

The Problematics of the Subversion of the Male Gaze: A Comparative Study of the Graphic Novels *Priya's Shakti* (2014) and *Kari* (2008)

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Abstract

Gender and sexuality have been matters of scholarly and political concern for many years. With the increased interest in the non-linguistic symbols in academia, images are increasingly being studied in relation to the discourse of gender. Literature has historically been one of the weapons used to challenge the dominant androcentric discourse and nowadays a number of feminist works that critique patriarchal metanarratives are presented as graphic novels. This article examines the graphic novels *Priya's Shakti* (2014) by Ram Devineni and Dan Goldman and *Kari* (2008) by Amruta Patil. Using Laura Mulvey's concept of the male gaze I compare how the two texts resist the hegemonic masculinist mode of looking. While previous research has examined *Priya's Shakti* as a proponent of gender equality, this article deconstructs the counter-discourse in *Priya's Shakti* wherein we find an absolute absence of female characters other than the protagonist herself. Further, the deification of Priya as a strategy to subvert the male gaze is also problematic. This article argues that *Kari* is a more successful attempt at shifting the male gaze.

Keywords: gender equality, male gaze, graphic novels, androcentrism

Introduction

In the preface to *Visual Culture* Chris Jenks notes that how we see things is not simply an innate ability. It is inextricably related to how our society has organised its forms of desire, knowledge and power across time.¹ Hence, the visual culture that surrounds us places us in a particular subject position from where we look at things. It emanates from and in turn reinforces the seemingly innocuous ideological power play of race, class, caste, and gender: the last is the focus of this study. It has been observed that historically many authors have resorted to literature to challenge oppressive discourse. The contours of the feminist movement in particular have been marked by works of literature, both fiction and non-fiction. The importance of texts such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), *The Madwoman in The Attic* (1979), *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) in shaping the feminist discourse and providing a viewpoint to critique the patriarchal androcentric discourse cannot be denied. The significance of images in this regard is unquestionable since they provide visual representation of culturally normative or subversive ideas. Hence, visual art in all forms including graphic novels is also used to attack

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¹ Chris Jenks, *Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

patriarchal metanarratives such as the dominance of men over women, the prescriptive femininity which upholds the patriarchal status quo and so on. Here two graphic novels with female protagonists, *Priya's Shakti* and *Kari*, are examined to expose their respective strategies of opposition to hegemonic masculinist modes of looking.

Both texts offer alternative modes of 'looking' through their narrative and graphics. Both texts feature female protagonists who fight against gender norms which are often patriarchal and misogynistic. While *Priya's Shakti* clearly states its agenda of sensitisation and awareness about gender-based violence, *Kari* is a *bildungsroman* which tells the story of the eponymous character and traces her journey as an individual and a queer woman in the urban culture of Bombay. The graphics, as well as the narrative of the two texts, are strikingly different from each other. While *Kari* is contextualised in a concrete setting, the setting of the other text is a nameless Indian village and is embedded in Hindu mythology. Consequently, their approach to battling hegemonic patriarchal structures also differs. This article contends that the latter with its non-heteronormative central character, holds a stronger feminist stance as compared to the former.

Ram Devineni and Dan Goldman's graphic novel *Priya's Shakti* is about the titular character Priya's struggle against sexual violence. At the beginning of the story, a group of men assault and rape Priya. Due to the social stigma surrounding rape, her family does not support her and instead holds her responsible for bringing disgrace to them. The village elders also blame her for encouraging the men. Priya is utterly dejected and runs to the forest to escape this humiliation by ending her life. But Parvati, the Hindu goddess and the consort of Lord Shiva, sees her in distress and seeks to help her devotee. She enters Priya's body and accosts her rapists. The men, unaware that it is Goddess Parvati in Priya's body, try to rape her again. In fury, the goddess takes her true form. Lord Shiva is enraged at seeing this and curses all men to impotence. But Parvati is objects; she gives Priya a mantra that helps women speak up against the injustices done to them. Priya becomes a super-powered defender of women's rights, who protects and empowers women.

Priya's Shakti breaks the long-established notion of the silence of the rape victim. When read using the augmented reality app Blippar, this comic book is linked to a larger project that features true accounts of sexual abuse and rape survivors.² The text creates a new type of female superhero and seeks to dispel stigmas linked with a violated female body. Furthermore, it has a large participation of women in all stages of its writing and production. Many of these women are activists and researchers in the fields of gender-based violence, women's rights, and social justice. Priya is viewed as an object by the men of her village; this draws the attention of readers to the way women are objectified.³ Amruta Patil's *Kari* is the very first Indian graphic novel in English by a woman. *Kari* is a queer woman who works in an advertising agency. The story revolves around her struggles in the smoggy Bombay city, her professional life and her relationship with

² Matthew Freeman, 'India: Augmented Reality, Transmedia Reality, and *Priya's Shakti*', in *Global Convergence Cultures: Transmedia Earth*, eds. Matthew Freeman and William Proctor (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 192-203.

³ Ayesha Vemuri and Sailaja Krishnamurti, "'Bring about the change we want to see': Ram Devineni and the Media Spectacle of *Priya's Shakti*", *Feminist Media Studies*, vol. 23, no. 7 (2023), pp. 3239-3257.

her two flatmates. Whereas *Priya's Shakti* talks about gender-based violence and rape, *Kari* takes up the issue of female sexuality, gender stereotypes, and friendship. It attempts to liberate women from all fixed social norms of sexuality, appearance and lifestyle through an unconventional protagonist who actively flouts accepted notions of femininity. She grapples with questions about the importance of male companionship and marriage which are posed by her friends and family.

Since its release in 2014, *Priya's Shakti* has drawn scholarly interest from the fields of gender studies and media studies. The existing studies focus on how the text creates awareness and critiques the social stigma associated with rape survivors. The text has also been acclaimed for its strong female protagonist and its wide audience outreach owing to the re-imagining of mythology in its graphics. But these studies do not adequately examine the overtly Hindu nature of the text as well as the *deus ex machina* in the form of Goddess Parvati. The lack of agency in *Priya's* character also goes unaccounted for. This article problematizes these elements by comparing the text with *Kari*, which features a protagonist who asserts her agency throughout the narrative to defy gender norms, and is hence diametrically opposite to *Priya*. In *Priya's Shakti* the only female character is the protagonist herself. Moreover, the deification of *Priya* as a strategy to subvert the male gaze is also problematic in the Indian context. I argue that *Kari* is a better attempt at shifting the male gaze since it dismantles the generalised view of the 'ideal' woman by depicting the atypical modern women with the multiplicity of their personalities and experiences.⁴

Theoretical Framework and Research Design

Psychoanalytic theorist Sigmund Freud associates power with the phallus and posits the concept of castration anxiety that resides in the male subconscious. Metaphorically, this suggests the fear of being dominated. The female, owing to the absence of phallus, is the image of this anxiety. He also proposes that human beings derive a distinct pleasure from looking at others, which he terms as scopophilia. While Freud directs the gaze outwards, Jacques Lacan establishes the importance of gaze in identifying ourselves. Mulvey combines Freud's ideas with Jacques Lacan's proposition that we identify ourselves by looking at others as distinct from our own self. She claims that the image of woman is often stripped of the agency to 'look' because of this fear of castration; it is by looking at the objectified women that men unconsciously reassure themselves of their dominance.⁵

The act of looking is hence, as Mulvey argues, structured in a gendered manner. Our society is determined to a large extent by sexual disparity and hence visual pleasure has been divided unequally between male and female. Male fantasy is projected onto the female figure, which is accordingly styled in an erotic sexualised manner. In other words, *the right to look* has always been ascribed to men while women are passive in this gendered visuality. It is men who look and women who are looked at. Mulvey uses Freud's and Lacan's ideas in the context of Film Studies to emphasize that the audience of films and by extension all visual art is the embodiment of a

⁴ Surangama Datta, "'Can You See Her the Way I Do?': (Feminist) Ways of Seeing in Amruta Patil's *Kari* (2008)", *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2020).

⁵ Laura Mulvey, "Some Thoughts on Theories of Fetishism in the Context of Contemporary Culture", *October*, vol. 65 (1993), pp. 3-20.

heterosexual man where he is the spectator, and the woman is an object to be sexualised and looked at by men. In other words, visual art is created from a male perspective for a male spectator which completely occludes the perspective as well as the gaze of women.

According to Mulvey, woman as spectacle has no significant role the film's narrative. This creates a sense of fragmentation in the flow of the film that lures the viewer into an intimate stare at the female image. "Traditionally," she adds, "the woman displayed has functioned on two levels: as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium"⁶. The two primary texts, with their feminist agendas, are expected to present a dissident point of view so that readers may observe the objects in the graphics via a non-masculine gaze. Building on Mulvey's framework, film theorist Lorraine Gamman gives the concept of the "female gaze" in contrast to the male gaze and contests that the female gaze displaces the power of scopophilia by creating the possibility of multiple points of view. The female gaze in visual art, usually attributed to works produced by female artists, exists in a contestatory relationship with the phallogocentric power. Gamman states that it provides alternative modes of looking⁷ that entail the representation of female characters as subjects that have agency. Gamman's theory is useful for the study of graphic novels as well. Besides looking for the strategies which disparage the male gaze, I also look for instances where the female gaze is evident.

Discussion

In *Priya's Shakti*, the illustrations depict the lustful gaze of men on Priya and thus attack the masculinist way of looking, but it does not provide any alternative (Figure 1). There are no significant female characters other than the protagonist herself. The graphics undoubtedly aim to destabilize the male gaze but the absence of female characters in the story makes it problematic. In her review of the book, Sharmila Mukherjee raises questions about this aspect:

In fact, women are underrepresented in the novel in toto. One feels as though Priya is living in a village emptied of women altogether. Are we to assume that rape is a by-product of extreme gender imbalance? Or are we to interpret the characters as one-dimensional cogs that are merge effects of a society that is thoroughly conditioned by patriarchal society?⁸

These questions are left unanswered by Devineni. The absence of a female gaze in the novel creates an interpretative lacuna in the text. *Kari*, on the other hand, shows the eponymous protagonist living with two female companions. Their presence shows how women can be seen with love and

⁶ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 837.

⁷ Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment, *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture* (Seattle: Real Comet Press, 1989).

⁸ Sharmila Mukherjee, "Reviewed Work: *Priya's Shakti* by Ram Devineni, Vikas K. Menon, Lina Srivastava, Dan Goldman", *Modern Language Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2 (2016), p. 63.

affection by other women, rather than seen as sexual objects by men. The homosocial interactions between the three women in provide alternate ways of looking at women and at the world at large.

Figure 1 shows Priya bending to pick vegetables while the village men ogle her. The illustration is complex and layered. It shows the two fiery eyes of goddess Parvati in the background while the other images and the text bubbles are set in the foreground. This is the writer's attempt to see Priya and the men through Parvati's eyes. But all we see is white rage directed towards the men while Priya is visible to the readers as if they were looking at her from the point of view of the village men. According to Mulvey, there are three components of the scopophilic gaze: the gaze of the camera, the gaze of the audience on the final product; and the gaze of characters on one another.⁹ The first two are often subordinate to and guided by the third. Thus, the *deus ex machina* which aims to substitute the female gaze comes out as a mythical opiate to substitute the gaze of real women. It is not Priya, but Parvati who drives the story forward.

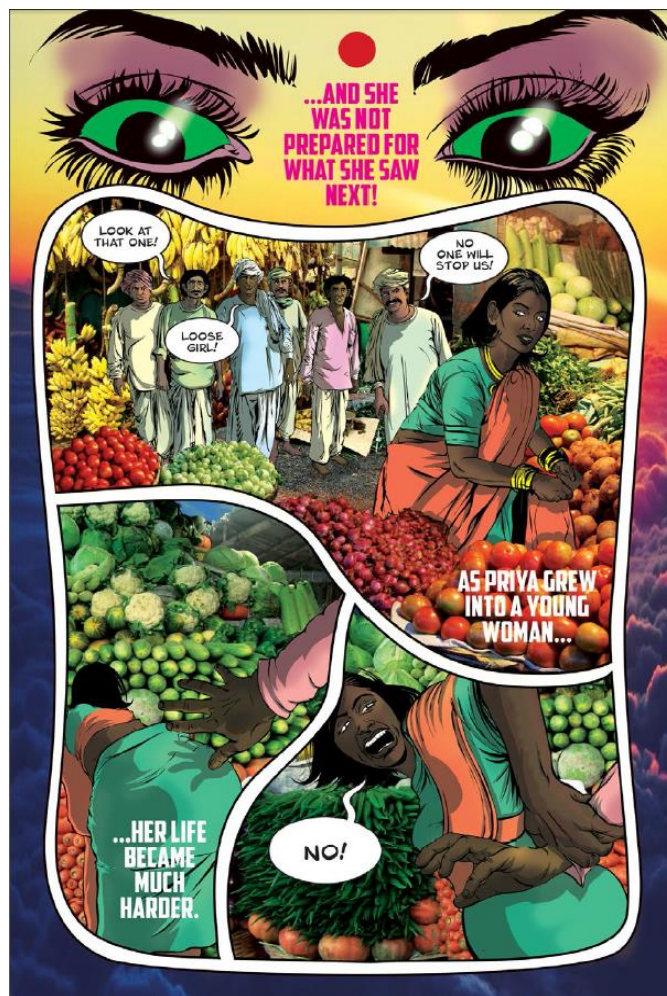


Figure 1. A Panel from *Priya's Shakti*.

⁹ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", p. 843.

In contrast to the panel in Figure 1, another panel at the beginning of the narrative shows an enraged Lord Shiva deciding to curse all men with impotency upon finding that the village men have assaulted Priya. In Figure 2 Shiva's fury dominates the imagery while Parvati is at the margin. Shiva's wrath takes precedence over Priya's agency. Parvati's idea to bless Priya with a feminist mantra turns out to be a strategy to pacify her husband's rage. In this figure we see the perpetrator only through Shiva's eyes. Also, the choice of the Goddess Parvati as Priya's savior is peculiar considering her image as a mother figure and a devoted wife in Hindu mythology. Rukmini Pande and Samira Nadkarni further problematize this aspect by highlighting the overwhelmingly Hindu nature of the text.¹⁰ Looking at the text via the Blippar app further emphasizes the Hindu pantheon.

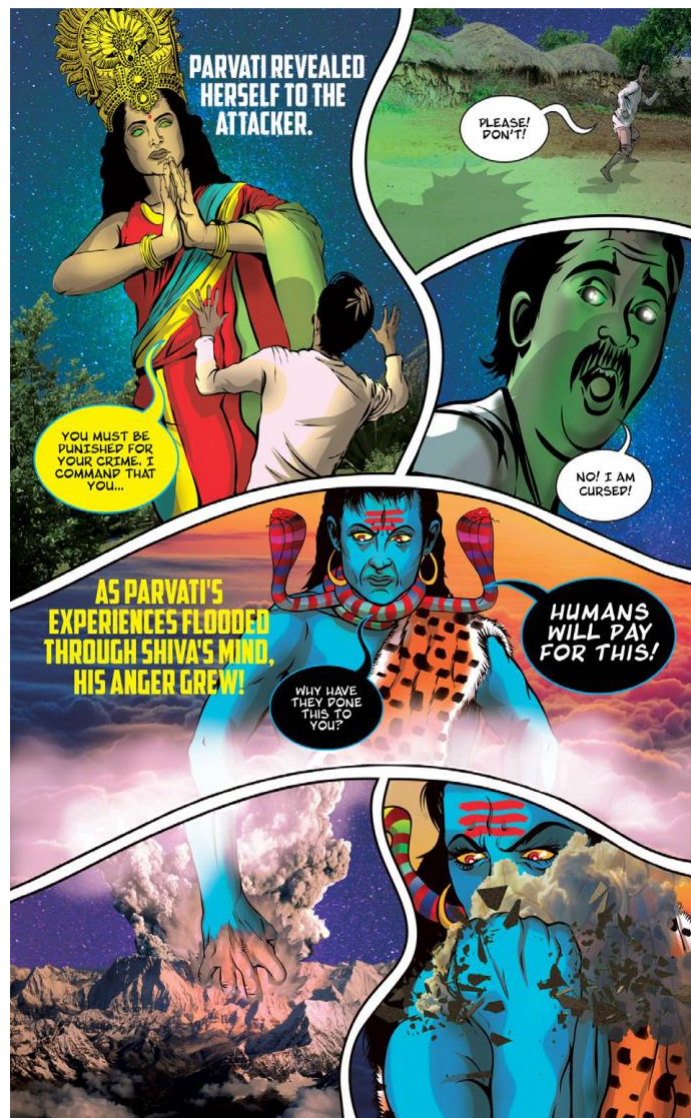


Figure 2. A Panel from *Priya's Shakti*.

¹⁰ Rukmini Pande and Samira Nadkarni. "I Will Tell Your Story: New Media Activism and the Indian 'Rape Crisis'", *Journal of Feminist Scholarship*, vol. 11 (2016), pp. 28-45.

Despite the text relying heavily on Hindu mythology, the element of caste is ironically absent. Although both texts fail to consider caste, the issue is more pertinent to *Priya's Shakti* because acts of sexual violence in India are often situated in the caste matrix. In the panel showing the village Panchayat listening to Priya, there is no mention of caste:

In a rural setting, Priya's interactions with local institutional bodies, like the panchayats, accurately portray their often violently patriarchal nature. However, in the real world, these interactions are also heavily influenced by caste affiliations, and so again Priya's "universal" status becomes an obstacle to situated and sustained critique.¹¹

The village seems to be a nameless, casteless place. We do not see any regional linguistic or sartorial markers. Moreover, a panel conflates the identity of Priya with the mythological heroine Savitri, with female freedom fighters, and also with the Gulab Gang. This further occludes the context of the story by invoking the universalised image of the archetypal ahistoric Indian woman. This non-contextualised portrayal of Priya and her transformation into a mainstream Hindu Goddess further alienates her story from the struggles of ordinary modern Indian women.

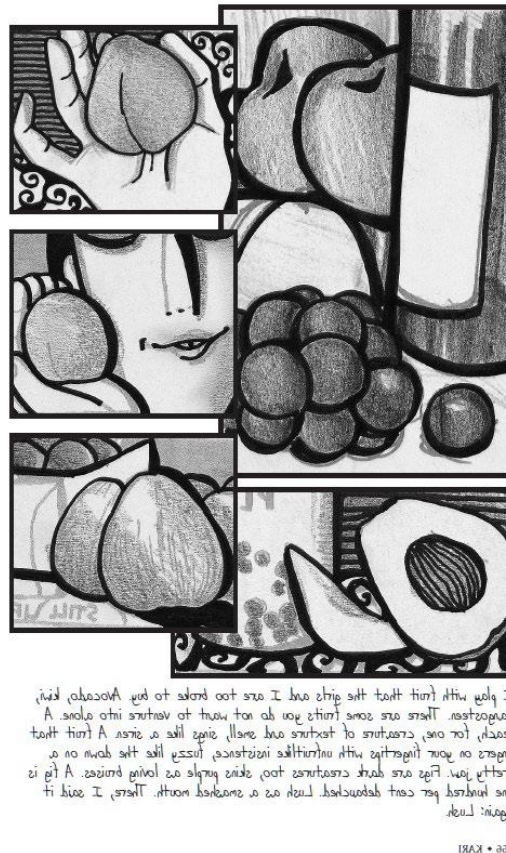


Figure 3. (Patil 66) ©Amruta Patil.

¹¹ Pande and Nadkarni, "I Will Tell Your Story", p. 39.

Unlike the deified Priya, Kari is grounded in reality. She has friends, a career, and a romantic life. She is a sexual being who thinks of sensuous pleasures. She is not a goddess but a human being who has her quirks and flaws. The panel in Figure 3 shows her sensuously enjoying fruit. The image is very suggestive of her sexuality and her inner life but does not hyper-sexualize her. It offers her the consciousness and subjectivity that Priya lacks. This panel provides multiple ways of looking that do not conform to masculinist scopophilia. The illustrator is making us look at her thoughts. The gaze this panel demands is not stealthy or voyeuristic. Neither does it demand reverence. This just shows Kari's desire and feelings as a human.

Kari does not apotheosize femininity. Exaltation into a goddess is also a kind of dehumanization. It is a distinctive feature of masculinist politics that entails appropriation by containment into stereotypes. Kari is a blend of an inquisitive non-conforming queer woman and a detached recluse. Her image is antithetical to that of the hyper-feminine eroticized images prevalent in visual art. She is a dynamic, rounded character whose personality defies any reductive masculinist totalization. Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan asserts that equating women with Goddesses seems to uphold a single notion of femininity and "goodness."¹² Priya has to become a goddess to save herself from men, which rather than destabilizing the male gaze confirms the patriarchal structure from which it is born. Moreover, it suggests that a woman has to be desexualized to be safe from rape and discrimination. The villagers fold their hands in reverence before Parvati and gaze at her as the pure and powerful divine mother while they shame the rape victim Priya and look at her with disgust. Another panel shows Kari holding an advertisement produced by the ad agency where she works. Kari comments: "If hair-product audition equals so much cleavage, lingerie audition equals what?"¹³ The image of the advertisement and the image of Kari's hand are superimposed at such an angle in the panel that readers look at the advertisement from the same angle as Kari (Figure 4). Hence it challenges the male gaze at all three levels; the gaze of the creator, the gaze of characters at other characters, and the gaze of the audience.

In an interview with Paul Gravett, Amruta Patil comments on her graphic novel *Kari*:

Indeed, as the text nears its close, Kari moves further towards androgyny. In its second last chapter, 'The awards ceremony', she decides to get her hair cut into a 2 mm buzz-cut to attend a crucial awards function. She refuses to adopt either traditionally feminine image of 'ruffled siren' or 'earth mother' ... She rejects the barber's offer to give her one of the 'lady's patterns', or at least a 'lady's boy-cut' and is as visibly pleased as the barber dismayed that her 'face looking boy type.'¹⁴

¹² Rajeswari Sunder Rajan, "Is the Hindu Goddess a Feminist?", *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 33, no. 44 (1998), p. 37.

¹³ Amruta Patil, *Kari* (Noida, Uttar Pradesh, India: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2008), p. 65.

¹⁴ Paul Gravett, "Amruta Patil: India's First Female Graphic Novelist", *Comics, Graphic Novels, Manga*, 12 September (2012). At: www.paulgravett.com/articles/article/amruta_patil.

Neither Kari's clothes nor her face seems to uphold the social norms of femininity (Figure 5). Such androgynous images employed by Amruta Patil in *Kari* are a better attempt at subverting the male gaze than the prescriptive femininity of *Priya's Shakti*. The former provides more autonomy to the individual in self-expression and portray her ability to joyously ignore anything anyone has to say about her seemingly radical and non-conformist choices and preferences.

Through her quest for identity, Kari experiences and uncovers the dark underbelly of the "smog city".¹⁵ The attention in visual arts, which has historically been focused on the eroticized female body, shifts to the dominant culture itself which we observe through Kari's eyes. The gaze becomes critical rather than voyeuristic. Kari pays close attention to the city as she navigates its superficiality and restrictive conceptions of gender and relationships. Accompanied by her art director, Lazarus, and a camera in her hand she sets out on one of these explorations.

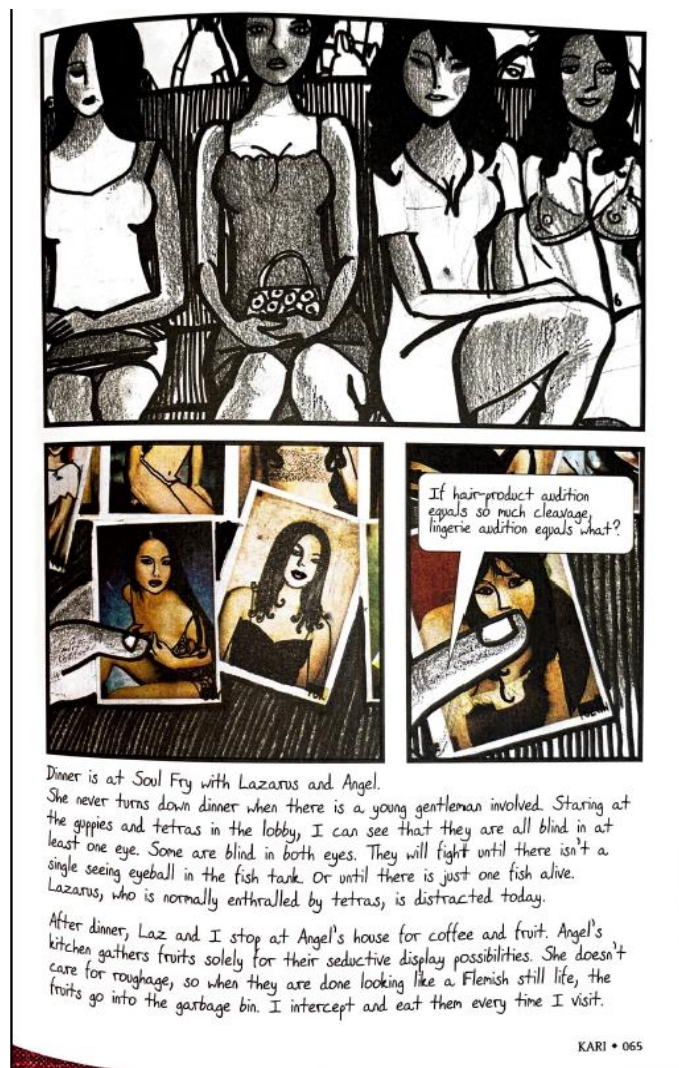


Figure 4. (Patil 65) ©Amruta Patil.

¹⁵ Patil, *Kari*, p. 16.

This is a direct attack on the male gaze as well as an example of Gamman's female gaze. Kari reflects on her surroundings as the panel depicts her staring out towards the city:

Laz and I have been walking around the city at night, camera in hand, watching homeless people deep in slumber. They sleep on roadsides, under carts and benches, on platforms. Arms holding bodies, legs under legs, a defensive ball against the threats that whiz past at night. It is appalling this, this watching.¹⁶

I consider lying to the man that I am auditioning for a film about the Indian Army - people like being aides to celluloid history - but I am too lazy to begin. As it is, scissorman is neither happy nor convinced. Why would someone choose to be a shorn sheep when she could be earth mother or ruffled siren instead? The answer is that, increasingly, my hair makes me feel like a drag queen.



Figure 5. A panel from *Kari* © Amruta Patil.

The readers are not looking at Kari, but at the polluted Bombay city through her eyes. All three aspects of the male gaze are absent in this image. On another occasion, Kari is staring in the mirror at her nude body (Figure 6), thinking about her identity in the heteronormative world where women

¹⁶ Patil, *Kari*, p. 78.

must strictly adhere to gender roles. The readers cannot see the mirror in the panel, and Kari is facing the readers directly as she claims:

It's not that I have a bad relationship with the mirror. On the contrary, I think mirrors are splendid, shiny things that make great collectibles, whether whole or in smashed bits. Problem is, I just don't know what they are trying to tell me. These things can be troubling. The girls outside the door telling me to wear kohl, and here I am wondering why I aren't looking like Sean Penn today.¹⁷



Figure 6. A panel from *Kari* © Amruta Patil.

With her short hair, dark eyes, and bewildered expression in this panel, the protagonist more closely resembles clinical image of the anatomic components rather than a feminine body on

¹⁷ Patil, *Kari*, p, 60.

display for the aesthetic pleasure of the male spectator.¹⁸ Kari discusses the different ways in which society wishes to shape her identity, such as insisting her to wear eyeliner and get married to a man, denying her existence as a queer woman. She does not exhibit what Mulvey terms as “to be looked at-ness,”¹⁹ she is not the object of the gaze instead she is the one actively looking.

In Figure 6 Kari allows her uncovered body to be completely exposed to the gaze of readers. Debanjana Nayek argues that her confrontation with the ‘mirror’/readers offers a resistance to the disguised examining gaze of society. She adds that “Kari’s unhesitant acknowledgement of her body ... propels their [women’s] ‘movement’ of self-assertion and expression further.”²⁰ This article contends that the naked female body in the visual does not attract the typical ‘voyeuristic’ male gaze since it depicts Kari’s ownership of her body and her agency as a subject rather than presenting her body as an object of erotic desire for men.

Priya’s Shakti takes up the issue of rape and gender-based violence and discrimination, thus making womanhood important for strategic essentialism. The paper does not object to such categorization; it rather challenges how womanhood and femininity are conventionally viewed. Kari’s sexuality and identity are fluid, and this is further reinforced by the peculiar graphics in the novel. She does not come across as an object to be looked at but as a subject who can look and think about what she sees around her. Mimi Marinucci argues that the male-female binary in this androcentric world places male sexuality at a higher, dominant social order, often in opposition with that of women. This consequently effaces women’s sexuality.²¹ Here I argue that heteronormativity results in a greater expectation of conforming to gender roles for men and encourages hyper-masculinity that results in further suppression of female subjectivity. Queer theory deconstructs the binary of gender and can act as a tool of liberation for women.

This article also observes the repeated connection of Kari with the sewer. The paper contends that this association questions the conventional cultural imagination which equates femininity and physical beauty. In several panels, Kari is shown to visit drainage sites; on one such occasion, her “clothes smell funny” from falling into “the stinking river of effluents.”²² Such imagery shifts the readers, attention away from conventional standards of female beauty and does not attract the voyeuristic male gaze as defined by Mulvey. Her minimalist clothing style serves a similar purpose. The readers’ gaze is redirected from her body and placed instead on her mind-
scape. This results in a captivating visual tactic and also serves as a strategy to subvert the male gaze. If anything captures attention within her appearance, it is her intense eyes. One character in the text describes her as “the young lady with burning eyes.”²³ The foregrounding of Kari’s eyes, representing her gaze and her position as a subject, further supplants the male gaze and provides an alternate female gaze. The strong visuals and the bold colours of *Priya’s Shakti* stand in stark

¹⁸ Debanjana Nayek, “From Shakuntala to Sanitary Panels: Women in Indian Graphic Narratives”, *Feminist Encounters: A Journal of Critical Studies in Culture and Politics*, vol. 4, no. 10 (2020), p. 7.

¹⁹ Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema”, p. 836.

²⁰ Debanjana Nayek, “From Shakuntala to Sanitary Panels”, p. 7.

²¹ Mimi Marinucci, *Feminism is Queer: The Intimate Connection between Queer and Feminist Theory* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

²² Patil, *Kari*, p. 9.

²³ Patil, *Kari*, p. 71.

contrast to the heteroglossia of media in *Kari*. *Kari*'s inner environment is captured in all its complexity through the experimental use of ink, marker, charcoal and oilbar, crayon and discovered photographs, producing a unique story defined by her interiority. Whereas the graphics in *Priya's Shakti* focus on the external, the graphics in *Kari* focus on the internal. There are sudden bursts of colour at specific turns in the book which provide a contrast to the otherwise predominantly black and white imagery. Such instances often take us deep into *Kari*'s imagination and enable us to understand the workings of her mind. The gaze in such images is turned inward and does not allow room for scopophilia.

Conclusion

The titular character in *Priya's Shakti* is a flat character who is first presented as a rape survivor first and later as a divine superhero. *Kari*, on the other hand, is a complex, rounded character capable of thinking and having sexual desire. Her subjectivity provides a multiplicity of focal points to the reader can choose from several positions that do not correspond to the masculinist point of view. *Priya's Shakti* also does not allow for scopophilia or voyeuristic modes of looking, but the lack of an alternative weakens the attempt. Mulvey defines women's role in film as "a source of anxiety....to be investigated, punished and forgiven" or she is to be "idealised and fetishized."²⁴ *Kari* is neither a goddess nor a damsel in distress. She is not the "source of anxiety" that Mulvey talks about. *Kari* is important not only within the space of graphic literature but also within feminist and queer cultural production in India. The idea to create the *Priya's Shakti* comic book series was conceived after the heinous Damini gang rape that happened in New Delhi in 2012. The creators of the book were honored by UN Women as "gender equality champions." *Kari* on the other hand, despite its importance in the tradition of graphic literature in India, remains less popular. This underscores another important question of mass appeal. Can something so avant-garde as *Kari*, attain as much popularity as *Priya's Shakti*? Are we still unable to imagine a woman as a graphic artist? Are we still lagging in appreciating women writers? Are we still unable to talk about exterminating gender-based violence without stifling female sexuality and desire?

With a queer woman as its protagonist and a myriad of artistic media, *Kari* develops not only the central female protagonist but even peripheral female characters to a complex round whole. This non-conformity in the narrative, the style, and the character development place it in a better position than *Priya's Shakti* to quash the masculinist prescriptive gaze. The relevance of this article lies in the fact that *Kari* has not received adequate scholarly attention till now. Moreover, the question of gaze is significant since more and more cultural productions these days are visual. It would be interesting to see the gendered dimension of the visual literary culture that surrounds us. The comparison of the two texts in question leads us to greater issues of representation of gender, female sexuality and gaze in all graphic literature while emphasizing the role of avant-garde feminist perspectives in visual culture to dismantle the male gaze.

²⁴ Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," p. 840.