



Book Review

***Indian Graphic Narratives: Critical Responses* edited by Sapna Dogra**

Reviewed by

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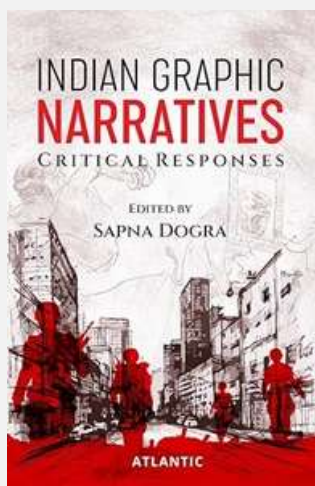
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Indian Graphic Narratives: Critical Responses (2024) is a compilation of essays offering varied critical perspectives on some of the acclaimed Indian graphic narratives. These essays examine key works such as Amruta Patil's *Kari*, Sarnath Banerjee's *Corridor*, Pratik Thomas and Rajiv Eipe's *Hush*, Malik Sajad's *Munnu: A Boy From Kashmir*, Naseer Ahmed and Saurabh Singh's *Kashmir Pending* and other Indian graphic narratives, addressing concepts of gender, identity, social discrimination, sociopolitical paradigms, and socio-spatial expression. Some of the essays also advocate for the unique narrative power of graphic discourse as a medium and a tool for social change, particularly when integrated into educational curricula.

This collection positions Indian graphic narratives within the “global graphic turn” (xvi), emphasising their relevance in representing themes as broad as destruction, desolation, abuse, deprivation, displacement, and trauma. The book's contributors, including the editor—all emerging and established scholars in the field—delve into narrative strategies that set Indian graphic novels apart from the American, European, and Manga traditions. In India, as the editor notes, graphic narratives are evolving into “a new representational mode” that has seamlessly integrated into the canon of Indian Writing in English (IWE) (xi). The essays emphasise the significance of this graphic turn, highlighting how the increasing adoption of this medium by authors and artists is shaping a unique and powerful visual language that is part of a gradual “subversive literary [and artistic] movement” in the country. (Nayak, 15)

The introduction to the book draws on the history of graphic narratives in India and on how this medium has shaped the collective historical and social imaginaries. It provides a well-researched overview of how Indian graphic storytelling has evolved, touching upon key moments in its development and linking it to broader socio-political discourses. The introduction also effectively synthesises existing scholarship on the subject, situating this collection within ongoing critical debates. From representing the exploration of sexuality, sexual abuse and gender identity (*Kari*, *Hush* and *Drawing the Line: Indian Women Fight Back*), historical post-memories of the public historical mass-events like the Indian Emergency of 1975-77, the Partition, political turmoil in Kashmir (*Delhi Calm*, *This Side That Side: Restorying Partition*, *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* and *Kashmir Pending*), social discrimination (*A Gardener in the Wasteland: Jyotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty* and *Bhimayana: The Experiences of Untouchability*), environmental degradation in Orjit Sen's *River of Stories* and *All Quiet in Vikaspuri* and even mythological reworking (*Adi Parva: Churning of the Ocean*, *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers* and *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest*). The book, therefore, establishes itself as a valuable contribution to the study of Indian graphic narratives, bringing together essays that analyse their thematic, visual, and narrative complexities.

The book devotes significant attention to Amruta Patil's *Kari*, analysing it through multiple critical lenses. The opening chapter, "The Graphic Deterritorialisation: A Socio-Analytic Study of Amruta Patil's *Kari*", offers a socio-analytic reading of *Kari*, examining identity crises, estrangement, and queer representation. The discussion draws on Deleuzian ideas of deterritorialisation while considering *Kari*'s engagement with Indian cultural contexts. The second chapter, "Gender and Violence in Indian Graphic Narratives", takes a comparative approach to several graphic narratives written by female graphic novelists and artists, featuring women protagonists. This provides a distinctive examination of the evolving portrayal of gender and sexuality in the Indian context. "Cityscapes and Real-Imagined Spatiality: Locating Topophrenia" offers a spatial reading of *Kari*, particularly in relation to evolving urban landscapes. This chapter examines the interplay between visual storytelling and the lived realities of urban existence, highlighting how space shapes identity and narrative structure. Meanwhile, "Marginalised Non-Heterosexual in Normalised Heterosexual Metropolitan City" revisits the novel through the lens of gender performativity and non-binary identity, emphasising its navigation of queerness within a heteronormative society. Together, these chapters provide a multifaceted exploration of gender-centred graphic narratives, including *Kari*, reflecting its complexity and enduring relevance.

The third chapter, "The Impact of Social Paradigms and its Resonance on the Characters of Sarnath Banerjee's *Corridor*", examines how the graphic narrative engages with societal expectations and individuality. The analysis explores the narrative's engagement with urban life, personal freedom, and cultural shifts within contemporary India by portraying a city in flux, where tradition and modernity collide, shaping the identities of its inhabitants. Through its characters, the narrative records the existential struggles of urban youth, providing a layered critique of Indian social structures.

The study of the graphic narrative *Hush* in the fifth chapter offers a poignant exploration of trauma through a wordless narrative, relying solely on visual storytelling to convey the harrowing experience of abuse. The absence of text forces the reader to engage more deeply with the imagery, mirroring the silences that often accompany trauma. This use of the graphic form to depict psychological distress is part of a broader trend where graphic narratives have become an increasingly popular medium for representing trauma. The interplay of text and image allows for a more fragmented, yet deeply affective, portrayal of traumatic memory, capturing its non-linear and often unspeakable nature. Many works, such as *Maus*, *Persepolis*, and others, exemplify how graphic storytelling can articulate experiences of abuse, violence, displacement, and marginalisation in ways that traditional prose struggles to achieve. In this context, *Hush* aligns

with a growing global body of graphic narratives that use visual metaphors, panel transitions, and narrative gaps to reflect the silences and ruptures inherent in trauma, making the medium a compelling space for personal and collective histories of suffering and resilience.

The chapters, “Animals as Visual Metaphors in Graphic Narratives” in *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* and “Violence and Manipulation in Kashmir Pending,” explore themes of geopolitical violence and identity. The discussion of animal metaphors in *Munnu* considers how animal symbolism functions within narratives of historical trauma and resistance, drawing on semiotic representations of anthropomorphism. Similarly, *Kashmir Pending* is examined as a counter-narrative to state discourse, highlighting its portrayal of conflict and resistance within the Kashmir region. The juxtaposition of these texts within the collection situates Indian graphic narratives within a broader tradition of political storytelling, akin to *Maus* and other global works that use the medium to challenge dominant historical narratives.

“Graphic Narratives as an Educational Tool” and “Graphic Narratives: An Emerging Source of Education for Learners” collectively explore the pedagogical significance of graphic narratives in contemporary learning environments. They highlight the unique ability of visual storytelling to engage students, enhance literacy, and stimulate critical thinking. These discussions underline the potential of graphic novels to bridge textual and visual comprehension, offering an interdisciplinary approach to education. The inclusion of theoretical perspectives on multimodal learning reinforces the argument. It also establishes a scope for additional empirical studies revolving around visual learning models within the Indian educational framework.

Given the growing prominence of graphic narratives, there is a clear opportunity for a future edition of the book to incorporate new voices and perspectives, expanding on additional works that have emerged in the field. In fact, one of the book’s most innovative aspects is its implicit encouragement for future researchers to explore underrepresented themes and works, positioning this collection as a foundation rather than a definitive anthology. The exclusion of some contemporary Indian graphic works in this volume reflects the field’s dynamic and ever-evolving nature, signalling the need for ongoing exploration. Thus, this edition serves as a critical, although initial, map of Indian graphic narratives.

Indian Graphic Narratives: Critical Responses, therefore, underscores the distinctiveness of homegrown graphic storytelling by examining its culturally-rooted narrative techniques. The book is an excellent example of how Indian graphic narratives employ indigenous visual metaphors, fragmented storytelling, intertextual references to mythology, folklore, and popular culture, and multilingual text to construct narratives deeply tied to local histories and sociopolitical realities. By engaging with these elements, the essays in this volume reinforce the

Indianness of the medium, demonstrating how it moves beyond Western influences to carve its own space in the global discourse of comics and graphic narratives. This focus on cultural specificity makes the book a valuable contribution to understanding how graphic novels in India function as both artistic expressions and socio-political commentaries, reflecting the complexities of identity, resistance, and memory in the Indian context.

In conclusion, all the essays in this volume align with ongoing debates on the Indian graphic narrative as a medium for exploring identity and cultural specificity. It interrogates *Indianness* not as a fixed construct but as an evolving narrative shaped by historical, political, and social forces. By examining how these graphic texts engage with local storytelling traditions while conversing with global influences, the book highlights their ability to assert regional identity and address universal concerns simultaneously. Moreover, the chapters on graphic narratives as an educational tool critically assess the medium's potential and constraints, reinforcing its intellectual and pedagogical value. While there is scope for a new anthology to include the ever-expanding collection of graphic books in India, the book remains an essential reference for courses on graphic narratives, offering a springboard for deeper interdisciplinary studies and signalling new avenues for scholarship in this vibrant field.