Nilima Sheikh: Fractured Skies
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From *Each Night Put Kashmir in Your Dreams* (2003–14)

The title of the series is a quotation from Agha Shahid Ali's "I See Kashmir from New Delhi at Midnight," published in *The Country Without a Post Office: Poems, 1991–1995* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 1997).

Valley (2003/2010)

Recto

I write on that void: Kashmir, Kaschmir, Cashmere, Qashmir, Cashmir, Cashmire, Kashmere, Cachemire, Cushmeer, Cachmiere, Cašmir. Or Cauchemar in a sea of stories? Or: Kacmir, Kaschemir, Kasmere, Kachmire, Kasmir. Kerseymere?

— Agha Shahid Ali, *The Country Without a Post Office: Poems, 1991–1995* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 1997)

Verso

This lake, even a mustard seed's too large
to sink in it,
yet everybody comes
to drink its water.

Deer, jackals, rhinos, cloud-elephants
are born,
and barely born, fall back
into its waters.

—Lal Ded, "Eight Verses," in *Lal Vakh: The Verses of Lal Ded*, translated from the Kashmiri by Ranjit Hoskote, vol. 6 (International Gallerie: A Journey of Ideas, 2003)

Baba Mir Uvays was a mystic from the Sultanate period who had ties to the ruling dynasty and wrote primarily in Persian. Uvaysi's verse illuminates the interaction between region and religion as well as the particular and the universal:

> The whole creation belongs to me:
> Beyond the void is my abode.
> O supplicants of Time, listen attentively:
>
> My banquet spreads from Qaf to Qaf.
> Know that this world of being is naught;
> The true world, be sure, belongs to me.
> He whom you find to be without any trace
> Is watchman at my gate.
> I chose solitude in Kashmir,
> For this universe is my garden.

— Chitralekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003)

In his introduction to the Rajtarangini …Kalhana Pandit says of the valley: 'It is a country where the sun shines mildly, being the place created by Kashayapa as if for his glory. High school-houses, the saffron, iced-water and grapes, which are rare even in heaven, are common here. Kailasa is the best place in the three worlds, Himalaya the best part of Kailasa, and Kashmir the best place in Himalaya.'
— Walter R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir* (Srinagar: Gulshan Publishers, 2002)

By the sea is here meant the Wular Lake, the largest lake in Kashmir. The natives say that Kashyapa, the drainer of the valley, brought a specimen of everything here, that could be found on the face of the earth: yea, he brought the sea also. The holy Shastras, too, declare that everything is to be met with in Kashmir, lions and all manner of beasts, all manner of birds and fruits and flowers, &c., &e., and that men must believe this though they may never see, or hear of, them !
— J. Hinton Knowles, *Folk-Tales of Kashmir* (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2003)

Contrary to popular belief, it was not the isolation of the Kashmir Valley that produced narratives of regional and religious belonging; rather, it was the Valley's links with the world outside that helped reinforce the poetic discourse on identities in the mid-eighteenth to early-nineteenth centuries. Instead of seeing the Valley and its inhabitants as being fettered by the mountains that surround them into articulating an immutable, insular identity, the use of another geographic metaphor, that of the river, is more apt in discussing the political culture and discourse on identities in the region. The river Jhelum, which has carved the Kashmir Valley out of the mountains and defines its geographic boundaries, is in constant motion, changing its course through the rough and tumble of the Valley's landscape, even as it continues to transform it. The articulation of identities by inhabitants of the Valley is a similar process of interaction in this instance between socio-political factors, religious affiliations, and shifting geographic contexts.
— Chitralekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003)

…it is thought that one spur to production of (this) map shawl was the survey of Kashmir carried out by British geographers between 1855 and 1864 as part of the Grand Trigonometrical Survey of India. In its commissioning, we may therefore read a counter-assertion of rights of surveillance and ownership, of the force of traditional cultural knowledge versus the scientific measurement of Western modernity.

There is an implicit statement in the teeming and peopled detail of the shawl's map, and its pre-modern multiple perspectives, that trigonometrical reproductions of landscape do not capture everything in their uniform and abstracting art. The embroidered map affirms the importance of intimacy of local knowledge and the richness of lived detail.
— Paul Sharrad, "Following the Map: A Postcolonial Unpacking of a Kashmir Shawl" *TEXTILE* 2, no. 1 (2004)

Water, spring, rock, cave, tree, mountain all these are honoured, held sacred in Kashmir by Pandit and Muslim alike and imbued with the moving spirit. In truth their differences are on the surface. Deeper down they are animists, faithfully following the traditions of their common ancestors. In Kashmir you can't take a step without walking into a shrine or temple built along a crevice, under a tree, over a spring. Great islands of peace in these turbulent times.
— Sonia Jabbar, "The Spirit of Place," in *Civil Lines 5*, edited by Kai Frise and Mukul Kesavan (IndiaInk, 2001)

The mountains which surround Kashmir are never monotonous. Infinitely varied in form and colour, they are such as an artist might picture in his dreams.
— Walter R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir* (Srinagar: Gulshan Publishers, 2002)

Construction Site (2009–10)

Recto
No text.

Verso
The country may be conquered by the force of spiritual merits, but not by forces of soldiers. Hence its inhabitants are afraid only of the world beyond.

There the rivers are free from dangers and aquatic monsters, provided with warm bath-houses for the winter, and furnished with comfortable embankments (for descending) into the water.

Out of respect, as it were, the sun does not burn fiercely, during summer even, in that (country) which has been created by his father (Kasyapa), as he knows that it ought not to be tormented.

Learning, lofty houses, saffron, icy water and grapes: things that even in heaven are difficult to find, are common there.
— Kalhana's verses, in *Kalhana's Rajatarangini: A Chronicle of the Kings of Kaśmīr*, translated from the Sanskrit and edited by M. A. Stein, vol. 1 (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1989)

On a stone of that manar was carved this prose composition, written by Mulla Muhammad Husain of Kashmir, who was the chief of the elegant writers of the day: "In this enchanting place an antelope came into the world-holding (jahan-giri) net of the God-knowing ruler Nuru-d-din Jahangir Padshah. In the space of one month, having overcome his desert fierceness, he became the head of the special antelopes." On account of the rare quality of this antelope, I commanded that no person should hunt the deer of this plain, and that their flesh should be to Hindus and Muhammadans as is the flesh of cows and pigs. They made the gravestone in the shape of an antelope.
— Emperor Jahangir, "Account of an Antelope," in *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri or Memoirs of Jahangir*, translated by Alexander Rogers, edited by Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1909–14), page 9

I, Lalla, set out to bloom like a cotton-flower,
The cleaner tore me, the carder shredded me.
The gossamer, that was I
the spinning woman lifted
from her wheel. At the weaver's,
they hung me out on the loom.

Only after the washerman had pounded me
on the cleaning stone, scrubbed me
with clay and soap, and the tailor
had measured me, piece by piece,
with his scissors, did I, Lalla,
ascend the Throne of Life.

Drifter, lift up your feet and get moving!
You still have time, go look for the Friend.
Make yourself wings, take wing and fly.
You still have time, go back for the Friend.
Charge the bellows with breath
just as the blacksmith does.
That'll turn your iron into gold
You still have time, go look for the Friend.
— Lal Ded, *Lal Vakh: The Verses of Lal Ded*, translated by Ranjit Hoskote, vol. 6 (International Gallerie: A Journey of Ideas, 2003).

The reason Lal Ded's poetry is so essential for votaries of Kashmiriyat is self-evident from an examination of her verses. These are suffused with a sense of the fluidity of religious boundaries, and this has been interpreted as a manifestation of the Kashmiri ethos of tolerance.

Considered Lal Ded's spiritual successor, Sheikh Nooruddin or Nund Rishi (b. 1378), is another figure central to the memory and meaning of Kashmiriyat. Again, both Kashmiri Pandits and Kashmiri Muslims claim him as their spiritual guide, the former referring to him as Shazanand (one who has attained ultimate truth) and the latter calling his verses the Koshur Quran . . . Since Sheikh Nooruddin is more squarely placed in the Islamic tradition, his writings have had a significant impact on the discourse on Kashmiri Muslim identities.
— Chitralekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003), pages 21 and 23

By simply bowing down, you can not become a Rishi.
By retiring to a cave, you cannot find God,
For the mongoose and the rat seldom come out of their holes.
By bathing, the mind can not be cleansed,
For the fish and the otter never climb up to the bank.
— A verse by Nund Rishi / Sheikh Nuruddin Nurani, translated from the Kashmiri by Gahuar, in Yoginder Sikand, "The Role of Women in Kashmir Rishism," in *Speaking Peace: Women's Voices from Kashmir*, edited by Urvashi Butalia (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2002)

Son et Lumière (2006/2010)

Recto
Son et Lumière at Shalimar Garden

Brahma's voice is torn water:
It runs down
the slopes of Zabarvan
and Kashmir is a lake
till a mountain to its west
is pierced with a trident
and the valley drained to reveal
the One Born of Water,
Now easily slain.
Who was that demon
of desiccated water?
No one knows
in the drying land
where a rattle of cones is thatching
the roofs of kingdoms.
We watch the wind,
And unheated,
the centuries pass:
Slaves plane the mountains with roots the carried
in trunks from Isfahan:
Spotlights lash their backs
as Shalimar blooms into
the Mughal's thirst for
terracing the seasons
into symmetry.
In the marble summer palace,
a nautch girl pours wine,
into the Emperor's glass,
splintering the future
into wars of succession,
the leaves scattered
as the wind blows
an era into
another dynasty's bloody arms.
— Agha Shahid Ali, "Son et Lumière at Shalimar Garden," in *The Country Without a Post Office: Poems, 1991–1995* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 1997)

Verso

Every educated Hindu and most Musalmans in Kashmir believe that the valley was once a vast lake on which the goddess Parvati sailed in a pleasure-boat from her mountain home on Haramak in the north to Konsa Nag lake in the south. In her honour the lake was known as Satisar, the tarn of the chaste woman. But there dwelt in the lake a cruel demon Jaldeo, whose patron was Brahma, and this demon destroyed all life on the shores and rendered the country waste. By chance Kashaf, a grandson of Brahma, found his way to the lake, and distressed at this..... Kashaf gave himself up to religious exercises and then braced himself up for a struggle with Jaldeo, but the demon eluded him and hid under the water. Then Vishnu came to the help of Kashaf and struck the mountains at Baramula with his trident, and the waters of the lake rushed out. But Jaldeo entrenched himself in low ground near the Hari-Parbat, and though the gods searched for him with the sun in one hand and the moon in the other the demon baffled them. But at last the goddess Parvati dropped a mountain on top of him, crushing his life out, and the mountain is now known as Hari-Parbat and on it is a great shrine in honour of Devi. After this the valley was known as Kashafmar, the home of Kashaf, and it is now corrupted to Kashmir . . . When Jaldeo was crushed to death the smaller demons lost heart, and men began to visit the valley in the summer, as winter came on withdrawing to the warmer and drier regions of Kishtwar and leaving Kashmir to the demons. But by chance an old Brahman, who was unable to walk, spent the winter in the valley and went to Nilanag, and the deity of the fountain gave to him the Nilamata Puran. By studying the precepts of the Puran the Brahmans were enabled to rout the demons, and Kashmir became permanently The people point a high pass in the south-west of the valley, and relate how the king, crossing the mountain with his army, was amused by the agonies and cries of an elephant which had fallen down a ravine.

— Walter R. Lawrence, *The Valley of Kashmir* (Srinagar: Gulshan Publishers, 2002)

One's mouth must blossom before he goes to see the flower-blossoms.

The different pleasure-gardens around the Dal Lake are constantly and largely visited by the natives, and especially, when the plum-trees and roses and lilacs are in full bloom. They take their dinner with them, and spend the greater part of the day on the excursion.

She came to the baniya's but arrived at the baker's.

This saying has its origin in a story well-known in Kashmir. Lal Ded used to peregrinate in an almost nude condition, and was constantly saying that He only was a man, who feared God, and there were very few such men about.

I have seen a man, she said, to the astonished baniya, into whose shop she had fled for refuge. The baniya, however, turned her out. Then Lal Ded rushed to the baker's house and jumped into the oven, which at that time was fully heated for baking the bread. When the baker saw this he fell down in a swoon thinking that, for certain, the king would hear of this and punish him. However, there was no need of fear, as Lal Ded presently appeared from the mouth of the oven clad in clothes of gold, and hastened after Shah Hamadan.

— Lal Ded, in *A Dictionary of the Kashmiri Proverbs and Sayings*, edited by J. Hinton Knowles (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1985)

In Kashmir there is plenty of water from streams and springs. By far the best is that of the Lar valley, which joins the Bihat in the village of Shihabu-d-din-pur. This village is one of the celebrated places of Kashmir, and is on the Bihat. About a hundred plane-trees (chanar) of graceful form clustered together on one plot of ground, pleasant and green, join each other so as to shade the whole plot, and the whole surface of the ground is grass and trefoil; so much so that to lay a carpet on it would be superfluous and in bad taste. The village was founded by Sultan Zainu-l-abidin, who for 52 years ruled Kashmir with absolute sway. They speak of him as the great Padshah. They tell many strange customs of his. There are many remains and traces of buildings of his in Kashmir. One of these is in the midst of a lake called Wulur, and of which the length and breadth are more than three of four kos. It is called Zain-lanka, and in making it they have exerted themselves greatly. The springs of this lake are very deep. The first time they brought a large quantity of stone in boats and poured it on the place where now the building stands it had not result. At last they sank some thousands of boats with stones, and with great labour recovered a piece of ground 100 gaz by 100 gaz out of the water, and made a terrace, and on one side thereof the Sultan erected a temple for the worship of his supreme God. Than this there is no finer place.

— Emperor Jahangir, *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri or Memoirs of Jahangir*, translated by Alexander Rogers, edited by Henry Beveridge, 2 vols. (London: Royal Asiatic Society, 1909–14)

Most significant to later articulations of regional identities, however, was the establishment of the tradition of Kashmiri historiography in Persian. Akbar ordered the translation of the Rajatarangini into Persian, a task allotted to Mulla Ahmad Shahabadi. During Jehangir's time, Malik Haider and Narayan Kaul Aziz one a Kashmiri Muslim and the other a Kashmir Pandit wrote detailed histories of the Valley in Persian. It is also significant that one of the more prominent historians of the late Mughal period, Khwaja Azam Dyadmari, was the first historian to revive the memory of Lal Ded in his famous Tawarikh-i-Kashmir (History of Kashmir), written in 1730. By the early eighteenth century, local Kashmiri historians had began to play an important role in articulating a sense of belonging to Kashmir by carrying forward the tradition of complaint to its logical conclusion, evident in the following verse by Khwaja Mohammad Azam:

So great is the distress of the people of Kashmir,
That it escapes even their own comprehension.
When the people were weakened by famine,
Chaos sprang up from town to desert.
No rice or grain can be found anywhere,
Except in the wheaty-complexioned beauty of the beloved.
Bellies like ovens are heated to the grilling point,
Yearning for a piece of bread.

Written after the famine that hit the Valley in 1733, this verse clearly makes a plea for restitution to the Mughal court.

— Chitralekha Zutshi, *Languages of Belonging: Islam, Regional Identity, and the Making of Kashmir* (Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003)

We Must Bear (2014)

Recto
We must bear the lightening and thunder
We must bear the darkness at noon
We must bear the mountain on our shoulders
We must bear the fire we place on our palms
We must bear our bodies milled to dust
We must bear to swallow the poison load together.
— A verse by Nund Rishi / Sheikh Nuruddin Nurani, quoted in *Until My Freedom Has Come: The New Intifada in Kashmir*, edited by Sanjay Kak (Penguin Books India, 2011)

The dust still uneasy on hurried graves
— Agha Shahid Ali, "A Pastoral," in *The Country Without a Post Office: Poems, 1991–1995* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 1997)

Now every night we bury our houses
and theirs, the ones left empty
— Agha Shahid Ali, "The Country Without a Post Office," in *The Country Without a Post Office: Poems, 1991–1995* (Delhi: Ravi Dayal Publisher, 1997)

Verso
Earth is pressing against us, trapping us in the final passage.
To pass through, we pull off our limbs.
Earth is squeezing us. If only we were its wheat, we might die and yet live
……
Where do we go after the last border? Where should birds fly after the last sky?
Where should plants sleep after the last breath of air?
We write our names with crimson mist!
We end the hymn with our flesh.
Here we will die. Here, in the final passage.
Here or there, our blood will plant olive trees.
— Mahmoud Darwish, *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise: Selected Poems*, translated and edited by Munir Akash and Carolyn Forche with Sinan Antoon and Amira El-Zein (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2003)

Mummy, mae-ae aav heartas fire.
Mummy, the fire is at my heart.
These were the last words spoken by twenty-four-year-old Fancy Jan as she turned away from the first-floor window of her working-class home in downtown Srinagar that July morning.

She was reaching for the curtain, her family said, to keep out the acrid teargas smoke floating in from the streets of her volatile Batmaloo neighbourhood. (The window lacked glass-panes; the room was still being built.) The 'fire' she had drawn into the privacy of her home was a bullet, and she dropped dead soon after, a victim of a casual brutality, of a weapon fired carelessly by one of the hundreds of police and paramilitary soldiers on the streets outside.
— Sanjay Kak, "The Fire Is at My Heart," in *Until My Freedom Has Come: The New Intifada in Kashmir*, edited by Sanjay Kak (Penguin Books India, 2011)

For three days, I have been making graves.
Not graves in the strictest sense but messy heaps of earth covering shallow scratchy ditches. It is so, so hard, even though I do look forward- well, almost- to the process towards the end, when I have a dune ready and I get to carve a headstone. Not a real tombstone, but a small hill of dirt that I know will weather down gradually, but which will stand for something for now.
Five graves I have made in all, this being the fifth, on a raised patch of ground just a little away from the main field, at the far end of what was once our cricket pitch- my very martyrs' graveyard. I hear they have plenty in the city now.
— Mirza Waheed, *The Collaborator* (Caravan, 2011)

I will slog over this endless road to its end.
Until my heart stops, I will slog over this endless, endless road
with nothing to lose but the dust, what has died in me, and a row of palms
pointing toward what vanishes. I will pass the row of palms.
— Mahmoud Darwish, "I Will Slog over This Road," in *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise: Selected Poems*, translated and edited by Munir Akash and Carolyn Forche with Sinan Antoon and Amira El-Zein (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2003)

'I took mud from their mouths and ears. I cleaned the blood from them,' said Atta…'The bodies started coming and coming and coming,' he said. 'Sometimes there were five bodies at once. Sometimes eight bodies.' We would ask the authorities: "Who are they?"
— Atta Mohammed, quoted in Tim Sullivan, "Kashmir's Anonymous Graves Summon Darkest Days," in *Until My Freedom Has Come: The New Intifada in Kashmir*, edited by Sanjay Kak (Penguin Books India, 2011)

'Well, guns are not like fruit, my friend, they don't come off trees, they don't just rot with age…' he had answered thoughtfully… 'They must be somewhere, mustn't they? There must be many, many weapons buried in the Valley. Plenty of ammunition too…"
— Sanjay Kak,"What Are Kashmir's Stone-pelters Saying to Us?" *Economic and Political Weekly* 45, no. 37 (2010)

Dying Dreaming (2007/2010)

Recto

THERE WERE SIX HUNDRED THOUSAND INDIAN TROOPS IN KASHMIR BUT THE POGROM OF THE PANDITS WAS NOT PREVENTED, WHY WAS THAT. THREE AND A HALF LAKHS OF HUMAN BEINGS ARRIVED IN JAMMU AS DISPLACED PERSONS AND FOR MANY MONTHS THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT PROVIDE SHELTERS OR RELIEF OR EVEN REGISTER THEIR NAMES, WHY WAS THAT. WHEN THE GOVERNMENT FINALLY BUILT CAMPS IT ONLY ALLOWED FOR SIX THOUSAND FAMILIES TO REMAIN IN THE STATE, DISPERSING THE OTHERS AROUND THE COUNTRY WHERE THEY WOULD BE INVISIBLE AND IMPOTENT, WHY WAS THAT. THE CAMPS AT PURKHOO, MUTHI, MISHRIWALLAH, NAGROTA WERE BUILT ON THE BANKS AND BEDS OF NULLAHAS, DRY SEASONAL WATERWAYS, AND WHEN THE WATER CAME THE CAMPS WERE FLOODED, WHY WAS THAT. THE MINISTERS OF THE GOVERNMENT MADE SPEECHES ABOUT ETHNIC CLEANSING BUT THE CIVIL SERVANTS WROTE ONE ANOTHER MEMOS SAYING THAT THE PANDITS WERE SIMPLY INTERNAL MIGRANTS WHOSE DISPLACEMENT HAD BEEN SELF-IMPOSED, WHY WAS THAT. THE TENTS PROVIDED FOR THE REFUGEES TO LIVE IN WERE OFTEN UNINSPECTED AND LEAKING AND THE MONSOON RAINS CAME THROUGH, WHY WAS THAT. WHEN THE ONE-ROOM TENEMENTS CALLED ORTS WERE BUILT TO REPLACE THE TENTS THEY TOO LEAKED PROFUSELY, WHY WAS THAT. THERE WAS ONE BATHROOM PER THREE HUNDRED PERSONS IN MANY CAMPS WHY WAS THAT. AND THE MEDICAL DISPENSARIES LACKED BASIC FIRST-AID MATERIALS WHY WAS THAT. AND THOUSANDS OF THE DISPLACED DIED BECAUSE OF INADEQUATE FOOD AND SHELTER WHY WAS THAT. MAY BE FIVE THOUSAND DEATHS BECAUSE OF INTENSE HEAT AND HUMIDITY BECAUSE OF SNAKE BITES AND GASTROENTERITIS AND DENGUE FEVER AND STRESS DIABETES AND KIDNEY AILMENTS AND TUBERCULOSIS AND PSYCHONEUROSIS AND THERE WAS NOT A SINGLE HEALTH SURVEY CONDUCTED BY THE GOVERNMENT WHY WAS THAT. AND THE PANDITS OF KASHMIR WERE LEFT TO ROT IN THEIR SLUM CAMPS, TO ROT WHILE THE ARMY AND THE INSURGENCY FOUGHT OVER THE BLOODIED AND BROKEN VALLEY, TO DREAM OF RETURN, TO DIE WHILE DREAMING OF RETURN, TO DIE AFTER THE DREAM OF RETURN DIED SO THAT THEY COULD NOT EVEN DIE DREAMING OF IT, WHY WAS THAT WHY WAS THAT. WHY WAS THAT. WHY WAS THAT. WHY WAS THAT.

— Salman Rushdie, *Shalimar the Clown* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005)

Ehery tongue brings in a several tale

— William Shakespeare, *Richard III* (1633) 5.3

Verso

Touched by the kindness of a Hindu girl named Bhawan, who would earn her livelihood by carrying water to a village perched on a hilltop and would spend all her earnings on feeding her birds while she herself would, starve, he (Hazrat Nurudin Nurani/Nunda Rishi) wrote in one of his verses:

> The dumb girl in a small village
> Who quenched the thirst of the thirsty
> Flew in the high heavens with her pet birds
> Bestow on me, my Lord, the same grace

— Yoginder Sikand, "The Role of Women in Kashmir Rishism," in *Speaking Peace: Women's Voices from Kashmir*, edited by Urvashi Butalia (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 2002)

In the Rishinama it is said that one spring Sheikh Nuru'ddin, accompanied by some of his disciples, visited the Pir Pantsal. He had reached a place at the foot of the mountain called Zezah Nar, now called Lal Ghulam, where a black dev was in the habit of seizing passers by and eating them. The dev's name was Dahkadu. In consequence of this the Sheikh's disciples turned to him in great distress and besought him to deliver them. The Shekh heard their petition, and taking hold of one of the ears of the dev, threw him over the mountain. As soon as the body touched the ground on the other side, it was metamorphosed into a stone, which may be seen there, in the form of a man, to the present day...

Several of these stones, called in Kashmiri dumats, are to be seen about the valley. People think them to be as old as the Pandavas, and believe they are the petrified bodies of wicked men, whom some good folk in olden times cursed because they were troubled by them. Near Hari Parbat, a hill in Srinagar, are five or six of these stones, which people declare were formerly chatai-farosh (sellers of matting), whom Lakshmi, the goddess, cursed because they would not sell some matting cheap.

Tradition says that Kashmir was once a tributary of China; and because there was not much money in the valley and cattle was difficult of transport, men and women were sent yearly as tribute to that country. When Zainu'labadin obtained possession of Kashmir he declined to pay the tribute, whereupon the Shah-i-Chin sent a parwana, censuring him, and threatening him that if he did not quickly comply with the custom of his predecessors in the valley he would make war on him and ruin him and every one and everything belonging to him. Now Zainu'labadin had heard of the Chinese, of their vast numbers, and power, and cleverness, and therefore was somewhat frightened by these stern words... At that time there lived in Kashmir a very famous faqir by the name of Bahadin, who begged the king not to be distressed, and promised to arrange the matter for him. This faqir, by virtue of his sanctity, flew over to China in the twinkling of an eye, and brought back the Shah-i-Chin lying on his bed to his own humble abode. In the morning, when the Shah awoke and found himself in a meager hut, he was very much surprised.

"Oh, holy man," said he to the faqir, "Tell me, I pray you, why you have brought me here."

"I have transported you hither," replied Bahadin, "in order that you might meet face to face with Zainu'labadin, and promise him that you will abolish this wicked custom..."

The Shah-i-Chin was pricked to the heart by these words, and cutting his finger, so that the blood oozed out, he called for a pen and some paper, and at once wrote an order declaring Kashmir an independent state. Then Bahadin presented him with some peaches, apricots, walnuts, and other fruits, and caused him to arrive at his country again. When the Shah related to his people what had happened to him and what he had seen, his people would not believe him; but afterwards, when he showed them the different fruits that the faqir had given him, they were convinced, and applauded his deed.

— J. Hinton Knowles, *Folk-Tales of Kashmir* (Delhi: Low Price Publications, 2003)

In the case of the (Godfrey) shawl, resplendent on wall or back-room table, the self-presence of the artwork--the overwhelming detail coupled with the dominating size of the piece--presents its map as a flat, totalized image. But the shawl can also be read as a map of stories, a palimpsest of changes and differences. It includes the tomb of Sultan Zain-ul-Abidin and the Shankaracharya Hindu temple (thus indicating the multicultural tradition of Kashmir); shows the fort Hari Parbat built by Emperor Akbar, who annexed the valley in 1588 and visited the same year; depicts the famous gardens constructed by emperor Jehangir, contains in its fabric memories of Ranjit Singh, who took Srinagar in 1819 (driving workers away to Lahore, Amritsar, Rawalpindi because of taxes) and the British, who annexed it after the first Sikh war (1846) but sold it to the Dogra Maharaja of Jammu, Gulab. Such was the revenue from Kashmir that this ruler decreed weavers could not leave unless they found a replacement to do their work.

— Paul Sharrad, "Following the Map: A Postcolonial Unpacking of a Kashmir Shawl," *TEXTILE* 2, no. 1 (2004)

This page contains references to sexual violence and murder.

From Home, Land (2023–25)

***Home, Land 2* (2024)**

My body reduced to ashes by hate
is carried away by the cool wind.
I shall be back as
a moment in history.
— Subbu Holeyar, "Killers Drink the Milk of the Cow," translated from the Kannada by Laxmi Chandrashekar, in *Steel Nibs Are Sprouting, New Dalit Writing from South India, Dossier II: Kannada and Telugu*, edited by K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu (Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India: Harper Collins, 2013)

***Home, Land 3* (2024)**

'How much further do you have to go?'
'All the way'
'So go then, go
as if you have arrived, and not arrived'
— Mahmoud Darwish, "An eagle flying low," in *A River Dies of Thirst: Diaries*, translated from the Arabic by Catherine Cobham (London: SAQI Books, 2024)

On that afternoon, her mother recalls,
Asifa went to the forest to bring home the horses. The horses returned but Asifa did not.
— Sameer Yasir, "Asifa Bano: The child rape and murder that has Kashmir on edge," *BBC*, April 12, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-43722714

Accompanying text panel, left

Being nomadic does not imply wandering aimlessly. Instead nomadic movement is highly precise and calculated and aimed at achieving targeted objectives and goals. They are experts at maximising the use of rangelands… Furthermore, people are nomadic within a specific range of territory, which they are accustomed to and have knowledge of, and an area to which they thus, have at least a measure of political claim.

… nomadic pastoral populations like the Bakkarwals, Gaddis and Gujjars migrate through regions of agricultural settlements and pass, and even stop at, major cities and towns. . . . In times when settlements were few, roads limited, and communication over long distances rare, nomads were seen to be the carriers of news, goods and resources from other societies.
— Anita Sharma, Anita. *South Asian Nomads - A Literature Review* (Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity, 2011)

This page contains references to sexual violence and murder.

The traditional forest dwellers are protected in India under the Forest Rights Act 2006, against forced displacements and have rights of grazing and, apart from timber, they have access to forest resources.
— Aakash Hassan, "Why are Kashmiri Muslim nomads being evicted?" *Al Jazeera*, November 20, 2020,
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/20/tribal-community-face-eviction-from-forests-in-kashmir

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... it is important to begin with what, after all, transpired at Kathua in early 2018.
The nomadic Bakarwals had set base in the village limits of Rasana, Kathua, towards the end of 2017. The migratory route of the Bakarwals cuts through some of the verdant pastures in such reaches. On 10 January 2018, however, a young girl of 8 years of age went missing from the makeshift campsite of the Bakarwals. The girl's father filed a complaint on the subsequent day... The girl's body was eventually discovered a week later by a search party on 17 January in a nearby forest. Signs of brutality were in full evidence right from the start. As the investigation proceeded it started to become increasingly clear that the Bakarwal girl had not gone missing but had been abducted. A post-mortem report of September 2018 confirmed the girl had been gang raped. She had also been sedated in order to 'render her incapacitated' for the purpose of raping. The same report also confirmed that her head had been lethally struck with a rock in the final moments before her body was disposed in the jungle.
— Varun Sharma, "Criminalizing Nomadic Femininity: Colonial Trail of the Kathua Rape–Murder," *ANTYAJAA: Indian Journal of Women and Social Change* 5, no. 1 (2019)

... the purpose was not just to satisfy lust or exhibit power but it is 'retaliation and revenge' against the nomad community to evict them to 'prevent geographic changes in the region'. The object was to strike fear and terror among the community which count for less than 8 percent population in and around Jammu and to drive them out.
— Shalu Nigam, "A Year After Brutal Gang Rape and Murder in Kathua: Apathetic State Agenda, Regressive Policies and Escalating Violence Continued," *CounterCurrents.org*, April 2, 2019,
https://countercurrents.org/2019/02/a-year-after-brutal-gang-rape-and-murder-in-kathua-apathetic-state-agenda-regressive-policies-and-escalating-violence-continued/

Accompanying text panel, right
Asifa belongs to tribal nomad community which exists at the margin. Besides her religion, her socio-economic status further made her vulnerable besides her gender which added patriarchy and misogyny as other dimensions... Kathua matter is one of the spectacular cases of authoritarianism that is being used to strategically create an environment of fear and terror among `Other' communities where the state apparatus is being used politically to polarise.
— Shalu Nigam, Shalu. "A Year After Brutal Gang Rape and Murder in Kathua: Apathetic State Agenda, Regressive Policies and Escalating Violence Continued." *CounterCurrents.org*, April 2, 2019,
https://countercurrents.org/2019/02/a-year-after-brutal-gang-rape-and-murder-in-kathua-apathetic-state-agenda-regressive-policies-and-escalating-violence-continued/

This page contains references to sexual violence and murder.

… the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 had already allocated ‘born,’ ‘heredity’ and ‘instinctive’ criminality to nearly 190 tribes across the subcontinent . . . If these tribes were decried as being ‘criminals by birth’ for various reasons, including itinerant and peripatetic behaviours, then infants also came under the colonial scanner.

The social nature of the current-day campaign against the Bakarwals follows a familiar pattern in this sense. One that is revealed not so much from the convicts that have been gladly sentenced, but those dozens of FIRS filed by relatively anonymous local residents against the Bakarwals over the last couple of years, as also the angry mobs that thronged the streets of Kathua demanding the release of the accused from police custody in the days immediately following (the perpetrator’s) arrest.

In such situations, the moral contagion that nomads have historically represented acquires strong communal over tones. If nomads have been seen as a threat to spaces of settled civility, they are now additionally perceived as a threat… The body of the nomadic girl child caught in such intersections is the worst to suffer.
— Varun Sharma, “Criminalizing Nomadic Femininity: Colonial Trail of the Kathua Rape–Murder,” *ANTYAJAA: Indian Journal of Women and Social Change* 5, no. 1 (2019)

This page contains references to sexual violence and murder.

***Home, Land 4* (2025)**

Three times I saw a lake overflowing a lake.
Once I saw a lake mirrored in the sky
Once I saw a lake that bridged
north and south, Mount Haramukh and Lake Kausar.
Seven times I saw a lake shaping itself into emptiness.
— Lal Ded, *I, Lalla: The Poems of Lal Ded*, translated from the Kashmiri by Ranjit Hoskote (Penguin, 2011)

How much further do you have to go?
All the way
So go then, go
as if you have arrived, and not arrived
— Mahmoud Darwish, "An eagle flying low," in *A River Dies of Thirst: Diaries*, translated from the Arabic by Catherine Cobham (London: SAQI Books, 2024)

My little girl,
where did they hide you?
In which sky,
under which earth,
at the root of which tree?
— "A Bonda Song," translated by Sitakant Mahapatra, in *Painted Words: An Anthology of Tribal Literature*, edited By G. N. Devy (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2002)

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a chirping bird who ran like a deer.
— Shanta Acharya, "'Can You Hear Our Screams' and other poems" *The Punch Magazine*, May 31, 2019

My screams died before my death
They tied me down in a little space

They kept me captive for eight days
Against eight summers I ever lived
— Syed Sajjad Qadri, quoted in "A tale of 2 poems," *The Telegraph*, April 20, 2018.

The girl had gone missing from near her house in Rasana and her body was found seven days later dumped in a nearby forest.
— Majid Hyderi, "Dedicated police team resisted odds to crack Kathua rape case," *Asia Times*, April 12, 2018,
https://asiatimes.com/2018/04/dedicated-police-team-resisted-odds-crack-asifa-rape-case/

This page contains references to sexual violence and murder.

... abduction and murder, according to police, was a plot to drive out members of her community.
— 'Inside story' of the most horrific ASIFA rape-murder", *The Kashmir Monitor*, April 11, 2018

Unfortunately, the criminalization of nomadic femininity as part of a grand 'civilizing' mission in the colony is matched by civil society's carefully preserved blind spot for the nomad in the present.
— Chinmayi S. K. "Criminalizing Nomadic Femininity: Colonial Trail of the Kathua Rape-Murder," *AntyAjAA: Indian Journal of Women and Social Change* 5, no. 1 (2019)

We are living in forests for hundreds of years and now we are being termed as illegal occupants said Ashraf, a Bakkarwal.
—Mohammad Ashraf quoted in Aakash Hassan, "Why are Kashmiri Muslim nomads being evicted?" *Al Jazeera*, November 20, 2020, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/11/20/tribal-community-face-eviction-from-forests-in-kashmir

This page contains references to sexual violence and murder.

Shahid/Witness (2025–26)

FRONT ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:

Asifa

Recto
Asifa's mother described her as a chirping bird who ran like a deer. 'When we travelled, she looked after the herd… she was the centre of our universe.'
On that afternoon, Asifa went to the forest to bring home the horses. The horses returned but Asifa did not.
… her body was found seven days later.
— Sameer Yasir, "Asifa Bano: The child rape and murder that has Kashmir on edge," *BBC*, April 12, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-43722714

Verso
The atrocity, rape and murder of the 8 year old minor girl in Kathua brings to light the manner in which sexual violence against women and children is used as a tool to further subjugate marginalised communities.
— "MAKAAM STATEMENT CONDEMNING KATHUA ATROCITIES," *Mahila Kisan Adhikaar Manch*, May 2, 2018, https://makaam.in/makaam-statement-condemning-kathua-atrocities-english/

Asifa's mother described her as a chirping bird who ran like a deer.
When we travelled, she looked after the herd . . . that made her the darling of our community . . . she was the center of our universe.
— Sameer Yasir, "Asifa Bano: The child rape and murder that has Kashmir on edge," *BBC*, April 12, 2018, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-43722714

The girl had gone missing from near her house in Rasana on Jan 10, 2018, and her body was found seven days later dumped in a nearby forest.
**— Majid Hyderi, "Dedicated police team resisted odds to crack Kathua rape case," *Asia Times*, April 12, 2018,
https://asiatimes.com/2018/04/dedicated-police-team-resisted-odds-crack-asifa-rape-case/**

Sheher
No text.

Climate Change / Flood 2
No text.

Hospital

Recto
No text.

Verso
When did the new war begin?

Whoever gets to write it most
gets to erase it best.

The new war has been coming for a long time.
The old war has been going for a long time.
— Fady Joudah, "I Seem As If I Am: Ten Maqams, #6," in *[...]* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2024)

Surveillance
No text.

BACK ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT:

Climate Change/Flood 1

Recto
You mad river
You have taken someone's land
You have taken someone's tin house
You have taken my newly budding love
— A Miyah song: "Mad River," translated by Shalim M. Hussain, in *Again I Hear These Waters*, edited by Shalim M. Hussain (London: Tilted Axis Press, 2024)

Verso
We are all singing the same song, said Mukhtar Chechi, a Bakarwal shepherd. We are trying to tell the rest of the world, 'look, we are seeing these things, and you are not doing anything about it.' If the animals die, we die. If the river dies, we are gone.
— Mohd Tufail, "Impact of the Climatic Change on the Seasonal Movement of the Bakarwals Nomads in the Valley of Kashmir," in *The Gujjars*, vol. 4, edited by Javaid Rahi (Srinagar and Jammu: J&K Academy of Art, Culture and Languages, 2014), https://javaidrahi.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/the-gujjars-vol-4-ed-by-dr-javaid-rahi.pdf

Migrants

Recto
“How much further do you have to go?”
“All the way”
“Is all the way far enough for the traveller to arrive?”
— Mahmoud Darwish, “An eagle flying low,” in *A River Dies of Thirst: Diaries*, translated from the Arabic by Catherine Cobham (London: SAQI Books, 2024)

Verso
Grief for my land accompanies
me wherever I go.
…
While journeying, Ghani,
seek the company of the light ones.
It’s the frail sail which sees the boat through
— Tahir Ghani, “Ghazals,” in *The Captured Gazelle: The Poems of Ghani Kashmiri*, translated from the Persian by Mufti Mudasir Farooqi and Nusrat Bazaz (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 2013)

Now, at which bank will the boat come
to rest, my love?
It’s the middle of the stream.
One river, two banks, my love.
Which bank is it going to be?
One river, two banks, which bank?
One road, two paths, my love.
Which path will you take, my love?
The boat is very old,
Weather-beaten and coming apart,
While the water gushes with force.
Now the shores seem deceptively false,
beloved.
At which shore will the boat come to
rest, beloved?
— A Bhojpuri song from Chhapra in Bihar, translated from Bhojpuri and local dialects by Smita Tewari Jassal, in *Unearthing Gender: Folksongs of North India* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012)

Ruined City

Recto
A little of the endless blue
is enough
to make the footstep of this time lighter
and to clean up the mud of this place
— Mahmoud Darwish, "A State of Siege (2002)," in *The Butterfly's Burden*, translated by Fady Joudah (United Kingdom: Bloodaxe Books Ltd, 2007)

Verso
हम देखेंगे
लाजिम है कि हम भी देखेंगे
वो दिन के जिसका वादा है
जो लोह-ए-अज़ल में लिखा है

We shall see-
It's certain we too shall see
The day that was promised to us
And set indelibly in iron
— Faiz Ahmed Faiz, "Hum dekhenge," translated from the Urdu by Amit Chaudhuri, in *India at 75* (New York: PEN/Barbey Freedom to Write Center, 2022)

On days of hope,
I cling to the promise/premise of those lines:
अनहोनी को होनी कर दें होनी को अनहोनी
एक जगह जब जमा हों तीनों
अमर, अकबर, एंथनी
— Jerry Pinto, in *India at 75* (New York: PEN/Barbey Freedom to Write Center, 2022). The lines in Hindi are lyrics by Anand Bakshi, penned for the title song of the film Amar Akbar Anthony, directed by Manmohan Desai in 1977

You tell me, screaming,
That this nurtured plot of land,
this pond, this farmhouse
you tell me, these are not mine?
You order me, with blazing eyes,
to leave all this
and go away
wherever – anywhere at all.
But this was the land of legends.
— Parimal Hembram (Marsal Hembram), "Then I must pick up my bow," translated from the Santali by Antara Dev Sen and the poet, *Tribes in Transition*, undated, https://tribesintransition.blogspot.com/p/marsalhembrom-then-i-must-pick-up-my.html

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I write for the future

because my present is demolished.
I fly to the future

to retrieve my demolished present
as a legible past. To see

what isn't hard to see
in a world that doesn't.
— Fady Joudah, Untitled poem, in *[...]* (Minneapolis: Milkweed Editions, 2024)

"Song that refuses silence.
Words that shatter caste.
Movement that disobeys fear.
Those burning for liberation!
Do not wait!
Do not ask permission!
Come!"
— Ektha Harthi Hiriyur, "Songs that refuse silence," *People's Archive of Rural India*, April 14, 2026, https://ruralindiaonline.org/article/song-that-refuses-silence

Sometimes you find yourself repeating the same things . . .
as you talk about memory and its decay, about war and its decay,
about childhood and its fading, about longing and its wear, about
family and your grief. The city won't come back to life; martyrs
won't return; memories won't come knocking at your door to check
if you're still around or if you've left.
— Mohammed Moussa, "Will the city ever return to you?" *Gaza Poets Society*, December 15, 2025, https://gazapoetssociety.substack.com/p/the-kindness-of-a-lost-city

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The Harvest of manslaughter is ceaselessly obtained here.
Seasons change only in accordance with the wind's direction.
From east to west, north to south
Harvesting never ends...
— Ashok Chakravarti, "Harvest," translated by Charudatta Bhagwat, in *Poisoned Bread: Translations from Modern Marathi Dalit Literature*, edited by Arjun Dangle (Hyderabad: Orient Blackswan Private Limited, 2009)

You've seen the refugees heading nowhere, you've heard the
executioners sing joyfully.
You should praise the mutilated world...
Praise the mutilated world and the grey feather a thrush lost, and
the gentle light that
strays and vanishes and returns
— Adam Zagajewski, "Try to Praise the Mutilated World," translated from the Polish by Clare Cavanagh, *New Yorker*, September 17, 2001, https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2001/09/24/try-to-praise-the-mutilated-world

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I belong there. I have many memories. I was born as everyone is
born.
...
And a piece of earth
I have lived on the land long before swords turned man into prey.
— Mahmoud Darwish, "I Belong There," in *Unfortunately, It Was Paradise: Selected Poems*, translated and edited by Munir Akash and Carolyn Forche with Sinan Antoon and Amira El-Zein (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2003)

Forest Fire

Recto
No text.

Verso
A fire lit the forest,
a bird came and sat
The wingless tree cried out
I'll burn, I am ablaze,
But you, winged one, should fly!
— A Marwari folk song: "Kin Sang Karaan Sneh" by Dharamdas from Jaisalmer, Rajasthan. A translation of the song by Shabnam Virmani and Vidya Rao was published online by Ajab Shahar, as part of the Kabir Project.
https://ajabshahar.com/songs/details/143/Kin-Sang-Karaan-Sneh&title=Kin-Sang-Karaan-Sneh

Street inJustice

Recto
Every new atrocity is a reminder of a previous one.
— Basharat Peer, "Kashmir unrest: A letter to unknown Indian," *The Economic Times*, August 9, 2010,https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/kashmir-unrest-a-letter-to-unknown-indian/articleshow/6278402.cms?from=mdr

Verso
Jumping in the ecstasy of killing,
may your feet not get sore,
may your hands not become heavy,
may your swords not grow blunt,
may your throat not be rent
by your angry shouts.

My body
reduced to ashes by hate
is carried away by the cool wind.
I shall be back as
a moment in history.
— Subbu Holeyar, Subbu. "Killers Drink the Milk of the Cow," translated by Laxmi Chandrashekar, in *Steel Nibs Are Sprouting: New Dalit Writing from South India, Dossier II: Kannada and Telugu*, edited by K. Satyanarayana and Susie Tharu (Noida: Harper Collins, 2013)