

“Each night put Kashmir in your dreams”

Nilima Sheikh
Baroda, India

Nilima Sheikh's series “Each night put Kashmir in your dreams” reveals her continuing exploration of the historical fate of Kashmir through the past decade, through a set of nine scrolls (casein, tempera on canvas sized 10 by 6 feet each).

Her painted scrolls reveal an informed palimpsest presentation of material that one had come to associate with Sheikh's work with all of Kashmir's contradictory and multicultural histories erupting through the artist's reverie about the land as Paradise. The magical and the marvelous, the mythic and the fabulous and ritual and fantasy pass through the photographic, the performative, the textual, the uttered and the art historical as well as through the artisanal habitual and the ecological. Multiple cultural sensibilities from all over the world from various strata of history make up the Kashmir of today. Textual references from Kalhana rub shoulder with the poetry of Lal Ded, folktales jostle with the poetry of Agha Shahid Ali or the prose of Salman Rushdie and the work of historian Chitrlekha Zutshi while visual references range from pre-Renaissance Italian art to famed Persian master Bihzad to the magnificent demonography of the Siyah Qalam and Thangka art amongst others.

As evinced in Sheikh's work, it is not a simple lament for the destruction of Paradise by political violence. Instead she unravels in various directions the multiple layers of forces of history at play in Kashmir today, the outcome of which is yet to be seen.*

* Based on Chemould Prescott Road Gallery text by Kaushik Bhaumik, *Each night put Kashmir in your dreams*: Nilima Sheikh, 2010.

Construction Site



Casein Tempera on canvas 120 x 72 inches, 2010

Construction Site

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.

Kashana's Rajatarangini, Vol. 1
Translated and edited by M. A. Stein

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) not of the God-knowing ruler Nur-ud-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 Hindus and Mussulmans as is the flesh of cows and pigs. They made the provisions in the shape of an antelope.

Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri or Memoirs of Jahangir, trans. Alexander Rogers, ed. Henry Beveridge

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 Vakh
Translated by Ranjit Hoskote

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.

Chitrakalpa Zutshi Languages of Belonging

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.

Hazrat Nooruddin Noorani
Translated by Yoginder Sikand

Each night put Kashmir in your dreams



Casein Tempera on canvas 120 x 72 inches, 2007

Each night put Kashmir in your dreams

My son never asked me, 'Ammaji, can I go to Pakistan and become a militant?' He simply left. I wept. That is the fate of the mothers of Kashmir. When he crossed the border on his return he was caught and jailed for two years. When he was released the Tanzeem (militant group) got after him because they felt he'd broken under torture. So he joined the Ikhwan to protect himself. Either way he was trapped: Lala, Bandipora

Bheka Chhabhai and Sonia Jabbar
Speaking Peace

'Don't tell my father I have died,' he says,
and I follow him through blood on the road
and hundreds of pairs of shoes the mourners left behind, as they ran from the funeral,
victims of the firing. From windows we hear
grieving mothers, and the snow begins to fall
on us, like ash. Black on edges of flames,
it can not extinguish the neighborhoods,
the homes set ablaze by midnight soldiers...

Agha Shahid Ali
The Country Without a Post Office

And it wasn't as if much was going to change by my going or not going. All this I knew... And yet, and yet, when the world is blowing up around you, it is irrelevant to ask whether the smallest gesture of humanity makes any difference or not. I went to each of the five families and begged forgiveness

Sonia Jabbar
Blood-Soil: Chittisinghpora and After

One of the prettiest objects in the village is the graveyard, shaded by the Celtis Australis and bright with iris, purple, white (guli sosan) and yellow (zambak), which the people plant over their departed relatives.

I have seen the best companies in Kashmir, though perhaps the best the Bhaggats of Syebug died off in the famine of 1877, and men now sigh, 'Alas I poor Yorick,' and speak of their excellent acting. The Bhaggats portray village life in a most vivid manner. Their dresses and make up are excellent, and they represent most faithfully the internal working of a village community. It is said that Maharaja Gulab Singh acquired a very intimate knowledge of village administration from the Bhaggat's performances, and I have picked up some hints from them as to the methods of the patwari, the village accountant.

Walter R. Lawrence
The Valley of Kashmir

Gathering Threads



Casein Tempera on canvas 120 x 72 inches, 2003

Gathering Threads

Nationalist discourse, particularly of the state-sponsored variety, is characterized by a unified and cohesive vision of the nation's past, aimed at papering over internal differences, conflicts, and contradictions in not only the nation's history, but also the history of the nationalist movement that brings its corollary the nation-state into existence. In the case of Kashmir, Indian and Kashmiri nationalist discourses have both converged to define Kashmiri history and cultural identity in terms of a concept widely known as Kashmiriyat. Akin to its Indian cousin, Kashmiri nationalism's memory of the past is refracted through rose-tinted glasses, in which Kashmir appears as a unique region where religious communities lived in harmony since time immemorial and differences in religion did not translate into acrimonious conflict until external intervention.

Chitrlekha Zutshi
Languages of Belonging

Thence, with two halts in the middle, I pitched on the bank of the Bihat (Jhelam). On that night a great wind blew and a black cloud hid the face of the sky. The rain was of such violence that old men remembered none such. It turned to hail, and every hailstone was the size of a hen's egg. From the flooding of the river and the force of the wind and rain, the bridge broke. I, with the inmates of the harem, crossed in a boat. As there were few boats, I ordered the men not to cross in these, but to rebuild the bridge. It was finished in a week, and the whole army crossed with ease. The source of the Bihat is a spring in Kashmir called the Vir-nag, in the language of India a snake is vir-nag. Clearly there had been a large snake at that place. I went twice to the spring in my father's lifetime, it is 20 kos from the city of Kashmir. It is an octagonal reservoir about 20 yards by 20. Near it are the remains of a place of worship for recluses; cells cut out of the rock and numerous caves. The water is exceedingly pure. Although I could not guess its depth, a grain of poppy-seed is visible until it touches the bottom... After my accession I ordered them to build the sides of the spring round with stone, and they made a garden round it with a canal, and built halls and houses about it, and made a place such that travelers over the world can point out few like it. When the river reaches the village of Pampur, at a distance of ten kos from the city, it increases, and all the saffron of Kashmir is obtained in this village. I do not know if there is so much saffron in any other place in the world. The annual crop is 500 maunds by Hindustan weight, equal to 5,000 wilayat (Persian) maunds. In attendance on my revered father, I went to this place at the season when the saffron was in flower. On other plants of the world, first the branches (stems) shoot out and then the leaves and flowers. On the contrary, when the saffron stem is four fingers breadth from the dry ground, its flowers shoot out, of the colour of the iris, with four petals, and the middle are four threads (risa) of an orange colour like that of the flower, and of the length of a finger-joint. This is the saffron. The land is not ploughed or irrigated, the plant springs up amongst the clods. In some places its cultivation extends for a kos and in others for half a kos. It looks better from a distance. At the time of plucking, all my attendants got headache from its sharp scent. Though I drank wine and took a cup, I too got headache.

Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri
trans. Alexander Rogers, ed. Henry Beveridge

The Srinagar maps also point to the fact that very few of us are now likely to see the fourth example or the city it is housed in, because the multicultural harmony of Kashmir has become a war zone... The materiality and multiple contending stories of the shawls show us how in realpolitik, theories of hybridity offer no comfortable solution and debates on textual performances of diasporic identities mask all kinds of suffering. At best we only ever have an uneasy syncretism and there are forces that push to resolve even this into simple oppositions of totalizing uniformity. Aga Shahid Ali's poem (A History of Paisley, 1997) can be read against the text's of the Godfrey shawl. Ironically it carries the title of the place that helped create its status as a priceless art object by decimating the craft production which gave shawls their fame:

Paul Sharad
Following the map

You who will find the dark fossils of paisleys
one afternoon on the peaks of Zabarvan --
Trader from an ancient market of the future,
alibi of chronology, that vain
collaborator of time -- won't know that these

are her footprints from the day the world began...

...O see, it is still the day the world begins.

and the city rises, holding its remains,
its wooden beams already their own fire's prophets.)
And you, now touching sky, deaf to her anklets
still echoing in the valley, deaf to men
fleeing from soldiers into dead-end lanes

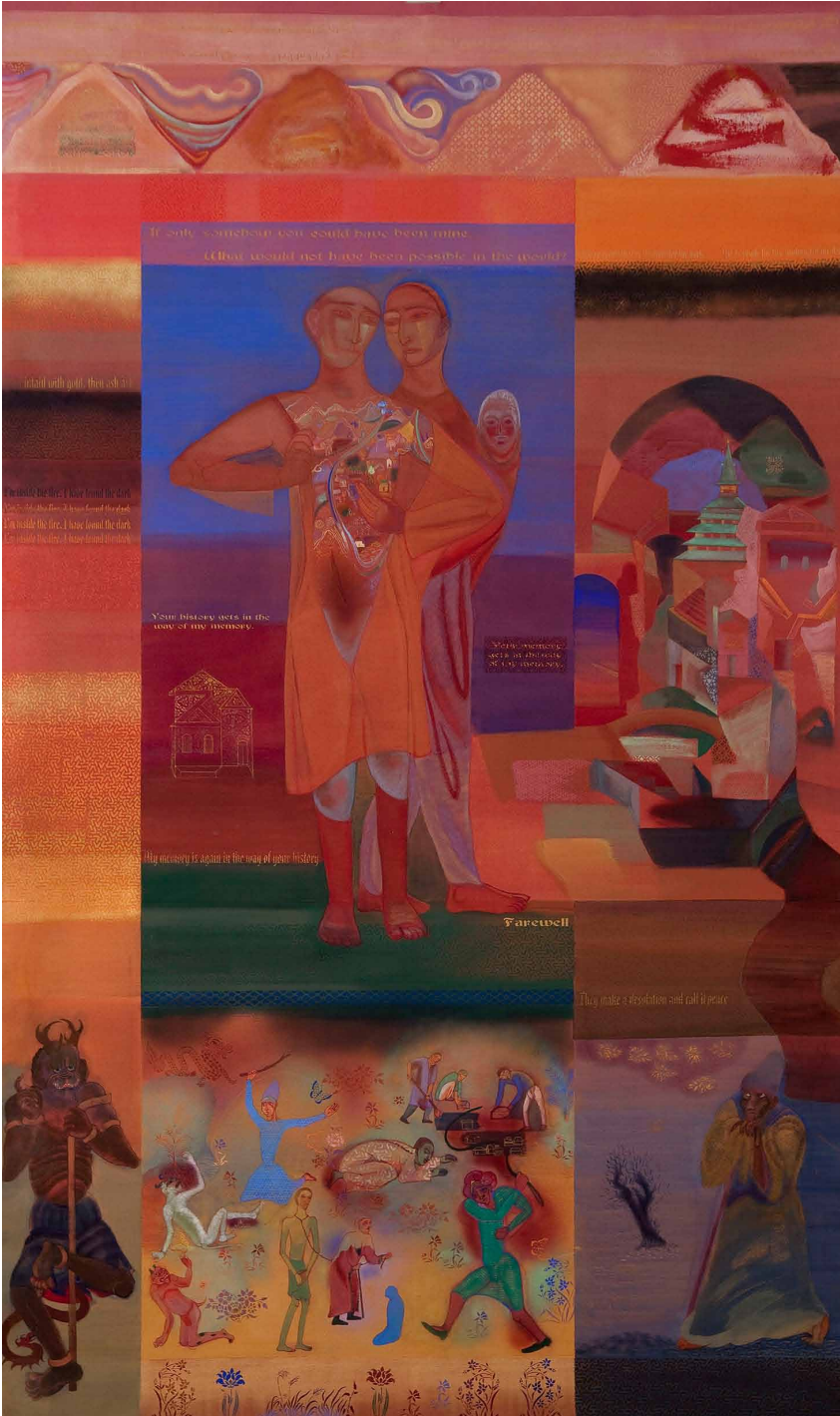
(Look! Their feet bleed; they leave footprints on the street
which will give up its fabric, at dusk, a carpet
you have found -- you'll think -- the first teardrop, gem
that was enticed for a mogul diadem
into design ...

... three men are discussing, between
sips of tea, undiscovered routes on emerald

seas, ships with almonds, with shawls bound for Egypt.
It is dusk. The quays is torn. A weaver kneels,
gathers falling threads. Soon he will stitch the air.

Agha Shahid Ali

Farewell



Casein Tempera on canvas 120 x 72 inches, 2004

Farewell

That failure of the subconscious was the border. The line of control did not run through 576 kilometres of militarised mountains. It ran through our souls, our hearts, and our minds. It ran through everything a Kashmiri, an Indian, and a Pakistani said, wrote, and did. It ran through the fingers of editors writing newspaper and magazine editorials, it ran through the eyes of reporters, it ran through the reels of Bollywood coming to life in dark theatres, it ran through conversations in coffee shops and TV screens showing cricket matches, it ran through families and dinner talk, it ran through the whispers of lovers. And it ran through our grief, our anger, our tears, and our silences.

The buses carrying the passengers from Muzaffarabad traveled under a drizzling grey sky to Srinagar. It is a road that has been deserted after dusk for a decade and a half. I watched thousands of woman, man, and children stand along the much soldiered road, waving hands and umbrellas, welcoming the ones who had stepped across the line. There was no fear that evening. There were only hands reaching out of the bus windows, waving in the air, as if each wave would erase the lines of control. I raised my hand and waved.

Basharat Peer
Curfewed Night

Interestingly, it was in the Afghan period that Kashmiri Pandits attained proficiency in Persian and not only began to form part of the administration of the land, but, more significantly, became an integral voice in the expression of a sense of longing for and belonging to the Kashmiri homeland. One such Kashmiri Pandit poet, Dayaram Kachru (1743-1811), came from a family known for its scholarship in Persian and Sanskrit and for service as civil officials to the Afghans. Even as Kachru held a number of civil positions with the Afghans, both in Srinagar and Kabul, he wrote prolifically in Persian, composing verses on Kashmir, his homeland, and introducing Hindu devotional themes to Persian poetry in Kashmir. Not only did Kachru translate the Bhagavadgita into Persian, he also composed the *Masnavi-i-Kashmir*, which he wrote in praise of his homeland while stationed in Kabul.

O Lord, blossom the bird of my hopes,
And show me spring in the garden of Kashmir.
I pine in separation from my home,
Not knowing why destiny cast me away.

Where is the fervor of those fountains,
Whose sighs, O Lord, are lifted to the heavens by the wind?

I cannot describe the state of my separation.
Fortitude is better, fortitude is better.

Sanaullah Kiri (1795-1873), a devotional poet who wrote naats...composed the following verse.

Will you not go there,
Where the Prophet lies asleep?
You will tell him my condition,
He is the medicine for our illnesses.
He is the beautiful one,
He is our well-wisher.
Will you not tell him,
That the Kashmiris have fallen?
They are helpless, useless, and unskilled
Without friends or helpers.

Chitrlekha Zutshi
Languages of Belonging

Dying Dreaming



Casein Tempera on canvas 120 x 72 inches, 2004

Dying Dreaming

Touched by the kindness of a Hindu girl named Bhawan, who would earn her livelihood by carrying water to a village perched on a hill-top 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 Kashmiri Rishism*

In the Rishinama it is said that one spring Sheikh Nuru'ddin, accompanied by some of his disciples, visited the Pir Pantisal. 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 Sheikh 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 meagre 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."

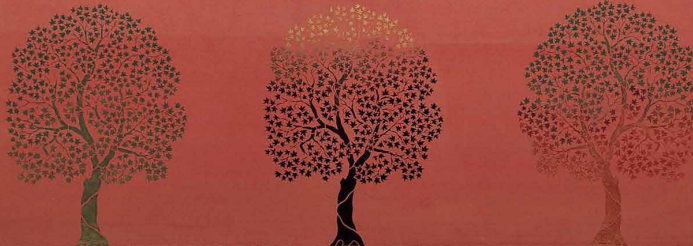
"I have transported you hither," replied Bahadin, "in order that you might meet face to face with Zainu'labadin, and promise him that you will abolish this wicked custom..."

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

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 Sharrod
Following the map



Casein Tempera on canvas 120 x 72 inches, 2004

Going Away

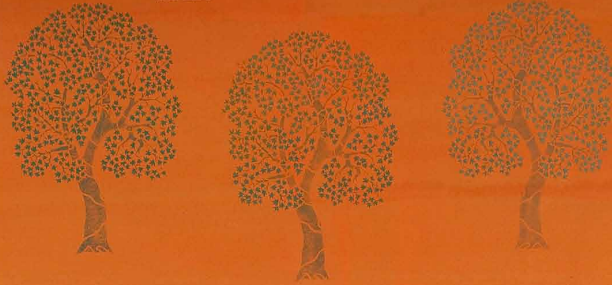


Casein Tempera on canvas 120 x 72 inches, 2010

Going Away

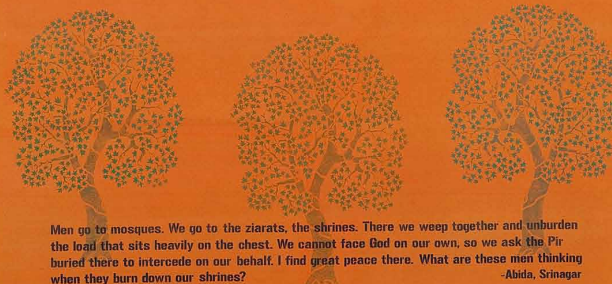
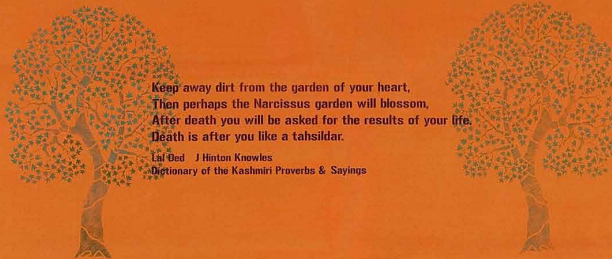
Not all, only a few return from dust, disguised as roses.
What hopes the earth forever covers, what faces?

Agha Shahid Ali
(After Ghallib)



Keep away dirt from the garden of your heart,
Then perhaps the Narcissus garden will blossom,
After death you will be asked for the results of your life,
Death is after you like a tahsildar.

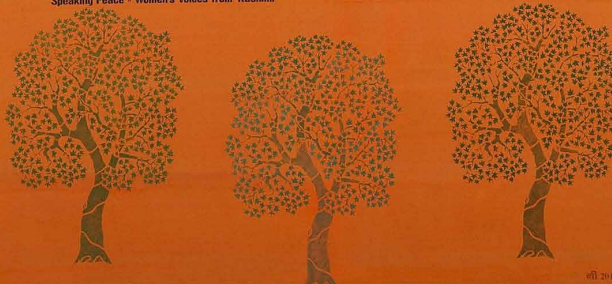
Lal Qud J Hinton Knowles
Dictionary of the Kashmiri Proverbs & Sayings



Men go to mosques. We go to the ziarats, the shrines. There we weep together and unburden
the load that sits heavily on the chest. We cannot face God on our own, so we ask the Pir
buried there to intercede on our behalf. I find great peace there. What are these men thinking
when they burn down our shrines?

-Abida, Srinagar

Collated by Sheba Chhachhi and Sania Jabbar
Speaking Peace - Women's Voices from Kashmir



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Casein Tempera on canvas 120 x 72 inches, 2010

Son et Lumiere



Casein Tempera on canvas 120 x 72 inches, 2010

Son et Lumiere

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 Kansa 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

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.

J Hinton Knowles, Lal Vakh, Dictionary of the Kashmiri Proverbs & Sayings

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 or 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 no 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.

Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri or Memoirs of Jahangir, trans. Alexander Rogers, ed. Henry Beveridge

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 Jahangir's time, Malik Haider and Narayan Kaul Aziz one a Kashmiri Muslim and the other a Kashmiri 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 begun 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.

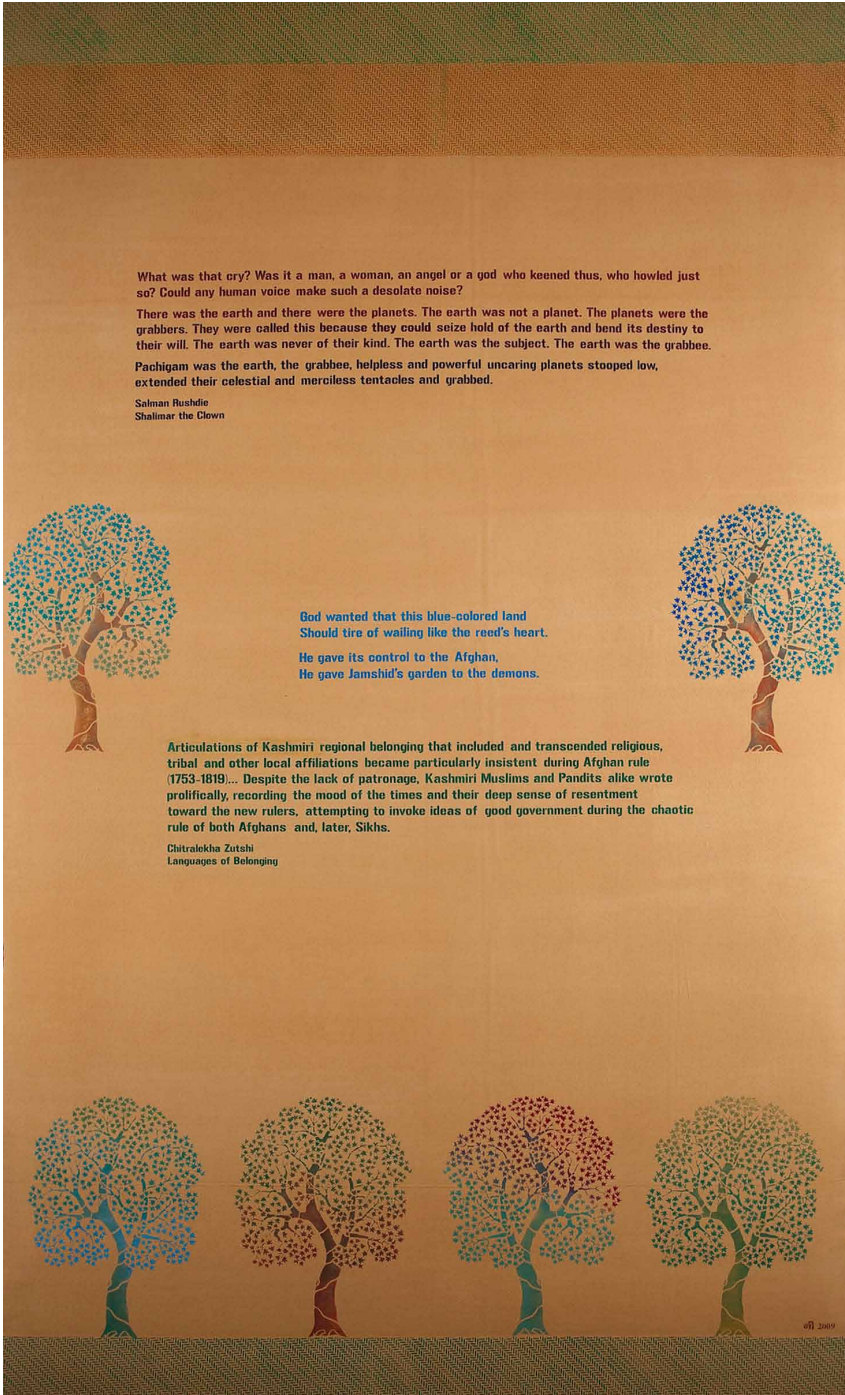
Chitrlekha Zutshi - Languages of Belonging

The beautiful village of Pachigam still exists



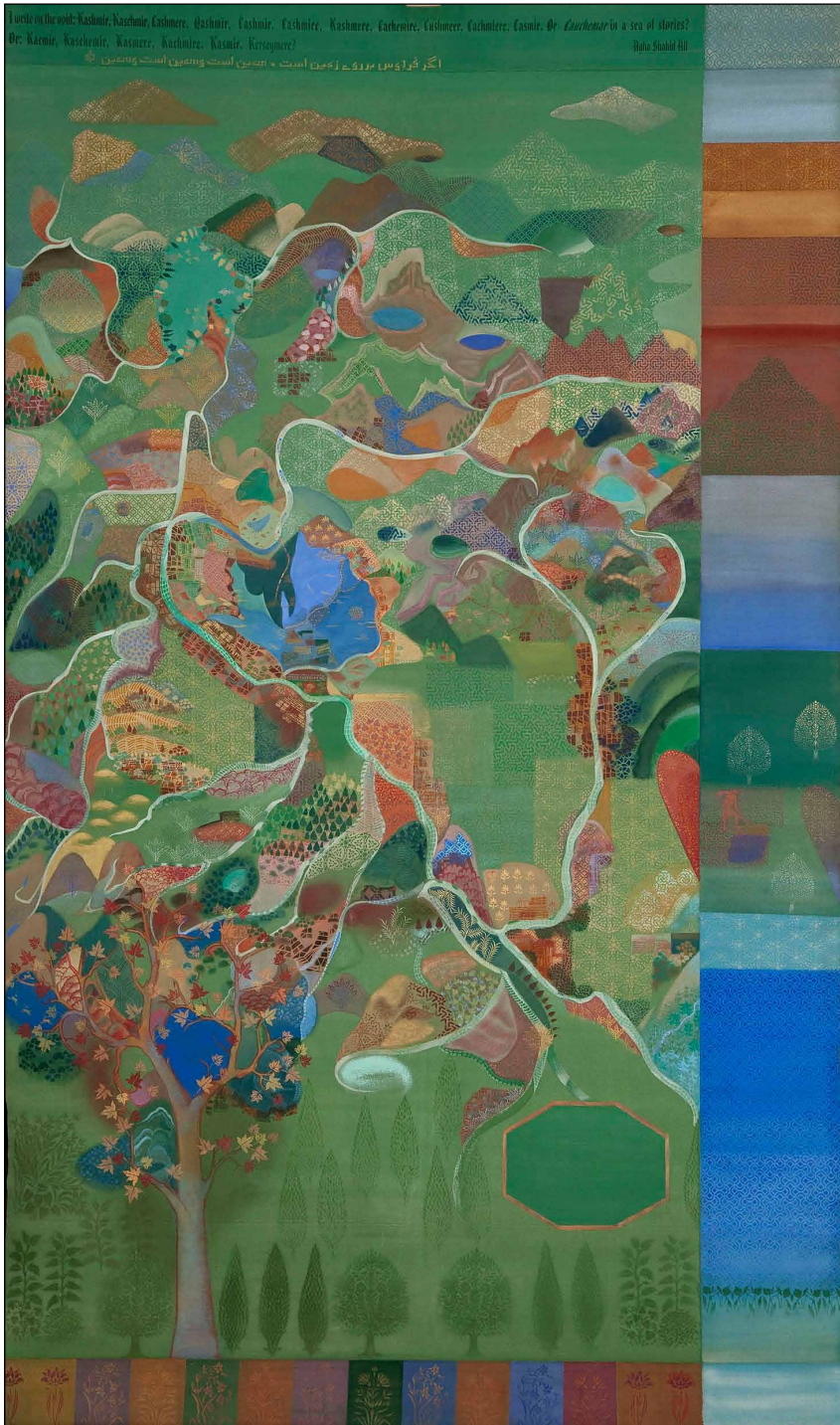
Casein Tempera on canvas 120 x 72 inches, 2009

The beautiful village of Pachigam still exists



Casein Tempera on canvas 120 x 72 inches, 2009

Valley



Casein Tempera on canvas 120 x 72 inches, 2003

Valley

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.

Lat Wakh, Translated by Rishi Bhatnagar

Baba Mir Uways was a mystic from the Sultanate period who had ties to the ruling dynasty and wrote primarily in Persian. Uways'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.



Oshtakhla Zaitun
Landscape of Kashmir

In his introduction to the Rajatarangini ...Kalhana Pandit says of the valley; 'It is a country where the sun shines mildly, being the place created by Kashyapa as if for his glory. High school-houses, the saffron, lead-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

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., &c., and that men must believe this though they may never see, or hear of, them!

Jibonno Khasin, Feb. Taleq of Kashmir

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.

Oshtakhla Zaitun, Landscape of Kashmir

...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 1884 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 weaving 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.

Following the map
Paul Sharrad

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.

Sanku Jabbar, Spirit of Peace

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.

The Valley of Kashmir
Walter R. Lawrence

Casein Tempera on canvas 120 x 72 inches, 2003

NILIMA SHEIKH was born in New Delhi in 1945 and after graduating in history, she studied painting at the MS University of Baroda (1965-71). She has exhibited her paintings since 1969, and in 2017 she participated in Documenta 14 in Kassel and Athens. Her solo exhibitions include *Each night put Kashmir in your dreams* at the Art Institute of Chicago in 2014. She has illustrated and designed children’s books since 1986 and between 1989 and 2000 created the scenography and visual design for theater productions. She writes on art and has published essays in books, journals and artists’ catalogues.