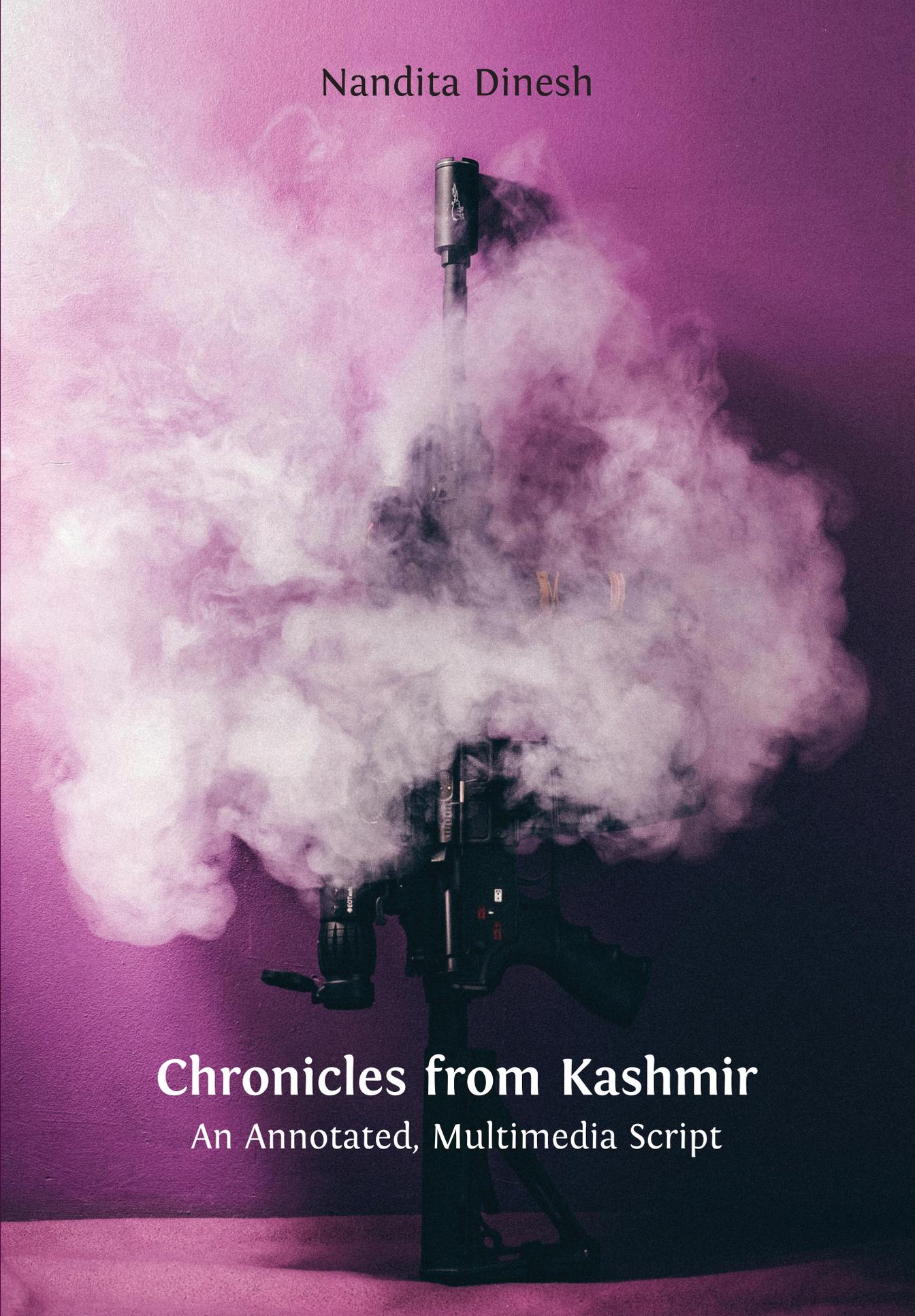


Nandita Dinesh



Chronicles from Kashmir

An Annotated, Multimedia Script



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Scene Two: The Departure



▶ WATCH THE VIDEO

The GUIDES lead the audience into a kitchen; NEIGHBOURS #1, #2, & #3 enter with the them.

DOCTOR: Good day everyone.

GUIDE: Good day!

NEIGHBOUR #1: Hello! How's it going, doctor?

The three NEIGHBOURS shake hands with the DOCTOR. The DOCTOR shakes hands with spectators, informally greeting them to his home. The GUIDES direct spectators where to sit. Once everyone is seated:

DOCTOR: I'm really glad to see you all and to have you here as part of your journey. Tell me about your trip to Kashmir so far — what have you seen, what have you learned?

The audience is given a chance to interact with the DOCTOR. The GUIDES encourage the audience to speak: to establish that, indeed, there are occasions when spectators can directly engage with the performers. Whatever the response is from the audience, the DOCTOR engages with questions that invite spectators to clarify their thoughts and opinions. When a rapport has been established:

DOCTOR: Listen, I would love to offer you all something to eat... But it's been a slightly difficult time and I don't really have anything at the moment.

NEIGHBOUR #3: What's wrong Doctor *saab*?

DOCTOR: Oh, you know what's been happening around here. I found a note on the door yesterday... The same kind of note that Kaul *saab* received.

Saab
Sir

NEIGHBOUR #3: Who was the note from?

DOCTOR: Well, we'll never know who they're from exactly... Could be some kids playing a prank, could be something more serious.

NEIGHBOUR #2: What are you going to do?

DOCTOR: I'm thinking of publishing the note in the paper tomorrow, so that people can see what happened. And if it is some kids having their fun, they can be stopped.

NEIGHBOUR #1: It might not be kids you know... It might be something more serious.

DOCTOR: I know.

NEIGHBOUR #1: And by publishing the note in the paper you will only draw more attention to yourself.

DOCTOR: I know that.

NEIGHBOUR #1: So?

DOCTOR: What else can I do?

NEIGHBOUR #3: Look I think you're right. Publish it in the paper and if anything happens, we are with you.

Janab
Your Excellency
(a colloquialism that is
used to connote respect,
regardless of the gender
of the person being
addressed)

NEIGHBOUR #1: Please, *janab*. Don't make glib promises that you cannot keep. If this note is from who we think it's from, and if Tickoo *saab* publishes it in the newspaper, there is nothing we can do to protect him from them. I'm sorry, Doctor *saab*. I'm not trying to upset you, but the truth is that if they show up in the neighbourhood because you publish their note in the newspaper, you cannot expect us to come out to save you.

NEIGHBOUR #3: I'll come out.

NEIGHBOUR #2: Much good you'll do, standing outside his door on your own. They'll just take you down with him.

DOCTOR: Please, don't get involved in this any of you. I don't want anything to happen to you. I just need to figure out what I'm going to do.

NEIGHBOUR #1: I've heard that the Pandits in the other neighbourhood have already left.

DOCTOR: Yes, I've heard the same thing.

NEIGHBOUR #3: But there are others like you Doctor *saab*, who are still here. So, don't feel pressured to leave. Take your time and make a decision that you're comfortable with.

NEIGHBOUR #2: Time? You think there is time to make this decision? Doctor *saab*, you need to decide quickly. Things are going from bad to worse every day.

DOCTOR: I know that... I know. I'll try to decide by tonight. There's a bus leaving first thing tomorrow morning and...

MAN enters. The lines below overlap. There is a sense of chaos. Of fear. Of unrest.

MAN: Let me through!

DOCTOR: Excuse me.

MAN: You. You're the one we've been looking for —

NEIGHBOUR #3: What's going on? Hey! Let him go! What the hell is going on?

NEIGHBOUR #3 tries to defend the DOCTOR. NEIGHBOURS #1 and #2 quietly leave the room.

DOCTOR: Let me go!

The DOCTOR pushes the MAN; NEIGHBOUR #3 tries to help him by beating the MAN with a broom. Confusion.

NEIGHBOUR #3: Let him go! Let him go!

The OFFICIAL enters.

OFFICIAL: What's going on here? Halt! Separate!

DOCTOR,

MAN,

NEIGHBOUR #3: *(all at the same time)* Sir, they were pushing him! — Over here — Over there — They tied him up — They dragged him down —

OFFICIAL: One at a time.

NEIGHBOUR #3: Sir, what is happening here? He's a good man.

OFFICIAL: It doesn't matter what you think.

NEIGHBOUR #3: But we saw...!

OFFICIAL: What you saw is of no consequence.

NEIGHBOUR #3 mixes in with the audience. The OFFICIAL moves off to the side, crosses his arms, his expression serious. MAN has DOCTOR down on his knees and keeps him kneeling if he ever tries to rise. Throughout the following interrogation, the OFFICIAL walks around the kitchen — tipping over containers, spilling staples and spices everywhere. The room should be in complete disarray by the time the OFFICIAL exits: a mix of food and smells and memories.

OFFICIAL: Name.

DOCTOR: Tickoo.

OFFICIAL: Tickoo?

MAN: Sir, this is Sanjay Tickoo and is one of the men that we have been looking for. He stands accused of not having done enough to promote equal educational opportunities in this community.

OFFICIAL: Ah, yes. He is one of those people.

DOCTOR: Sir, I haven't done anything. Please, sir. I don't know what he is talking about. Why are you doing this to me?

OFFICIAL: Silence. I'll ask the questions here.

Silence.

OFFICIAL: How long have you lived here?

DOCTOR: My family has lived here for generations, sir.

OFFICIAL: How many generations exactly?

DOCTOR: I'm not sure, sir. At least four or five. Hundred. Maybe more...

OFFICIAL: I see. Tell me about your family.

DOCTOR: What would you like to know, sir?

OFFICIAL: What do they do?

DOCTOR: Sir, we are a family of doctors. My grandparents, parents, myself, we are all doctors. My brother is a lawyer. My sister is a homemaker, and she lives in Delhi.

OFFICIAL: Delhi, I see. I suppose that's to be expected.

DOCTOR: I don't know what you mean, sir. She's married there and —

OFFICIAL: Yes, yes. I know why she's in Delhi rather than Srinagar or Lahore.

DOCTOR: I... I don't know what you mean, sir.

OFFICIAL: And your brother? Where is he?

DOCTOR: Right now, he is on a business trip in London, sir.

OFFICIAL: London, huh. It must be nice to have so many opportunities.

DOCTOR: Everything we have, we have had to earn, sir. We have worked hard for what we have.

OFFICIAL: How do you give back to your neighbourhood?

DOCTOR: My neigh — what do you mean, sir?

OFFICIAL: Your family is doing well. How do you share your wealth and opportunity with those around you, who might not have as much as you?

Pause. OFFICIAL smirks at the DOCTOR's visible confusion.

OFFICIAL: *Chalo*, let's talk about the school in this neighbourhood. Your family's school.

DOCTOR: What about the school, sir?

OFFICIAL: Tell me something. Who are the students in the school?

DOCTOR: They are all from here, sir.

OFFICIAL: Don't try to evade the question. Isn't the school that you and your family studied in, the school that your great grandfather established, the 'best' school in this neighbourhood, only for your community's children?

DOCTOR: No, sir. It's for everyone. Everyone is welcome at our school — wherever they are from.

OFFICIAL: Oh, is that right? And you make sure there is equal access for all the children in this *mohalla* to go to your school?

DOCTOR: I... I don't understand, sir. I don't stop anyone's children from going to any school.

OFFICIAL: Let me rephrase my question. Do you make a conscious effort to ensure that children from outside your community have access to your school?

DOCTOR: I —

What are the complex ways in which complicity manifests? Where does the responsibility of relative privilege begin/end?

Mohalla
Neighborhood

OFFICIAL: You are on the board of the school, correct?

DOCTOR: Yes, sir, I'm on the school board because my great-grandfather started the school. I still don't understand what you want from me.

OFFICIAL: I want you to admit your part in the inequality that has been created in this neighbourhood and in Kashmir.

DOCTOR: What?

OFFICIAL: I. Want. You. To. Admit. It.

DOCTOR: Admit what, sir?

OFFICIAL: Admit your part in the inequality that exists between your community and mine.

DOCTOR: Sir, I'm just on the board of the school. I don't decide who attends the school.

OFFICIAL: But do you do your part, as a citizen of Kashmir, to make sure that the school treats everyone fairly? Do you make sure that other people's children can go there too; not just your own?

DOCTOR: I don't know what I'm expected to say, sir... I don't understand.

OFFICIAL: Of course, you don't understand. In your opinion, you are just one person, right? The inequality that exists between your community and ours, is not your fault? Let me tell you something, Mr. Tickoo. The inequality in Kashmir is, in some way, the fault of everyone in your community. Do you understand what I'm saying to you, Doctor *saab*?

A long silence.

Consider an instance in your life when you were/ are complicit with a situation of injustice.

If you were to be on trial for this complicity, who would be your defence? Your prosecution? Your jury?

DOCTOR: (*Quietly*) Some Kashmiris have more than other Kashmiris because of... because of one reason or another.

(*Building intensity*) But I still do not understand how any of this is my fault, sir. I don't know what you expect me to do about the situation of the school. I don't know what you expect me to do about the circumstances that I was born into. Yes, I'm on the board of the school and help with school activities sometimes. But I am, first and foremost, a doctor. And as a doctor, I treat all my patients fairly; regardless of which community they belong to.

NEIGHBOUR #3: Sir, that's true. Doctor *saab* always —

OFFICIAL gives NEIGHBOUR #3 a look that immediately silences them.

OFFICIAL: Let me ask you this, Mr. Tickoo, if everyone in Kashmir were to think like you: that some people just have more privilege and there is nothing to be done about it, will anything change?

Look into the narratives surrounding the Kashmiri Pandit community.

DOCTOR: I don't know, sir. But how does blaming me for a system that I had no part in creating change anything either? I don't understand what you want from me.

OFFICIAL: You don't understand... That's the problem, isn't it, Mr. Tickoo? You do not understand your role in what's happening in Kashmir these days. That's why you are receiving these notes that tell you to leave.

Pause.

DOCTOR: You know about the notes.

OFFICIAL: We know everything, Doctor *saab*.

DOCTOR: So, it's not some children playing a joke on me?

OFFICIAL: No.

DOCTOR: The notes are real?

OFFICIAL: Yes.

DOCTOR: You want me to leave Kashmir?

OFFICIAL: Well, I wouldn't say *I* want you to leave Kashmir specifically. But it is advised that you leave.

DOCTOR: Sir, this is my home.

OFFICIAL: If it were your home, don't you think you would do more to address the inequalities here?

DOCTOR: No, no. This isn't right, sir. I am free to stay here if I wish.

MAN and OFFICIAL laugh.

DOCTOR: Am I not free?

The role of the OFFICIAL in this scene has been intentionally written as being ambiguous. Based on your research and understanding of what is happening/has happened to Kashmiri Pandits, who might this archetype represent?

OFFICIAL: You can stay if you like. But... we cannot be held responsible if anything happens to you. Consider this conversation your final warning.

OFFICIAL and MAN exit. Silence.

In the process of creating *Chronicles from Kashmir*, the choice of cultural elements — like the song at the end of the scene — was left to the members of EKTA.

If you were to stage this work in your context, how would you go about identifying these pieces of the puzzle? Who would you contact? How would you begin this process?

NEIGHBOUR #3 stands up and goes to the DOCTOR. They hug. NEIGHBOUR #3 exits.

The DOCTOR stops being able to see the audience members and the GUIDES. He is in his own world. He stares at a trunk, which has been placed in the middle of the room. He stares at the trunk and after a few seconds, makes a decision. He walks swiftly around the room, collecting objects that have meaning for him, placing each of them on the trunk: the items are somehow symbolic of Kashmir.

Finally, the DOCTOR's glance lands on the pheran — a traditional Kashmiri tunic — that he is wearing. He removes it violently and throws it on the floor. As soon as it hits the floor, he runs to it, picks up the pheran, hugs it. He looks at all the objects that he has placed on the trunk. He takes an object or two in his hands, because he cannot take everything with him, no? Some objects fall to the ground

when he opens the trunk. He gazes at the fallen objects and at the objects in his hands. He climbs into the trunk with the objects in his hands. He closes the trunk.

Silence.

GUIDE #1 breaks out into song — a song associated with exodus; with migration. A few lines into the song, GUIDE #2 hands stone souvenirs to the audience to place in their bags. Meanwhile, GUIDE #1 continues to sing and the DOCTOR remains inside the trunk. Here, the stone souvenir for the spectator is embellished, somehow, with an image of a long line of migrants/refugees who are en route from one place to another.

Topi
A hat that functions as a marker of one's identity

When GUIDE #1 finishes his song of lament, the audience is led to the next space down a path that is varyingly draped with hats; hats worn specifically by Kashmiri Pandits — Pandit topis as they are called.