



Metropolis and the Mind: The Interplay of Space and Psyche in Amruta Patil's *Kari*

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Abstract

This paper delves into the symbiotic relationship between urban environment and individual psychology as portrayed in the narrative of the Graphic Novel *Kari* by Amruta Patil. This novel emerges as a poignant exploration of modern urban meshed with the intricate tapestry of queer identity. In this groundbreaking graphic novel, the sprawling, smog-laden landscape of the city becomes a reflection of the protagonist Kari's inner turmoil and search for identity. Drawing upon the spatial and psychoanalytical perspectives, this article highlights how the metropolis not only influences but also mirrors Kari's internal landscape. The city with its labyrinthine alleys and towering structures, acts as both a reflection of and catalyst for her psychological transformation. The urban environment, portrayed through evocative illustrations and narratives encapsulates the sense of alienation, solitude, and yearning often associated with queerness in a predominantly heteronormative landscape. At the heart of this exploration is Kari, whose identity navigates the intricate pathways of love, loss, and self-recognition. Through an in-depth analysis of Amruta Patil's evocative illustrations and visual as well as textual narrative styles, this article provides insights into the border dynamics of city living and mental well-being, suggesting that one's external surroundings and internal emotions are inextricably linked and further provides a fresh perspective on the intersections of space, identity and emotion.

Keywords: Metropolis, inner turmoil, urban life, city landscapes, identity.

Introduction

A graphic novel is a unique form of storytelling that combines the visual allure of art with the narrative power of literature. Unlike traditional novels, graphic novels employ a combination of illustrations and text to convey their tales, creating a dynamic and immersive reading experience. Over the past few decades, India has witnessed a burgeoning creativity in the realm of graphic storytelling. This unique genre combines the rich tapestry of Indian culture, history, and contemporary life with the visually captivating medium of illustrated narratives. With an ever-growing roster of talented authors and artists, Indian graphic novels have emerged as a powerful vehicle for expressing complex ideas, exploring social issues, and remaining traditional story telling in a visually engaging way.

Amrutha Patil, writer as well as painter, the author of four eminent graphic novels is most renowned as India's first female graphic novelist. She created the groundbreaking graphic novel *Kari* including four other graphic novels named; the Parva duology – *Adi Parva: Churning of the Ocean* (2012) and *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers* (2016) – and *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest* (2019). Patil has a freewheeling visual style that incorporates memento mori, sexuality, myth, sustainable living, and the unbroken thread of stories passed down from storyteller to storyteller through the ages. (web)

In the realm of graphic novels and contemporary literature, Amruta Patil's *Kari* stands as a mesmerizing testament to the intricate dance between urban landscapes and the human psyche. This, set against the vibrant backdrop of the metropolis, and delves deep into the labyrinthine alleys of the mind, intertwining the external cityscape with the internal world of its protagonist. In this exploration, the article embarks on a journey that illuminates the profound connection between the spaces we inhabit and the complex workings of the human mind. This article unravels the layers of this compelling narrative, shedding light on how Amruta Patil masterfully waves together the physical and psychological dimensions of her character's lives within the bustling hear of the city. As the article navigates the pages of *Kari*, it discovers how the urban landscape becomes a mirror, reflecting the aspirations, conflicts, and the transformations of the human spirit. This article embarks on an insightful analysis of the enthralling interplay between space and psyche in Patil's *Kari*, unveiling the depths of this captivating literary work and its relevance in understanding the contemporary urban experience.

A quick glance through the graphic novel

Kari's narrative unfolds against the vibrant backdrop of Mumbai. While the city is a subtle yet crucial element of the story, the tale's heart lies in Kari's introspective journey. The plot traces Kari, a lesbian, deeply introverted, asocial and a young women navigating the aftermath of a heartbreak with her love, Ruth. Their joint suicide attempt fails, leading them on separate paths. Kari embarks on a self-healing journey, likening herself to a boatman braving murky waters. The story delves into fragments of Kari's thoughts, sprinkled with cynicism, and highlights two pivotal moments in her life. One is the challenges she faces during an advertising campaign, and the other is her growing bond with a terminally ill girl named Angel. As the story concludes,

Angel's life ends as anticipated, and Kari gains recognition for her work in advertising. By the book's closure, Kari emerges transformed: sporting shorter hair, exuding more confidence, and no longer contemplating suicide.

The Metropolis as a Canvas of Memory and Desire

Every city has its own heartbeat, and in *Kari*, the metropolis throbs with memory, desires and countless untold stories. Kari, as a character, is seamlessly intertwined with this urban tapestry. The city's skyline, with its towering buildings and neon lights, often mirrors Kari's ambitions and aspirations, while the quiet, dim-lit streets echo her moments of introspection and vulnerability. This is evident when their first attempt of failed suicide, where Ruth's final memory of the city gets to be that of an ariel, dark and ablaze with fistful of light that which the darkness replicates Ruth's mind filled with death where the fistful lights depict the life ahead of her after she got saved and leaves the city including Kari. On the contrary, Kari was saved by stinking sewer, to which the city averts their faces from. The stink here is her failed attempt and the thought of death which she has to carry with, for the rest of her life. Just as ecosystems teeter between growth and decay, the novel exhibits the metropolis as a delicate balance of creation and destruction. The city's structural evolution mirror's Kari's personal growth, while urban decay reflects her moments of emotional and mental regression. The reflection of mental regression often depends on one's gender concerning this, The article, "Communal Expectancy and the Authentic Self of Men and Transgenders - Arms and the Man by George Bernard Shaw and Birthday by Meredith Russo" the author Suganya et al. explains the emotional sufferings of men and transgender as,

Restricting one's emotions will lead to physical and psychological effects. Peer pressure and societal fear drags down the male victims from equity and impartial justice. Transgender individuals face significant discrimination and marginalization, including lack of legal recognition and access to appropriate healthcare, harassment and violence (Suganya et al. 882).

The Smog-City and Kari's Emotional Turmoil

Kari's Mumbai is both overwhelming and nurturing. Throughout the novel the city is named and seen as "Smog-city" (Patil 13). The city is not merely a backdrop; it's a living, breathing entity that echoes the tumultuous emotions of its inhabitants. The smoggy, shadowed lanes, the bustling crowds, and the cramped apartments mirrors Kari's feeling of suffocation, isolation and the constant struggle to find her identity in a place that seems both familiar and alien. This kind of strong emotion is experienced by protagonist due to her separation from her true love, the city seems to alter when Ruth leaves Kari, the bridges and roads becomes unfamiliar, alley and streets changes to mazes and air around the protagonist become smog this in turn is actually a description of the mind of Kari after Ruth separated from her where her absence cover her memories as dark smog, making her hard to breathe through life and her character including her whole self and soul gets lost in labyrinth of death and life after the failed suicide, which made her loose her own self.

Crystal Palace as a chorus to her life

The Crystal Palace (Patil 16) in this novel is actually the house where Kari lives in the Smog-city and it's named as Crystal Palace both as sarcasm and reality reflecting her inner psyche. Despite being surrounded by millions, Kari's isolation in the city underscores the paradox of urban life. Kari's interactions with spaces – her home, her workplace, the rooftop – highlight the dichotomy of confinement and freedom. These spaces become arenas for self-discovery and self-reflection. The name of the protagonist home represents her vulnerability to Ruth and her desire to die considering death to be inevitable. Unlike the actual Crystal Palace people tend to imagine, this one is quite different:

“It doesn't have golden trees instead three potted plants that double up as ashtrays. Too broke to take our private lives any place else, we bring them into this shares 2bhk. But the reality of three bodies squeezed into an 8' by 10' room and will make a psychopath out of a good human being. The book shelf is the dam that keeps our temper from running back. I try and imagine different worlds on the other side of the bookshelf” (Patil 17).

The above quoted phrase signifies the reality of the house inhabited by Kari as well her inner turmoil. In metropolis, humans are interconnected much like the complex root systems beneath the forest floor. The protagonist has never got the camaraderie she always earned for, the house seemed alien to her due to two main reasons, first where the protagonist longs for connectivity and understanding in the heterosexual society that sidelines homosexual love, second her constant search for identity in the metropolis which is said to be progressive and modern but still continues to harbour a highly heterosexual understanding of society. Mumbai's crowded streets, while brimming with life, also encapsulates the loneliness many feel in such an environment. Such loneliness can be healed with food for instance, in the article, "Gender Performance on the Reinvigoration via Food", the author Suganya et al. describes the optimistic role of women in facilitating the multicultural environment, the protagonist from both the novels exhibits food consumption and the offering of comfort food by women shape an optimistic multicultural environment. It paves a way to blend in culture and is made possible through the field of Gastronomy discussed in Richard. C Morais' *The Hundred-Foot Journey* (Suganya et al. 883).

The Boatman and Kari

After a failed suicide attempt, Kari's salvation via the city's sewers becomes symbolic. The murky waters of Mumbai's underbelly can be seen both as place of rebirth and a reflection of Kari's emotional depth. Ever since after being saved by the stinking sewers and brought back to life, she often imagined herself to be a 'Boatman' (Patil 31). The protagonist always imagines her to be a boatman but in turn she wants to sail through the sewer and purify it out of dirt, stink, clogging plastics etc. she always felt some kind of a belongingness with them and it is made further evident through the following lines quoted from the text:

“The day I halved myself out of the sewer – the day of the double suicide – I promised the water I’d return her favour. That I’d unclog her sewers when she couldn’t breathe. I earned me a boat that night. As a boatman, you learn to row and clean through the darkest water” (Patil 31).

This feeling signifies how Kari who has been twice born always wanted to purify the mind of the metropolis and bring upon neutrality and sensitivity in gender along with the wrong assumed understanding of heterosexual society. Despite being an urban tale, *Kari* does not entirely eschew nature. The occasional glimpse of a starry sky or solitary tree amidst concrete symbolises moments of hope and resilience in Kari’s journey. They stand as reminders that even in the densest urban maze, there’s room for growth, rejuvenation, and connection with one’s root as in just like her rebirth.

Angel and the City’s Dichotomies

Kari’s relationship with Angel introduces another fact of Mumbai, that is the juxtaposing of life and death, health and decay. Angel’s deteriorating health in the midst of a vibrant city accentuates the city’s duality. This is inevitable when Angel left behind a note to Kari on her death bed and this note also indicates one of the most important and peculiar themes of the author, that is memento mori:

“Birthday blessing for you: death will come to you as a friend. You will not be scared. Now don’t be clingy. Fuck off” (Patil 86).

In the midst of Mumbai’s rugged and relentless landscape, Angel’s deteriorating health is a poignant reminder of human fragility. Angel’s presence in Kari’s life, too, swings between being a beacon of hope and a looming shadow of morality. Their bond, much like the city they inhabit, is marked by moments of joy, overshadowed by the inevitable reality of Angel’s health as well as the death. Angel and Kari often find solace in spaces within the city that offer a reprieve from its chaos. These pockets of peace are symbolic of the city’s dual nature. Just as Angel provides Kari with moments of respite from her internal turmoil, certain spaces within the bustling city offer moments of reflection and tranquillity.

Conclusion

Amruta Patil masterfully uses *Metropolis* as more than a setting in *Kari*. It becomes a character in itself, reflecting and amplifying the innermost feelings and conflicts of its protagonist. By intertwining the external environment with the psyche, Patil offers readers a nuanced, layered exploration of identity, belonging, and the eternal interplay between the individual and the environment. The urban landscape in *Kari* serves as a poignant reminder that our surroundings often mirror what lies deep within all its living entity especially human’s heart, mind and soul, and in understanding the environment along with one step closer to understanding oneself.

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