

Kashmir Pending: Narrative and Ideology in a Graphic Novel

Patrick C. Hogan

Volume 4, numéro 2, 2014

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1062102ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1062102ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Narrative, St. Thomas University

ISSN

1925-0622 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Hogan, P. (2014). Kashmir Pending: Narrative and Ideology in a Graphic Novel. *Narrative Works*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.7202/1062102ar>

Résumé de l'article

Kashmir Pending (2007) is the graphic novel of a man who joined the militant insurgency against Indian rule in Kashmir, but who eventually became disillusioned with the revolutionaries. It is valuable in portraying some aspects of the situation in Kashmir that are largely absent from mainstream treatments of the conflict. Nonetheless, it is problematic in a number of ways, ranging from its somewhat unrepresentative apportioning of the violence in Kashmir to its use of a childhood model of militants in its emplotment of the insurgency. In consequence, the novel arguably reinforces a liberal colonialist ideology regarding Indian control of Kashmir.

SPECIAL ISSUE: NARRATIVE EMOTIONS AND THE SHAPING(S) OF IDENTITY

***Kashmir Pending:* Narrative and Ideology in a Graphic Novel**

Patrick C. Hogan
University of Connecticut

Kashmir Pending (2007) is the graphic novel of a man who joined the militant insurgency against Indian rule in Kashmir, but who eventually became disillusioned with the revolutionaries. It is valuable in portraying some aspects of the situation in Kashmir that are largely absent from mainstream treatments of the conflict. Nonetheless, it is problematic in a number of ways, ranging from its somewhat unrepresentative apportioning of the violence in Kashmir to its use of a childhood model of militants in its emplotment of the insurgency. In consequence, the novel arguably reinforces a liberal colonialist ideology regarding Indian control of Kashmir.

Kashmir Pending is an unusual work—a readable and engaging graphic novel, in English, that purports to represent an authentic testimony regarding the Kashmir insurgency.¹ As such, it is a potentially valuable resource in understanding the conditions in Kashmir and conveying that understanding to a large audience.² But there are

¹ The national status of Kashmir has been in dispute since the formation of Pakistan and India in 1947. Since that time, Kashmiris have been denied the opportunity to determine their national status through a plebiscite. From the late 1980s, the dispute has taken the form of a violent insurgency, aided by Pakistan and brutally suppressed by the Indian government. Tens of thousands have perished in the conflict. There are many overviews of the situation in Kashmir (see, for example, Ali, Bhatt, Chatterji, Mishra, & Roy, 2011).

² The concern of the present essay is with the ideological implications of the novel, what it is likely to convey to readers about the political and military situation in Kashmir. Thus the analysis focuses almost entirely on representation and emplotment. That focus necessarily leaves aside many key features of the novel. Readers interested in the visual

problems. First, the degree to which the novel represents a militant's experiences is questionable. Second, the way in which the novel emplots events seems to rely on standard models of liberal ideology that conceal and distort at least as much as they reveal. On the other hand, the novel is not without insights into Kashmir as well as larger issues of colonialism and anti-colonial militancy.

The Implied Reader and the True Story

One of the first topics to consider in examining a political work is its target audience. There are some indications in the story that the primary target audience of *Kashmir Pending* is young, Muslim, Kashmiri males. Specifically, the novel functions most obviously as a cautionary tale for potential militants, serving to dissuade them from taking part in the insurgency. Here, one might ask: is it in fact the case that potential militants are reading English-language comics, even if they are about Kashmir? Perhaps. But the fact that the publication is a graphic novel in English may also suggest that it is appealing to the growing body of Anglophone humanists—often with liberal political views—who have recently taken to reading and interpreting graphic fiction. In this respect, the real target audience may be readers who are interested in such works as Spiegelman's *Maus* (1986)³ or Satrapi's *Persepolis* (2004).⁴ There is, however, the complication that such readers are probably supposed to *imagine* themselves as a secondary readership for the work, rather than as the primary readership. In other words, it is important for liberal humanists reading the work to think of its primary audience not as liberal humanists, but as “at risk” Kashmiri youths. Put differently, we may say that there is what might be called a *rhetorical audience* for the work. The rhetorical audience is a group assumed to be the main implied audience by the *actual* implied audience.⁵

qualities of the work may consult Desai's (2011) nuanced and sensitive analysis. Desai's valuable essay is also complementary to the present study in its treatment of some ideological weaknesses in the work.

³ On the historical effect of *Maus* (Spiegelman, 1986) forming a particular readership for graphic fiction, see Gordon (2010) and Loman (2010).

⁴ Several readers of this article have also mentioned Joe Sacco's *Palestine* (1993/2001). The connection makes sense. However, Desai makes a good case that the politics and rhetorical effectiveness of *Palestine* contrast strikingly with those of *Kashmir Pending*.

⁵ One referee for this article expressed concern over my criticism of readers of *Kashmir Pending*. I should therefore clarify that I am not criticizing real readers. I am, rather, setting out to analyze the narrational structure of the work. In connection with this, it is

This rhetorical audience orientation, with its suggestion of an adolescent Kashmiri reader, is bound up with an important aspect of the narrative representation. Specifically, the work draws on a cognitive model that tacitly understands militants as adolescents. In this respect, it takes up one standard, liberal emplotment of the Kashmir insurgency, an emplotment found in films ranging from Mani Ratnam's *Roja* (Balachander, Kandaswamy, & Ratnam, 1992) to Piyush Jha's *Sikandar* (Mishra & Jha, 2009). In each case, the militants (whatever their age) are understood as youths, misled by corrupt and seductive adults, particularly from Pakistan. Of course, many revolutionaries are young and that is important. The point, however, is that adolescence operates as a common liberal colonialist model for characterizing and evaluating—thus guiding readers' thought about and emotional response to—rebellion. Moreover, this is independent of the rights or grievances of the rebels. This model is liberal in contrast with modeling rebels on, for example, animals (see Ch. 4 of Hogan, 2001). In keeping with this difference, liberal colonialism as a political orientation supports colonial domination for putatively humanitarian reasons and with some sort of constrained democratic framework. However, that democratic framework does not extend to, for example, popular self-determination regarding the presence of colonial armed forces. The constraint in self-determination is related to the adolescent model of anti-colonial rebellion and an associated parental model of the colonizers (adolescents having only limited self-determination relative to parents).

Of course, all this is relatively insignificant if the work's representation of the situation in Kashmir is trustworthy. In this case, the trustworthiness of the story is founded on its supposed authenticity.⁶

important to stress that neither the rhetorical implied audience nor the actual implied audience is the same as the real reader. Here, as in other works, real readers may or may not conform to the tacit simulations of the authors, their projections of a reader.

⁶ Writers on graphic memoirs have treated the issue of authenticity. For example, El Refaie (2012) emphasizes “the impossibility of ever establishing the historical facts” (p. 166) and contends that “Under the influence of postmodernism, the concept of a single, straightforward Truth has been dismantled” (p. 136). I, too, find the idea of authenticity to be questionable. Moreover, El Refaie usefully treats the ambiguity of the term and insightfully examines the rhetorical complexity of conveying a sense of authenticity. (Other writers have helpfully discussed such related topics as witnessing; see the essays in Chaney, 2011.) However, my point here is not that there is “a single, straightforward Truth.” It is rather that some things have happened in Kashmir and some things have not happened, that there are patterns to both, and that the facts and the patterns matter. Of course, we can never *fully* establish the particular facts or the general patterns. However,

Thus, just after the title page, we read, “This story is based on a true account” (p. 3). The fact that the story is largely a first person narration suggests that it is actual testimony by the author, Naseer Ahmed. This is impossible to check, since “Names of characters and organizations have been changed” (3). Nonetheless, the statement reinforces the reader’s sense of testimony, since *changing* the names indicates that there are real, historical/biographical counterparts for the characters. Indeed, there is even a hint that these real people would be endangered by the militants (not the Indian military, given the relation of the main character to the military at the end of the novel).

Even so, there is reason to doubt that this is strictly historical and biographical. It presumably is “based on” actual events. But the question is to what extent the details of the story correspond to particular occurrences. First, the story fits somewhat too neatly into a prototypical emplotment of Kashmiri militants as adolescents misled by sinister Pakistani adults, as just noted. No less significantly, the events of the narrative have rather greater narrative structure than we would expect from events in real life. We have a virtually Aristotelian plot here. The main character, Mushtaq, commits the tragic error of turning to violence. It is not the result of a bad character, but he is also not entirely without blame. His tragic error leads to death. Death, in turn, precipitates recognition and reversal, leading Mushtaq from militancy to a peaceful and non-political private existence as a small businessman. He has been “relocated” (p. 82), presumably by the government, and has somehow ended up owning a restaurant. His post-prison success—and even his “relocation”—sit rather uneasily with his insistence that he did not give any information to the authorities while in prison. The point is important because the reader’s sense of the hero’s ultimate nobility would seem to rely on his not being a self-serving collaborationist who trades his principles (however misguided) for business success.

It is true that there is a sense of irresolution at the end of the novel, which in this respect is not artificially structured. However, that irresolution concerns the political situation in Kashmir, not the life of the protagonist. The life of the protagonist is, rather, quite settled—a satisfying resolution based on his own choices and efforts. Indeed, one of the most interesting and problematic aspects of the narrative is the way it treats the free choices of Kashmiri militants, the way it presents militants as making their own lives rather than being made by circumstances. One

we can determine that, in light of the evidence, some accounts are likely to be misleading.

effect of focusing on the choices of Kashmiri Muslim youths is that the story ends up treating Indian government policies and Indian military actions, as well as Pakistani government policies and secret service actions, as mere background, as conditions for action, rather than as actions *per se*. Put differently, the novel does something that is supposed to be virtually always good, in standard left-liberal views of literature. It “gives agency” to “the subaltern.” But the effect of this is that the choice for ending the conflict is put entirely into the hands of the militants. Their choices are, roughly, to give up militancy—indeed, to give up politics altogether, if Mushtaq is the appropriate model—or to struggle pointlessly against the policies and practices of India and Pakistan, which in effect constitute an unalterable state of nature. In short, the liberal granting of “agency” is fully in keeping with the government view. Indeed, one might go so far as to say that *focusing* on or *foregrounding* the agency of the militants and *backgrounding* government agency is part of the larger problematic that frames the conflict in a liberal version of standard colonial ideology.⁷

Returning to the veracity of this “true account,” we find not only a broadly Aristotelian trajectory, but more specific narrative structures as well. There are suggestions of a conversion narrative in which the hero wanders down a false life path until a crisis precipitates a realization and a resulting transformation. This is integrated with standard structural motifs, such as exile and return, particularly in relation to a familial separation and reunion prototype (on the latter, see Hogan, 2011, pp. 199-209). Of course, a structure may be common and still true. The recurrence of a pattern in different stories does not indicate that it did not happen. However, the structure still selects particular events and leads to certain causal inferences. Even if all the events in the life of “Mushtaq” happened to someone, it is clear that many other things happened also, that there were complex causal interrelations among these things, and that the construction of a coherent, simple story will tend to make one causal sequence prominent, at the expense of that complexity. Here, the point is particularly consequential since the familial separation prototype stresses that the main character is a child—a point consistent with the liberal colonialist ideology of the work.

This narrative shaping enters most obviously in the composition process, about which the reader knows very little. The title page explains that, though the story is “written by Naseer Ahmed,” the “visualization”

⁷ On ideological narrowing of focus, see Hogan, 2001, pp. 59-67.

is by Saurabh Singh, Anindya Roy, and Sarnath Banerjee.⁸ This already makes a difference, since the “visualization” involves particularizing events and conditions in ways not defined in the written text. Indeed, the possible conflict between visualization and text is widely stressed in theoretical discussions of graphic fiction (see, for example, Aldama, 2009, p. 100).⁹ What is important for our purposes is that a division of labor between the writer and the visual artist may lead to misleading visual representations when the writer is claiming a sort of testamentary authority not shared by the visual artist. The problem is only furthered by the fact that the “narrative structure” is also contributed by Singh, Roy, and Banerjee.

Of course, testimony can be mistaken and “outsiders” can make true observations. But it is difficult to get accurate information about conditions in Kashmir. As a result, testimony is particularly important. Moreover, the rhetorical effect of the work almost certainly depends to some extent on the putative “insider” perspective. Thus, in one of the few critical treatments of the novel to date, Suhaan Mehta (2010) writes that it “privileg[es] the perspective of the Kashmiri people” (p. 179). Of course, even if the work were entirely a product of a genuine former Kashmiri militant, it would hardly represent “the perspective of the Kashmiri people.” At best, it would only represent one such perspective, if perhaps one that has many important similarities with those of numerous other Kashmiris. However, the contributions of Singh, Roy, and Banerjee would seem to limit even this.

⁸ Roy, an editor and publisher (see <http://manicmongol.com/aboutus.html>), and Banerjee, a graphic novelist (see <http://www.sarnathbanerjee.net>), are the founders of the New Delhi-based Phantomville, the graphic novel publishing house that published *Kashmir Pending*.

⁹ This sort of conflict is celebrated by some graphic fiction writers as part of the “radically fragmented and unstable” nature of graphic fiction, in Hatfield’s phrase (2005, p. 36). In keeping with Poststructuralist trends that were current not long before, some graphic fiction theorists see aspects of style as carrying political implications. For example, Hatfield contrasts the “roughhewn” graphic with the “Clear Line” tradition; the former, in this view, presents a “subversion of the cultural and ideological reassurances proffered by” the latter (p. 61). It may well be the case that, as a contingent historical fact, roughhewn works present more ideologically challenging politics. However, it is very difficult to imagine that roughhewn style as such has the effect of challenging the reader’s acceptance of mainstream politics, or that clear lines as such reinforce the reader’s ideological acquiescence. Since I see no reason to believe there are ideological consequences to such stylistic features, I will leave aside this common approach to the politics of graphic fiction.

Detailing the Crisis: A Liberal Problematic

But these are relatively general points. The heart of fiction is in the details, the particulars, verbal and visual. For example, the deaths reported in a novel are frequently personalized. In other words, the people killed are often individuals about whom we know something as individuals. This is important, in *Kashmir Pending* and in other works treating Kashmir. For example, Kashmiri political discourse rarely gives us an image as emotionally powerful as the death of Boonyi in Rushdie's *Shalimar the Clown* (2005). This particularity is where literature produces its distinctive political effects.

It would be unfair to compare *Kashmir Pending* to *Shalimar the Clown*, which is arguably the single great work of the Kashmir conflict. But the killings in *Kashmir Pending* are, individually, rather pallid and, collectively, relatively limited. There is an early statement that “Many lives were lost” (p. 15), illustrated with a single corpse (see Figure 1).¹⁰ Yet in the years covered by the novel, there are few deaths. Moreover, those are somewhat equivocal in terms of blame. For instance, the text reports that “A stray bullet hit a protester” (p. 24), but there is no indication of whether it was a mortal wound, a serious injury, or a light wound. (Of course, any possibility is bad.) Subsequently, there is a pictorial representation of a man being shot, evidently deliberately (p. 27). The problem here is twofold. First, the text is supposed to be testimony, but not necessarily the visuals, so we do not know whether or not to trust this depiction. Second, we learn nothing about the man or what happened prior to the shooting—though it is important that, in the visual representation, he is not holding a weapon. Subsequently, Mushtaq's fellow-militant, Aziz, is killed. He is deliberately killed by the Indian army. However, Mushtaq explains that he was betrayed by a rival militant group (p. 68). In addition, a vegetable seller is killed in the “crossfire” between soldiers and militants (p. 36), as are “a couple of civilian bystanders” (p. 66). Finally, the militant Ali kills himself and two soldiers (p. 91).

¹⁰ I am grateful to Sarnath Banerjee and Anindya Roy for permission to reprint images from the book.

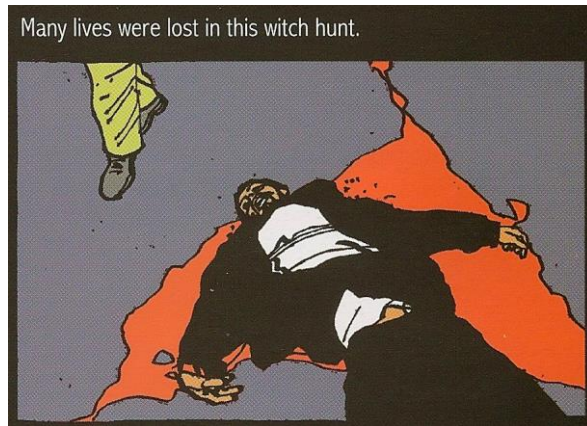


Figure 1

Clearly, the treatment of killing in *Kashmir Pending* is more in line with actual events than is, say, the popular film *Roja* (Balachander, et al., 1992)—where the Indian military apparently kills no one, even in military raids, whereas the militants kill many people. Indeed, the comparison is unfair to *Kashmir Pending*. Moreover, it is undoubtedly the case that the great majority of the killing in the valley is more to be blamed on the militarized situation than on the side that happened to fire a particular bullet—a point brought out well by the novel. Nonetheless, it is worth considering the treatment of the deaths in the novel. There are nine clear deaths (listed above, not counting the “stray bullet” case). Of these, one is a deliberate killing by the army. Again, this is represented visually, but not stated in the (putatively testimonial) text; on the other hand, the actual effect of the visual representation on readers may be strong enough that the absence in the verbal “testimony” does not matter. We might add the visual representation accompanying the “Many lives were lost” statement (p. 15). Though this does not strictly assign blame to the army, I imagine it is taken to do so by most readers. Thus we have two people killed by the army. Neither is killed in the testimony. There is, in addition, Aziz. Since Aziz is indeed a militant, at least some readers may count this case as somewhat different. More significantly, Mushtaq himself blames the infighting of militants equally with the army, thus dividing the responsibility. The vegetable seller and the two bystanders are killed in crossfire, thus we cannot assign blame for these deaths. On the other hand, the full sentence reporting the civilian deaths is as follows: “We tried to shoot our way out, but a couple of civilian bystanders died in the crossfire” (p. 66), which could be taken as blaming

the militants. Finally, Ali and two soldiers are killed by Ali, thus by a militant.

There are different ways of interpreting these numbers. If we simply count up the killings, then we might say that there appear to be two killings of civilians by the army (though the precise status of the victims is not explicit); there is one militant and one civilian for whom the army and the militants share responsibility; the militants are also responsible for the deaths of one militant and two soldiers. This puts government responsibility at, let us say, four (two whole killings plus half responsibility for four other killings). The militants, in contrast, are responsible for five killings (three whole killings plus half responsibility for four others). The numbers change to three and six respectively, if we take the bystanders to have been killed by the militants when they “tried to shoot [their] way out” (p. 66). In the second case, the militants are killing at twice the rate of the army. This is not in keeping with the numbers presented by Talbot and Singh (2009), which indicate the reverse—that the militants have killed at about half the rate of government forces (pp. 136-137). On the other hand, it is important that the army killings come first and are much more likely to involve (apparent) civilians. This partially balances the distorted representation of the numbers killed.

But there is another, perhaps more important bias here. The killings by the militants seem much more chosen, much more deliberate. Again, one of the killings by the army has no event surrounding it. It is merely an image of a dead young man (p. 15; Figure 1). Another is actually instigated by the militants (p. 68). Like so much else in the novel, the deaths perpetrated by the army are almost like forces of nature. It is as if they are not the result of policy and decision. In contrast, killings by the militants appear more willed. Indeed, Mushtaq’s final decision to leave the militancy involves a decision that he can even prevent deaths in “cross fires” (p. 95). Thus the ideological orientation of the novel is not so much a matter of who kills more people. Rather, it is a matter of who has the capacity to stop the killing. This clear political/ideological orientation suggests again that this is not simply “a true account” (p. 3), but a highly shaped and purposeful story. In itself, that is not a problem. But the shape is to a great extent provided by the two liberal tendencies already indicated: first, modeling the militancy on adolescent rebelliousness and, second, placing the entire responsibility for ending the conflict—including the avoidance of even accidental deaths—in the hands of the militants.

Tracing the Emplotment

As the story begins, an adult man is kneeling in Muslim prayer. In first-person narration, he explains that prison is the ideal place “to get closer to God” (p. 5). Getting closer to God means, as we learn, leaving the militancy. The point is uncontroversial for liberal colonialist readers of the novel, but not of course for militant Islamists. The ease with which this connection is assumed further suggests that the work is not in fact aimed at Islamist youths. It is, of course, also important that this adult figure is the one who will leave the militancy.

After some background on Mushtaq and the introduction of 22-year-old Ali, the scene then shifts to a young boy sitting presumably on the Dal Lake. Soldiers are seated in traditional Kashmiri boats. Unprovoked, the boy hurls a stone in the direction of the heavily armed soldiers (see Figure 2), who do not respond. The scene is clearly important in closely linking rebellion with children. It also to some extent suggests that the initiators of the violence are not the soldiers, but the rebellious youths—particularly as the soldiers do not respond.



Figure 2

After this interruption, the scene returns to the prison. The focus of the prisoners' concern is food. The point may seem merely incidental until Mushtaq contrasts his current situation with his boyhood, when his mother would chase him to feed him (p. 10). Mushtaq goes on to recall his father's hope that he would be a doctor. On the one hand, these reflections are quite normal. One imagines that prisoners often think about their families. On the other hand, there is also a clear way in which we are being prepared to take Mushtaq's wrong turn toward militancy as adolescent behavior. More simply, we are being led to think of him as a child.

Mushtaq then turns to something more along the lines of historical background. He explains that he lived near the mosque, which was "a symbol of Kashmiri nationalist sentiment" where "Friday prayer" was "followed by fiery speeches against the government" (p. 12). This is important in directly linking Kashmiri nationalism with Islam, thus separating it from the history of secular nationalism, beginning with the National Conference. Undoubtedly, for many young Kashmiris, nationalism is in fact Islamic nationalism, with nothing secular about it. For many, it is more connected with mosques than with a movement for progressive social reform.¹¹ On the other hand, this is also the standard view in much of the rest of the world and it ignores other strands in Kashmiri nationalism. The point becomes clear in the following frame. Referring to the speeches at the mosque, Mushtaq reports that "The consequence of such instigations was often felt on the street" (p. 12). The frame depicts a soldier encountering protestors. The suggestion is that this conflict originated in the propaganda of the mosques. This is no doubt partially true, but far from the whole story.

The following pages are more revealing in that they go beyond standard ideology on Kashmir. Mushtaq discusses the astonishingly naïve view of Pakistan held by some Kashmiri Muslims at the time. This too speaks against the validity of the insurgency. But it does so in a way that does not fit with Indian or western propaganda. It indicates that a people denied self-determination are likely to idealize options that are forbidden to them. Mushtaq also sensitively portrays the out-grouping of Kashmiri Hindus. Indeed, he represents his own childhood attitudes and actions harshly, explaining that they literally saw Kashmiri Hindus as people to spit on. Of course, here again the representation makes the rebels into

¹¹ Early on, the National Conference set forth a progressive program for an independent Kashmir. See its 1944 "New Kashmir" principles (*Naya Kashmir*, 1944).

adolescents. But the recognition of the sectarian quality of Kashmiri-Islamic nationalism is important.

Following these criticisms of the militancy, Mushtaq turns to the Indian army. This is one of the most effective sections of the work. The account of the law is important and accurate—“Troops could arrest, kill or rough up any person on mere suspicion” (p. 15). The 1990 Disturbed Areas Act “forbade the assembly of more than five people; authorized relatively low-ranking personnel to shoot anyone they suspected of disturbing public order; and permitted the destruction of any building thought to be an arms dump or providing shelter to militants.” Following the 1990 Special Powers Act, “Officers were entitled to fire upon anyone contravening any law or order in force, in the disturbed area . . . arrest people without warrant . . . enter and search any premises without warrant” (Malik, 2002, p. 307). Moreover, the visual presentation is perhaps the most effective in the book. The bright, shadow-casting silhouettes of soldiers marching through the city in the first panel are chilling (see Figure 3). The whiteness gives them an almost ethereal quality. Indeed, the soldier in the foreground might seem to be floating above his own shadow. The ghost-like representation makes the army all the more ominous, particularly against the red of the city, as if it had literally been washed in blood. On the other hand, in context, the representation may contribute to the sense that the army is simply a brute fact or force that cannot be changed.

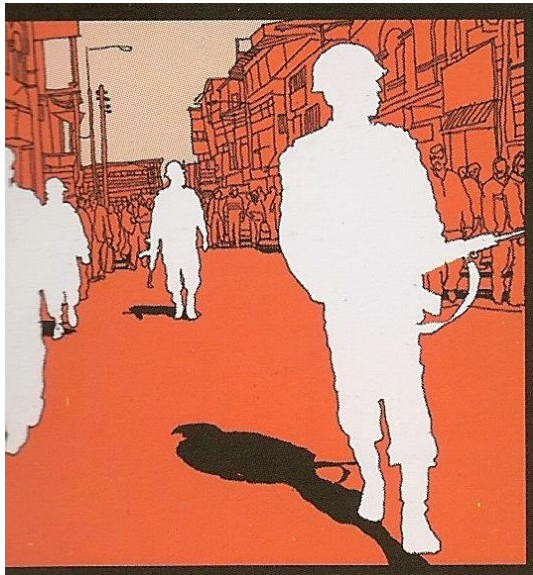


Figure 3

The following pages do convey a sense of the broad range of Kashmiri men and women involved in protests. This is where we are told that “Many lives were lost” (p. 15; on the tens of thousands of deaths due to the conflict, see Widmalm, 2002, p. 131). On the other hand, before we actually witness police firing, we are told that protestors used “Stones and petrol bombs” (p. 17). Moreover, in contrast with reports of the army engaging in arson (Gossman, 1993, p. 8), here the militants are responsible for “act[s] of arson” (p. 19; the representation is not wrong—my own family had their ancestral home burned down by militants—but it is misleading). The police respond, we are told, with “teargas,” but we are shown the police more benignly dousing a fire with a water hose (p. 19).

The next chapter begins with Mushtaq’s schooling. Though the text speaks of mathematics, physics, and biology, the graphics seem to represent an Islamic school (p. 20; see Figure 4). This seems once again to suggest the responsibility of Islamic teachers for the violence. Specifically, one imagines that many readers—particularly liberal colonialist readers—will link Mushtaq’s eventual violence with the early Islamic education depicted in the visuals. Here, as elsewhere, it is true that Muslim leaders are in part responsible for the violence, but only in part.

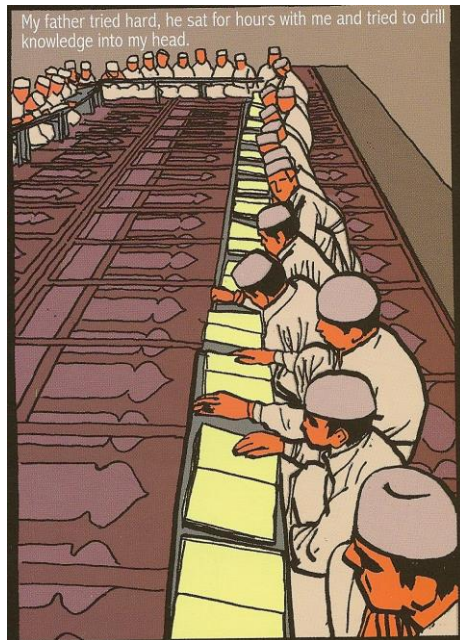


Figure 4

In any case, Mushtaq is a mediocre student. When he turns sixteen, he determines that it is time to become more involved in the exciting political events that he largely does not understand. He makes it clear that the protestors have guns at this point (p. 21), that “processions” are regularly “turning into riots,” and that “Aggression had reached a high level, the police was having a tough time controlling the mob” (p. 22). This is when the “stray bullet hit a protester” (p. 24) and, subsequently, the unarmed man is shot. As noted above, the cycle of killing is begun by the police. But here again the violence seems to be initiated by militants.

Mushtaq is arrested. The visuals present him as being tortured, fully in keeping with actual practices in Kashmir; according to a 1995 Amnesty International report, “The brutality of torture in Jammu and Kashmir defies belief” (p. 2).¹² We of course know that Mushtaq has nothing to tell the army, since he is just an adolescent naif at this point. When he leaves prison, however, he is received as a hero. The development is important and revealing. Many people in a society suffering military occupation are likely to identify and sympathize with a young boy arrested and brutalized by the occupying army. Indeed, such incidents foster the sense—unfortunately accurate—that the military presence is a matter of occupation (rather than, say, protection). Moreover, the following chapter goes on to show how the experience in prison served to recruit Mushtaq to further anti-Indian nationalism. This too is a predictable result, but one that is often ignored.

Given these experiences, it would be quite possible to represent Mushtaq’s decisions as autonomous and adult. Nonetheless, the novel stresses that he is an “impressionable youth” (Mehta, 2010, p. 177). In his late teens, he treats leaders “with awe” (p. 33). One of the leaders urges him to join the armed struggle. After the vegetable seller is killed, he agrees.

The representation of this death is important, and probably reflects a common event in colonized countries. The vendor is “shot in the skirmish” of a “crossfire” (p. 36). Thus his death may have been caused by either the militants or the army. However, he is mourned as if killed by the army. One could argue that, if the army were not there, then the death would not have occurred. Indeed, that is one of the problems with colonial occupation. It creates a situation in which violence is likely to occur. (Of course, the same points apply to the militancy.) But the

¹² On the subsequent situation and continuing torture, see the Amnesty International (2011) report entitled *A “Lawless Law”: Detentions under the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act*.

mourning suggests more than this sort of qualified blame. Moreover, his identification as a “vegetable vendor” (not as a militant) suggests that he was not at all involved in the movement. In technical terms, there is no reason to believe that he was engaged in jihad, a struggle to bear witness in the face of a difficulty or trial (see Ali, 1995, pp. 402, n.1073 & pp. 761, n.1902; and Waines, 1995, p. 92). Nonetheless, he is labeled a “martyr.”

All this is a predictable result of colonial relations and their associated ingroup/outgroup divisions. Specifically, the colonial situation creates identity categories, which tend toward polarization.¹³ For some time, this division is systematic or organized on the side of the colonizer, but only spontaneous on the part of the colonized. However, eventually, colonized people begin to develop institutional structures. When such organization occurs, some colonized people begin to respond to the colonial situation in a more planned and systematic manner. This planning and systematization tend to be structured hierarchically through a leadership. Spontaneous and ephemeral acts of colonized people may already be connected with circulating, spontaneous, and ephemeral ideologies. With the advent of institutions, these spontaneous ideologies become systematized, revised, and recorded in self-conscious analyses and policies. (This is in part what occurs through the mosques in the novel.) The analyses provide a framework for understanding current conditions. The policies provide a framework for altering those conditions.

With this background, we may return to the canonization of the vegetable vendor. Given the nature of political organizations, one would expect them to recruit any events to support official analyses and policies. This is predictable not only due to the bad faith of political leaders generally. It is predictable also as a result of (sincere) confirmation bias, the general human tendency to construe data as fitting a prior theory (see Nisbett and Ross, 1980, pp. 238-242). Indeed, the latter will operate spontaneously. Politicized crowds will tend to act on confirmation bias without any direct guidance from leaders and often with only minimal communication among themselves. As a result, in the Kashmiri context, any death is likely to be blamed on the government by the opposition (and vice versa). Moreover, both the political leaders and ordinary people are strongly motivated to interpret apparently meaningless deaths in such a way as to give them some sense or purpose. The bestowal of the label “martyr,” however inappropriate, is one way of doing both—particularly

¹³ On the tendency for groups to polarize, see Ball, 2004, pp. 270-294.

in a context where militant Islam has largely displaced other nationalist ideologies.

Having joined the militants, Mushtaq is now sent to Pakistan. We are brought into the camp, and see the recruits praying before their automatic weapons (p. 45) in an iconic image (see Figure 5) familiar from films such as *Roja*. Here, as in the case of the school, the visuals seem to stress the link between the violence and religious belief and the responsibility of Islamic leaders for the violence. In Pakistan, the “underbelly” of the revolution is exposed (p. 46). Unsurprisingly, that underbelly is first of all a matter of separating family. As far as we know, Mushtaq does not have a wife or child. Thus the illustration representing a mother and child can only refer to Mushtaq’s own mother—again stressing that he is a child. The Pakistanis have in effect taken these children from their parents, giving them the wrong parental guidance.



Figure 5

Having been denied the possibility of returning to his home for a visit, Mushtaq makes the apparently strange decision to join the revolutionaries in Afghanistan. This is presumably before 1992, thus Mushtaq is 21 at the oldest, having been born in 1971 (p. 13). Despite his partial skepticism about the Pakistanis and other groups of Kashmiri militants, he seems to have nothing but support for the Afghan revolutionaries. Moreover, he explains that “Their struggle reminded me of mine” (p. 50), directly linking the Kashmiri insurgency with the

Afghan revolution. The book was published well after the nature of the Taliban government had become clear. It is, therefore, difficult to interpret this parallel in a positive light.

Following this period in Afghanistan, Mushtaq finally returns to Kashmir. He is particularly pleased that he will return to his “parents” (p. 51). In the border crossing, they are discovered and the Indian troops apparently open fire without warning and without constraint (pp. 52-53). Surprisingly, no one is killed—rather reminiscent of the opening raid in *Roja* where the Indian army does not kill anyone, despite massive firing. Finally, Mushtaq does return home. The novel touchingly portrays his reunion with his mother. Though he is now physically an adult, the visual representation of Mushtaq and his mother (p. 58) clearly recalls the earlier image of a mother and young child (p. 47). The implications hardly need to be spelled out—he is still a boy. In the context of this mother/child reunion, he meets “the rest of the group.” They are “Young guys” too (p. 59). The “leader,” however, is parental, “an older looking man” (p. 59).

Mushtaq explains that the police force is not functioning. As a result, everyone has to pay protection money to the militants; otherwise they will be “caught in the crossfire between the police and the freedom fighters” (p. 61). Of course, paying protection money hardly guarantees that someone will not be caught in crossfire. The implication is that this is a euphemism for being assassinated by the “freedom fighters.” In keeping with this, he goes on to explain that, “More than freedom fighters, they were cold hearted killers” (p. 62). As already noted, war tends to give rise to situations in which innocent people will be killed in crossfire. Colonialism tends to give rise to situations in which the colonizer will escalate violence—firing on unarmed crowds, rounding up and torturing innocents, and so on. Similarly, when revolutionary groups take up arms and blend in with the population, it is very likely that they will use those arms to get what they want from that population. Just as violence is likely to spiral with the colonial forces, so too is violence likely to spiral with the revolutionaries. Reliance on coercive force and corruption as a modulator of coercive force is likely to escalate both coercive force and corruption. Indeed, these are the reasons that violence is misguided, even in response to real wrongs. The acceptance of violence almost inevitably leads to situations where greater wrongs are perpetrated.

In any case, the introduction of corruption and extortion among the militants leads to conflict. Mushtaq presents this as conflict between the corrupt “K force” and his own uncorrupted organization. It seems unlikely that any militant group is wholly good. But the key point is that

group dynamics in an insurrection are likely to give rise to such conflicts. As to corruption, there are likely to be some militants who oppose corruption. They are likely to enter into serious conflict with the extortionist elements in their own ranks. In addition, different revolutionaries will have different goals and different self-interests. Militant organizations attract people who are genuinely outraged by the cruelties of a social situation. But one expects them to attract a number of people who simply like the idea of firing guns. Moreover, in the general population, there are presumably people who are outraged by social conditions, but not attracted by the idea of shooting people. Men and women of this sort are unlikely to join a militant organization. Thus a revolutionary group is almost certain to have a skewed social composition relative to the population as a whole. Specifically, it is likely to include a disproportionate number of people with an unusually strong inclination toward violence and relatively few people who would act to inhibit that inclination. Moreover, the practice of violence and the ubiquity of weapons are likely to habituate participants to violence and weapons—including those who had no prior inclination toward violence. In this context, it would be surprising if there were not sometimes fatal conflicts among revolutionaries.

In the novel, this conflict among militants leads to the deaths of the bystanders and Aziz. For unclear reasons, Mushtaq blames himself for Aziz's death, and so do Aziz's parents. Though the reasons for this particular attribution are obscure, the reasons for some sort of self-criticism are clear. This is a moment when Mushtaq takes responsibility for his actions. As such, he becomes an "adult." The fact that he can be blamed suggests that he had some sort of almost parental responsibility for Aziz. As one would expect from the adolescent model, the change to adulthood is accompanied by the abandonment of militancy. Indeed, the connection is almost explicit in the penultimate chapter.

Specifically, Mushtaq encounters a roadblock. He has just reported that he no longer participates in "aggressive operations" (p. 72). Though it is not clearly consistent with that claim, he is carrying grenades. He now has a choice—throw a grenade and escape or turn himself in. He flashes back to his childhood and his "early . . . hatred for men in uniform" (p. 75). He explains that he "never really knew why" he threw stones (p. 76). The visual images emphasize the parallels between the stone-throwing child and the grenade-throwing militant. He realizes that throwing the grenade would "cost . . . many innocent lives" (p. 78). To stress that this is an adult point of view, the visual image shows that

the innocent lives at risk are a mother and the small child in her lap (see Figure 6)—for readers familiar with Western art, perhaps somewhat reminiscent of the various representations of Mary and Jesus. To further the connection with adulthood, he explains that this was true bravery (p. 79). The bravery of the choice is intensified when he says that he refused to give the army any information (p. 80). There is no mention of torture. He explains that the soldiers “were puzzled” (p. 80). Rather surprisingly, for a militant who does not give information, his sentence is only seven years long and, as already noted, he is relocated and apparently established in a business (pp. 82, 92).



Figure 6

He goes on to condemn both the “rebels and the rulers,” explaining that “neither of them would exist without the other” (p. 84). The point is probably true in some sense. But the condemnation of “the politician” deceiving “the masses” (p. 84) is overly simple—and it is overly simple in just the way we would expect, with falsely parental leaders misguiding confused youths. “Young men like Ali are too charged to see through the manipulation,” he explains (p. 84). This is when Ali becomes a suicide bomber.

The novel ends with Mushtaq in his restaurant, finding it “difficult . . . to make peace with my conscience” for the “recklessness” of his “violent” past (p. 93). There is no mention of government atrocities. Now, there is only the violence of the militants. The conclusion leaves us with Mushtaq’s reaffirmation of leaving the revolution: “I do not want any more innocent lives to be lost in the cross fires of my war” (p. 95). Of

course, the opposition to the deaths of innocents is uncontroversial. But, once more, the suggestion is that the possibility of putting an end to innocent deaths is solely in the hands of the militants. Again, the violence of the state is simply given, immutable. It is up to the revolutionaries to produce peace. The point seems to be furthered by the peculiar reference to the insurgency as “my war.” Of course, “our war” would have been problematic as well, suggesting a uniformity of Kashmiri views—“the perspective of the Kashmiri people,” as Mehta puts it (2010, p. 179). A more appropriate statement would simply have been “I do not want any more innocent lives to be lost in the cross fires of this war”—or, better still, “of war.”

Conclusion

In sum, *Kashmir Pending* does suggest many points about Kashmir that are missing from standard ideology on the crisis there. It sensitizes readers to the likelihood that colonized people will overestimate the worth of the colonizer’s enemies (in this case, Pakistan) or victims (e.g., youths falsely detained by the government); that they will feel an intensified sense of cultural identity in opposition to the colonizer (here, focusing on Islam); that they will engage in confirmatory thinking that assigns disproportionate blame to the colonizer for even random tragedies. It also gives us a better sense of how group dynamics will tend to operate to enhance violence and corruption once they have begun. Last but not least, it cultivates an empathic response to the human suffering in Kashmir.

Despite these values, however, *Kashmir Pending* conveys a liberal colonialist ideology about Kashmir. It over-represents killings by militants and under-represents those by the government; it has the same flaw in its general representation of violence. It identifies Kashmiri nationalism with Islamic nationalism and, to some extent, with militancy. It models the Kashmiri nationalists on adolescents, thereby undermining their authority and any justice their cause might have, reducing Kashmiri nationalism to vulnerability to the bad parenting of Pakistan. In keeping with this, the work’s narrative is partially shaped by a family separation and reunion prototype, which furthers the assimilation of militants to children. At the same time, it frames the conflict in such a way as to suggest that the only power of choice is that of the militants. If the violence is going to stop, then the Kashmiri militants need to make that decision—as if curfews, torture, warrantless searches, and wide discretion

to shoot to kill were not policies, but simple facts of nature. In some ways, the insights of *Kashmir Pending* serve only to make these ideological points acceptable to a liberal, but still colonialist readership. This ideological effect is enhanced by the questionable claim of testimonial accuracy and the subtle suggestion that the target reader of the work is not a non-Kashmiri liberal colonialist, but a Kashmiri youth with militant leanings, a youth in danger, but who can still be saved by a good (liberal colonial) parent.

References

- Aldama, F. (2009). *Your brain on Latino comics*. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Ali, M. (Ed. & Trans.). (1995). *The holy Qur'an: Arabic text, English translation and commentary*. 2nd ed. Columbus, OH: Ahmidiyyah Anjuman Isha'at Islam Lahore.
- Ali, T., Bhatt, H., Chatterji, A., Mishra, P., & Roy, A. (2011). *Kashmir: The case for freedom*. London, England: Verso.
- Amnesty International. (1995). *Torture and deaths in custody in Jammu and Kashmir*. (Report ASA 20/033/1995). Retrieved from: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA20/033/1995/en>
- Amnesty International. (2011). A "lawless law": *Detentions under the Jammu and Kashmir Public Safety Act*. (Report ASA 20/001/2011). Retrieved from: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/ASA20/001/2011/en>
- Balachander, K., & Kandaswamy, P. (Producers), & Ratnam, M. (Director). (1992). *Roja*. [Motion picture]. India: Kavithalayaa Productions & Pyramid Saimira.
- Ball, P. (2004). *Critical mass: How one thing leads to another*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Chaney, M. (Ed.). (2011). *Graphic subjects: Critical essays on autobiography and graphic novels*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Desai, P. (2011, November 18). Review of the book *Kashmir Pending*. *The Comics Journal*. Available at <http://www.tcj.com/reviews/kashmir-pending/>.
- El Refaie, E. (2012). *Autobiographical comics: Life writing in pictures*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.
- Gordon, I. (2010). Making comics respectable: How *Maus* helped redefine a medium. In P. Williams & J. Lyons. *The rise of the American comics artist: Creators and contexts* (pp. 179-193). Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.
- Gossman, P. (1993). *The human rights crisis in Kashmir: A pattern of impunity*. New York, NY: Human Rights Watch.
- Hatfield, C. (2005). *Alternative comics: An emerging literature*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.
- Hogan, P. (2001). *The culture of conformism: Understanding social consent*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Hogan, P. (2011). *Affective narratology: The emotional structure of stories*. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press.

- Kashmir Pending*. (2007). Written by N. Ahmed. Visualization and narrative structure by S. Singh, A. Roy, & S. Banerjee. Artwork by S. Singh. New Delhi, India: Phantomville.
- Loman, A. (2010). "That mouse's shadow": The canonization of Spiegelman's *Maus*. In P. Williams & J. Lyons. *The rise of the American comics artist: Creators and contexts* (pp. 210-234). Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.
- Malik, I. (2002). *Kashmir: Ethnic conflict, international dispute*. Karachi, Pakistan: Oxford University Press.
- Mehta, S. (2010). Wondrous capers: The graphic novel in India. In F. Aldama (Ed.), *Multicultural comics: From Zap to Blue Beetle* (pp. 173-188). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Mishra, S. (Producer), & Jha, P. (Director). (2009). *Sikander*. [Motion picture]. India: BIG Pictures.
- Naya Kashmir*. (1944). (S. Hussein, Trans.) *Wikisource*. Retrieved from http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Naya_Kashmir
- Nisbett, R., & Ross, L. (1980). *Human inference: Strategies and shortcomings of social judgment*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Rushdie, S. (2005). *Shalimar the clown*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Sacco, J. (2001). *Palestine*. Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books. (Original work published 1993)
- Satrapa, M. (2004). *Persepolis; The story of a childhood*. New York, NY: Pantheon.
- Spiegelman, A. (1986). *Maus: A survivor's tale*. New York, NY: Pantheon.
- Talbot, I. & Singh, G. (2009). *The partition of India*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Waines, D. (1995). *An introduction to Islam*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Widmalm, S. (2002). *Kashmir in comparative perspective: Democracy and violent separatism in India*. London, England: RoutledgeCurzon.

Patrick C. Hogan, PhD, is Professor of English at the University of Connecticut. He is also on the faculty of the India Studies Program and the Program in Cognitive Science. His areas of research and teaching include the history of literary theory; cognitive and neuroscientific approaches to literature, emotion, and narrative; the literature and culture of India; and postcolonial Anglophone literature. He is the author of twelve books and over one hundred scholarly articles, as well as several dozen shorter pieces. He has also edited five special issues of journals and four books, including the forthcoming *Cambridge Encyclopedia of the Language Sciences*.