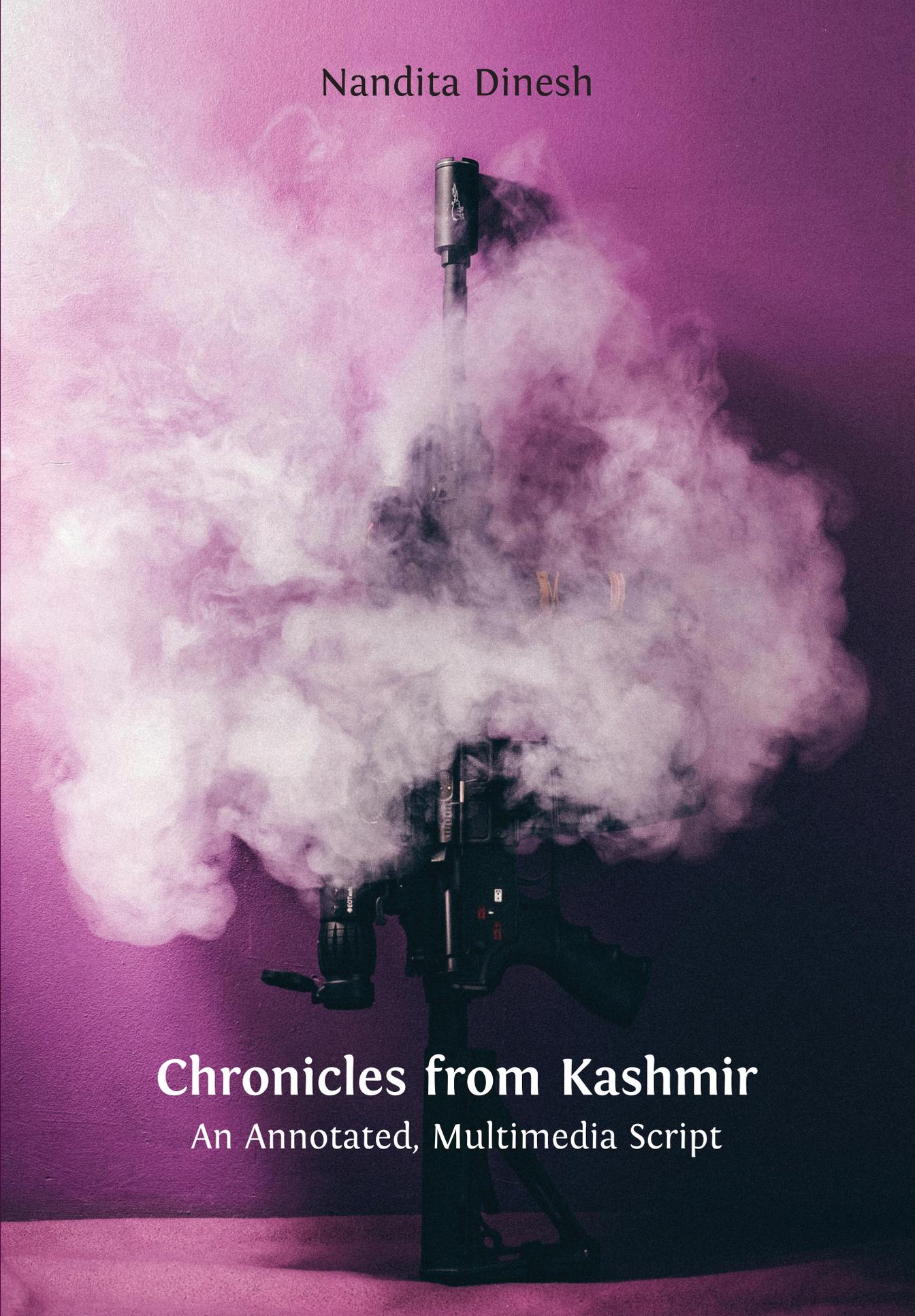


Nandita Dinesh



Chronicles from Kashmir

An Annotated, Multimedia Script



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Scene Nine: The Sikhs

A room with mirrors: like a green room. There should be, ideally, individual mirrors for each spectator.

Audience members at each mirror are assigned a MAKE-UP ARTIST. The GUIDES seat audience members at the different seats and then the MAKE UP ARTISTS take over. No talking. All that is heard is a song that has come to exemplify the presence of Sikhs in the Kashmir Valley.

As part of their make-up, audience members are given costumes — to wear over what they are wearing already, unless there is a changing room in that space for their transformation to take place expeditiously. Who do they become? Well, it's up to the MAKE-UP ARTISTS, isn't it?

Enter DIRECTOR, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, CAMERA PEOPLE, and LIGHTING PERSONNEL (the latter are referred to as the crew at points in this scene).

While the DIRECTOR speaks, the others start setting up their equipment. It's a film shoot.

DIRECTOR: Are they all ready?

GUIDE #2: Yes, sir. I haven't had the chance to tell them what this is about —

DIRECTOR: Right, let me do that then. So, we are here to shoot a film about some of the experiences of Sikhs in Kashmir. We're a little short of actors so that's why... well. You get the point. Now, most of our interviews are already done but we also want a few clips that are less... direct. Images that are more abstract... more conceptual.

We want to create a movie about the experiences of Sikhs in Kashmir, but we also want to make it in a way that is... *(he gesticulates with his arms, trying to find the right words)*. Look, bottom line: you all don't have to worry about a thing. We will tell you exactly what you need to do. Yes?

The Sikhs is one of the few scenes for which solely archival research was used.

For all the other scenes, the content was created through a combination of archival research, interviews, conversations, and workshops.

One of the goals in writing *The Sikhs*, therefore, was to visibly address the material's distance from lived experience.

Can you identify the strategies that have been used to achieve these goals?

The sequence of images that follow are deliberately described by content, rather than form. Based on the number of spectators and based on the space available, the construction of the images should differ. What is necessary though, is that the topic of each image is maintained.

The images can be understood as a tableau. A still image.

In these images, the DIRECTOR arranges the audience members into a particular composition and asks them to remain frozen in that position until he tells them that they can move.

Once the audience members are in the position desired by the DIRECTOR, the ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, CAMERA PEOPLE, and LIGHTING PERSONNEL take a short (1-minute) video of that particular image.

After each image has been filmed, audience members are told to relax, and immediately the recording is shown to the DIRECTOR on a screen that is also visible to the audience. The audience must be able to watch the recording as well.

After each recording is shown, the DIRECTOR and the ASSISTANT DIRECTOR have a brief conversation about the product. Sometimes, they want to reshoot an image because something hasn't been communicated accurately. Sometimes, they are happy with an image. Sometimes, they absolutely disagree on an image and have to either agree to disagree or to discard that image all together.

IMAGE #1: The Sikhs as a unique minority in the Kashmir Valley

After IMAGE #1 is staged, the DIRECTOR tells the audience to freeze in that position. The crew films that image for 1 minute. The video is played back for the DIRECTOR and the people in the image.

DIRECTOR: Yes, that works. That looks good to me. Anyone disagree?

ASSISTANT

DIRECTOR: Looks fine, sir. Looks fine.

DIRECTOR: Good. Let's move to the next one then. Let's see... It's the floods one. Let's bring in the props, please?

IMAGE #2: The Sikh community helping those affected during the 2014 floods, with the distribution of food and medicines

The necessary props are set up by the crew members and once IMAGE 2 is staged, the crew takes a video of the image for 1 minute. The video is played back for the DIRECTOR and the people in the image:

ASSISTANT

DIRECTOR: Something is missing sir.

DIRECTOR: What do you think?

ASSISTANT

DIRECTOR: I think that prop doesn't work for this scene, sir. It's too direct and obvious. Can we use something more abstract?

DIRECTOR: What did you have in mind?

ASSISTANT

DIRECTOR: It needs more texture, I think, sir. The trough. Maybe we can use the trough and fill it with —

DIRECTOR: Yes, I love that idea. Do it.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR and the crew bring in a trough (audience can be asked to help). The trough is filled with water. Excited that the suggestion has been accepted enthusiastically, the ASSISTANT DIRECTOR starts to compose the image. Midway through this, the DIRECTOR interrupts the ASSISTANT DIRECTOR and rearranges elements of the image. From an image that was more abstract, the DIRECTOR chooses realism. The ASSISTANT DIRECTOR is visibly dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction is ignored by the DIRECTOR.

IMAGE #2 is recorded as the DIRECTOR sets it up. The video is shown again.

This time, while other members of the crew point out to things they like about the image, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR stays quiet.

DIRECTOR: Well?

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR shrugs.

DIRECTOR: Don't sulk. If you have something to say, say it.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR shrugs again.

DIRECTOR: Fine, let's just proceed.

IMAGE #3: Interfaith partnerships, but not interfaith marriages

Before IMAGE #3 is completed by the DIRECTOR —

ASSISTANT

DIRECTOR: Sir —

DIRECTOR: Now you want to say something?

ASSISTANT

DIRECTOR: Sir, it's just —

How do you interpret the topic for Image #3?

What does this topic tell you about the intracultural dynamics between the communities in question?

DIRECTOR: Just say it!

ASSISTANT

DIRECTOR: Sir, this image is too vague, sir.

DIRECTOR: First the images are too obvious, and now they're too vague? Do you want to direct this?

ASSITANT

DIRECTOR: No sir, I just — It's ok, sir. Please go ahead as you wish.

DIRECTOR is irritated.

After IMAGE #3 is staged, the crew films it for 1 minute. The video is played back for the DIRECTOR and the people in the image:

DIRECTOR: Well?

ASSITANT

DIRECTOR: It's fine, sir.

DIRECTOR: You don't like it.

ASSISTANT

DIRECTOR: It's OK.

DIRECTOR: Go on, do it your way and show me.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR changes the image and this time, attempts to create a "sense" of the protest but without the placards. IMAGE #3 is restaged, reshot, and shown once again. The ASSISTANT DIRECTOR is visibly nervous. Keen to make their point, yes. But nervous.

The DIRECTOR pulls up two videos of IMAGE #3 together. The two videos are shown side by side and the DIRECTOR turns to one of the audience members:

DIRECTOR: Which one do you prefer? (*Listens to audience response and regardless of what is said*) Let's keep both for now and choose later, yes?

ASSISTANT

DIRECTOR: Sure, sir.

DIRECTOR: OK, next image. Which one is that?

ASSISTANT

DIRECTOR: The triangle one, sir.

DIRECTOR: Right... Let's see. (*Turns to GUIDES*) We'll need you both for this one.

IMAGE #4: A triangle between Pandits, Muslims, and Sikhs

After IMAGE #4 is staged, the crew films it for 1 minute. The video is played back for the DIRECTOR and the people in the image.

DIRECTOR: No, I don't like this one. It creates this... makes a problematic comparison between two different communities... Let's try something else.

After IMAGE #4 is restaged, the crew takes another video of it. The video is played back for the DIRECTOR and the people in the image.

DIRECTOR: (To GUIDE #1) What do you think, sir?

GUIDE #1: I don't know... something seems missing. What are you trying to say with this image?

DIRECTOR: I want to show something about how the Pandits, Sikhs, and Muslims have interacted in the Valley... that there are different ways in which they have evolved... that it's tough to figure out why one set of relationships worked out one way, while the other didn't....

GUIDE #1: I... maybe one of our visitors will have an idea sir?

Audience members are given the chance to give suggestions that the DIRECTOR can try, or not. If there are no suggestions from the audience, the GUIDES can give ideas. If they have none either, the DIRECTOR says he will think about it later and moves on to the next image.

DIRECTOR: Let's move on to the last one. For this, everyone, I need to move turbans from over there and place them in rows. (*Audience members are shown how to do this*).

IMAGE #5: A memorial of Sikh martyrs, who have played a role in Kashmir's history

After IMAGE #5 is staged, the crew films it.

The video is played back for the DIRECTOR and the people in the image. The DIRECTOR and ASSISTANT DIRECTOR both like this image.

DIRECTOR: Ok, that's a wrap. Thank you all for helping. You can get out of your costumes now and we'll have some tea and snacks served as a small thank-you for your help! If you would like a copy of the images, please let one of them (*points to the GUIDES*) know and we'll get a copy to you.

ASSITANT

DIRECTOR: If you have any questions after you get out of your costume, please come

Which historical event in Kashmir might Image #5 be referencing?

Why has the name of the event been obscured from the text?

chat with us. We'll be over there (*points to a corner*) editing the video.

The DIRECTOR and crew remain in a corner, looking at the footage. Audience members work with the make-up artists again and once they are back in their everyday clothes, they can choose to speak to the DIRECTOR and the crew about any questions they have about the images of which they were part.

The same song that played in the beginning plays at the end. Tea and biscuits are provided to the audience as a thank-you from the film crew.

During the tea break, the DIRECTOR and other crew members thank each audience member and hands them a stone souvenir that is wrapped with an image that documents Sikhs living in Kashmir.

Which lesser-known voices in Kashmir would you want to add to the passageway that is described as linking the space containing this scene to the one that follows?

Once audience members are out of their costumes, have had their tea break, and have received their souvenir, the GUIDES take them to the next space down a path that is made up of visuals of lesser-known Kashmiri voices. Voices from the Gujjars, or from Kashmir's LGBTQI+ community.

But also, possibly, more conceptual imagery that alludes to voices of everyday inequalities that are inevitably glossed over amidst the more spectacular narrative of war.