

## Forgotten Country

Jan Janaan<sup>1</sup>

*Everyone carries his address in his pocket  
So that at least his body will reach home.  
– Agba Shahid Ali*

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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<sup>1</sup>Jan 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.