes, but this time without the movement between spaces i.e., both scenes are performed in the same place, to a static audience.

What changes?

What stays the same?