Chronicles from Kashmir
An Annotated, Multimedia Script

NANDITA DINESH

“What is happening in Kashmir?” This book explores this question through a site-adaptable 24-hour theatrical performance.

Developed between 2013 and 2018 by the Ensemble Kashmir Theatre Akademi and Nandita Dinesh, the play uses a durational, 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-adaptable 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

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Nandita Dinesh
Scene Six: The Incarcerated

They reach the doorway of another room. A prison. The LADY is already present.

During the monologue each of the following monologues, the LADY is staged at a location in the middle of the space. Through directorial choices, it is signified that she symbolically takes on the role of each person that a particular PRISONER is speaking about. The stage directions below each PRISONER’s text describe the LADY’s actions.

PRISONER 1: By becoming a rebel, one can lose everything. My wife has left me, married someone else, taken my things, my child... The rebel movement... I joined because it was the thing to do at the time. There didn’t seem to be any other choice. Some of us became rebels for the money, some of us did it for fun, some did it because they were unemployed, and they thought it better to die for a cause rather than dying a little bit every day from hunger.

While the monologue is spoken by PRISONER 1, LADY takes on the role of his child. The child speaks two lines: “When I grow up, I want to be like my father” and “When I grow up, I do not want to be like my father” As the child says these lines, she is playing with her toys. She murmurs the lines quietly. She continues her murmurs even when PRISONER #1 has finished speaking. Her muttering pierces the silence. PRISONER 1 watches her. A few seconds. Freeze.

The first song.

PRISONER 2: What about those of us who actually believed in the struggle? Who will not break for anything? I became a rebel for the freedom of my nation. Becoming a
rebel is a noble undertaking... When justice is gone, what room is there for peace? I... I spit on profit. I spit on people who joined because they thought it would be romantic to be a hero. I spit on those who used the movement for their own gain. I spit on them. I SPIT ON THEM. I SPIT ON THEM. Thoo. Thoo. Thoo. Thoo. Thoo.

the monologue spoken by PRISONER 2, the LADY takes on the role of his mother. This mother has become a beggar after her son was taken to prison. She expected that maybe her son’s rebel colleagues would take care of her — her son was a hero after all. But she hasn’t been provided with anything. She begs for money, unsure what else to do to make ends meet, but it is important that she is proud of what her son did. She walks around amidst the audience. She says one line “My son was a hero. Help me in his name.” LADY continues her murmurs even when PRISONER #2 has finished speaking. Her mumbled begging pierces the silence. PRISONER #2 watches her. A few seconds.

Freeze.

The second song.

PRISONER #3: My wife married me while her parents would have never tolerated a man like me on their doorstep. When we were first together, we shared one blanket. If I moved, she was out of it, if she moved, I was out of it. What could I give her? All our women who have come from across the border, there needs to be support for them to go back home. They need to be able to see their families again.... But instead, what they face here... People say to me: “Who have you brought home? Couldn’t you have brought a Kashmiri?”

While the monologue of PRISONER #3 is being spoken, the LADY becomes a wife who has now turned to prostitution to make ends meet. Unable to see her husband, unable to ask for support from her parents or in-laws, she has no option but to... you know. The way she shows this is subtle — a change in clothes, an adding-on of make-up; cultural codes that show she has had to step out. PRISONER #3 watches her. A few seconds.

Freeze.

The third song.

PRISONER #4: I am NOT a rebel. I am innocent. I am not a rebel. I am innocent. I AM NOT A REBEL. I AM INNO-

While PRISONER #4 speaks, the woman wipes off her make-up and goes back to being a neutral LADY.

The PRISONERS begin to sing the fourth song collectively; one that might be coming from the LADY’s inner world. We don’t know who is singing; it doesn’t matter.
As the PRISONERS sing, the LADY walks from prisoner to prisoner with increasing speed— as herself; as the mother; as the child; as the wife — till she’s finally running. Sprinting. And ultimately, collapsing on the ground.

Freeze.

GUIDE #1: So, these are the stories of rebellion that you’ve heard in Kashmir?

GUIDE #2: Yes, that’s right.

GUIDE #1: You do know that there are different kinds of rebels in Kashmir, right? Not just the ones who might be called ‘militants’?

GUIDE #2: Of course, sir; I realize that. But it has been hard to find those voices that will readily admit to why and how they are rebels… I can understand that, since there will be risks to sharing that with an outsider like me… Tell me, janab, who are some of the rebels you think I should speak to?

GUIDE #1: Why don’t we ask our guests here what they think? I can always tell you my thoughts later, but I think this would be a wonderful opportunity for you to hear more opinions.

GUIDE #1 turns to the audience and tries to evoke responses — who do they think are rebels? Who are the rebellious voices that an outsider to Kashmir needs to hear? GUIDE #1 structures this like a conversation that would take place in a classroom/lecture and calls out the names of audience members from their badges. During this discussion GUIDE #2 hands stone souvenirs to each audience member. The stones are covered with a letter from a prisoner of war, from anywhere.

When the discussion has reached a natural pause: the first song.

PRISONER #1 walks out from his jail cell. LADY sits up and takes on the role of the child again. PRISONER #1 walks over to the child, sits down in front of her. They look at each other for a few seconds, in silence.

LADY
(as child): You’re back.

PRISONER #1: I’m back.

Silence.
LADY
(as child): I’m sorry, papa. But I don’t know how to talk to you.

PRISONER #1: We’ll learn how to talk to each other. We have all the time in the world now.

LADY
(as child): You’re not going to go away again?

PRISONER #1: I’m not going to go away again. I promise... You know, it was only the thought of seeing you that kept me going. Without the thought of you; without knowing that I would have you to come home to; I don’t know if I would have made it out of prison.

LADY
(as child): It was that bad?

PRISONER #1: It was worse than anything you could have imagined... But that’s all behind us now. Now, the only thing I have to worry about is how I can give you everything you want.

LADY
(as child): Why were you in jail for, papa?

PRISONER #1: What did your mother tell you?

LADY
(as child): Nothing.

Pause.

LADY
(as child): Have they forgiven you now?

PRISONER #1: No; no, they haven’t.

LADY
(as child): So, how come they let you out?

PRISONER #1: Because some people decided it was time...

LADY
(as child): Even though you weren’t forgiven?

PRISONER #1: Even though I wasn’t forgiven.

LADY
(as child): Have you forgiven yourself, papa?
PRISONER #1: What?

LADY
(as child): Have you forgiven yourself?

The smile slowly fades from PRISONER 1’s face. Freeze.

The second song.

PRISONER #2 walks out from his jail cell. LADY takes on the role of the mother. PRISONER #2 walks over to his mother, sits down in front of her. They look at each other for a few seconds, in silence.

LADY
(as mother): You’re back.

PRISONER #2: I’m back, ma.

LADY
(as mother): You have no idea how much I have missed you.

PRISONER #2: Can’t be more than I missed you.

LADY
(as mother): Look at you. You’ve gotten so skinny.

PRISONER #2 smiles.

LADY
(as mother): What now?

PRISONER #2: You know what I have to do, ma.

LADY
(as mother): You’re going to join them again?

PRISONER #2: I have to. I have to fight.

LADY
(as mother): Why does it have to be you? Can’t someone else do the fighting?

PRISONER #2: If everyone thought that way, nothing would change.

LADY
(as mother): But beta, what has changed with your fighting? All that has changed is that I have had to... I have had to beg. That’s all that changed.

PRISONER #2 freezes in position.
The third song.

PRISONER #3 walks out from his jail cell. As he is doing so, LADY takes on the role of his wife and starts putting on make-up. PRISONER #3 walks over to his wife, sits down in front of her. They look at each other for a few seconds, in silence.

LADY
(as wife): You’re back.

PRISONER #3: I’m back.

PRISONER #3 watches her put on the make-up. After a few moments of silence, he takes the make-up out of her hands, takes a handkerchief out of his pocket, and wipes the make-up slowly and deliberately off her face. As he does this, tears roll down her face. Once he has taken off all her make-up —

PRISONER #3: You don’t have to do this anymore.

LADY
(as wife): Have you found a job?

Silence. They look at each other. He picks up the handkerchief again and takes it to her face. He wipes the make-up off. She tries to put it back on. A struggle. He knocks the make up out of her hands and they fall to the floor. PRISONER #3 freezes.

LADY becomes her original character: not the child, the mother, or the wife. She sings the fourth song that the PRISONERS were singing earlier. As she sings, she slowly walks out of the room.

PRISONER #4 walks out from his jail cell and walks to PRISONERS #1, #2 & #3, shaking them and bringing them out of their frozen positions while repeating the lines “I’m innocent. I didn’t do anything.” The three previously frozen actors get more and more agitated by PRISONER #4, until:

PRISONERS
#1, #2, #3: SHUT UP.

Silence.

GUIDE #2: Shall we?

GUIDE #1: Please, lead the way.

As the audience members are led out of this space and to the next one, they walk down a path of smoke and ashes...