Forgotten Country

Jan Janaan

Enclosed by the snow-clad Himalayas, and wrapped in green
Is the Valley of Saints and Mystics, who saw it serene;
They chose the place to contemplate and meditate;
Ravishing and tranquil – they thought it shall always remain.

Little did they know that this land of delight: mountains and vales,
Of chinar and saffron, lotus and pansy, of streams and lakes,
Would carry the smell of live blood in its breeze.

Women would wail for men whose bodies would be thrown to freeze.
Children would ask for their fathers and mothers would lie:
Sleep my dear sleep, papa did not die. He’s gone to meet the guardian angel at the gates of Hope And ask if Heaven has fallen asleep for Kashmir is burning and God has not said a word!

Little did they know that this land of lush green meadows
Would be captured through a felonious invasion, And concertina wire would become

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1Jan Janaan is a US-based Kashmiri poet.
the fastest growing vegetation.
That Hawks would fly over to
prey upon the Bulbuls and Mynas
And Vultures would hover over
the wounded, and the dead.
That Songbirds would lose their
melodies and Spring would become
The season of sorrow & grief
over the (enforced) disappeared and butchered.
That mothers would eat rice
mingled with their tears
For the apples of their eyes
would pay the Freedom’s price.
That, the men in olive & green
would enjoy the impunity
To murder and slaughter,
to vandalise and torture.
That the mountains would bear
in their bellies & bosoms
The corpses of unknowns and
unmarked graves. The troops would learn
And brag it loud: They say it well that the dead tell no tales.
That women would be forced to
live as anything but wives –
As the Half-widows of the (enforced) disappeared
for the rest of their lives.

Little did they know that
mourning would become a crime
For those whose bodies are whisked
away to leave no sign.
That corpse stealing would
become a norm and a father
Would be left to beg for his son’s
body to be returned:
I am digging this grave and
will leave it open
Until my seventeen-year-old son is
regardfully returned.
He was innocent, abducted, and killed
in cold blood
Snatching away his body, now
makes me shudder.
That people would be silenced, and
they would forget
To ask not to kill and let
them live. Instead,
Return the Bodies would become
their heartfelt appeal.

Little did they know that the happy
faces they see in Til-Pheran
Would carry shame and dishonor
caused by the men in uniform.
That the men would be battered,
forced to stand outside and freeze
While their women would be violated
inside and not allowed to shriek.
That the nights would be dark – full
of demons and monsters
And the days would be coloured red
by the blood of protesters.
That a daughter would break down before
the men in olive & brown
Drenched in tears, helpless she
would feel, choking on words
Breathlessly she would plead:
Uncle why did you kill Baba?
This would be all that she could speak.
Snickering and sneering, and
laughing in her face,
The men would pathetically
turn into a disgrace.

Little did they know that in this land
of apple and grapevine
Houses would be razed to the ground, and
children would be shot blind.
That uncertainty would prevail, and
desolation would be called peace
Oppression would be normalised, and
the Oppressor would be at ease
That fear & despair, and hopelessness
& tragedy, and loss & remembrance,
Would cross each other like
an orchestrated performance
That – to lose and remember,
to defy and suffer
Intimate lovers would they become
of each other.
That speaking truth to power
would become a threat to existence
And mere sustenance would become
an act of resistance.
This is Kashmir – the forgotten land of mine
To which the world has turned
deaf, dumb, and blind.