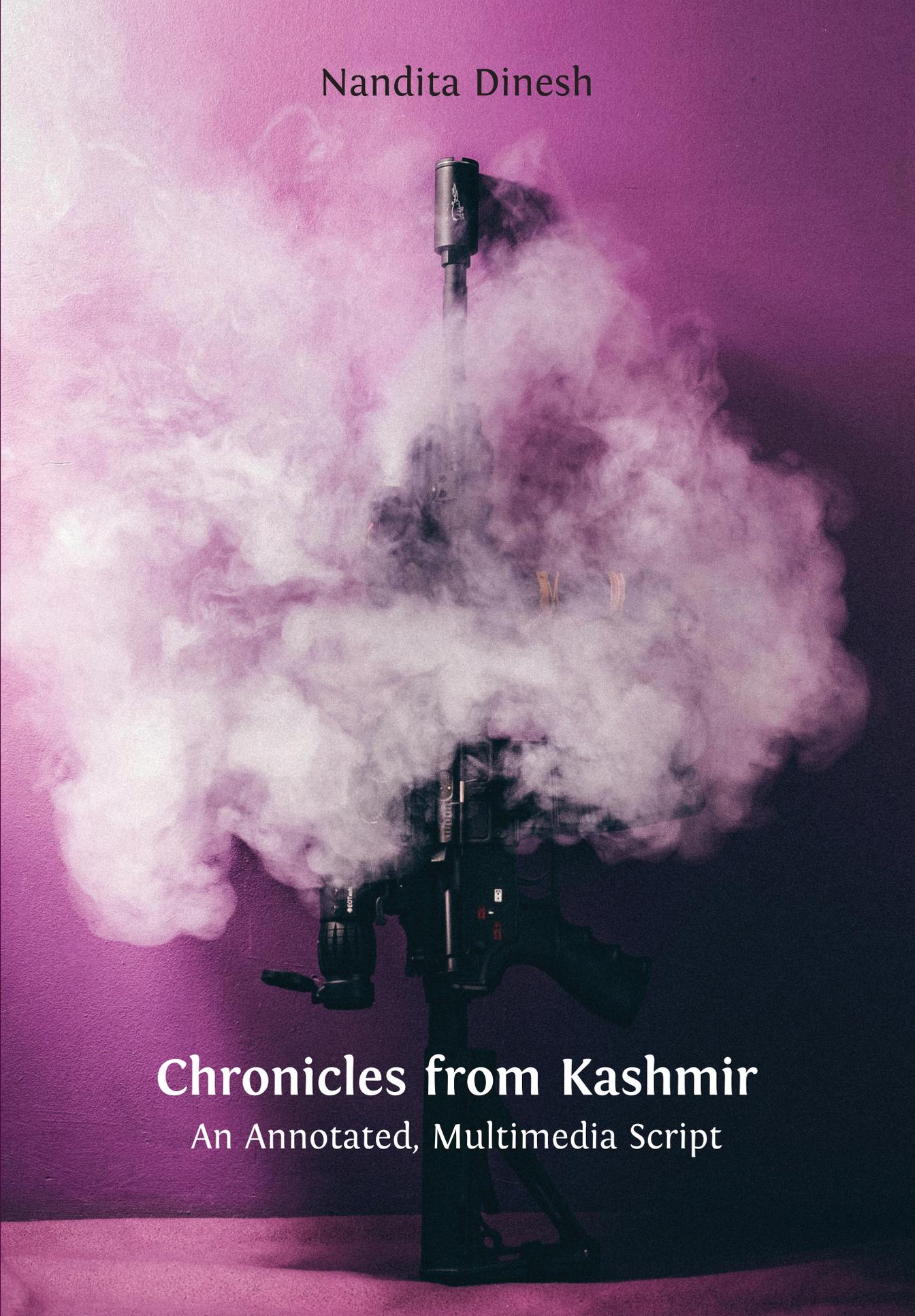


Nandita Dinesh



Chronicles from Kashmir

An Annotated, Multimedia Script



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Nandita Dinesh, *Chronicles from Kashmir: An Annotated, Multimedia Script*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2020, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0223>

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Applied Theatre Praxis Series, Vol. 2

ISSN (Print): 2515-0758

ISSN (Online): 2515-0766

ISBN Paperback: 978-1-80064-017-7

ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80064-018-4

ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80064-019-1

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 978-1-80064-020-7

ISBN Digital ebook (mobi): 978-1-80064-021-4

ISBN XML: 978-1-80064-022-1

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0223

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Cover design: Anna Gatti.

Scene Sixteen: The Women

As audience members enter this space, regardless of that person's gender identity, they are asked to dress as Kashmiri women are likely to dress. This is a space that is for women. And if anyone wants to really engage with the stories of Kashmir's women, they need to look for these spaces. They need to make the effort. To understand that feminism in this Valley has its own face. Its own logic. Its own rhythm.

As the spectator-women are seated in the space, they see people behind a screen — as shadows, silhouettes. The shadows are chopping something on wooden blocks. Something that looks like hair. The hair-chopping shadows provide the rhythm for what follows. The action and sound continue throughout the scene.

There are five women in front of the screen: Atiqa Banoo (AB); Nighat Sahiba (NS); Lal Ded (LD); Habba Khatoon (HK); Parveena Ahangar (PA). AB is building something... using stones, perhaps. Each stone has, written on it, names of particular aspects of Kashmiri culture and heritage that AB fought to preserve: the language; the customs; the particularities of the Valley's inhabitants.

While NS, LD, and HK speak, PA is making flyers for the disappeared — the same flyers (and actor) should be used outside Installation D; they are also the flyers that cover the stone souvenirs that are handed to audience members during the scene below; the same stones that AB is also using. Some audience members can be invited to make the flyers and stone souvenirs with PA.

At some point in what follows, AB and PA hand out stone souvenirs to each spectator.

Other audience members, in their roles as women, are given a host of different tasks to take on — by the GUIDES, or by PA and AB:

- *One person is asked to iron clothing*
- *One person is asked to peel potatoes*

Look into the lives of the women who are the protagonists of this scene: Atiqa Banoo, Nighat Sahiba, Lal Ded, Habba Khatoon, and Parveena Ahangar.

Consider these women's significance in Kashmiri history and, consequently, the significance of their inclusion in *Chronicles from Kashmir*.

- One person is seated by a small stove and is provided with materials to make chai
- One person is given a toy gun
- One person is given paper and pens
- One person is given photos of men, with a marker

You get the picture.

The woman reciting the poems below can move around the space. They can be more formally “staged.” Whatever works.

LD:¹ To learn the scriptures is easy, to live them, hard. The search for the Real is no simple matter.

HK:² Which rival of mine has lured you away from me? Why are you cross with me?
Forget the anger and the sulkiness, You are my only love, Why are you cross with me?
My garden has blossomed into colourful flowers, Why are you away from me?

NS:³ Either you will succumb or rise. I chose to rise.

I collected my scattered parts to rise.

Nobody fights for us.

Nobody fought for me.

You have to fight your own battle

Yes, I am a feminist.

HK: Which rival of mine has lured you away from me? Why are you cross with me?
Forget the anger and the sulkiness, You are my only love, Why are you cross with me?
My garden has blossomed into colourful flowers, Why are you away from me?

NS: *Daed balnas chu akh zamane lagan*

Daagh tschalnas chu akh zamane lagan

Yei zi pahra agar mokul aasakh

Posh pholnas chu akh bahane lagan

LD: Deep in my looking, the last words vanished. Joyous and silent, the waking that met me there.

1 (Ded, n.d.)

2 (Khatoon, n.d.)

3 (Geelani, 2017)

HK: My love, my only love, I think only of you, Why are you cross with me? I kept my doors open half the night, Come and enter my door, my jewel, Why have you forsaken the path to my house? Why are you cross with me? I swear, my love, I am waiting for you, dressed in colourful robes, My youth is in full bloom now, Why are you cross with me?

NS: I kill myself

in saving every minute item that I possess.

In my strife in saving

I scream out:

HK: Oh, marksman, my bosom is open To the darts you throw at me. These darts are piercing me, Why are you cross with me? I have been wasting away like snow in summer heat. My youth is in its bloom. This is your garden, come and enjoy it. Why are you cross with me?

NS: For the pain to heal,

eons it does take

For the scars to fade

eons it does take

Come, for a moment,

If a moment you possess

For the buds to bloom,

a moment it does take

HK: I have sought you over hills and dales, I have sought you from dawn till dusk, I have cooked dainty dishes for you. I do all this in vain! Why are you cross with me? I shed incessant tears for you, I am pining for you, What is my fault, O, my love? Why don't you seek me out? Why are you cross with me?

LD: Some, who have closed their eyes, are wide awake. Some, who look out at the world, are fast asleep. Some who bathe in sacred pools remain dirty. Some are at home in the world but keep their hands clean.

HK: The shock of your desertion has come as a blow to me, O cruel one, I continue to nurse the pain. Why are you cross with me? I have not complained even to the spring breeze That is my agony. Why have you forgotten me? Who will take care of me? Why are you cross with me? I swear by you I do not go out at all, I don't even

show up at the spring. My body is burning, Why don't you soothe it? Why are you cross with me? My hurt is marrow deep; I did not complain. I just wasted away for you. I have suppressed endless longing, Why are you cross with me?

NS: O you, who are dying, take me along!

HK: I, Habba Khatun, am grieving now.

LD: What the books taught me, I've practised. HK: Why didn't I ever greet you, my love?

LD: What they didn't teach me, I've taught myself.

NS: O you, who are living, keep me held tight.

HK: The day is fading, and I keep recalling,

NS: Either you will succumb or rise. I chose to rise.

LD: I've gone into the forest and wrestled with the lion.

NS: I collected my scattered parts to rise.	HK: Why are you cross with me?	LD: I didn't get this far by teaching one thing and doing another.
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What is the significance of the imagery of the hair-choppers and the hair chopping?

All five women walk behind the screen, where the hair chopping has continued the entire time.

There is a choreographed sequence with the shadows. Sometimes, the women seem to have the power; at other times, the hair-choppers do.

After a few iterations of this choreography, the GUIDES indicate to the audience to follow them and walk the group to the next space, down a path made of mirrors.