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Indian graphic novel and Indian culture

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[1]Punyaprada Singh,

Research Scholar, Department Of English,

Govt. V.Y.T. PG Auto. College, Durg, Chhattisgrah, India.

[2]Dr Mercy George

Assistant professor, Department Of English,

Govt. V.Y.T. PG Auto. College, Durg, Chhattisgrah, India.

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Abstract

The Indian graphic novel has emerged as a compelling literary and artistic medium that bridges the gap between traditional storytelling and contemporary socio-political commentary. This article explores the significance of Indian graphic novels as cultural artifacts, blending textual narrative and visual art to reflect and critique Indian culture. Rooted in the country's rich heritage of oral and visual storytelling traditions, such as *Pattachitra* and *Amar Chitra Katha*, these works evolve into a modern medium capable of addressing themes of identity, mythology, gender, and social justice. By analyzing seminal works like Amruta Patil's *Kari*, Appupen's *Moonward*, and Orijit Sen's *The River of Stories*, this article examines how Indian graphic novels balance the preservation of cultural heritage with an exploration of modern realities. Patil's *Kari* is a landmark in Indian queer literature, featuring an androgynous, queer protagonist navigating urban alienation and societal judgment. Similarly, Appupen's *Moonward* employs surrealism to critique societal constraints, offering a dystopian vision that challenges entrenched cultural norms. Sen's *The River of Stories* juxtaposes mythology and modern environmental concerns, highlighting the tensions between tradition and progress, especially in the context of indigenous communities. The scope of this article extends to the reimagining of Indian mythology in graphic novels like Patil's *Adi Parva* and *Sauptik*, where epic narratives are reframed through feminist and ecological lenses. These reimaginings not only make ancient texts relevant to contemporary readers but also critique patriarchal and exploitative practices, emphasizing the enduring relevance of mythology in addressing modern issues such as gender inequality and environmental degradation. The article also delves into the visual narrative techniques employed in these works, analyzing how traditional Indian motifs, intricate panel designs, and culturally resonant color schemes enhance the storytelling. Through their unique blend of text and visuals, Indian graphic novels transcend conventional literary forms, offering a

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multidimensional approach to cultural critique. Using a literary analysis framework, the article critically evaluates the ways in which Indian graphic novels portray and critique Indian culture. It highlights their role in fostering dialogue on identity, mythology, gender, and socio-political issues, positioning them as transformative forces in contemporary Indian literature. This critical approach reveals the genre's potential to bridge generational and cultural divides, making it a vital medium for reimagining Indian identity in a globalized world. In conclusion, Indian graphic novels are not merely entertainment; they are powerful cultural artifacts that celebrate the complexities of Indian society while challenging its norms and assumptions. As this genre continues to evolve, it promises to remain a significant contributor to India's literary and artistic heritage, offering fresh perspectives on the stories that define the nation.

Keywords: Indian graphic novels, cultural heritage, mythology, gender roles, socio-political critique.

Introduction

      Graphic novels have become a global narrative medium by combining art's visual energy with literature's literary depth. This storytelling style has taken on modern issues in India by drawing from its rich artistic and narrative heritage. Indian graphic novels were inspired by Pattachitra and Warli painting to tell historical stories in a way that was accessible to a wide audience. They were popularized by Amar Chitra Katha. The medium expanded to address environmental degradation, gender politics, and urban alienation. Indian graphic novels' innovative use of traditional themes with modern art has made them a cultural phenomenon (Sarma). This paper examines how Indian graphic novels address social and political issues, gender roles, mythology, and cultural identity. Kari by Amruta Patil, The River of Stories by Orijit Sen, and Moonward by Appupen are graphic novels that explore Indian society's complexity and social issues. Analyzing Indian graphic novels will illuminate how they reimagine history, question values, and offer new perspectives on tradition and modernity. Indian graphic novels reflect Indian culture by blending text and image (Dawson Varughese). This paper claims that these works offer more than entertainment by revealing the conflicts between tradition and progress. This study will examine foundational texts to show how Indian graphic novels critique and celebrate Indian culture in new ways, bridging the old and new.

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Analysis

1. Cultural Identity and Representation

There is no other art form like Indian graphic novels, which show the country's rich history and modern identity. People have long praised Amar Chitra Katha, one of the first and most well-known, for keeping Indian history, mythology, and folklore alive. Many people have met Akbar, Krishna, and Arjuna through its clear story and beautiful pictures. Some people don't like Amar Chitra Katha, though. A lot of academics have said that it shows Indian identity in a too simplistic and Brahmanical way (Rohila). These stories put patriarchal, upper-caste ideas ahead of diversity by caste, region, and subaltern voices. While cultural preservation is important, this criticism shows how it can reinforce dominant ideas instead of encouraging acceptance. Instead of showing Indian identity in a simple way, graphic novels like Orijit Sen's The River of Stories look at the problems that arise when tradition and modernity clash. The story takes place during the Narmada Bachao Andolan and shows how big construction projects hurt native people and the environment (Biswas). Sen's writing is more than just stories; it also criticizes how land, tradition, and resistance shape cultural identity. The River of Stories doesn't accept the uniform stories found in mainstream cultural artifacts. Instead, it emphasizes the diversity and conflict in Indian society by bringing attention to voices that aren't often heard.

Kari by Amruta Patil broadens the way culture is shown by looking at city identity and LGBTQ+ points of view. Kari is about a gay main character in Mumbai who has to deal with being alone, losing someone, and finding out who they are (Madan). Urban existentialism, which compares solitude to disorder, shows that Indian cities today are a mix of different cultures. Kari is a queer androgynous woman who questions the roles of men and women in Indian culture. By writing about gender, sexuality, and city life, Patil breaks new ground in representation and gives voice to groups that haven't had one before (Prakasan). This collection of works by different artists shows how Indian graphic novels have dealt with cultural identity over time. Even though it's important to keep cultural heritage alive, Amar Chitra Katha doesn't show Indian society in a critical and inclusive way. In order to deal with this problem, graphic novels like Kari and The River of Stories criticize and praise India's social and political systems in complex ways. The way these works look at identity, tradition, and modernity makes Indianness more valuable in this complicated world.

2. Reimagining Mythology

In Indian graphic novels, myths aren't just told again; they're used to criticize and talk about modern social problems. The important parts of this new reading are Amruta Patil's

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feminist and eco-friendly retellings of the Mahabharata, Adi Parva and Sauptik. Patil uses Ganga's voice in Adi Parva to warn about how people treat nature and how people's ambition and conflict can lead to disaster. Poetic language and lush, earthy images make people think about the environmental lessons that can be learned from old Indian stories by showing how much people depend on nature (Biswas). Patil writes about death and rebirth in Sauptik, the sequel to Mahabharata. The book rewrites the epic's bloody ending as a reflection on power, human fragility, and the cycle of life, told from the point of view of Ashwatthama, who is tragic and flawed. Patil ties the ancient epic to modern concerns about the environment by showing how war hurts the environment. Patil's visual storytelling uses modern art, symbols, and old themes to show how the epic can be used to solve problems in the present. Her feminist analysis of the Mahabharata questions male-centered readings and looks into Ganga and Draupadi's freedom, giving voice to those who haven't been heard before.

Bringing mythological characters back to life gives these works more depth and meaning. Archetypes like Bhishma, Draupadi, and Karna are complicated characters who have to deal with moral problems and social pressures. Draupadi turns into a heroine who fights against male dominance and stands for strength and defiance. Patil criticizes unequal treatment of women by comparing the social situations in the epic to our own. Ashwatthama, who is both immortal and guilty, represents how people will always be responsible for their bad actions, such as harming the environment (Varughese). Indian graphic novels, like this retelling of a myth, use old stories in new ways to talk about modern issues. These books make people think about how mythology can be used to solve problems in the modern world by combining ancient wisdom with modern ideas. Patil's Adi Parva and Sauptik show how reimagining myths can connect the old and the new. Indian mythology is reimagined in these graphic novels through feminist and environmental lenses. This makes them a powerful way to criticize and raise awareness about culture while still honoring its rich history.

3. Gender and Social Commentary

Indian graphic novels have become popular as a way to fight patriarchy and other forms of structural inequality and give voice to people who don't usually get heard. Often, these works go against the mainstream stories by showing women and other oppressed people as real people, not as stereotypes or plot devices (Bhattacharjee). This thoughtful consideration of gender and social issues shows that the medium can help people have deep conversations about identity, agency, and structural oppression. Kari by Amruta Patil is one of the first books in this genre. In a culture that values men and women equally, Kari, the main character who is both male and female, has a hard time. Kari doesn't follow gender norms. She is one of a kind because she is both weak and strong. People who live in cities

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today can relate to how she honestly writes about being alone, social awkwardness, and heartbreak. Through Kari, Patil criticizes India's strict rules about sexual orientation and gender identity. The main character's identity is a big part of his inner journey, and it shows how important diversity and acceptance are in Indian society.

Moonward and Appupen's other strange and allegorical graphic novels make comments about society and gender. Appupen shows how societal limits and systematic oppression keep inequality going through vague stories and fantastical settings. He makes Moonward, a dystopian society that is based on Indian social norms and hierarchies (Singh). By showing characters stuck in cycles of exploitation and conformity, the book criticizes how society limits people's freedom in the face of pressure, especially women and people from marginalized groups. Appupen uses surrealism to draw attention to systems that are unfair. By changing what it means to be an individual and have free will, these graphic novels question gender roles. Moonward questions social norms, and Kari celebrates being unique. They make it possible to rethink the roles of men and women in India. They don't want patriarchal ideas to be praised in history (Nanmozhi). Kari and Moonward show how Indian comic books can change culture and make fun of society. They question the status quo, bring attention to identities that are on the outside, and educate readers about gender, sexuality, and structural inequality. These books show how literature can be used to talk about long-standing social problems by challenging stereotypes and giving new points of view.

4. Visual Narrative and Cultural Symbolism

Graphic novels are a creative way to learn about Indian culture because they use both pictures and words to tell stories. To tell powerful stories, Indian graphic novels often use themes, symbols, and styles from the country's many art forms. Visuals enhance storytelling and cultural resonance, amplifying their impact (Serrano Muñoz). Traditional art forms and Indian motifs in graphic novels' visual language connect modern stories to cultural heritage. Like folk art and Indian miniature paintings, Amruta Patil's Adi Parva and Sauptik feature mythological imagery, earthy tones, and intricate patterns. These visuals modernize the Mahabharata while strengthening its connection. The repetition of rivers, trees, and fire emphasizes rebirth, death, and nature. These images create a multi-layered narrative experience that connects readers to the story symbolically and literarily.

Panel arrangement and style are key to Indian graphic novels' cultural appeal. Orijit Sen's The River of Stories uses fluid, non-linear panel structures to show rivers and storytelling traditions flowing organically (Sivakumar). This visual style reflects the story's themes of environmental activism, indigenous identity, and cultural memory. Amruta Patil also

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uses fragmented compositions and overlapping frames to show her work's complexity and multiple perspectives. This method encourages readers to participate in the story, like Indian oral storytelling's cyclical, multi-level structure. Color schemes enhance Indian graphic novels' cultural symbolism. Many of the pieces have earthy tones and vibrant colors like Indian festivals and art. The grayscale palette with color bursts in Kari reflects the protagonist's emotions. This depicts urban alienation and fleeting joy. Moonward by Appupen explores dystopian themes and social constraints through surreal and muted color schemes (Sarkar). The stories' tone and cultural context are set by these aesthetic choices. Indian graphic novels use religious and philosophical symbols to enhance their stories. Mandalas, sacred geometry, and mythological characters in Adi Parva depict India's spiritual and cultural history. These symbols draw attention to the story's themes and often make readers think about what they mean in different cultures. Indian graphic novels break the rules of traditional literature by combining text with visually appealing, culturally relevant content. Srinidhi says that the story's visual appeal and emotional impact are improved by its layout, color, and symbols. By combining literary and artistic elements, these works connect people to both old and new values. Indian graphic novels use new ways of telling stories visually to both praise and criticize India's rich cultural tapestry.

Conclusion

Indian graphic novels are a unique way to learn about Indian culture because they are a mix of old and new. With a mix of traditional and modern elements, these visual-textual stories look at identity, mythology, and politics. They use modern issues to question traditional wisdom, bridging the gap between tradition and new ideas. The genre's unique way of telling stories that includes commentary on gender and society is a powerful way to change culture. The stories are better because they use traditional Indian patterns, complicated layouts, and color schemes that are important to the culture. These works have a bigger impact on modern Indian literature and culture, which changes how Indians see themselves in a world that is becoming more globalized. The variety and growth of the genre will make India's culture and mind stronger, and it will make writers and readers rethink who they are.

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