GRAPHIC NARRATIVES AND SOCIOPOLITICAL DISCOURSE: A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE SELECTED GRAPHIC NOVELS OF JOE SACCO AND MALIK SAJAD

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Candidate of **Master of Philosophy** at the National University of Modern Languages do hereby declare that the thesis **Graphic Narratives and Sociopolitical Discourse: A Critical Study of the Selected Graphic Novels of Joe Sacco and Malik Sajad** submitted by me in partial fulfillment of MPhil degree, is my original work, and has not been submitted or published earlier. I also solemnly declare that it shall not, in future, be submitted by me for obtaining any other degree from this or any other university or institution.

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ABSTRACT

Title: Graphic Narratives and Sociopolitical Discourse: A Critical Study of the Selected Graphic Novels of Joe Sacco and Malik Sajad

This research deals with graphic narratives whose multimodality characterizes their genre, meaning that graphic narratives have a unique form of storytelling that combines both visual and textual elements to convey meaningful narratives. The current research, keeping in view this unique aspect of graphic narratives, analyzes two graphic texts *Paying the Land* (2020) by Joe Sacco and *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* (2015) by Malik Sajad. These are analyzed in the light of the theoretical framework developed from the works of comic and political theorists to address socio-political issues in two different geospatial contexts. The analysis follows two trajectories. Firstly, it focuses on their medium-specific combination of verbal-visual features such as frames, panels, graphic style, and page layout, to name a few, and secondly, how these graphic novels frame the socio-political stance on the documented crisis. *Paying the Land* is particularly analyzed for its subversion of dominant political discourse regarding Dene in Canada, and *Munnu* for problematizing the sociopolitical violence in Kashmir via the medium of comics. The findings suggest that *Paying the Land* brings to fore an alternate discourse regarding the Dene crisis in Canada foregrounding the importance of indigenous perspectives, agency, and cultural resilience. Through its multimodal aesthetics, it not only acts as a vehicle for truth-telling but also advocates indigenous rights and self-determination. Findings also suggest that *Munnu* serves as a powerful critique of sociopolitical violence in Kashmir owing to its graphic novel format. The discussion is expanded beyond this to account for how the documented crises are framed to influence readers to form a certain perspective of reality and to encourage their active engagement for the cause that graphic narratives represent. The visual culture of graphic novels is thus addressed establishing that it plays a significant role in highlighting and disseminating global issues. Through their unique combination of visual-verbal aesthetics, and storytelling techniques, graphic narratives engage, raise awareness, inspire action, and create solidarities of marginalized voices at a transnational level.

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DEDICATION

It is for all the comics, webtoons, and graphic novel readers out there!

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

In today's world where the proliferation of images is a defining characteristic of our daily lives, comics scholarship is riding currents around the globe. Graphic narratives are enjoying their position as a popular and mainstream medium rigorously researched and critiqued in academia. With their diverse forms encompassing varied themes like contested and alternate histories, social exclusion, contemporary politics, identity politics, historical wrongs, social inequalities, political injustices, human rights issues, and silences of the victims, graphic narratives are adding significantly to this literary canon of comic studies (Nayar 9). What makes them unique in their approach in dealing with these serious subject matters is their form, their demotic register, and visual vocabularies that serve as an agency of the marginalized voices and call for the need for human rights activism against the historical abuse of communities around the globe. Keeping in view this significant surge in the comics scholarship and its focus on socio-politically charged themes that can serve as a cause for solidarity among globally marginalized communities facing human rights crises as a result of sociopolitical oppression of the states, this research project has selected two graphic narratives. One of these is *Paying the Land* (2020) by Joe Sacco who is a Maltese-American cartoonist and a comic journalist. The second primary text selected is *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* (2015) which is a debut graphic novel by Malik Sajad- a graphic novelist based in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir.

This research project took up Malik Sajad's graphic novel, *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* (2015), which won the 2016 Verve Storyteller of the Year award, along with Joe Sacco's *Paying the Land* (2020) as both of them deal with sociopolitical themes and represent the agency of victims through graphic representation. This puts two culturally and geospatially different global communities together when it comes to human rights abuses meted out to them. As Joe Sacco's work mostly deals with "locations that are disregarded," and "Sacco's consistent modus operandi of illustrating and voicing the global subaltern" (Hodapp 1), it is suitable to read his text *Paying the Land* with Malik Sajad's graphic novel *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir*. This is because the latter text voices the

concerns of the people of the troubled land of Kashmir and has been studied from the aspect of subalterns by Shugla Mandokheil et al. (2019). This parallel has been drawn here to make a point that how different communities around the globe face oppression and can be studied together to trace human rights abuses meted out to people in different parts of the globe.

Moreover, Azeezah Kanji who is a legal academic and journalist places Kashmir beside Palestine and Canada and draws the parallel between social and political violence perpetrated by states on the indigenous communities which she sees as "the markers of a settler colonial present maintained by perpetual brutality" (n.pag.). She argues that "[t]he connections between the colonial projects of Canada, Israel, and India," are cemented "through multi-million-dollar arms deals, joint police and military trainings, shared propaganda tours, and diplomatic support for international legal impunity" (Ibid). She calls it a "transnational solidarity between settler regimes" which should be resisted via transnational solidarity between the people they subjugate by drawing the connections between oppression in Canada, Palestine, Kashmir, and beyond to share strategies or "practices of an anti-colonial international relations from the undersides of colonial sovereignty" (Ibid). Taking the lead of this, it is argued in this research project how the medium of graphic narratives voices the concerns of communities around the globe regarding the oppression they face to create solidarity among them. At the same time, there is no denying the fact that differences are obvious in terms of cultural and geographical contexts, but the social conditions that result from political oppression instigated by the states on their people have an effect on the personal and the public domain of people of these areas and this again provides a point of intersection for which these texts can be read together to draw parallels between indigenous communities in the global north and global south and to create solidarity against human rights crisis faced by these communities and lay bare the power divide, oppression and inequalities in the context they represent.

1.2. Graphic Novelists: Joe Sacco and Malik Sajad

Joe Sacco is an established comic artist who won the 2012 winner of PEN Literary Award in Graphic Literature for Outstanding Body of Work and is "one of the most significant comics artists of our time" (Worden 6), known for his "popular and influential comic journalism" which "frequently reveal issues and people that are overlooked or misrepresented in western media" (Hodapp 1). The issues his comics have so far reported

are conflicts like "the Israel-Palestine conflict, the Bosnian War, the Iraq War, African immigration to Malta, the poverty faced by Native Americans on the Pine Ridge Reservation and coal miners in Appalachia, to name just a few" (Worden 3). His major works include *Palestine* (1993), *Safe Area Gorazde* (2000), *The Fixer* (2003), *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009), and *Paying the Land* (2020) which is his most recent work and one of the primary texts of this research. The significance of Joe Sacco's work lies in that "his work stands as a testament to cartooning's power to depict layers of experience, history, feeling, and action on a single page, in a single panel" (3). In short, it can be said that "Sacco's work is both comics and journalism, art and information, autobiography and history" (4) and also falls in the category of "documentary graphic novels" that document important global issues (13). If we see in this regard, the selected primary text *Paying the Land* (2020) follows the literary tradition of Joe Sacco's previous works and deals with one of the communities in the global north that has so far not gained a due representation in western media, just like Kashmiris that are more often than not have also been misrepresented or underrepresented, which again requires them to be read together to form an alliance of marginalized communities. A review published in The Guardian says that *Paying the Land* (2020) is a "painful history of the Northwestern Territory's indigenous people [which] takes the celebrated cartoonist away from AK47s and mortar shells, and into a different kind of war" (Edemariam). It further states that this war is "nonetheless; an internal war, where the invisible threads that hold a human together – self-worth, community, language, even the ability to love – are deliberately cut away" (Edemariam). How this war encompasses sociopolitical violence and human rights abuse, and how the text of Paying the Land (2020) documents an alternate political discourse to the dominant one, is the aim of studying this text.

An important characteristic feature of Sacco's work is that it "testifies to the existence of allied depictions" (Arioli 72) to break the silence on the sufferings of people he documents in his graphic novels as he, himself, does not belong to the communities he represents in his work. Providing active support to marginalized groups, while not being a member of that group, is a crucial aspect of allyship. It is a step forward in recognizing the pain and sufferings of others, Nevertheless, while these efforts are commendable for raising awareness about the suffering of others, they can occasionally overlook specific experiences. Matia Arioli talks about one such instance quoting the example of Chester Brown's *Louis Riel* which is a comic-strip biography of a Metis leader saying that it "did

not feature the perspective of Indigenous women," however, about Sacco's "allied comics" she opines that "Sacco portrays many different voices and allows Indigenous people to talk about themselves (almost) without any overt mediation" (72). This marks the value of Joe Sacco's work and makes his selected text *Paying the Land* (2020) suitable to be studied together with *Munnu* (2015) which unlike the former, is an autobiographical graphic novel of Malik Sajad.

Malik Sajad, initially a Kashmiri cartoonist published his first cartoon at the age of 14. He was born two years prior to the 1989 military insurgency in Kashmir, lived through that time period and responded to the situation critically with his cartoons and artwork. He worked at "the Greater Kashmiri" (Ghosal 129) newspaper as a political cartoonist from 2003 to 2016. As a young cartoonist, when he demonstrated the army's highhandedness, officials arrived at the Greater Kashmir office to take him into custody. Although it seems unlikely now, the management of the newspaper stood by him (Malik). In 2015, he published his first book-length graphic narrative, *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* detailing life in Kashmir.

Munnu (2015), states Sreyoshi Sarkar (2018), is more specifically an "autoethnographic account" (105) which is "a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context," and such a "documentation of lives can become a source of resistance or a source of repression, depending upon the context" (Reed-Danahay 9). In the same way, *Munnu* is autoethnography where "the drawn subject is led to observe, analyze, interpret himself, and recognize himself as a domain of possible knowledge about the ongoing conflict in Kashmir" (Sarkar 105). Moreover, *Munnu* has been compared to the work of Art Spiegelman (*Maus*) and the work of Marjane Satrapi (*Persepolis*) both of which are autobiographies dealing with serious subject matters. For instance, Art Spiegelman's serially published *Maus* (1981-86) is considered a pioneer work that raised the visibility of the medium and exhibited many characteristics that came to be the hallmarks of the graphic novel. These include a frame/tale structure constructed from multiple layers of narrative, black and white drawings, the inclusion of animal symbolism as well as anthropomorphization, and (auto) biographical elements within the narrative, such as metatextual references to the artist (Martin 172). This means that graphic novels, which encompass numerous kinds of comical books, share some or all of the characteristics

of this genre and in turn, heighten their visibility to a larger audience and due to their 'form' (stress intended) they can be studied together for analysis.

Moreover, "the genre of graphic memoirs, or "autographics," circulates as a register of remembering complex histories of violence— transnational, national, communal, familial, and personal" (Smith 66). Just like *Maus* deals with the theme of the Holocaust and the protagonist's fraught relationship with his father and *Persepolis* (2000) also deals with the coming-of-age experience of a young girl in pre-and post-revolutionary Iran and then in Europe, the same way the autobiographical account of *Munnu* (2015) highlights the plight of the Kashmiri people and renders it worthy to be studied from a sociopolitical lens along with Sacco's text *Paying the Land* (2020). In both the selected primary texts, "genre can be thought of as social action, contributing to the "social work" of publicizing rights discourse, distributing rights identities, and interpellating the reader as a subject of rights activism" (Smith 64). This study, therefore, investigates how the text-image combination harnesses a mode of critique that textually and visually depicts challenging perspectives regarding sociopolitical debates, and human rights abuse in the selected graphic texts.

A unique aspect of graphic novels is their visual-verbal elements that are not mere aesthetics of the genre but hold significance in terms of form that delivers meaning. Moreover, it is also a deliberate choice of an artist who employs these formal elements in his work making them sophisticated narratives as a whole. A few of the very basic formal elements of the genre include panels, frames, gutter, typography or font, colours, speech balloons, the style used in the drawings, captions (text boxes) etc. For instance, the size and shape of panels as stated by McCloud (1994), are a means of showing "story rhythm and passage of time" (30). Similarly, frames also act as narrative devices and their presence or absence deliver a variety of meanings to the graphic story and its atmosphere, as well as give hints to the reader to perceive the story as intended by the author. The gutter, or the empty space between two successive panels, is another important graphic element which is crucial for closure or mental gap-filling on the part of the reader to extract meaning from panel-to-panel transitions. Furthermore, typography or lettering "functions as an extension of the imagery" adding to the general mood of the scenes depicted (Eisner 10). In the same way, colours also express the mood of a scene and add depth to it. Moreover, the drawing style can be iconic or cartoony or it can be realistic depending upon the choice of the author or his personal drawing style. Speech balloons are also utilized by graphic artists to describe

the sound or utterance in this apparently mute medium of art and lastly, the text in the caption boxes acts as a narratorial voice of the author to guide the reader in the reading process and provide an external commentary on the events that take place in the graphic novel.

These basic formal features of graphic novels are shared by all forms of graphic narrative books. The variations in the use of these elements signify the personal style of a graphic novelist or a deliberate attempt to convey a certain perspective of the graphic story illustrated or event documented. Owing to the importance of these formal features of graphic novels, this thesis also studies their use in the selected graphic texts to identify their significance in the context they have been employed and how they add meaning and give a perspective to the events that the selected graphic novelists aim to represent. For the said purpose, comics concepts by J.P. Schmid are used who gives an elaborate explanation of these graphic features and how they impart meaning to the graphic story and events depicted in the graphic novels. These comics concepts are traced in the selected graphic novels and socio-political themes are read in the light of concepts of necropolitics, resurgence practices and normative lifeways by Joseph-Achille Mbembe, and Glen Sean Coulthard for interpreting socio-political themes embedded in the selected graphic novels.

In conclusion, this research focuses on highlighting the socio-political oppression in both of the selected graphic novels *Paying the Land* (2020) and *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* (2015) through their medium-specific features some of which are discussed above. The socio-political discourse is traced at the visual-verbal conflation, thus unleashing the power of graphic narratives in the visual documentation of the hegemony of the state, contributing to the visual culture of graphic narratives. Moreover, the text of *Munnu* also adds a local context to this research since it is a South Asian graphic narrative, particularly belonging to the Indian subcontinent region, and signifies the importance of visual narratives of this area in highlighting the Kashmir issue and communicating the cause to the world in a popular medium of the graphic novel. This way, the research underscores the importance of graphic novels as a significant visual medium in the representation of the social and political debates both within the local as well as the global context.

1.3. Thesis Statement

Living in an era of proliferation of images much of which are deeply invested with political meanings, graphic narratives with their image-text conflation also run a socio-politically charged discourse that serves as a medium of agency in visually representing the peripheral voices, moving them to the center, and offering insight on important global issues of the current era. In line with this current tradition of graphic novels, the selected graphic narratives of Joe Sacco and Malik Sajad with their multimodal aesthetics also inform the praxis of socio-politics in the global north and global south which emphasizes the need to address the human rights crisis meted out to the people living in two different parts of the globe; Kashmiris in the Indian subcontinent and Dene from Northwest Territories in Canada.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

The research objectives of this study are:

1.   To highlight the importance of visual culture of the graphic narratives in disseminating issues of global importance, particularly as a medium of agency for peripheral voices.

2.   To dissect the graphic narrative of Joe Sacco and highlight political discourse about the Dene people in Canada.

3.   To discuss the issue of sociopolitical violence in Kashmir from the selected graphic narrative of Malik Sajad.

1.5. Research Questions

The research is carried out with a focus on the following research questions:

1. What role does the visual culture of graphic narratives play in highlighting and disseminating important global issues?
2. How does the graphic narrative of Joe Sacco challenge and subvert the dominant political discourse about Dene in Canada through its visual aesthetics?
3. In what ways do the multi-modal aesthetics of the selected graphic narrative of Malik Sajad problematize the contemporary issue of sociopolitical violence in Kashmir?

1.6. Significance of the Study

The significance and rationale of this study lie in the visual projection of sociopolitical issues via the medium of graphic narratives. The selected graphic narratives make a point for critical literary studies about the sociopolitical problems faced by marginalized communities whose issues are often underrepresented or misrepresented in western media. Considering the texts dealing with groups from two different geographies, one from the West and the other from the East, this study underscores that be it the Dene of Northwest Territories in Canada, or the people of Indian Occupied Kashmir, they must be given agency to call out the wrongs done to them, dig out their long, traumatic and invisible histories, highlight their contemporary conflicts and pave way for creating solidarity against human rights abuse faced by them. In addition, this project highlights the importance of 'form' (stress intended) in dealing with these issues. It argues that images in graphic novels are semantically teemed with social and political meanings and serve an important cause. Thus, outlining the potential parameters of graphic novels, this study furthers the scholarship on graphic novels as a site of real-world debates.

Further, the hybrid image-text medium of graphic novels tends to be scriptible (writers' friendly) and opens a vast scope for researchers to dig into the invisible message they try to convey through the verbal-visual intersection and other elemental features. In a very oblique manner, it brings to the limelight what usually remains at the periphery, or is invisible, or subjected to underrepresentation or misrepresentation. In short, this study highlights the subversive function of graphic novels.

Lastly, the visual aspect of the graphic novel also lends significance to this research project because images drawn or the graphics/illustrations printed on the page with their affective value get imprinted on the mind and have a long-lasting impact. These images on their own open up multi-layered interpretations which bring nuances to the meaning of the story. Thus, the multimodal aesthetics of the genre of graphic novels also impart uniqueness to this research project. In conclusion, this research project is a noticeable contribution to the field of comics studies at large.

1.7. Delimitation of the Study

This research project is delimited to the study and analysis of only two graphic narratives: Joe Sacco's recent work *Paying the Land* (2020), and Malik Sajad's debut graphic novel *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* (2015). These two graphic novels have been particularly selected to trace socio-political themes from local as well as global context. These socio-political themes are varied but limited in this thesis to necropolitical oppression of the states such as extreme violence, militarization, enactment of hegemonic policies and laws, dehumanization and othering, gendered violence, cultural genocide, mortality as well as resurgence practices and normative lifeways to counter such necropolitical milieu. Similarly, the selected graphic novels employ a wide range of graphic elements, but due to the restriction of space, this thesis is limited in its analysis to a few of them that are common in both of the selected graphic novels. These include frames and framings (material, visual, narrative), panels, graphic style, page layout, lettering and others. These are traced in the novels from the perspective that they necessarily complement the theme and discourse of socio-politics through their form and content to address the research questions framed.

1.8. Organization of the Study

This research project is designed such that it is divided into six chapters: Chapter One introduces this research project, giving a background to the study and situating the primary authors and their selected graphic narratives in the larger framework of comic studies. This chapter provides a detailed rationale and context of the intended study, in addition to the thesis statement, research objectives, and research questions followed by significance and the delimitation of the study.

Chapter two, titled Literature Review, builds upon the already existing literature to justify and authenticate the research gap this study is going to fill. It also includes a detailed review of works already done on the primary texts of this thesis. Chapter three includes a thorough discussion of the research methodology and theoretical perspective that is used in this research. It discusses both the primary framework of comics concepts by J.P Schmid followed by a discussion on the secondary framework of political concepts by Joseph-Achille Mbembe and Glen Sean Coulthard. It also includes a discussion of methodology which explains how the analysis of primary texts is carried out in this thesis.

Chapters four and five entail a detailed analysis of the selected text of Joe Sacco, *Paying the Land* (2020) and Malik Sajad's *Munnu*: *A Boy from Kashmir* (2015), respectively, in the light of the theoretical framework developed and the research methodology selected for approaching the texts. Each chapter is divided into two parts. Part one deals with the analysis of medium-specific features of selected texts, whereas part two gives the sociopolitical analysis of the selected graphic novels.

Chapter six is the last chapter of this thesis. It not only concludes the discussion but also provides the answers to the questions raised. It also gives social implications of this study and gives suggestions for the possibility of further research in the area of comics and literary studies.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter of the thesis is divided into two parts to help frame the argument in a systematic manner. Firstly, it draws upon the works in the field of comics and literary scholarship to create the niche for this research project in contemporary debates in literature making this point home that the visual culture of graphic narratives plays a significant role in highlighting and disseminating important global issues, and secondly, it revisits the past scholarship on the selected primary works to outline the gap in existing literature that this study attempts to fill.

2.1. Exploring Comics: Critical Insights on Visual Culture and Socio-Political Debates in Graphic Narratives

In contemporary times, global issues be they social, political, economic, ecological, or others are being represented via different modes in media and literature. The medium of graphic novels is one of these and it is significantly adding to the visual culture of contemporary times. Visual culture is "an interdisciplinary notion that constitutes the visual as a precursor for knowledge and understanding" (Gemmel). It is "the study of the use of images to present meaning" (Marcum 190). So, the discussion of the visual culture of graphic novels here manifests how graphic novels as a hybrid visual-verbal medium are a source of knowledge about the global crisis be it sociopolitical or otherwise, and how they provide a deeper understanding of those issues and address them effectively. Moreover, it is also incumbent to mention here that no piece of literature is apolitical, which means that it is based on a certain ideology, serves a particular purpose, expounds a certain discourse, resists, problematizes, or challenges an already dominant discourse, and most of all demands a certain action within all the possible limits that the genre or medium of literature offers it. In the same way, the discourse in graphic narratives is also socio-politically charged, and the medium of graphic narratives with their multi-modal features unravel discourses on suffering, victimhood, and oppression in relation to the socio-politics of a given geographical area which is the main point addressed in this thesis.

Moreover, if critique on comics in literature is traced it becomes evident that it is spread around various literary debates such as "social perspectives or ideologies" as well

as "political or contextual critique" (Brown et al. 2). This is evident from the fact that various versions of Critical Theory have been employed to study comics and further its critique. For instance, studies on the stories and characters of superhero comics reveal that they are connected to systems of authority such as capitalism, patriarchy, heteronormativity, and white supremacy, and often work to reinforce these existing power structures (7) and this establishes that even in comic books, "there are no innocent texts" (Kellner and Durham xiii). For instance, Matthew P. McAllister and Joe Cruz use a Marxist perspective to compare the iconic superheroes Batman and Iron Man to real-life billionaires like Donald Trump and Elon Musk. This comparison in their study highlights how these billionaires' individualistic lifestyles reflect the exploitative nature of capitalism.

Similarly, within the postcolonial paradigm, *Tintin in the Congo* (1932) by Hergé is seen as a "colonial comic … for its stereotypical (mis)representation of Congolese people as inferior, inept, primitive, or marginal" (Dony 18). However, Anton Kannemeyer's *Pappa in Afrika* (2010) and *Pappa in Doubt* (2015) employ "subversive elements to denounce fantasies, violence, and anxieties surrounding colonial discourse and its legacy, which *Tintin* in the Congo articulates narratively and visually" (19). Christophe Dony's examination of the work of Kannemeyer focuses on the lasting impact of the presence of white Afrikaner in South Africa and argues that Kannemeyer makes use of "Hergé's aesthetic … as a critique of colonial discourse and ideology, and their persistence even in so-called postcolonial times" (19). Dony situates his discussion in a "writing back" approach, stating that Kannemeyer's narrative aptly fits into this framework, due to its complexity which contrasts with the "linear and non-evolving model of seriality characterizing of *The Adventures of Tintin*" (28), illustrating how they effectively challenge and critique the enduring influence of colonial discourse and ideology, even in the supposed postcolonial era.

Numerous writers from the subcontinent have also produced works of graphic narratives, for instance: *Kashmir Pending* (2007) by Naseer Ahmed and Saurabh Singh, *Bhimayana* (2011) by Navayana, *A Gardener in the Wasteland: Jotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty* (2011) by Srividya Natarajan *This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition* (2013) by Vishwajyoti Ghosh, and the graphic anthology named *Drawing the Line: Indian Women Fight Back* (2015) edited collectively by Priya Kuriyan, Ludmilla Bartscht, Larissa Bertonasco, to name a few. This shows that amid the massive surge of graphic novels

around the globe authors from the subcontinent are also contributing to this genre. Some other renowned graphic novels from India include *Corridor* (2004) by Sarnath Banerjee, *Delhi Calm* (2010) by Vishwajyoti Ghosh, and *Hush* (2010) by Prateek Thomas, Vivek Thomas and Rajiv Eipe.

In *The Indian Graphic Novel: Nation, History and Critique* (2016) Pramod K. Nayar provides an insightful scholarship on the graphic narratives from India that approaches graphic novels from a number of different perspectives such as urban graphics, cultural graphics, graphic satire etc. She states:

> In its conflation of the popular with the critique (or the critique within or as the popular) the Indian graphic narrative enables the cultural legibility of contentious social issues, and bestows upon concerns about human rights, which are otherwise debated mainly in the realm of the legal-juridical, a cultural legitimacy. (Nayar 9)

This is apparent from the themes of the graphic novels such as child abuse (*Hush*), violence against women (*Drawing the Line*), caste discrimination (*Bhimayana, A Gardener in the Wasteland*), traumatic memories (*This Side, That Side*), which reinforce the importance of graphic novels as a site of sociopolitical discourse and resistance.

The Human Rights Graphic Novel: Drawing it Just Right (2020) also entails a discussion on how graphic novels are used to represent HR themes and contribute to the field of HR and social justice. Pramod K. Nayar, in this book, advocates the idea of "examining socio-political situations and texts" from the perspective of rights discourse as such a reading "constitutes activist-scholarship and contributes, consequently, to HR cultures and HR practices" (2). As per Nayar, HR graphic novels enable "visualization of vulnerability, trauma, witnessing, resilience and resistance so as to produce the structure of feelings of empathy, sympathy and politically charged emotions central to HR" (6). The book argues that graphic novels are an effective medium for voicing human rights crises around the globe and urge the readers through their affective qualities to show solidarity with the victims of social injustice and human rights abuse. Focusing on the representation of HR issues such as migrant and refugee rights, freedom of expression, or gender rights, it maintains that graphic novels prove to be an efficient tool of social justice against oppressive regimes. With the help of its visual-verbal form, it resists dominant narratives and gives agency to marginalized voices to express their dissent. The author also discusses how graphic novels expose and critique power structures. It also highlights their role in

social and political movements, in mobilizing communities, and in creating a sense of collective action. This significant work of Pramod K. Nayar in the literature provides a significant backup to the argument of my study which also aims to trace sociopolitical issues in the selected graphic novels, address the violence of human rights abuses and call for action and resistance against oppressive regimes.

The discussion above gives a short critique on comics that illuminates new avenues for critical engagement with graphic novels providing valuable insights into the evolving landscape of comics scholarship. From the discussion, it is established that graphic narratives critique global issues, and the visual culture of graphic narratives challenge, contest and subvert the conventional mainstream narratives. The next part deals with the literature review pertaining to the selected primary texts to situate the analysis within the research already done on the selected texts of Sacco and Sajad.

2.2. Review of Works on *Paying the Land* (2020)

A very insightful interpretation of Joe Sacco's selected text has been done by Dominic Davies (2021) in his article "Terrestrial Realism and the Gravity of World Literature: Joe Sacco's Seismic Lines". Through a close reading of the text, he highlights the struggle of the Dene people in Canada's Northwest Territories. He focuses on different phases of "colonial modernity" through a discussion of "peripheral realism" and "terrestrial realism" (303–04). For him, the "practice of drawing" of Joe Sacco serves as a materialist and a decolonial response to "capitalist modernity" (309). This thesis differs from Davies's work as it focuses on the formal properties of *Paying the Land* like graphic style, page layout, frames, etc. to examine how they effectively engender sociopolitical realities about Dene in Canada.

Johannes C.P. Schmid (2020) studies the representation of cultural genocide of Indigenous communities in *Paying the Land* in his article "Cultural Genocide in Joe Sacco's Paying the Land". He argues that it was the so-called Indian Residential School Systems (IRSS) that paved the way for the "transgenerational cycles of abuse" (both domestic abuse and substance abuse) among the indigenous communities and disrupted their social cohesion (139). His article specifically deals with contrasting depictions of IRS perpetrators, intracommunal violence, as well as indigenous perpetrators. Schmid also brings to the fore that accountability for this cultural genocide rests not only on the

policymakers or the staff of IRSS, but also on the North American Society inclusive of him, and calls out everyone as "implicated subjects" (111) entangled with colonial histories. This thesis also studies the aspect of cultural genocide in *Paying the Land* but from the viewpoint of necropolitics which makes it different from Schmid's study.

Mattia Arioli (2022), in her study "Documenting De-colonial Practices through Comics: Joe Sacco's *Paying the Land*" draws upon the feature of slowness in comics and argues that the medium of comics exposes the readers to less sensory information and requires more of a reader's involvement in creating a connection between words and pictures to have a complete understanding of the subject matter. This is in contrast to the fast-paced mainstream news which is sensationalizing and does not require a viewer's involvement to recompose and actively participate in understanding it. So, as a medium, comics hold significance in the sense that they document injustice and oppression and involve readers to create a perception about the represented events. Establishing this context of comics being a slow medium, Arioli studies Joe Sacco's graphic novel *Paying the Land*. She discusses "the past and present relationship between Aboriginal people and (all) Canadians" (72). Since Joe Sacco is not of "Aboriginal descent" and does not "appropriate indigenous stories" his reporting of present and past sufferings of the Dene peoples in Canada reflects "the existence of allied depictions" as stated by Arioli (abstract). Testifying the existence of these allied depictions, Sacco documents not only the suffering of Dene but also their "Indigenous activism", "healing practices", and their efforts to "re-construct community ties" (72). This last aspect has been furthered in this thesis from the lens of Coulthard's postulation of grounded normativity and resurgence practices.

James Scorer's research article (2022) "Comic-Strip Mining: Neo-Extractivism and Land Conflicts in Joe Sacco's *Paying the Land* (2020) and Nelly Luna and Jesús Cossio's *La guerra por el agua* (2016)" makes a comparative study of Joe Sacco's *Paying the Land* (2020) with Nelly Luna and Jesús Cossio's *La guerra por el agua* (2016) to examine "[n]eo-extractivist practices" (2) documented in both graphic texts with reference to the concept of slow violence by Rob Nixon. As slow violence is gradual and often goes unnoticed, the same way long-term hazardous effects of extractivism of natural resources taking place in remote areas are also hidden from the public eye. Scorer explores these "(in)visibilities of extractivism" in the Americas via the "visual narratives of the entropic comics page" of the selected graphic texts (3). According to him, "the energetic

temporalities and visualities of graphic narratives" effectively represent the "entropic transformations of extraction" by which he means the destructive, exploitative, and disorderly nature of extractive practices that lead to environmental degradation and social disruption (4). He also states that the selected graphic narratives bring forth "counter-imaginaries of exploitation that transgress the narratives of big capital" (3). He concludes his discussion by stating that both of these novels end with figures of persistence who present alternative ways of thinking about energy and engaging with the land. This thesis differs from Scorer's work as it approaches the novel *Paying the Land* in a different way, focusing on its formal aesthetics and tracing the socio-politics behind the fracking and other crises Dene are facing.

Małgorzata Olsza (2022) in his article "Comics in the Anthropocene: Graphic Narratives of Apocalypse, Regeneration and Warning" studies Sacco's graphic novel along with two others: *Swamp Thing* (2019) by Scott Snyder and Yanick Paquette and *Here* (2014) by Richard McGuire. The article examines how comics respond to the environmental crisis and presents two dominant narratives of the Anthropocene: the progressive narrative and the apocalyptic narrative. It explores *Paying the Land* for its reflection on the conflict between nature and progress, the capitalist exploitation of Indigenous communities, and empathy as a tool to combat these problems. In *Swamp Things,* it traces the concept of ecological reconciliation and regeneration, whereas the concept of nonchronological perspective on environment is studied in the graphic text *Here*. In this way, the article presents three different kinds of human responses to the Anthropocene via the medium of comics. The article also looks at the temporal elements of these comics, such as their layout, gutters, and panels to understand how comics engage with the temporal nature of the Anthropocene studied not only in terms of geological sense but also as "a time of unprecedented human influence on the Earth with its negative political, ethical, economic and cultural consequences" (Olsza 53). The current thesis also focuses on the graphic elements such as panels and page layouts but not in terms of temporality and Anthropocene discourses as discussed in this article, rather it focuses on sociopolitical discourse in *Paying the Land.*

The critical scholarship discussed above revolves around the themes of colonial modernity, cultural genocide, indigenous-Canadian relationship, neo-extractivism, and Anthropocene providing a firm ground upon which this study builds its argument further.

The current study also focuses on the Dene crisis but with more focus on sociopolitical discourse and the approach it adopts to study the text focuses on its graphic elements studied in the light of comic concepts which are discussed in detail in chapter three, which takes this study a step further from the already work done on novel.

2.3. Review of Works on *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* (2015)

Antarleena Basu (2017), in her article "Rejection of the Nation in Malik Sajad's Munnu: Analyzing the Idea of Nation and Nationalism through the Graphic Narrative" studies how the text of *Munnu* rejects the predominant notions of nation and nationalism forced upon the Kashmiri people. She argues that the hegemony of the nation-state of India upon the Kashmiri community (she borrows Nayar's term "terror of the nation" who studied the text of *Munnu* as a postcolonial gothic) urges the Kashmiri separatists to create an imagined political space for themselves; their "own "imagined" nation, Kashmir" (227), "a territory integral to the Kashmiris and a space of security and progress" (236). This imagined nation space is the result of their rejection as well as reconstruction of the idea of Indian nationalism because the latter subjects them to violence and subsequent dehumanization. Since the Indian nation denies even the simplest form of humanity to the Kashmiri citizens, it leads Kashmiris to the "dismissal of the Indian nation as a whole" (231) and they turn to seek freedom from the Indian nation-state. This thesis furthers the discussion on the theme of violence in *Munnu*, but instead of violence accompanied by nationalism, it draws upon the multiple facets of necropolitical violence perpetrated in the valley of Kashmir.

Andrew Hock Soon Ng's (2018) article on *Munnu* titled, "Nationalism and the Intangible Effects of Violence in Malik Sajad's Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir" draws upon the psychoanalytic framework, to offer a critique of nationalism and its inherent violence on Kashmiris. Specifically talking about intangible effects of violence, he says that its "impression is largely located in the victim's (i.e., Munnu's) unconscious" (160) and the graphic "narrative itself potentially functions as symptom implying a textual unconscious that … reflect[s] Munnu's repression of violence's impact on him" (166). He also proposes that the genre of graphic novels aptly represents this trauma and evokes the "reader's emotional and ethical response" (161). This in particular is the point of Andrew's study which this thesis also extends. However, this thesis studies how the graphic aesthetics serve to present sociopolitical violence faced by Kashmiris and is not limited to the effects of

nationalism, its inherent violence and consequent trauma. Rather, it deals with the Kashmir issue on a broader level in the light of the selected comic and political theories.

Sreyoshi Sarkar (2018) in her article "The Art of Postcolonial Resistance and Multispecies Storytelling in Malik Sajad's Graphic Novel *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir*" studies the "the narrative form of the kuntslerroman, cartographic interventions, and strategies of "speculative fabulation"" (105–06) in *Munnu* to make a case for social and ecological justice in the valley of Kashmir. As per Sarkar, Malik Sajad, using these strategies in his graphic novel, challenges the "stereotypical Bollywood representations of Kashmir … as either snow-capped, idyllic paradise, or dark terrorist haven (or both)" (105) giving insight into multifaceted aspects of Kashmiri culture, history, struggles, and "intertwined fates of humans, non-humans, and their environments within the conflict zone" to create "planetary consciousness" (107–08). Sarkar traces these aspects in his article and concludes that the graphic novel *Munnu* shows postcolonial resistance via challenging monolithic representation of Kashmir through its affective graphic format. This thesis also draws upon the graphic features of *Munnu*, but to problematize the issue of sociopolitical violence in the valley.

Akhila Narayanan's (2021) article "From An (Im) Mobile Land: Inscribing The (Postcolonial) Other In Malik Sajad's *Munnu: A Boy From Kashmir*" is also along the lines of Sarkar's study as it focuses on the "risk of representation" of the postcolonial other in *Munnu* unlike the popular representation of Kashmir either "as a fantastical setting or as a breeding ground of terrorism" (abstract). The main concern of Narayanan's article is to address this "material effacement of Kashmiri body" by reading *Munnu* as a counter-discourse which inscribes native Kashmiri body into the landscape and "unravel author's personal and the collective trauma of surviving in a "conflict zone" on to a visual medium" (4800). Unlike Narayanan's work, this research focuses on formal features of *Munnu* to portray the violence perpetrated on the people and the land of Kashmir.

Likewise, Shugla Mandokheil et. al (2019) in their article "Can the Subalterns Sketch? A Critical Semiotic Analysis of the Novel '*Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir*'" uses a critical semiotic approach to study the theme of Kashmir's subjugation and argue that counter hegemony is possible against it through the genre of graphic novels. According to them, the graphic medium has a potential to communicate hegemony in Kashmir which is absent from mainstream media's treatment of Kashmir's conflict. This aspect of

representation of Kashmir's conflict is relevant to this thesis. This thesis also expands upon this point of potential of graphic narratives in giving agency to peripheral voices, in this case Kashmir. But this study is different from these works in its approach as it uses a mix of comic and political theories to address this issue.

Sagar and Nair (2021) in their article "Decoding the Visual Narrative of Atrocity in Sajad Malik's *Munnu*" read the text of *Munnu* as atrocity literature. Their point of intervention in reading this text is suggesting it to be an "anti-India rhetoric" aimed to "influence a western readership" (1280–81), "equat[ing] atrocities in Kashmir with that of the cultural universal of the Holocaust" (1281), by making graphical allusions such as swastika in the novel. According to them, it is "the physical space of the page" that plays an important role in "modifying the reader perception" (1276), which induces "the author's payload of ideologies into the reader space that it contacts" (1276). With this stance on graphic novels ability to inform a reader's perception, Sagar and Nair examine the "cultural universality of "atrocity," and "trauma" in *Munnu* to categorize it as Atrocity Literature. (1276). They even go to the extent of calling out the form of graphic novel that it facilitated in furthering the propagandist view in the novel. They state that "the form of graphic novel allows development of ideas in a very short reading time thus making it a potent tool for propagandist agenda" (1278). This way, the graphic novel *Munnu* "construct[ed] a narrative of victimization for a western audience" (1281). They conclude that the visual narrative of *Munnu* by allowing accessibility to a mediocre reader acquires a certain propagandist value. Unlike the study by Sagar and Nair who take *Munnu* as a piece of propagandist atrocity literature from both its form and content, my research question would drive the analyses of *Munnu* to highlight the veracity of atrocities and sociopolitical violence to create solidarity in both terms of form and content to a geo-spatially different area i.e., Northwestern Territories in Canada.

Anmol Sahni (2021) does a collective reading of *Munnu* (2015) with *The Collaborator* (2011) by Mirza Waheed in his work "Necropolitical Kashmir: Mediating Decolonization through Postcolonial Literature and Posthuman Knowledge". Sahni's aim is to examine how post-2000 Anglophone literature in India "mediate[s] decolonization" (Sahni 2). His analysis of *Munnu* (2015) also incorporates the lens of posthumanism. He states, "By attending to the repressed animal in the humanistic discourse, Munnu expands the human rights graphic narrative's aesthetic and ethical concerns beyond the human to

include the posthuman" (16). This suggests that Sajad's depiction of Kashmiris as hanguls not only unravels how the necropolitics in Kashmir dehumanizes Kashmiri identity, but also gives a vantage point to study the protagonist's experiences in the necropolitical milieu via the "prism of animalistic subjectivity" (16). The point of departure of this thesis is from the lens of posthumanism. Rather it would be discussing instances of social and political violence perpetrated in Kashmir and how effectively the demotic register of *Munnu*'s text makes it visible.

Suniti Madaan and Cijo's (2021) article "More Than a Victim: Childhood Resilience in Malik Sajad's *Munnu*" studies *Munnu* as a text documenting Kashmiri children's resilience in the militarized zone of Kashmir. They argue for a more nuanced reading of childhood in the armed conflict regions against the dominant representation which dwells exclusively on victim stereotypes, picturing children's plight and reducing them to mere "individuals in need of rescue" (179). Instead, they explore the "creative agency" (173) of the child protagonist Munnu, and his engagement with "various cultural, social, and artistic routes" (167) to cope with trauma and loss. This study, therefore, gives insight into how children participate in the socio-political life in conflict zones in a resilient way. This thesis also traces how amid the necropolitical violence in Kashmir, *Munnu* portrays the personal and collective resistance of Kashmiris against state brutality.

Tuhin Majumdar (2022) also studies the theme of childhood in his article "Childhood Amidst Conflict: Graphic Novels Promoting Transnational Solidarity and Planetary Humanism". He studies the text of *Munnu* (2015) with Joe Sacoo's *Palestine* (1993) because of the commonality of human rights violation with reference to children from two spatio-temporally different conflict zones to highlight the graphic novel's role in creating universal solidarity and promoting planetary humanism (241). In the same way, Majumdar explores the importance of creating solidarity among geo-spatially different communities on the basis of human rights abuse, this thesis also aims to study together two texts that highlight issues that are geospatially, temporally, as well as culturally different, but on the basis of commonality of human rights abuse due to sociopolitical violence are being studied together to create a "sense of fellow feeling [that] is vital to encourage transnational solidarity" (242) to combat such injustices on a global scale.

The above-mentioned researchers have studied *Munnu* (2015) from a number of aspects which include but are not limited to nationalism, postcolonialism, subaltern studies,

psychoanalysis, necropolitics, atrocity literature, posthumanism and others focusing on various visual strategies to bring home their perspective on the text of *Munnu* (2015). This thesis takes the lead of these articles and studies the sociopolitical violence in *Munnu* (2015) as a global crisis taken up by the medium of graphic narratives studying it along with Joe Sacco's text *Paying the Land* (2020) to make a case for solidarity for the victims of sociopolitical hegemonies in two different parts of the globe. The current study specifically discusses the graphic elements of *Munnu* (2015) like framings, graphic style, page layout, panels, etc. which is also an intervention this study makes.

2.4. Bridging the Gap in Literature

The critical scholarship discussed above highlights the potential of graphic narratives in portraying crises around the globe. It establishes that graphic narratives have joined the canon of literary scholarship to inform a perspective on global issues like marginalized voices, human rights issues, identity claims, sociopolitical violence and other issues documented in the light of the hybrid verbal-visual medium. Thus, graphic novels are contributing largely to the visual culture of the present era challenging, subverting and resisting the dominant narratives. This discussion creates a niche for my thesis to study my primary texts for their sociopolitical themes. Past literature on the selected primary texts is traced to establish that the current study is an extension of works previously done and how it further adds to the literary body of comic scholarship. It is the socio-politically charged themes that both the texts deal with and the social and political oppression of the states that lead to violence in private and public spheres of the lives of people. This sociopolitical violence is embedded in the selected graphic narratives which their visual vocabularies represent to make a case for human rights crises around the globe and a call for solidarity at a transnational level. This aspect would be the focus of the current study, which imparts newness to this research project as both the texts *Munnu; A Boy from Kashmir* (2015) and *Paying the Land* (2010) represent crisis from two different geographical contexts, one from global north and the other from global south on the commonality of human rights abuse because of sociopolitical violence perpetrated in these regions. The graphic elements that the study focuses on are the paratextual elements, title and lettering, graphic style, frames, panel relations, page layout, and others as discussed in the selected postulates of comics theory. To sum up, this research project is important as it focuses on the selected graphic novels in terms of their multimodal aesthetics and socio-

political content analyzed in light of both comics and political theories, adding to the visual culture of the graphic narratives.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter deals with the research methodology explaining the procedure that how this research is conducted. It discusses the selected theories, research method(s), and methodological approach for critically reading the selected graphic novels. The theoretical framework of this thesis is divided into primary and secondary frameworks. The primary framework is drawn from the work of J.P Schmid, whereas the secondary framework is drawn from the works of Joseph-Achille Mbembe, and Glen Sean Coulthard. The former theorist deals with comic theory concepts whereas the latter two deal with political theorization. This eclectic approach to the theoretical framework is a requirement for this thesis as the selected texts for analysis are bi-medial graphic narratives. Major tenets from Mbembe and Glen's theory are used for critically examining the sociopolitical aspects of the selected graphic novels. How these sociopolitical perspectives have been framed by the graphic novelists making use of various graphic elements is read in the light of Schmid's work.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

3.1.1. Comics Theory

Comics theory concepts that are selected for analysis of graphic novels in this thesis include three different types of framings (material, visual, and narrative) and subsequent graphic elements. Johannes C. P. Schmid talks about how graphic novelists document events using various graphic features deliberately framed by the graphic artist. According to him, there exists a reciprocal relationship between the manifest frames on the page and the cognitive frames created in the reader's mind. These cognitive frames then direct the reader's understanding of structured representation in the graphic narrative (1). He defines framing as "the process of structuring a representation (or portions thereof) by situating it within certain boundaries—for example, a panel" (1). The medial form that an author selects to structure a representation and the framing techniques he employs, therefore, hold significance in communicating his particular point of view of the respective event or crisis he represents in his text. This means that graphic narratives in their materialized form portray events in such a manner as to support a particular discourse and point of view. This

also highlights the significance of the graphic medium in reframing the global crisis by making use of its medium-specific features and studying this aspect of graphic narratives is the main driving force behind this research project. In this context, Schmid has talked about three types of framings: material, visual and narrative farming. Employing these authors influences the meaning-making process on the various levels of the graphic narrative book concerning the conflicts and crises they document in their work.

Schmid states that material framing holds significance as a "graphic narrative book offers various textual cues on its outer appendages that inform the reader's expectation for the narrative" (65). Discussing paratextual features like cover titles and artwork, Schmid opines that paratexts "implicitly evoke frames concerning the represented events, instructing the reader in how to make sense of them and showing them why they should care" (65) about the topic of crisis that is documented in the graphic narrative book. Further talking about the function of the titles and subtitles, Schmid states that "[t]itles and subtitles are crucial for marking genre and informing the reader about content. … titles prominently attach interpretative frames to the documented crises. … the visuality of the title lettering and placement within the layout constitutes a meaningful aspect of the graphic narrative book" (73). So, titles are one of the most crucial aspects of the graphic narrative book that can influence the reader's understanding of the content.

Moreover, the thematic and descriptive function of titles, as described by Schmid, is also integral to identifying specific crises within the narrative. The specific strategy how graphic artists do this, is by "locat[ing] the reportage temporarily and geographically, either in the main or in the subtitle" (73) and this helps orient the readers within the narrative landscape, enhancing their comprehension of the events. Another importance that Schmid highlights regarding thematic descriptive titles is that when an author titles a book with a certain theme, they imply that the book is a comprehensive representation of the theme, even though their coverage is limited. This way descriptive titles give a particular event more significance by making it seem like it is a definitive account of a certain place, or historical event (74). This approach lends weight to the narrative while acknowledging the inherent constraints of representation.

By visual framings in graphic narratives, Schmid means "a complex multiplicity of interdependent images and written materials within a single text" (125), all purposefully arranged in relation to one another. He categorizes these as drawing styles, comics page,

and panels and intra-panel framings, each shaping the comprehension of the represented event in its own way such that represented events constantly negotiate the cognitive frames relevant to the story, and cognitive frames, in turn, filter the reader's perception of the graphic narrative discourse.

Talking about the drawing style Schmid states that it can serve as an "intertextual reference to fine art" (123) enriching the narrative with layers of meaning. Moreover, it "defines the appearance of the represented events contained within" (128). Therefore, the manner in which a cartoonist draws can have a strong influence on how readers perceive the subject matter. It structures the reader's gaze, allowing the cartoonist to emphasize certain aspects and de-emphasize others, shaping the reader's overall interpretation of the subject matter.

Drawing styles can both be cartooning (abstract) or realisms (naturalistic). Schmid points out that in nonfiction graphic narratives where abstract representations are employed, the correspondence between these representations and the actual world remains intact (130). For instance, in autobiographical comics, cartooning operates as a unique "form of realism by capturing an underlying truth through abstract graphic representation" (130). Thus, abstract graphic representation in nonfiction graphic narratives can be used to effectively express complex ideas, while still maintaining a sense of realism.

Page layout is another crucial element of visual framing, which contributes to the meaning-making process in graphic narratives. Panels on a comics page interact with one another, creating moments of cohesion and disruption that contribute to the narrative's overall impact. This interplay between panels helps to construct a coherent narrative while also inviting readers to consider the relationships between events, contributing to their engagement with the content (174). Accordingly, comics layout is an essential element of the visual framing process and plays a crucial role in shaping the readerly interpretation of the content.

Narrative framing as stated by Schmid goes beyond visual elements to encompass the structuring of the narrative itself, its beginning and ending, how to present evidence, and construct arguments through storytelling techniques. The narrative framing allocates roles to characters, such as victims or perpetrators, influencing readers' cognitive frames and affecting their judgments based on the author's presentation of evidence (201).

Moreover, it also considers the author's avatar within the narrative as a character as "[c]artooning and self-caricature serve as a way of aligning readerly identification with the author" (151). Schmid also points out framing functions of both the opening and closing moments of a graphic narrative. The opening frames influence readers' reception and expectations, while the closing frames provide a conclusive assessment of the preceding narrative. This conclusive framing or reframing can leave a lasting impact on readers' understanding and emotional engagement with the narrative (207). As a result, the use of narrative framing in graphic narratives has an important role to play in constructing readers' understanding and engagement with the story.

Schmid's framing theory of graphic narratives is used to study how sociopolitical perspectives have been framed by graphic novelists making use of various graphic elements. Schmid's approach analyzes the visual aesthetics of both selected texts, tracing the sociopolitical discourse with a veracity that "serves to disrupt naturalized assumptions of medial truth-telling [as well as] generate affect and empathy for the represented groups and individuals" (10).

Concluding, the critical discussion above provides the necessary framework to analyze the selected graphic novels in terms of their hybrid visual-verbal medium. These aspects identified and analyzed in the selected works inform how Joe Sacco and Malik Sajad deliberately make use of these graphic elements to shape a perspective on the documented crisis of Dene in the Northwest Territories in Canada and Kashmiris in the Indian subcontinent.

3.1.2. Sociopolitical Theories: Necropolitics, Resurgence, and Grounded Normativity

To explore the sociopolitical dimensions of the selected texts further, postulates of necropolitics, resurgence practices and grounded normativity are selected. Necropolitical tenants by Mbembe are triangulated with indigenous theoretical concepts by Glen Sean Coulthard, in order to identify the ways in which indigenous communities in both Kashmir and Canada counter the necropolitical hegemony of the state powers. On one hand, the concept of necropolitics would be dominantly traced in the warp and weft of the selected graphic text and on the other hand, the resistance and aggression that is documented in the text of the native communities would also be highlighted with the help of the selected theoretical concepts.

As per Achille Mbembe, necropolitics refers to the exercise of power and sovereignty over populations by deliberately causing death. It involves the manipulation of life and death through the control and administration of mortality, allowing certain lives to flourish while condemning others to perish. Necropower, on the other hand, encompasses the mechanisms and strategies employed to enforce necropolitics, utilizing violence and coercion to achieve its objectives. According to Mbembe, exercise of sovereignty is closely tied to the State's control over "mortality" such that it "dictate[s] who may live and who must die" (11-12). This way, the State not only exercises its sovereignty but also establishes its control over the population. This system of control creates a world where there is a "generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations" (Mbembe 14) and where people are systematically denied their basic human rights and are subjected to oppressive laws and policies, leaving them in a state of precarity and vulnerability. Moreover, the violence, death and destruction caused to the target population are justified by the laws and policies that govern the political ideology of necropowers because they consider the target population as a "mortal threat" (18) to their sovereignty and Mbembe observes that the necropower may feel a need "to kill in order to live" because the existence of the subjects of necropolitics poses a threat of opposing, challenging, or subverting the authority of the sovereign (18). Therefore, necropowers' use of violence and force against the target population is justified by the necropolitical sovereign as a method of protecting and asserting its sovereignty. In this way, the State asserts its dominance and exercises its authority as Mbembe puts it:

> necropolitics and necropower … account for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of death-worlds, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of living dead. (40)

In the above quote, the concept of death-worlds refers to the emergence of unique social environments, where large populations are subjected to precarious conditions of life that render them akin to the living dead. Under such conditions, their "daily life is militarized" (30) which entails mortality, oppression, insecurity, militarization, marginalization, dehumanization, cultural genocide, erosion of basic human rights and the enactment of hegemonic laws and policies to create an atmosphere of perpetual fear and despair. These

conditions have a profound implication on the social existence of individuals as the populations inhabiting these realms are stripped of agency, and are reduced to mere subjects of violence and control stripping them of their fundamental human rights i.e., the collective loss of "home", "political status" and "loss of rights over his or her body" (21). Mbembe terms it as "triple loss" (21) which marks the lives of these necropolitical subjects and leaves a lasting impression on their lives and identity. They live under constant threat, their lives are devalued, and their voices are silenced. So, necropolitics is an important theoretical concept which is employed in this thesis to bring attention to the dark side of state power, exposing the deliberate manipulation of life and death for political gain.

This thesis does not limit itself to the analysis of documentation of necropolitical oppression in the selected graphic texts, rather it also brings to the fore the indigenous resilience and aggression through "normative lifeways and resurgent practices" (Coulthard 179). According to Coulthard, resurgence is a way of enacting decolonization through the collective expression of anger and resentment. He believes that this is a more effective way of decolonizing than the politics of recognition and reconciliation. He suggests that by expressing anger and resentment, Indigenous peoples can create new, decolonized forms of life by "disrupting existing power structures and demanding systemic change" and by "generating practices of resistance and cultural resurgence, … to build a more just relationship with non-Indigenous peoples on and in relation to the lands" (39). Outlining these "acts of resistance," he says that these are "premised on self-actualization, direct action, and the resurgence of cultural practice" (24). These emotions, often arising from ongoing experiences of marginalization, can fuel collective action and resistance against oppressive systems. By acknowledging and channelling these emotions, Indigenous communities can mobilize and reclaim their sovereignty, and cultural identities, assert their rights to self-determination, and challenge colonial narratives via "normative lifeways" (179) and land stewardship that prioritizes Indigenous knowledge, values, and traditions, shaping alternative ways of being that challenge colonial frameworks.

Furthermore, Coulthard proposes that indigenous struggles are guided by an ethical framework of "place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge" (60) which he terms as grounded normativity. According to him, it is an important tool for Indigenous communities to reclaim their connection with the land and create ethical relationships with their environment. He defines grounded normativity as "modalities of Indigenous land-

connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge that inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time" (28). Essentially, it means land is a "system of reciprocal relations and obligations" (13), that teaches the indigenous communities how to "lives in relation to one another and [their] surroundings in a respectful, nondominating and nonexploitative way" (60). Thus, land acts not merely an asset or a commodity, but also a source of knowledge, culture, and respect for the communities that interact with it and such an approach towards land promotes a holistic understanding of human and nonhuman interconnectedness and encourages sustainable and respectful relationships with the natural environment, and at the same time challenges the oppressive structures that have no regard for land or its people.

3.1.3. Rationale for Theoretical Framework

Tracing necropolitics in the selected graphic novels is imperative to highlight how under the democratic notion of sovereignty, citizenship rights are undermined and how necropolitics and necropower operate in the context of Kashmir and NWT in Canada. The analysis lays bare how populations in these two geographical contexts in their everyday lives face institutionalized violations of human rights via state-sponsored coercive and non-coercive violence. Studying the texts in terms of necropolitics gives insight into where the dignity and rights of individuals represented in the selected novels are upheld, questioning the ethical implications of sovereignty and the extent to which individuals are subject to the whims of the necropolitics of the State.

Moreover, the resurgent practices and the normative lifeways discussed above provide a powerful framework to counter necropolitical violence of the states, colonial or otherwise. By engaging in political processes via resurgence practices, and centering the voices of those affected by state oppression, individuals can challenge and dismantle oppressive structures that enable violence, demanding justice, accountability, and human rights. Grounded normativity complements this by emphasizing the importance of collective values and ethical frameworks rooted in lived experiences, fostering a society that prioritizes life, dignity, and justice for all. In the face of necropolitical violence, the resurgence politics and grounded normativity, therefore, offer a promising path forward. Together, these approaches provide a way to counter necropolitical violence and build a more just and inclusive future.

3.2. Research Methodology

This research project undertakes a qualitative analysis of the selected graphic narratives. The qualitative research relies "on text and image data, [has] unique steps in data analysis, and draw[s] on diverse strategies of inquiry" (Creswell 173). Since graphic novels are visual-verbal narratives and the data is in the form of images and text, a qualitative approach is suitable to study the selected primary texts of this thesis.

Moreover, analyzing the image and text of a graphic novel means taking into account its form, which includes the analysis of its medium-specific features; thus, this thesis focuses on the analysis of the formal features of selected graphic novels. Pascal Lefèvre in *Critical Approaches to Comics: Theories and Methods* (2012) says "[f]orm is anything but a neutral container of content in the comics medium; form shapes content, form suggests interpretations and feelings" (71). Therefore, it would be "pointless" (71) to navigate any discussion on the themes and content of the work without considering the formal aspects of the medium.

The analysis of the graphic novel's form and structure demands that it be treated as a hybrid of text and image. Such an analysis "offers both a verbal narrative line—the text—and a visual narrative line—the image" (Mohammed and Ibrahim 951) So, it is incumbent to describe the medium-specific techniques of the selected graphic texts and the role they play in visual narration and in communicating the main idea of the text. The important elements of form in graphic novels that this thesis analyzes are frames, panels, page layout, typography or font, drawing style, speech balloons, and captions (i.e., text box) etc. These "neo-semiotic" terminologies of graphic novels describe the relationship between images and text such that "drawings are not simply illustrations of text, but integral to the constitution of a narrative. Moreover, text not only conveys a written discourse, but is itself part of the visual" (Hansen 588–89). This means that both the text and the image have a symbiotic relationship in shaping the narrative.

Jan Baetens and Steven Surdiacourt in "How to 'Read' Images with Texts: The Graphic Novel Case" published in *The SAGE Handbook of Visual Research Methods* (2011) suggest a visual research method for analyzing graphic narratives, which is also supplemented in the analysis of this thesis. According to them, reading the graphic novel requires the reader

to make sense of the 'grammatextual' layer(s) of the information, and of the 'stylistic' features of the drawing; … to understand the textual information (inside or outside the panels) ... to scrutinize the diagrammatic and polygraphic dimension of the panels (which transforms them into reading screens); … to interpret the sequential arrangement of the pictures; and, …, to synthesize all the previous operations. (595)

In the above quote, grammatextual point of view and stylistic features of drawing means the visual treatment of everything on the pages of graphic novels such as hand written captions, dialogues and shouts, the lettering, words in speech balloons, panels, written symbols within the fictional world, as well as the presence of onomatopoeia sounds ('Wham,' 'Whoosh,' 'Whap') (593). On the other hand, the diagrammatic and polygraphic dimension of the panels means that they can be seen as providing a critical response to the established ideas and beliefs (595). The combination of the image as a diagram and the image as a polyphony allows for the graphic novel to be interpreted as a narrative and also as an active practice within a dynamic cultural framework.

The analysis, using this approach and research method and the selected political and comic theory, is carried out in two steps. Firstly, formal elements of selected graphic novels are addressed in the light of comic theory to determine their visual aesthetics and how they frame a perspective on the crisis they document from both the framing (material, visual, and narrative) as well as the narrative perspective. Discussion on material framings of the selected graphic novels considered their paratextual features such as the cover and the titles. Visual framing entailed a discussion on drawing styles, comics page, panels, and page layout. Narrative framings furthered the analysis outlining the structure of the selected graphic narratives, their beginning and end, and how they documented the crisis depending on the storytelling techniques employed by the respective graphic artists.

In addition, this part also touched upon the aspects of socio-politics and the relevant theoretical tenets of necropolitics, resurgence, and grounded normativity. It established how these framings (material, visual, and narrative) employed by the respective graphic artists are necro-frames, resurgence-frames, and frames of grounded normativity from the content they embed in them. Secondly, this analysis based on these graphic elements is furthered in the light of political theories (necropolitics, resurgence, and grounded normativity) in detail to read the narrative discourse that these graphic novels entail; in this case, socio-politics engendered in the selected graphic novels. This part also does not limit

itself to the analysis in the light of socio-politics; rather, it also involves the graphic aesthetics of the selected novels where needed and the use of medium-specific vocabulary to supplement the analysis. The reason being the graphic texts are a bi-medial medium, and as mentioned earlier, they hold a symbiotic relationship and together act as a whole to convey their narrative.

CHAPTER 4

EXAMINING JOE SACCO'S GRAPHIC NOVEL: SUBVERTING DOMINANT POLITICAL DISCOURSE THROUGH VISUAL AESTHETICS

Joe Sacco's *Paying the Land* is his most recent graphic novel that offers a thought-provoking account of the impact of colonialism, resource extraction, and modernization on the Dene community. In the novel, Sacco visits alongside his guide Shauna to multiple towns in Northwest Territories in Canada and collects stories and perspectives from the Indigenous people giving a glimpse into their ancestral knowledge, oral traditions, and the challenges they face in maintaining their cultural identity. The novel also delves into the issue of resource extraction, unfair land treaties and the residential school system. It also documents Dene's resistance against the government and its discriminatory policies and their efforts to heal and reclaim their land and cultural heritage. What follows here is the analysis of *Paying the Land* in the light of the theoretical framework developed to answer the research question framed pn the novel.

4.1. Visual Aesthetics in *Paying the Land* (2020)

Schmid's theorization regarding graphic narratives as discussed in the theoretical framework informs that authors of graphic novels exploit various visual-verbal elements to structure their text, and by doing so they essentially imbue their work with a particular interpretation of the events being represented. This intentional structuring influences and cultivates a specific state of mind for the readers as they engage with the narrative, inspiring a narrative response from them so that they read the text from the perspective framed by the author. Taking the lead of this, what follows here is the critical study of visual-verbal techniques employed by Joe Sacco in *Paying the Land* to inform the multi-layered interpretation of their situation of crisis. Moreover, this part will also establish how the particular frames employed by Sacco are necro frames which give insight into on-ground necropolitics, or how these frames can be read as resurgence frames and frames for documenting indigenous cultural resilience and cultural practices.

4.1.1. **Material Framing of** *Paying the Land* **(2020)**

As per Schmid, the outer appendages of a graphic narrative book, its material framing, instruct the reader how to make sense of the represented events. The cover of the book being the outermost instance of the paratext features the visual content from the narrative itself, introducing the reader to a set of information that stands in dialogue with the graphic narrative discourse, providing an initial understanding of the text (65-80). Studying the material framing of *Paying the Land* as per Schmid's point-of-view shows that a strong cohesion exists between the representation of the Dene crisis and its paratextual elements (see fig. 4.1). Its cover shows two contrasting scenes, one shows the traditional Dene way of life, and the scene is taken from the Part II of the book, and right below it an industrial plant is shown which gives anticipation about the episodes of colonial modernity in Northwest Territories in Canada. So, the cover sets the the frame for the book's main conflict, which is centred around indigenous traditions and modern industrial practices on Dene's native lands.

The titular phrase serves the same dual function. According to Schmid a prominent feature of the titles is that they "attach interpretive frames to the documented crises" (73). The title of Sacco's novel is also a reference to the Dene tradition which the readers come to know in the second part of the book, from which the cover imagery is also taken. This Dene custom is to "pay the land" or "bring the land a gift" to "treat it gently, not dig holes or make too much of a disturbance" (Sacco 50). Not only does the title inform the reader of the importance of land to the Dene people, but can also be read as a gesture of respect to them. By adopting this phrase as a title, Sacco pays homage to the Dene people for their relationship with the land and their cultural practices, and at the same time, also gives insight into the acquisition of native lands of Dene for the purpose of resource extraction.

Moreover, the image of traditional indigenous life cast in a reddish-brown sepia tone, and the industrial plant in a shade of grey colour below it, with the title placed in the centre of the front cover is another important thing to notice here as "visuality of the title lettering and placement within the layout" also contribute to the overall meaning of a graphic narrative book (Schmid 73). Its placement in the middle of the front cover, in large block letters, separating two different images complements the semantic dualism of the title itself. So, the title and the cover carry dual significance in framing a perspective for the readers regarding the subject matter of the book..
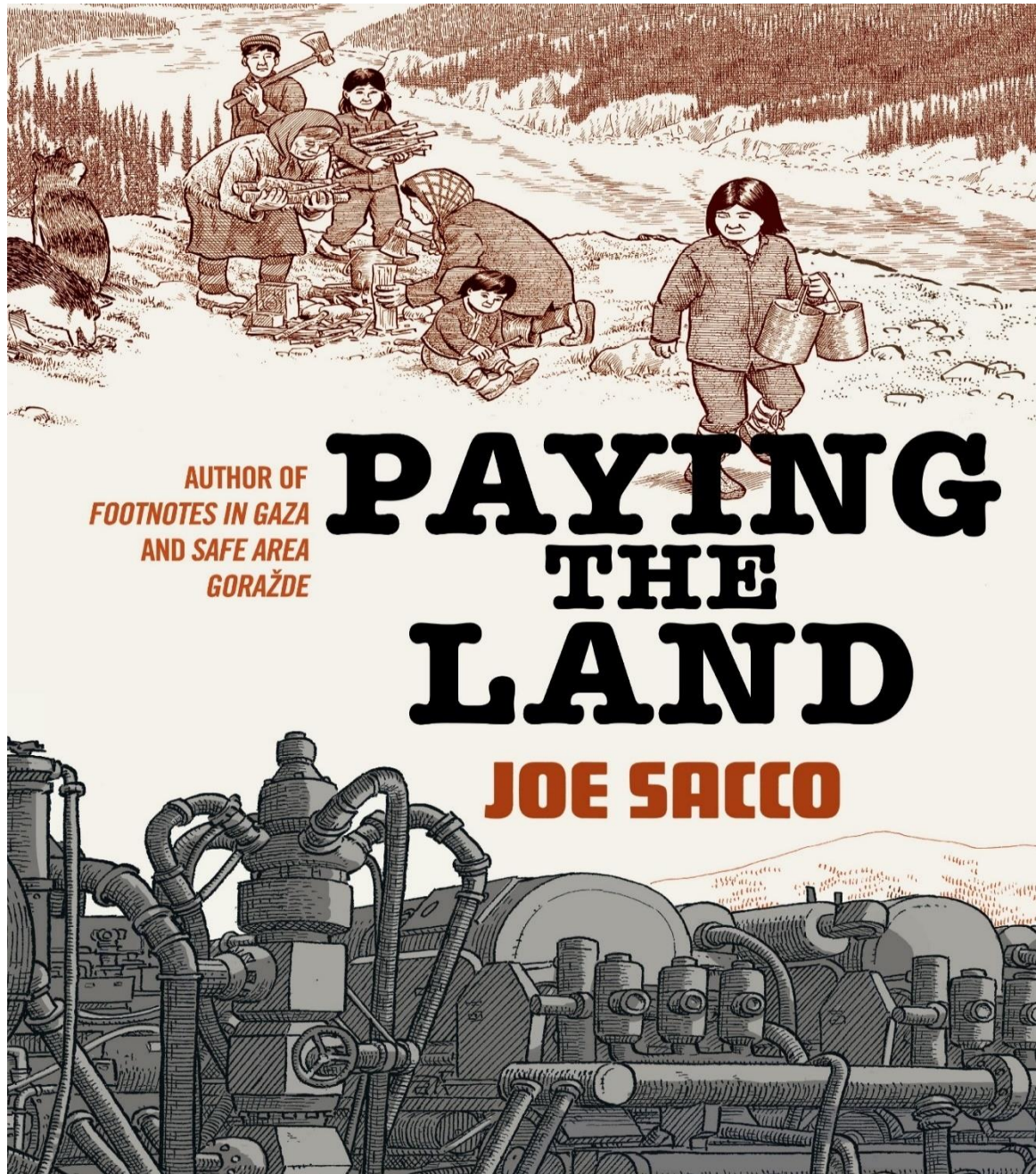
Fig. 4.1. Joe Sacco, front cover

These aspects of material framing give insight into the necropolitics of the settler state of Canada by visually juxtaposing the conflict between them and the indigenous Dene, and how the Dene people challenge it through traditional land-based practices which is discussed in detail in the next section of the analysis.

4.1.2. Visual Framing in *Paying the Land* (2020): Drawing Style and Page Layout

When it comes to the visual framing of graphic content inside the book, drawing style holds an important place in it. The drawing style of a cartoonist affects how an event is represented, and what frames it evokes in the readers regarding the documented subject matter by structuring the "reader's gaze" (Schmid 124). Joe Sacco has employed a naturalistic drawing style in *Paying the Land*, through which he frames the representation of the Dene people and their crisis. This is along the lines of his previous works about which Worden (2015) and Chute (2016) say that Joe Sacco adheres to an especially naturalistic style (Worden 11). Sacco's drawing style also marks his genre of comics journalism, as his visual and textual elements extend to his personal observations, witness testimonies, and the inclusion of documents and the "scientific and technical ('objective') pictures" like "maps, diagrams, charts, and geometric shapes" (Mikkonen 156). The entire book is saturated with so much detailing and information that when confronted with its pages, on prima facie, a reader cannot help but receive multiple impressions all at once.

To quote an example, in the chapter "Who We Are" (Sacco 33) Joe Sacco visualises his journey to Mackenzie River Valley with a map of NWT and a vertical-cross section diagram of the land explaining the fracking process that is "the process of extracting hard-to-access oil and natural gas by shooting toxic mixture of water; sand, and chemicals at extremely high pressure into shale rock" (33). This naturalistic visualization of the fracking process by Sacco is an attempt to lay bare an aspect of necropolitical oppression on Dene as it represents how modernity brought havoc on the lives of the indigenous people by dispossessing them from their lands and extracting their natural resources for the profitability of the sovereign state's political economy leaving both the native lands and the people in a precarious vulnerable state.

At another instance in the novel, a group of federal negotiators are depicted as they contemplate a paper map of abstract shapes and grids, utilizing geometrical tools such as calculator, ruler, compass and a protractor to measure the treaty lines (78) all adding to the details of visual frames in the novel. These treaty lines visually mark the discriminatory land treaties 8 and 11 by the government to form new land claim agreements to force first Nations to "cede, release and surrender" (Sacco 60) their authority over their own territory

which is another visual depiction of necropolitical oppression by the state to deprive the natives of their land and their resources.

Page layout is also an important aspect of visual framing, as various panels relate to each other on a comics page and take part in the meaning-making process as a whole. Page layout captures moments within panels juxtaposed with each other or superimposed against a certain background, evoking cohesion and disruption, and rendering the surface of the page meaningful as a whole (Schmid 174). In *Paying the Land* Joe Sacco employs irregular page layouts and the visual elements present on the pages of his novel overlap and extend towards the edges. For instance, Sacco does not use black hyperframes for witness accounts. He also omits panel borders when presenting contrasts between new and old ways of Dene lifestyle. In the first chapter titled "You Find Yourself in the Circle," (Sacco 3) Sacco uses bleeds and splashes to describe how the Dene people lived before they were colonized. Dene's way of life is represented by omitting panel borders all together, merging the bush, hunting, and gathering lifestyles into one, while Paul's interview portrait is set against a black backdrop while he is telling about the past Dene lifestyle (see fig. 4.2). The use of these splash pages or bleed here give a "timeless quality" (McCloud 102) and significantly describes the traditional Dene life as open and free with white background implying that indigenous cultures have existed there "since time immemorial" (Sacco 35). Highlighting the harmony between their lives and nature, where routines were dictated by environmental cues, Paul Andrew states, "I remember our lives being dictated by the environment, by the animals … There's a fish run at a certain place. It's time to go there … The moose skin is thick now. It's time to get moose" (6). Talking about their nomadic lifestyle, he further tells Joe Sacco that it was charcaterized by traveling and emphasized the necessity of minimal possessions and reliance on dog sleighs for transportation, "when you're a nomadic you need to travel light, you need to travel fast, everything had to be done really quickly so you carried the very basics … The basic essentials are in the dog sleigh so you don't have the luxury of riding… in the winter time… A lot of times it was just walking with dog packs in the summer time" (7). This reflects Dene's deep connection to their environment and a way of life prior to colonial disruptions. This deep connection of Dene with their lands is representative of their "normative lifeways" (Coulthard 179). Moreover, the black background of Andrew's talking-head panel superimposed on the vast landscape of the traditional Dene lifestyle metaphorically implies that Andrew is confined within the Western lifestyle, and therefore appears imprisoned in a dark place. In this way,

the page layout that Sacco employs significantly differentiates past life of the Dene from the present one by juxtaposing and superimposing interview portraits, and witness accounts and thereby deconstructs the ontological binaries of past and present, bringing all of it together on a single page of his graphic novel.
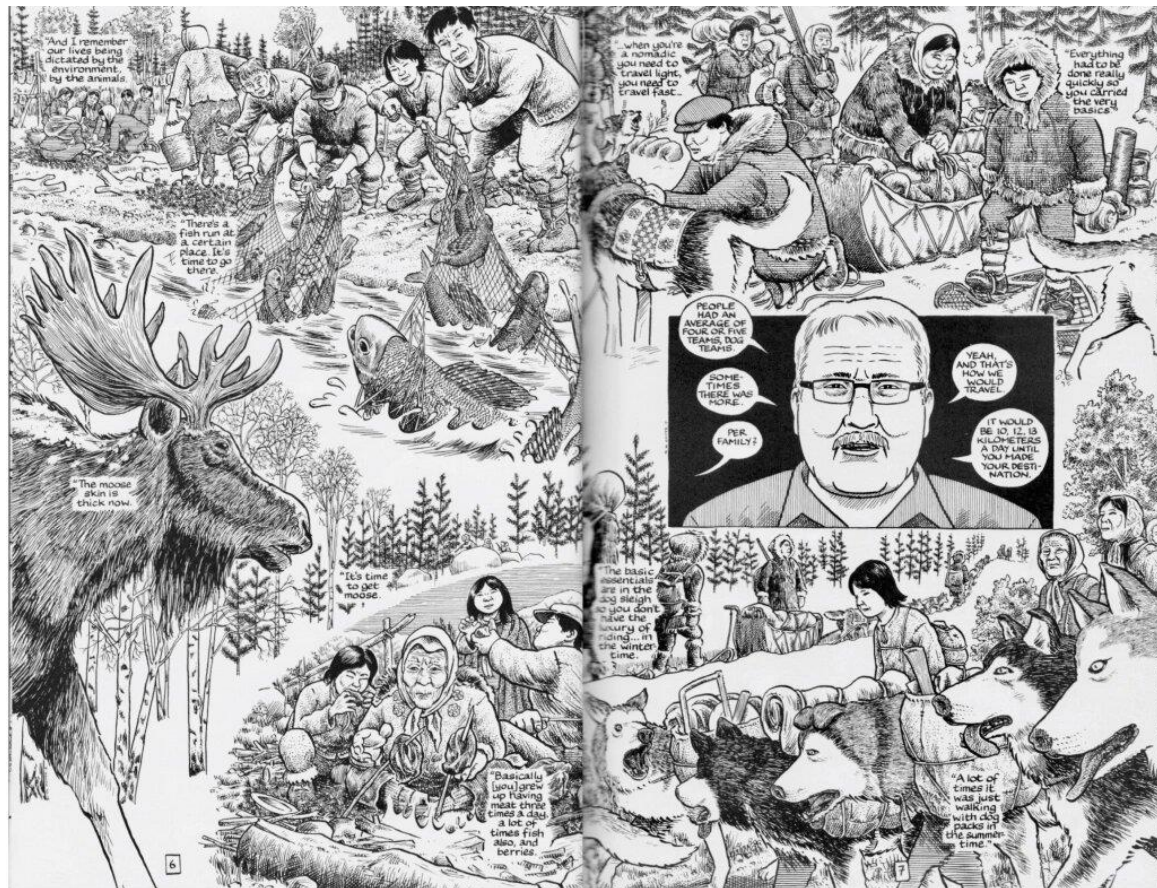
Fig. 4.2. Joe Sacco, 6-7

Later in the chapter "A Savage Who Can Read" (121), Sacco unfolds how western way of life trapped Paul Andrew. It is the moment of introduction of Western culture into the lives of Dene people. Sacco presents this scene with the arrival of the Canadian government officials on a plane at the Mackenzie River Valley to take Paul Andrew away from his home to a residential school (see fig. 4.3). A small aircraft is superimposed with two rectangular panel frames that mimic high-rise buildings against the vast and open sky. Here, Sacco directs the reader's gaze towards this aircraft using text boxes. The rigid frames, which contrast with the surrounding vista, symbolise the arrival of Western culture on the Indigenous people of the Northwest Territories. These frames represent the process of cultural assimilation, through which the Canadian government forced Indigenous people to conform to Western cultures. Here, Joe Sacco directly involves the readers to witness

the assimilation policies of the state of Canada which were inherently violent and oppressive, more precisely necropolitical in nature as are analyzed in this thesis, and reveals the human rights abuse the settler colonial practices accompanied by in Canada. Sacco confines the readers to the reason why "indigenous people of the Northwest Territories seem[ed] adrift, unmoored from the culture that once anchored them" (122). He reveals that "unmooring the indigenous people - in fact, erasing the essence of their indigeneity - was long Canada's official history. And for many of those who lived in the bush, that policy was heralded by the sound of aircraft engines" (122). The word policy here refers to the assimilation policies of the settler state of Canada through which they legitimized necropolitical violence on the native communities of NWT subjecting them to the "triple loss" that resulted in depriving them of their home, their bodily rights as well as their political status because they were literally uprooted from their native lands (Mbembe 21). In metaphorical terms also, these frames symbolize how Indigenous cultures were metaphorically included within Western culture frames as part of the Canadian government's cultural assimilation process. This also proves how visual framing subverts the frames of dominant narratives and documents an alternate reality of Dene in *Paying the Land* (2020).
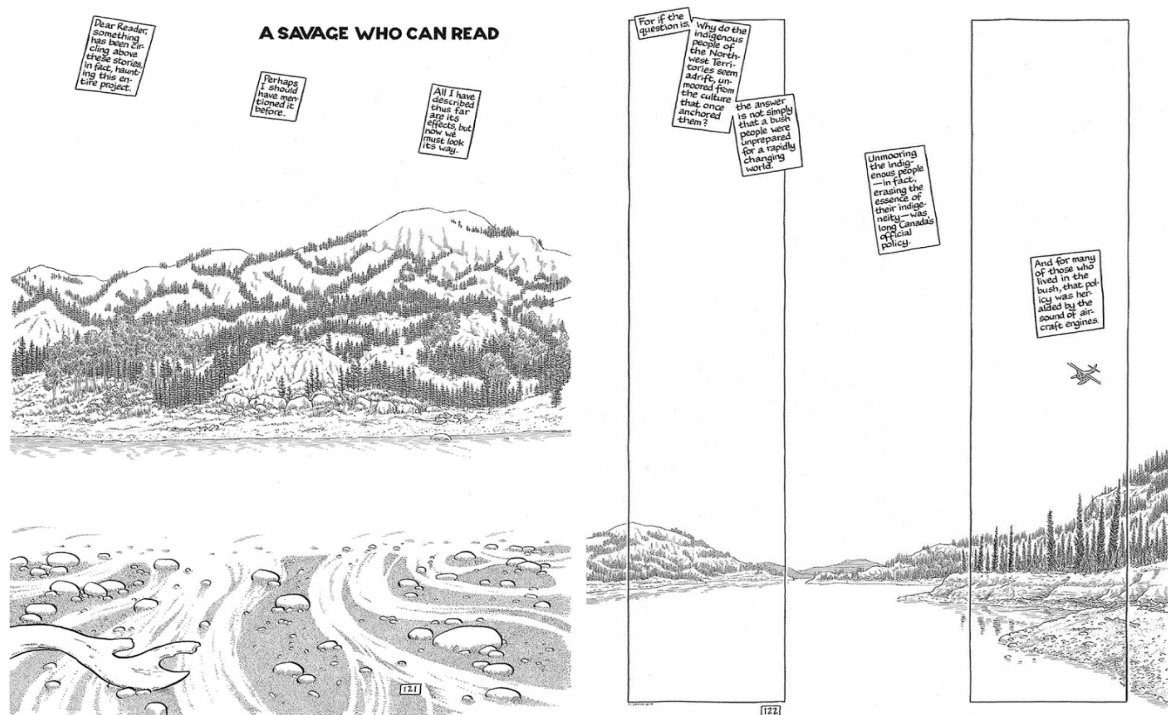

Fig. 4.3. Joe Sacco, 121-122

4.1.3. Narrative Framing in *Paying the Land* (2020)

In graphic narratives, narrative framing deals with the structuring of the narrative, its beginning and ending (Schmid 201). In *Paying the Land* Joe Sacco employed a circular structure in the narrative of the book. The very first chapter "You Find Yourself in the Circle" (3) and the last one "The Circle is Closed" (247) reflect this loop of continuity in the novel. It is reflective of the Dene way of life, who continues to live on the land "from time immemorial" (Sacco 35). It is, therefore, safe to assume that the narrative framing of the novel provides the reader with a lens of indigenous frames, and their "place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge" i.e. grounded normativity (Coulthard 60). The very first page of the first chapter of the novel shows the baby Paul Andrew in the hands and his umbilical cord is still on his body, merging into the "moose-skin-boat" (Sacco 3) against the landscape of mountains and trees which is indicative of the Dene's connection with the land right from their birth. The last chapter also portrays a character, Eugene Boulanger, who is from the current generation and who goes back to feel the connection and a sense of "wholeness" that his ancestors had with the land (258). This structure of the book reinforces the narrative of Dene, and how important their native land is for them.

Moreover, in the narrative of *Paying the Land*, Joe Sacco incorporates a number of interview partners, which makes up a huge portion of the text. During the interview scenes, Schmid suggests that the presence of the author as a character within the primary narrative is an important element. He states that "[c]artooning and self-caricature serve as a way of aligning readerly identification with the author" (Schmid 151). In interview scenes which carried conversations about the Indian Residential School System (IRSS), Sacco placed his avatar at the edges of the panels in the novel (148, 185). His presence is that of an interlocutor in these scenes but he does not draw attention to his own responses when he is interviewing the victims of IRSS, a sort of consternation can still be noticed on his face while listening to these stories of cultural genocide. His way of visually framing the interview scene in such a manner ensures that the reader's point of observation closely aligns with his own. Moreover, Joe Sacco has limited his subjective response in the novel, and instances of his avatar are less visible, which can be read as an implicit gesture of Sacco to forgo his narrative authority and give more space to his interview partners on the page and let them tell their stories with minimal intervention (Schmid 139–40). This serves to

emphasize Sacco's goal to critically observe and document his interviews rather than shape them with his own interpretation.

Moreover, Sacco is conscious of the limitations of his work and acknowledges this fact. His self-deprecating and self-critical tone is apparent in *Paying the Land*. In the last chapter, Joe Sacco visits the diamond field. During the process of extraction, this diamond field produced highly lethal arsenic toxic dust. Now the issue at hand was how to get rid of this toxic dust. Here Sacco positions himself against the other stories of colonial oppression and destruction. In a metaphorical way, Sacco draws a parallel between his own work about travelling to places and digging stories from there and the companies that exploit native lands by resource extraction. The visual representation of this is framed such that the head of a man is cut in half and in place of his brain, oil drilling equipment is placed, which is a reference to Sacco's research for his comics journalism. The textual musings of Sacco are: "After all what's the difference between me and an oil company? We've both come here to extract something" (107). This self-reflexivity urges Sacco to admit that his own work has an inherent colonial aspect to it. But even this self-critical judgement does not alter the reality about him being a Western interviewer interviewing the local natives. However, unlike his previous works, Sacco has deliberately kept his representation, and experience of travelling to NWT in the background and has allocated more space to the oral history of Dene people, documenting their peripheral version of narrative against the dominant one. Nonetheless, it is important to note that this oral history still mediated his authorship and framing narration. Though he makes a conscious effort to challenge and subvert the colonial dynamic of documenting this crisis, he still acknowledges that it exists and considers himself as well us readers (specifically western readers) as implicated subjects in this (Schmid 111). Ultimately, Joe Sacco's introspection not only exposes the colonial undertones present in his work but also showcases his deliberate attempt to disrupt prevailing narratives through a focus on the oral traditions of the Dene community.

Concluding, the discussion above highlights how the multimodal medium of Joe Sacco's *Paying the Land* (2020) frames the Dene crisis through its visual and textual grammar. The next part furthers this discussion to delve deeper into the sociopolitical framing of the Dene crisis to argue that comics as a medium engender socio-political discourse in the selected graphic novel.

4.2.   Interpreting Political Discourse in *Paying the Land* (2020)

In the previous heading, the visual aesthetics of Joe Sacco's graphic novel *Paying the Land* have been explored. What follows here is the necropolitical interpretation of the novel to establish this claim that the novel's multimodal aesthetics engender socio-political discourse in the context of colonialism's impact on Indigenous communities in Canada. For the said purpose, the text is studied in the light of selected postulates of Mbembe and Coulthard's theory to analyse these issues from an indigenous perspective and a way forward to address them.

4.2.1. Framing Political Discourse: Necropolitical Interests of Settler State in *Paying the Land* (2020)

The historical and contemporary experiences of the Dene Indigenous peoples reflect some aspects of the broader concept of necropolitics such as how power structures and policies have influenced their lives and well-being, like forced assimilation policies, the imposition of residential schools, the disruption of their traditional ways of life and subjected them to the conditions of living dead. These policies were part of broader efforts to erase Indigenous cultures, and exert control over Indigenous peoples resulting in the dispossession, exploitation, marginalization and "triple loss" of the target population of their "homes", "political status" and "bodily rights" turning them into what Mbembe terms as "living dead" (21). Mbembe argues that such violence, death and destruction caused to the target population are justified by the laws and policies that govern the political ideology of necropowers. Joe Sacco documents such vile acts of justifying necropolitics on the Dene community by the Canadian Settler state.

The chapter "A Savage Who Can Read" (121) as discussed in the previous section deals with this theme of "residential-school period [which] lasted 150 years, until the mid-1990s, … and the Northwest Territories [had] the Highest Per Capita Number of residential survivors of anywhere in Canada" (128). Sacco lays bare the necropolitical interests of settler society to erase the indigenous culture in the name of welfare. He ironically portrays Canada's first prime minister John Macdonald's idea of social welfare of indigenous children which alternatively unmasks the hegemonic settler policies:

> The child lives with its parents, who are savages… And though he may learn to read and write, his habits and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. Indian children should be withdrawn as much as

possible from the parental influence and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men. (127)

The quote above clearly demonstrates the dehumanisation and othering of indigenous communities at the hands of Canada's government. In the name of civilising the indigenous children, and to serve the discourse of "child welfare system" (128), they were subjected to assimilation within Euro-western norms, and their familial and cultural identities were compromised if not completely erased because their ultimate goal was "assimilation, [and therefore] the government made residential school mandatory for aboriginal children in 1920" (128). The above quote also reflects how the sovereignty of necropowers marked the lives of these necropolitical subjects with a "triple loss" (Mbembe 21) because the assimilation policies deprived them of their homes, their rights over their bodies, and their political identity as well.

Sacco also portrays Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs saying, "I want to get rid of Canada's Department of Indian Affairs: I want to get rid of the Indian problem… Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic…" (128), which is another reference in the novel about the hegemonic policies of Canada which paved the way for the violence that children had to face in the residential schools. The phrase "I want to get rid of the Indian problem" (128) shows the level of contempt and hatred towards the indigenous people, whom they considered as debased and whose existence they urged to wipe away by exercising their authority as a necropolitical sovereign.

Jeanette Schmid and Marina Morgenshtern (2022) study the child welfare discourses in the context of colonisation and white supremacy. They argue that Canadian social work literature highlights how settler colonialism has been attempting to eradicate Indigenous people and culture since the 1800s. This was primarily due to the view of Native parents and their societies as savages. As a result, kids were taken away and exposed to a school system that intended to erase the Indian within them and to indoctrinate them with white, middle-class values, principles, and language. These practices subjected the children to maltreatment and abuse, and they were disconnected from their families and traditions. This led to severe intergenerational trauma, despite Indigenous communities' resilience

against these eradication and assimilation strategies (147–48). This shows that for the Canadian settler state, indigenous communities were a "mortal threat" (Mbembe 18) to their sovereignty. Consequently, they legitimized violence against them, resulting in depriving them of their fundamental rights to home, political status, and control over their bodies, ultimately condemning them to a life no less than that of the living dead.

Sacco reveals the veracity of such dehumanization and othering of indigenous communities further in the novel through his interview with Marie Wilson, a former CBC journalist and one of the three commissioners on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada "which was mandated to gather testimony about the residential school system in 2008 as part of an out-of-court settlement to a class action lawsuit brought against the government by former students" (Sacco 128). She was left completely shaken knowing "the depths of the capability of human depravity [as] schools were used essentially as a weapon for assimilation and acculturation and christianization and their intent was the diminishment of everything that the children… felt they were as individuals and as members of a collective" (128). She tells Sacco that parents were forced and threatened to "surrender their children" and many of the children were considered "orphaned" even when their fathers were alive, only to "be "rounded up" by a priest, an officer of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and/or an Indian agent" (128). This sheds light on the disturbing realities of Canadian residential schools, emphasizing the devastating impact of these schools on the Indigenous children, examining the forced surrender of Indigenous children, and exposing the inherent necropolitics at play in these institutions whose explicit goal was diminishing the identity and collective consciousness of the children.

Sacco documents Margret Jumbo's experience who was living in the bush in Trout Lake when at the age of 8 years she was taken away from her parents forcefully and put in the residential school as "white people had a lot of power" (130). As shown on page 129 in the book Sacco has merged the past and its lingering trauma in the present by placing the talking-head of Margret against the background of her traumatic experience of forceful separation from her family and the isolation she felt at residential school since she knew naught anyone there, nor the English language with whom to converse with anyone. She told Sacco that "every time we tried to speak our language, they always told us AHHH, don't use that language! Don't use devil's language! You're gonna speak English!" (134). Paul Andrew reiterates the same regarding the use of their native language: "One of the

rules [was] that you can't speak your own language [and] the punishment could vary from going to bed early or not as much food, that kind of stuff" (134). Other necropolitical conditions that children had to face at residential schools that aimed to take away their identity were cutting off their hair. Paul Andrew tells Joe Sacco that "for us, our hair is really important. Aboriginal people take care of their hair" (130) but on the very first day at Grollier Hall in Inuvik, Paul says that their hairs were cut by a nun with an electric clipper, they were all made "bald-headed" (131). Comparing his experience in the bush and the residential school, Paul further says:

> In the camp… you're an individual, you're unique, you're important, you've a role. In residential schools there's no individuality… you're given a number, and you're that number. Every piece of clothing that you have is numbered… and bedsheets…almost everything. Hockey equipment. Sporting equipment. If you got mail, for example, instead of 'Paul' it would be 263. It's a part of taking away that personality… You're not particularly anybody or anything. So they're going to have to remake you. That's the process. (133)

This was a deliberate attempt to strip away the identity of the Indigenous children and make them conform to the white European-Canadian culture. It was a way of erasing their culture, language, and identity, replacing it with new beliefs and values, and as Paul Andrew puts it, it was a way to "reinvent us into their image" (135), and for the said purpose "they got us do everything [that] goes against us" (135) and whoever tried to run away had to face scare tactics of "public shaming" (136). At all costs, they were to be "saved" and that was only through the "catholic church" (136). All these acts of sociopolitical oppression are addressed as necropolitical acts on the part of the Canadian government here, which treated the Dene community as a racial and minority group and deprived them of basic human rights and dignity.

4.2.2. Framing Indigenous Resilience and Place-based Indigenous Practices: Resurgence and Grounded Normativity in *Paying the Land* (2020)

Sacco also documents Indigenous resilience by the Dene to resist these hegemonies perpetrated by the settler colonial state of Canada like erasing Dene way of life through residential schools and resource extraction, to signing treaties 8 and 11 to form new land claim agreements to force first Nations to "cede, release and surrender" (60) their authority

over their own territory. As per Coulthard, strategy to counter this sociopolitical oppression is through "normative lifeways and resurgent practices" (179). The rise of resistance movements in the territory, like those spearheaded by the Indian Brotherhood, now the Dene Nation, accounts for this aspect in the novel. The chapter "This Is Our Land, And How Come We Are Not Incharge of It?" (64) portrays such resistance by Dene in the novel. It voices the anger and resentment of various indigenous people and portrays Jim Antonie who in a series of speech bubbles narrates his own point-of-view and of the leaders of native political group Wunk Sheek, "This is our land and how come we are not incharge of it? How come these white people are running the towns and running the north? … They're putting out lines on our land, looking for oil and gas. We're the last people to know" (65). This expresses a strong sentiment of native people's outrage against the exploitation by the government.

Sacco documents this anger towards the Canadian government through his interview of Stephen Kakfwi. Sacco narrates in a textbox that when Kakfwi looked for information about his own people, he found nothing and Kakfwi expresses "it's almost like we didn't exist" (64). Registering his anger Kakfwi further states, "I identified with the anger and the strange detachment you have … being in a country called Canada that … diminished you and dehumanized you to a great extent" (64). Joe Sacco presents this counter-narrative and resistance from Indigenous communities against colonial oppression and exploitation articulated, read and analysed in terms of terms of analysed in terms of necropolitics earlier. This shows the agency of the indigenous communities and highlights their activism against the necropolitical violence inflicted upon them. Community-led initiatives and legal battles are also portrayed as forms of resistance against the dominant sociopolitical discourse such as Paulette et al. v. The Queen (*Paulette et al. v. The Queen - SCC Cases*) and The Berger Inquiry ("The Berger Inquiry"). Amplifying Indigenous voices and showcasing their resilience, the novel challenges the hegemonic narratives that have long marginalised Indigenous perspectives. One such example of this resurgence is found in the "Indian Brotherhood of Northwest Territories, the foremost expression of Dene solidarity and political engagement" (Sacco 66). Read in the light of resurgence politics, these efforts of Indigenous communities aimed to showcase their resistance against colonial erasure and assimilation.

Paying the Land also documents how settlers exploited the land and resources of Dene and reduced their lives to no less than the conditions of the "living dead" (Mbembe 40), at the same time it also documents Dene's hope and what they see as a way forward to deal with their past and present exploitation. Since Dene people have a strong, spiritual connection to their land, an apt way to challenge the capitalist and colonialist state of affairs in Northwest Territories is "grounded normativity" (Coulthard 28). As Joe Sacco has portrayed that land in Dene culture is seen as having a pedagogic function, guiding Dene to connect with both humans and non-human beings in their environment, this worldview is in itself subverting the policies of colonial-capitalist societies where monetary exchange and profit-driven motives often dominate. "Progress to us [Dene] means becoming a wiser person…It means living with the land and nature as close as possible, the pipeline means more white people who will be followed by even more white people. They push Indians aside and take over everything" (69). So, the land of Dene cannot become anti-colonial until it becomes anti-capitalist. And this can only be done through reviving Dene's connection with their land. If Dene's traditional practices or way of life are taken into account, like fishing, hunting, and living off the land, it is not solely about survival or economic gain rather the land holds a deeper significance for them. These traditional Dene practices are a challenge to capitalist values because they prioritize relationships with nature based on reciprocity and ethical coexistence rather than simply exploiting the land for financial gain. This is the same as what Coulthard says to think about land as a "system of reciprocal relations and obligations" (13). This has been described in the novel as ritual "to pray and to pay the land" (50), which means "you give it something … a bullet perhaps, water, tobacco, or tea" "Its like visiting someone" "You bring the land a gift" (50). This crucial aspect of Dene involves treating the land with respect and gratitude. Whenever a person returns to the land, they engage in a ritual of offering something to the land as a way of acknowledging its importance and showing appreciation as Frederick Andrew has been told by the elders: "treat it [the land] gently, not dig holes or make too much of a disturbance" if visiting the land after a long absence. (50), which symbolises a reciprocal relationship where the individual gives back to the land just as the land provides for them. It's like visiting someone's home and bringing a gift to show respect and gratitude.

The final scenes of the graphic novel, in the chapter "The Circle is Closed" (247) feature Eugene Boulanger, a Dene individual, hunting and shooting a caribou, an act that carries deep reverence and respect for the animal and the land. Through this act, Eugene

reconnects with his ancestral traditions and re-establishes his bond with the land. Hunting is not about dominance or sport; it's a way of engaging in a sacred and meaningful connection with nature and honoring the Dene's historical ties to their environment. As a city kid when he visits the Mackenzie mountains and hunts the caribou, he says that he had this "omniscient moment" where he saw himself in the "continuum of [his] ancestry: It was such a feeling of wholeness. I never feel as connected to anything as I have been up there. Connected to the land. Connected to the souls of people who haven't even been born yet. Connected to the souls my ancestors, whose names I don't know but can feel around me in those moments…" (258). This experience indelibly shaped Eugene's understanding of the land, his ancestors, and himself.

Highlighting the importance of land for Dene establishes that grounded normativity as a "place-based foundation of Indigenous decolonial thought and practice," (Coulthard 28) aptly fits to describe Indigenous peoples' connection to their traditional territories and their claims to sovereignty and self-determination based on their relationships with the land. Moreover, Sacco's graphic storytelling portrays the land as a living entity, essential to the sustenance and well-being of Indigenous communities, and challenges the dominant socio-political discourse that often fails to recognize the profound connection between Indigenous peoples and their territories. Furthermore, the graphic novel shows how grounded normativity informs the resistance efforts of Indigenous communities against resource extraction and environmental degradation. The struggle for land rights and protection are rooted in the understanding that the land is not merely a resource to be exploited but a crucial element of Indigenous identity and survival as Edward Jumbo tells Sacco "without the land we cannot be Dene. Without the land, we don't have integrity. We would be a weak people" (200). In this way, Indigenous land rights are both essential and inextricably linked to Indigenous identity and survival.

To conclude, *Paying the Land* highlights the profound spiritual and ethical aspects of Dene culture and their intimate relationship with the land. It challenges the dominant capitalist mindset by promoting values of reciprocity, respect, and sustainable coexistence with the natural world and urging the application of "Indigenous land-connected practices and longstanding experiential knowledge [to] inform and structure our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others over time" (Coulthard 28). The Indigenous concept of relationality thus provides a valuable framework for reconsidering ethical engagement with both the human and the non-human world.

CHAPTER 5

THE AESTHETICS OF MALIK SAJAD'S GRAPHIC NARRATIVE AND THE PROBLEMATIZATION OF SOCIO-POLITICAL VIOLENCE IN KASHMIR

Munnu is a coming-of-age story based on the life of the author himself. As an autobiographical account of Malik Sajad divided into 19 chapters, it recounts the autographer's early years as a young boy growing up in Batamaloo, in the 1990s of Kashmir, followed by his adolescence and development as a political cartoonist and a graphic novelist. With the personal account of Munnu in the novel, Sajad intertwines the sociopolitical milieu of Kashmir which gives insight into the everyday lives of Kashmiris facing relentless oppression at the hands of the Indian authorities in the form of crackdowns, curfews, frisking, shootings, mass-killings, and surveillance as an everyday practice in Kashmir. Sajad with a tinge of humour and irony in his graphic novel critiques the power structures that perpetrate violence in the valley. This thesis is devoted to Sajad's portrayal of sociopolitical violence using multimodal graphic elements specific to the medium of comics.

5.1. Multi-modal Aesthetics Employed in *Munnu* (2015)

Malik Sajad has employed a number of graphic elements in *Munnu* to problematize the issue of sociopolitical violence in Kashmir. What follows here is the critical evaluation of these visual-verbal techniques in light of Schmid postulation regarding graphic narratives as discussed earlier in the theoretical framework section.

5.1.1. Material Framing of *Munnu* (2015) and Readerly Expectations

Schmid proposes that the material framing of a graphic narrative provides the reader with clues and information about the narrative such that the paratexts "implicitly evoke frames concerning the represented events, instructing the reader in how to make sense of them" (65). In the same way, the material framing of *Munnu* also suggests a connection between the Kashmiri crisis documented in the graphic narrative and its paratextual elements. It evokes frames concerning the necropolitical violence in the besieged land of Kashmir as

well as Kashmiri dissent through its indigeneity. The cover illustration of the novel is in the Mughal art-style, depicting a window frame set against a dark background. It also refers to the intricate walnut woodwork practiced by Munnu's father and other Kashmiri craftsmen.   In   the   center   of   the   frame   is   a
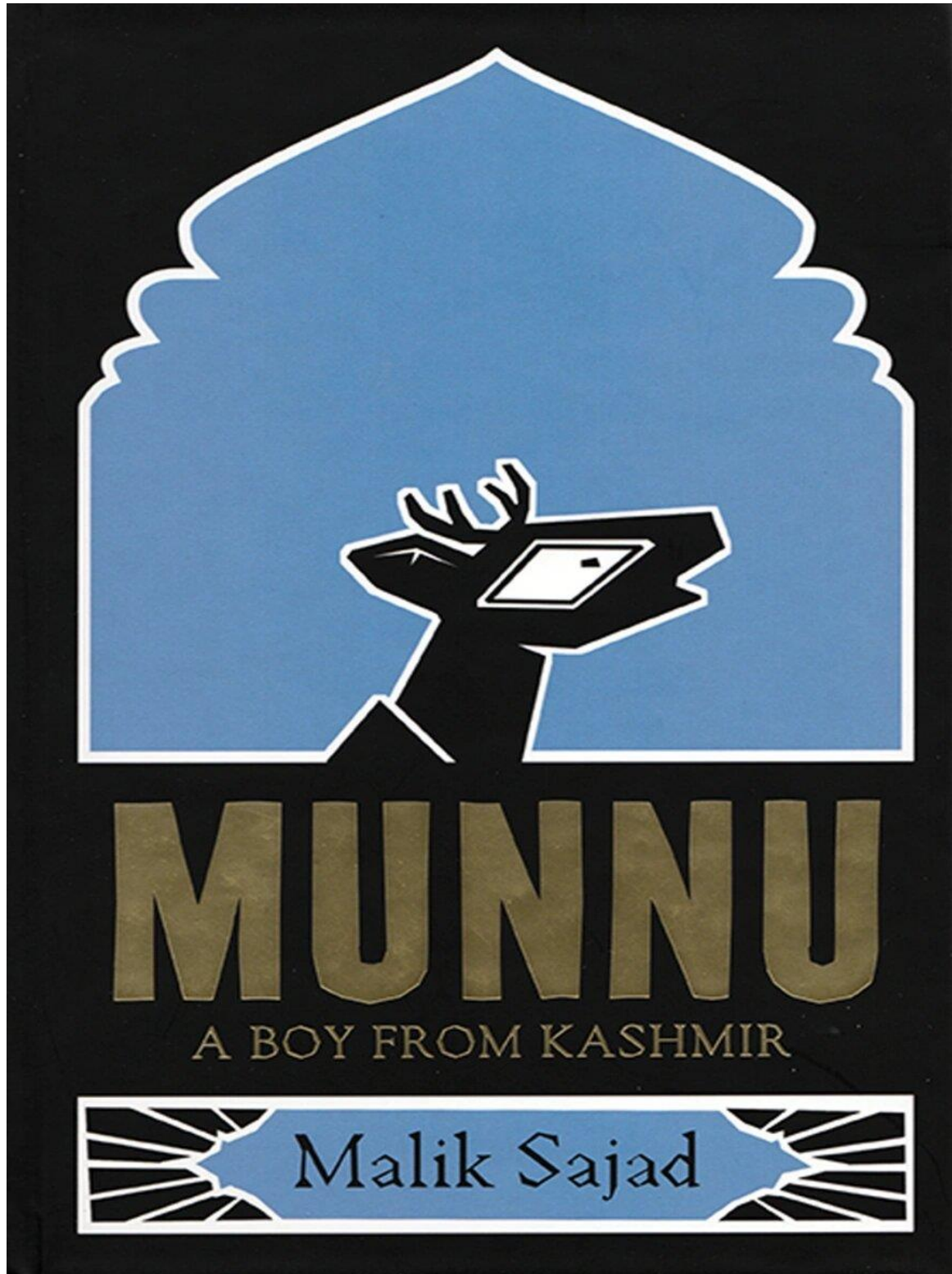

Fig. 5.1. Malik Sajad, front cover

picture of a hangul deer, with diamond-shaped eyes that appear to be wide open in fear. Since the hangul deer is the national animal of Kashmir, its depiction on the cover reflects the plight of the Kashmiris and their symbolic anthropomorphism as they have become an endangered species due to the ongoing conflict in the region. Reporting his aesthetic choice of using humanoid Kashmiris Sajad tells in his Interview with Francesca Recchia (2015) that the front page of Greater Kashmir – the English-language newspaper where Sajad had been publishing his cartoons since the age of 14 – featured an article highlighting the risk of extinction for the hangul deer, alongside the list of those who had died in clashes with the Indian army the day before. In the midst of the conflict, death had become an all-too-common occurrence, and Kashmiris themselves had become an endangered species, just like the local deer which prompted him to represent Kashmiris as Hanguls (Recchia). This is the reflection of "the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations" (Mbembe 14) in Kashmir where the native Kashmiris are being devalued, exploited, destroyed, and targeted for elimination and subjugation. Therefore, the choice to depict Kashmiris as hanguls highlights the shared vulnerability and marginalization experienced by both the indigenous species and the human inhabitants of the region.

As per Schmid "the visuality of the title lettering and placement within the layout constitutes a meaningful aspect of the graphic narrative book" (73). When it comes to *Munnu*, the title is emboldened in golden (gold embossed print) color placed right below the window frame of hangul deer. This shows that it is a personal story of Munnu; a common nickname in South Asia. But the titular phrase right after the colon "A Boy from Kashmir" takes the reader out of complacency, that it is not a normal story of any boy named Munnu, rather it is of a boy who belongs to Kashmir. So, the descriptor Kashmir here gives insight into the narrative of the book as "the thematic descriptive function of titles [is] to identify a particular crisis" (73), and sets a frame that the Kashmiri story is going to be told from the perspective of a boy named Munnu. The title here clearly indicates "temporarily and geographically" (73) that it is going to be the Kashmiri crisis that is discussed in the narrative of the book. Another interpretation of this sub-title can be that it is an outright and blatant dismissal of the nation-state of India, which reflects resurgence on the part of Kashmiris, as Munnu does not belong to India, rather he belongs to Kashmir and India has only oppressively occupied this area which belongs to the Kashmiris in the first place. Moreover, the single account also emphasizes the focus on witnessing, such that

this account is a testimony to the oppressive conditions in Kashmir. The cover and the title of *Munnu* also stand in dialogue with the narrative content inside the book which again reinforces what Schmid states that "[t]and subtitles are crucial for … informing the reader about content" (73). When Munnu's publisher asks him to name his graphic novel on Kashmir using "popular terminology" such as "Kashmiri Intifada" for "international audience to understand" his story, Munnu resists it (333). According to Munnu, the world "should know Kashmir as it is, not through a generalizing lens of intifada" (333) because it would then, as Sarkar (2018) puts it, reduce the political struggle of Kashmir to a generic "Islamic rebellion" (108). The cover and the title subvert it and reinforce that the Kashmiri cause is unique and Kashmiri stories should have a global reach in their entirety, not by merging and reducing them to Islamic cause only to exoticize them for Western audiences which again aligns with Schmid's postulation that when authors use thematic descriptive titles, they are implying that their work is a representation of a particular subject matter in its entirety, (even though they may not be able to cover the entirety of it due to inevitable limitations) and such titles give an exaggerated impression of an event, making it more important and influential (74). So, the material framing here serves as a form of resistance to the necropolitics of India, illustrating the native Kashmiris' resistance against the loss of their political status, which the necropolitical state of India intends to deprive them of.

The author's name Malik Sajad written at the end corresponds in color with the wooden frame above which pictures the hangul. The titular phrase in-between suggests that the boy from Kashmir is Malik Sajad or Munnu which in turn gives the genre indication that it is an autobiographical text. So, the paratext here communicates genre indication as Schmid says that "[t]itles and subtitles are crucial for marking genre and informing the reader about content" and the titular phrase and the cover illustration offer a "semantic potential" (78) and induce an emotional response to the Kashmiri crisis and set a particular mood of the story. In conclusion, the material framing of *Munnu* can be assumed to be the first necroframe that the reader encounters with, offering valuable insights into the necropolitical situation in Kashmir as documented in this graphic novel format.

5.1.2. Visual Framing in *Munnu* (2015): Drawing Style and Page Layout

Drawing style "defines the appearance of the represented events contained within" (Schmid 128), Malik Sajjad employs an abstract, cartooning drawing style in *Munnu* through which he frames the representation of sociopolitical violence perpetrated in Kashmir valley. Besides serving as a genre indicator, it also serves as an "intertextual reference to fine art" (123). The drawing style in *Munnu* follows the traditional Kashmiri woodcut pattern. The illustrations are white and black in color. Akhila Narayanan (2021) relates this style to the "German woodcutting (popular during the European expressionism) with sharp angular strokes" (4796). The cartooning characters are also an intertextual reference to Art Spiegelman's Maus who used hybrid animal-human form portraying his characters as cats, mouse, and pigs. The same way, Sajad has used bipedal anthropomorphized representation of Kashmiris as hangul deer. The abstract representation of Kashmiris is in contrast to the caricatured representations of Indians and foreigners in the novel. This alignment of Kashmiris with a species on the brink of extinction not only brings to the fore the precarious situation of Kashmiris and their habitat but also highlights the abuse of power that characterizes those portrayed as human beings. According to Schmid, nonfiction graphic narratives that use abstract representations to portray real-world events still accurately reflect the truth. Cartooning in autobiographical comics serves as a "form of realism by capturing an underlying truth through abstract graphic representation" (Schmid 130). Such graphic representations are deliberate choices of artists, and it can be inferred that such a characterization in Kashmiri context is doubly performative. On one hand, it represents the dehumanization and othering of Kashmiris and on the other hand, it represents Kashmiris as an indigenous community who are deeply connected with the land and the environment and both the human and nonhuman species are getting affected by the conflict on the land.

The arrangement of different panels on a comics page is an essential element of visual framing, as it helps to create the overall meaning of the page. The relationship between panels is integral in conveying the story and establishing the narrative (Schmid 174). The panel arrangement is mostly regular in *Munnu*. There are no bleed or splash pages, which means it follows the traditional narrative technique of comics sequenced with panels and gutters, reflecting that violence is an everyday encounter with Kashmiris. The panel layout is disrupted only to represent the unpredictability of chaotic situations that break this normal violence and exceed it, fracturing the lives of Kashmiris even more.

Moreover, the carefully crafted panel compositions reflect the trauma, emotions, and resilience of the characters, which direct the reader's gaze and evoke a frame of violence and make the readers a witness to it. Moreover, the visual framings of Munnu also involve the graphic showing of the onomatopoeic sounds. For instance, in the chapter "Ink and Orange'" Sajad portrays a scene of shooting by the Indian Army. The initial panel as well as the fourth and the last one shows the onomatopoeic sound of the gunshots "BANG" (100). As Munnu's family is running for their lives, his grandfather, Abba, hits a tree and the sound of banging the tree's "thud" and his painful cry "ouuuuch" has been graphically presented by Sajad. While speech balloons in the same scene also include jagged balloons which show their shrieking loud address to each other to save their lives (100). Likewise in the second last chapter, while Munnu is loitering alone on an inky night, he stumbles upon a menacing pack of stray dogs, and runs for his life. Sajad graphically shows the barking sounds of dogs in the panels in the form of graphic writing. Again, Munnu's dialogue in this scene in the jagged balloon which shows the words "HELP! HELP! PLEASE SAVE ME THIS ONCE" written in big bold letters which reflect the intensity of his cries for help (335). These add a dynamic and sensory dimension to the visual storytelling, enhancing the reader's immersion in the narrative and visually complimenting the sound it represents.

5.1.3. Narrative Framing in *Munnu* (2015)

As discussed in the theoretical framework, narrative framing is the way a story is told, its narrative structure, "beginning and ending", the order of events and how arguments influence readers' preconceptions about the story (Schmid 201). In *Munnu*, each chapter chronicles a different stage in the protagonist's life, with the narrative unfolding in a linear fashion. In the latter parts of the narrative, Munnu's experiences are presented with temporal arrangements that blur the lines between dreamscapes, reality and his memory. Moreover, the experiences of people outside of Munnu's immediate family are also voiced and brought to the forefront, allowing for a deeper understanding of the sociopolitical violence in Kashmir.
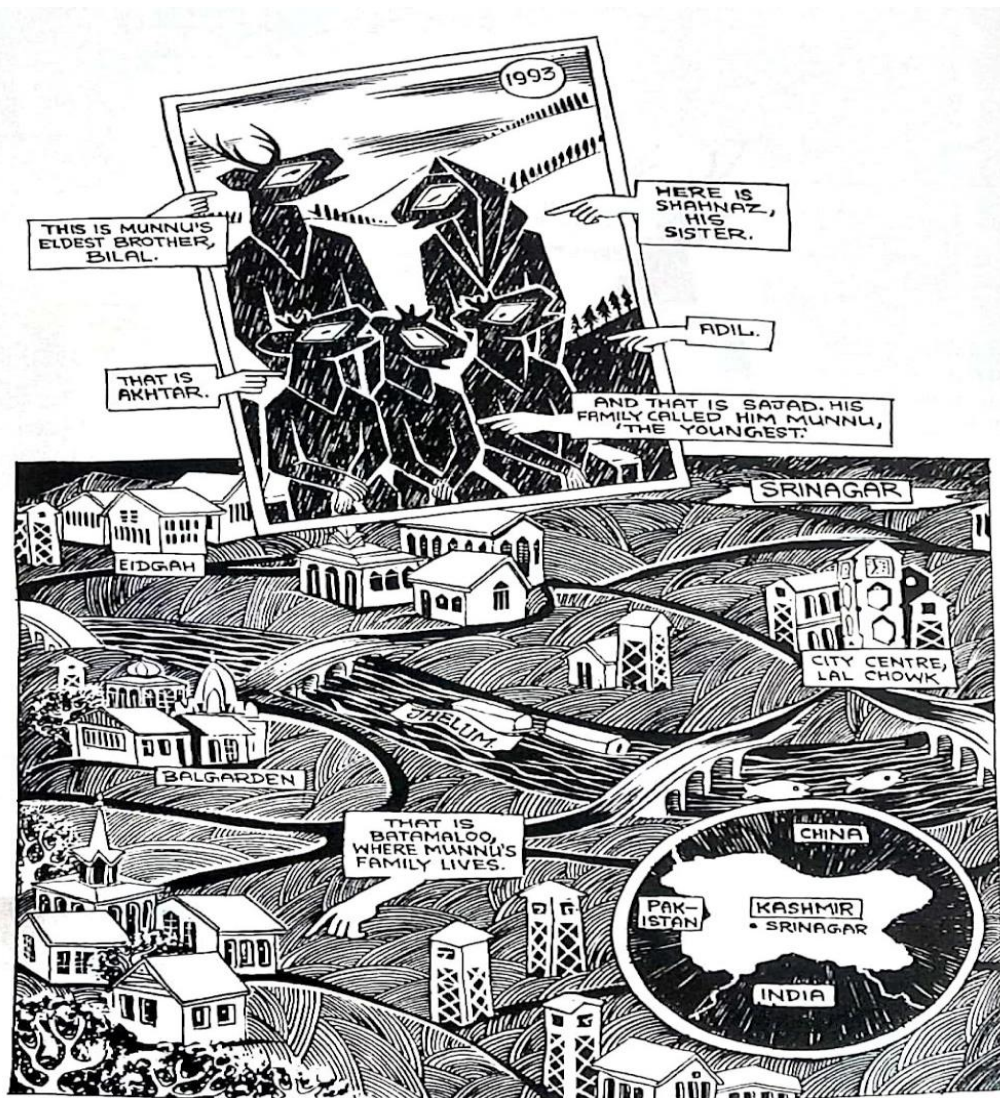
Fig. 5.2. Malik Sajad, 2

The very first chapter "Family Photo" introduces the characters and sets the time frame of the story i.e., 1993. The chapter depicts a photo frame that captures the protagonist "Sajad" a.k.a "Munnu" and his siblings "Shahnaz, Bilal, Akhtar, Adil", with fingers from the outside intruding the frame and pinning down their identities as "papa Gulya and mother Haseena" (2-3) This is meant to illustrate how the oppressive state of India has a constant surveillance on Kashmiris, restricting their basic human rights. The family photo is foregrounded against the pictorial map featuring captions for different locations such as Eidgah, City Centre Lal Chowk, Balgarden, Srinagar, river Jhelum, and Batamaloo, which is Munnu's place of residence as well as numerous army towers. These convey a sense of constant surveillance by the state regime without Sajad needing to use any words, simply by depicting these army towers scattered across the map. So, the chapter frames how Kashmiris are living under the heavily militarized conditions facing state oppression in

their everyday lives. which nonetheless is necropolitical in nature where "daily life [of citizens] is militarized" (Mbembe 30). The last chapter of the novel concludes the narrative with the narrator Sajad's self-reflexive musings while portraying *Munnu* loitering in the dark of the night. The narrative text box states: "Munnu never sought any meaning from his scribbling. But after growing into Sajad, he used it to criticise, to express, to expose, to seek revenge" against the sociopolitical violence of the state perpetrated on Kashmiris (335). But the very last scene is framed such that it depicts another dehumanizing act of violence, a woman being assaulted by Kashmiri men, which leaves the ending frustrating for the readers as the effect of ongoing violence in Kashmir lingers on even after the novel ends.

Midway through the novel, Sajad includes the chapter "Footnotes" (190) which narrates Kashmiri history full of violence and brutality and covers the period from the 12th–13th century Hindu and Buddhist settlements to the India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir in the 1990s. This is a significant shift in the narrative framing in *Munnu* before Sajad returns to the main narrative where the subsequent chapters are characterized by continuous back and forth movements between various episodes in Munnu's life. The diversion introduced by this chapter adds a unique structural element to the story. On prima facie, it seems that this chapter is ancillary to the rest of the chapters in the novel, but it serves a significant function. The inclusion of the metaphoric title of "Footnotes" (190) in the narrative depicts the treatment of historically marginalized massacres in official history writings and collective remembrances of Kashmir as Kavita Bahnot states that *Munnu* is "a remarkable and important graphic novel, [which] offers an alternative history of Indian administered Kashmir" (Bhanot). It is a similar approach adopted by Joe Sacco in whose graphic novel *Footnotes in Gaza* (2009), the narrator of the chapter titled "Footnotes" says: "And the footnotes . . . well, like most footnotes, they dropped to the bottom of history's pages, where they barely hang on. History can do without its footnotes. Footnotes are inessential at best; at worst they trip up the greater narrative" (8-9). Hillary Chute explains in her work *Disaster Drawn: Visual Witnesses, Comics, and Documentary Form* (2016) that these unsettling tactics can be used to allow people to "bear witness" by "defamiliarizing standard or received images of history while yet aiming to communicate and circulate [personal and public stories from within the conflict zone that are often elided in official history and media reports]" (4). This way, *Munnu* challenges the dominant historical discourse and questions the accuracy and completeness of collective

remembrances, and deliberately provokes the readers to reevaluate the way they understand and remember the tragic events in the history of Kashmir offering absolution to the readers through reading it.

In summary, it is discussed how *Munnu*, as a graphic novel, uses its visual elements to portray the Kashmiri crisis. The following part delves deeper into the discussion on the sociopolitical violence in Kashmir in the light of the selected political theories.

5.2. Analysis of Socio-political Violence in *Munnu* (2015)

As the discussion on multimodal aesthetics employed by Malik Sajad in *Munnu* lays the foundation as to how socio-political violence is framed in the graphic novel, this part of analysis builds upon this discussion to read the novel in the light of selected postulates of political theories. Malik Sajad frames Kashmir as a necropolitical locale where violence is an endemic feature of the Kashmiri landscape and where "[w]hether it's 37 degrees or -10 degrees here, you'll always see the Indian army tirelessly keeping watch on the streets!" (214). In order to assert territorial sovereignty in Kashmir, the Indian state violates human rights and militarizes public spaces in Kashmir through necropolitics (Hassan and Osuri qtd. in Umer Jan 63). So, violence is rampant in the valley, be it social or political. Ironically, in each case, it is the Kashmiris who are at the receiving end, as violence is intricately woven into the fabric of their everyday lives and subjects them to the conditions of "living dead" (Mbembe 40). Instances from the novel are discussed as follows to shed light on sociopolitical violence in Kashmir read through the lens of necropolitics.

5.2.1. Framing Kashmir as a Necropolitical Locale: Instances of Sociopolitical Violence in *Munnu* (2015)

According to Achille Mbembe, the utilization of the military by necropowers is a key strategy for suppressing the target population (25). By subjecting civilians to the relentless coercion and aggression of the state-controlled military, necropowers instil a constant fear of violent repercussions and force obedience from the civilian population. Mbembe refers to this phenomenon as the "daily life is militarized" (30) highlighting the overwhelming power wielded by the military and the severe restrictions it imposes on everyday life.

In *Munnu*, violence and brutality perpetrated by the military account for the most common instances of necropolitical violence in Kashmir. In one of the instances in the

novel, during one of the "crackdown identification parade," the Indian army apprehends Mustafa and one other Kashmiri man as militants, and they end up being fatally "shot in the face" by the army (Sajad 38). Taking this brutality to an even more violent level, their lifeless bodies are dragged through the streets, "until there was no skin left on their faces" (38). The visual representation of the whole scene in panel-panel-transition frames the necropower perpetrated in the Kashmir valley which reinforces how graphic novels as a medium represent the Kashmir crisis. In the last rectangular panel, the fallen deer occupies a substantial visual area in the forefront, while the military vehicle is situated in the middle ground. Such a framing directs attention towards the black deer against a predominantly white background. Consequently, this panel becomes a distinct segment in which the visual storytelling within the graphic novel draws the reader into the role of an eyewitness to the conflict, compelling the reader to adopt a perspective. As a result, the visual imagery on the page evokes the cognitive frame in the mind of the reader, and the accompanying voice-over "their bodies were then dragged through the streets of Batamaloo, until there was no skin left on their faces" (38) further engages the reader as an observer and a witness rather than a mere reader to the violence perpetrated in the valley of Kashmir. Sajad recounts another harrowing event like this where the military forces discovered militants hiding in the ceiling and mercilessly opened fire on them. As he illustrates and describes it, the ceiling "rained blood" as the army "peppered the ceiling with bullets" (80). These are telling examples of how the Indian state exercises its sovereignty in Kashmir and "dictate[s] who may live and who must die" (Mbembe 11-12). Therefore, it is clear that the Indian state exercises its sovereignty in Kashmir with extreme brutality and absolute disregard for Kashmiri's lives.

The novel also highlights Kashmiri genocide as an example of the necropolitical violence in Kashmir which again shows Indian state's control over "mortality" (Mbembe 11-12) in Indian Occupied Kashmir. Sajad visually depicts the incidents of "spring of 2010 [which were] stained by the death of Kashmir's youngest generation" (321). Documenting the grievous scenario of that time, the novel tells through the voice-over that approximately "120 civilians, mostly youths in their late teens and early twenties, fell victim to gunfire within a mere span of three months" (320). In addition to these tragic deaths borne by the victims of gunfire, "over two thousand individuals suffered injuries, leaving many of them permanently incapacitated" (320). Moreover, how mainstream media normalizes this necropolitical violence to reinforce the dominant narrative is also being portrayed by Sajad

here. A military personal is shown giving his perspective on television, stating "Our approach involves aiming at the lower limbs to disperse the demonstrators; however, the issue arises with youngsters being of shorter stature, causing our bullets to strike their heads... They are not engaged in peaceful protest, but rather identified as provocative terrorists" (320). This shows the callousness and insensitivity of the military violence in the valley of Kashmir. This also reflects that the military takes these necropolitical subjects as a threat to their sovereignty. Necropowers engage in the "destruction of human bodies and populations" (14). Therefore, necropowers take the extermination of the target population as a justified course of action. In regards to this event that Sajad visually documented in his novel, Wajahat Ahmad who is a lecturer of Peace Studies at the Islamic University of Science & Technology in Indian-administered-Kashmir, writes in his article, "Repression and Resistance in Kashmir" (2011), that in the Kashmiri summer of 2010, military forces violently quelled the mass protests, killing around 110 people and injuring about 2,500. This ruthless attempt to subdue the population was followed by a huge wave of arrests and torture of around 5,000 protesters, mainly students. Since then, most of them have been freed, however, they still are closely monitored and have to deal with court procedures. Amnesty International report, Lawless Law, estimates that between 8,000 and 20,000 individuals have been arrested under the Jammu & Kashmir Public Safety Act over the past two decades, with 322 of them detained between January and September 2010 (Wajahat). This research supplements the veracity of necropolitical violence portrayed by Sajad in the events documented in his novel. This also serves to highlight "the murderous state" of Indian Occupied Kashmir where the military acts as the executioner hired by the autocratic Indian government (Mbembe 17). Moreover, this necropolitical state takes Kashmiris as condemned individuals deemed as one of "the enemies of the state" whose life is worth disposing of (19). This shows the necropolitical power of the state over the indigenous Kashmiris.

This necropolitical violence can be traced further in the cultural genocide to which Kashmiris are being subjected as documented in the graphic novel. Cultural genocide is arguably one of the most subtle and impactful mechanisms of necropolitics, facilitating death through civil processes of violence, removal, and racial segregation, (Lee). Munnu's experience in "Crescent Educational Institute" (87) accounts for this necropolitical violence where education is weaponized to erase Kashmiri culture, language and identity. Munnu narrates that the students were not allowed to speak their native language Kashmiri. In a

series of four panels, Sajad depicts such a scene from his school. When one of the students answers his roll call in Kashmiri, the teacher is seen shouting in the next panel. Her dialogue in the jagged speech-balloon tells how offended she feels and in the very next panel, she is seen brutally punishing the student for being "uncivilized" (88). The text box voices "Discipline was mandatory" and that "the rules were written on the black board hung on every wall" (88). The lettering on the black board which stated the rules was "Speaking in Kashmiri is strictly prohibited" (88). This was indeed the civilization discourse that was being used by the teachers in schools to eliminate the use of Kashmiri language, and consequently the Kashmiri identity from within the Kashmiri students. Not only this, but the conditions of the classrooms Sajad depicted in the graphic novel are also questionable. Firstly, they "stank of rotten flour and fish" and secondly their walls were covered with "Indian newspapers bearing pictures of sleepy-looking, half-naked bollywood ladies" (113). These images and the poor conditions of classrooms indicate the abysmal conditions of the schools Sajad depicts in the graphic novel.

Moreover, "students became the victims of the torture techniques the teachers had learned from the army in the crackdown parades, for their untidy or incomplete homework" (115). So, the schools also became a symbol of institutionalized violence. The scene of Munnu being punished by the teacher is one such example (117-118). Since Munnu's haircut was not proper and he spoke to his headmaster in Kashmiri, he got brutally beaten by the headmaster. He received slaps, kicks, and punches until "[he] threw up with pain and sorrow and passed out" (118). These violent punishments were indeed an attempt to wipe out the Kashmiri identity, culture and language from within the Kashmiri children and its effect are seen in later life of Munnu when he confesses the editor of a magazine who asks him to make a graphic novel on Kashmir that he is unable to read or write in Kashmiri language. He says: "My English sucks and I can't read or write Kashmiri thanks to our teachers "civilizing" us. They prohibited Kashmiri in our school, forced us to speak in Urdu and made us write in English. Now I'm Jack of all trades" (215). Hence, the schools acted as a symbol of institutionalized violence, which were ultimately meant to displace Kashmiri identity and culture from within the children and which had effect on the later lives of Kashmirs as is the case with Munnu here.

Necropolitics offers a useful tool for the analysis of gendered violence (Islekel) and *Munnu* documents such instances which show that gendered violence accounts for another

necropolitical act on the part of Indian forces in Kashmir where Kashmiri women were deprived of their "bodily rights" (Mbembe 21) and were subjected to abuse and assault. For instance, Sajad accounts a harrowing incident that unfolds within the confines of the prison where Ajaz who was picked out from the crackdown parade and taken to the prison, is killed while "defending the honour of his sister" (65). During her visit to the prison Ajaz's sister is subjected to a horrific act of sexual assault by the "devils" in the name of "frisking" (65). The third panel of this heart-wrenching event portrays this graphic scene with the girl's piercing screams for help reverberating through the air and shown through the graphic writing "Brother!" (65). Locked behind bars, other Kashmiris who witnessed this heinous act unfold before their eyes can also be seen consumed by anger, frustration, and a sense of powerlessness, their voices rising in unison, shown by the jagged speech balloons, denouncing the oppressive Indian forces calling out them as dogs, registering their collective outrage. Nonetheless, this episode shows that Indian forces had made the "social existence" of Kashmiris so dire that they were literally subjected to the conditions of "living dead" (Mbembe 40), deprived of their basic human rights.

The above discussed instances from the novel, as well as and many other episodes of necropolitical conditions are documented in *Munnu* and the narrative is replete with sketches of the dead Kashmiris, the unidentified mass graves, tombstones as well as mass mournings. (5, 27, 34-7, 50, 56, 63-4, 66-7, 183-184, 243, 201, 203, 233-34, 320 etc.). All of these show India's ruthless approach to maintaining its territorial integrity and necropolitical sovereignty. Munnu's dialogue "Kashmir's a prison, you know" (Sajad 292) aptly describes Kashmir as a necropolitical locale where:

> necropolitics is experienced by the local population in … their everyday lived experience of collective and individual immobilisation, exclusivity, besiegement or blockade, loss of access to shared and private spaces, as well as through widespread temporal death, debilitation, censorship, confiscation of property, appropriation of land, extraction of resources, restructuring of indigenous spatial relations, infrastructure obliteration, detentions, sexual violence, and exposure to torture and other forms of systematic abuse (Ahmad 2013; Bukhari 2019; Waheed 2020). (Jan 63–64)

The quote above gives the veracity to the few instances of necropolitics discussed from the novel, and to sum up, *Munnu,* as a graphic novel is reflective of the sociopolitical violence

and systematic human rights abuse in the Kashmir and aptly portrays it as a necropolitical locale.

5.2.2. Confronting Necropolitics: Frames of Resurgence and Grounded Normativity in *Munnu* (2015)

Munnu also portrays instances of active resistance, resilience, and acts of defiance that demonstrate the determination of Kashmiri civilians in the face of oppressive military occupation and surveillance. This way *Munnu* documents the resurgence practices on the part of Kashmiris to assert their right to self-determination and political autonomy, and to challenge the narrative of subjugation imposed by the occupying forces. According to Coulthard, these "acts of resistance," are "premised on self-actualization, direct action, and the resurgence of cultural practice" (24) and lead to disrupt the existing "power structures" and demand "systemic change" (39). These acts of resistance fuel from the emotions of collective anger and resistance against the oppressive regimes

The first and foremost instances of such acts of resistance in the novel are the scenes of street protests where Kashmiris are seen raising their voice against injustice and demanding their rights. For instance, in the context of the 2008 Amarnath land transfer controversy, *Munnu* narrates and graphically shows the resentment against "Indian occupation" when the government transferred "90 acres of greenbelt land" to Hindu shrine board to accommodate annual Amarnath pilgrims" (279). In response to this, "hundreds of thousands of Kashmiris … hand in hand, marching from one corner of the valley to another, seeking salvation from the Indian army" forced the government to rescind the order (279). Although Kashmiris wanted "a peaceful solution" but they were again subjected to necropolitics of the state in the form of "indiscriminate shootings, killings, curfews with shoot at sight" (280). But this event shows Kashmiris' resurgence towards the Indian government to assert their right to their land. Not only this, but the narrative of *Munnu* is replete with Kashmiri' resilience to claim their right for self-determination. The anger and resentment that fuels the resurgence in Kashmiris are incorporated by Sajad in his graphic novel. Repeatedly Kashmiris are seen raising these slogans in the novel amid their protests, or collective mournings on the deaths of martyrs: "We want freedom" (8), "Azaadi! Azaadi!" (272), "No India! No Pakistan! We want freedom!" (279), "Get out India" (272), "India out!" (279), "Freedom is our birth right" (280), "Indian dogs get out" (304), "we want Justice" (300), "Let Kashmir decide their own future" (203). This angst and

emotional turbulence of the Kashmiri people symbolize their collective resilience and determination, exemplifying their resurgence practices in the face of necropolitical violence and the underlying structures of oppression that the Kashmiri people have to endure, such as militarization and surveillance. The novel also serves as a consciousness-raising and indigenous pathway and resurgence as Munnu asserts in the novel "Kashmir isn't disputed. It's an occupation! It doesn't belong to India or Pakistan. I was born and live in Kashmir, and I want independenc"e. (186) which gives insight on Indigenous Kashmiri understandings of justice over the contemporary political debate on Kashmir. Sajad's graphic novel *Munnu* itself gives insight on how Indigenous understandings of justice can inform and reshape contemporary political debate on Kashmir which is an aspect of Coulthard's concept of grounded normativity. *Munnu* serves as a cultural production of Kashmiri literature and a way for the people of Kashmir to assert their identity in the face of oppressive Indian politics. It is a source of indigenous knowledge which expresses feelings of resistance towards oppressive necropolitical government of India and acts as a sight of communal strength and solidarity.

Munnu also shows the role of literature and art in expressing resistance as *Munnu* narrates that he used his art "to criticise, to express, to expose, to seek revenge" (335). His political cartoons were a weapon against the sociopolitical violence in Kashmir and through his art he participated in the collective resistance of Kashmirs against human rights abuse they face. For instance, on the Republic Day, Munnu depicts the Indian army as a fierce bear gripping an AK-47 in his newspaper cartoon, while on Independence Day, as a soldier with crutches offering a salute to the Indian flag (161-177). These and many more instances in the novel are reflective of Munnu's resistance against the Indian occupation of Kashmir as Mark LeVine writes: "Art is especially important where civil society has little space for protest or to otherwise challenge the power of repressive regimes" (1277). By showcasing these instances of resistance, the novel serves as a powerful form of protest and criticism.

The novel also argues that a peaceful future for Kashmir is achievable, only if the people of Kashmir take the initiative to rebuild the region themselves. By establishing local agencies and collaborating with local resources, both human and nonhuman, the people of Kashmir can begin to rebuild their lives and their communities without having to wait for a diplomatic-political resolution to the conflict as Sajad puts it: "How can one expect justice from the gallows of Injustice?" (207) and when it is obvious that "India [does not] include

us [Kashmiris] in the Indo-Pak talks? They refuse to accept Kashmir as an international dispute!" and consider it their "internal affair" and want to solve it "within the bounds of Indian constitution" only (209). Therefore, bottom-up rehabilitation remains the only powerful tool in creating a future of peace and sustainability in Kashmir.

Munnu's art form and the narrative content in the novel uses the "place-based practices and associated forms of knowledge" (Coulthard 60) in the form of the local materials such as wood blocks, ink and paper, chinar leaves etc. In the first chapter of the novel, Munnu is portrayed as learning techniques of woodblock printing and drawing from his artisan father who "carved embroidery designs on walnut wood blocks" (Sajad 5). He learns to draw chinar branches to fill in the empty spaces with "Raisposh" in paisley designs on the wood blocks and the "fish scales," like the "rays of the sun" (5). This is the transfer of indigenous knowledge and land practices seen as "normative lifeways" by Coulthard that can dislodge the necropolitical oppression faced by the Kashmiris. Binish Ahmed in her article "Decolonizing Policy Research as Restorative Research Justice: Applying an Indigenous Policy Research Framework (IPRF)" (2023) also highlights the importance of land for Kashmiri people stating that "[i]n Kashmiri, people say the land feeds us, shelters us, and takes care of us. Kashmiri people regard themselves as the gardeners and stewards of mother earth, traditionally a deep relationship of reciprocity rather than a capitalist relationship of property that revolves around extraction" (12). This reinforces the argument that land-based indigenous practices hold importance for Kashmiris. In another instance, Munnu describes the old Srinagar city he visits with his father: "[t]he old city looked like an extension of the chinar branches. Each house had doors and windows decorated with paisley and chinar woodcarving" (Sajad 28). The pictorial map drawn on the woodblock in the first chapter also includes the fishes, the lands, the trees, the woodcarvings which define the land of Kashmir as a "system of reciprocal relations and obligations" (13) and how it teaches them to "lives in relation to one another and [their] surroundings in a respectful, nondominating and nonexploitative way" (60) unlike Indians who only exploited the land of Kashmir as Munnu states "Kashmir generates electricity for India, yet we Kashmiris are deprived of it" (148) and in return what they give back to the land of Kashmir and its people are mere violence and bloodshed and who have made it "[a] never-ending purgatory walled by the tall mountains, borders and minefields (206). Thus, the pictorial map serves as a reminder of the lost balance between humans and nature in Kashmir and serves as a reminder of the need to restore it.

The novel portrays another instance of the relationship between land and people of Kashmir and their indigenous culture and knowledge when, at the gathering to honor Ajaz's life, the priest Peer Sahib tells the story of the pomegranate tree to Ajaz's parents and the other attendees. The dreamscape shows the tree's roots winding around Ajaz's body, as if providing a protective cocoon. The image signified how the juice of the pomegranate tree, as well as the connections between humans, animals, plants, and the earth, can sustain the wronged and the dead in life, death, and beyond. So, it is only this indigeneity that can empower Kashmiri community with local creative cultures and practices, and salvage their own lives and the non-human life forms that Sajad portrays in the novel such as hangul deers and dogs "quotidian, ordinary and material features of interspecies cohabitation" (Baishya 5) and rest of the landscape of Kashmir as Sajad puts it that it is putting themselves in illusion by believing that "someone will come and rescue them after reading their stories" (214) and Sarkar also writes in her article that "[t]here can be no waiting for a political-diplomatic solution – for the Indian occupation to be removed first, for peace to be announced, and then start the work of healing the conflict zone" (106). That is why Sajad states in the novel, "I think it's the ordinary people of Kashmir who need to know about Kashmir" (213). This statement highlights the importance of raising awareness among the general populace about the ongoing conflict and the complexities of the situation. By emphasizing the relevance of this information to the ordinary people, Sajad underscores the urgency of addressing the occupation and working towards healing the conflict zone.

In conclusion, *Munnu* explores necropolitics and sociopolitical violence through multiple episodes, as well as providing strategies for coping with this violence. This way, it creates a space of conflict that encourages an understanding of self and other, as well as a practice of cooperation and care in the present, rather than relying on top-down plans from the authorities for peace and restoration and "[l]et Kashmir decide their own future" (203). At this point, the text of *Munnu* resembles *Paying the Land* as both see the solution to the problems of Kashmiris and the Dene based on normative lifeways and land-based knowledge and practices.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This chapter sums up the discussion of this thesis pointing out its key findings and answering its research questions. The critical discussion in chapter 2, 4 and 5 answers research question no. 1. The discussion entails that graphic narratives play a significant and multifaceted role in highlighting and disseminating important global issues. As an effective verbal-visual medium, they act as a precursor for knowledge and understanding, presenting global issues in a visually engaging and accessible manner. The comic critique in chapter 2 (heading 2.1) suggests that graphic narratives can be inherently political and ideological, and they often challenge existing power structures and dominant discourses such as systems of authority, capitalism, patriarchy, and white supremacy, to name a few, shedding light on the complex interplay of these forces in global contexts. Consequently, they offer alternative perspectives on global issues and question established viewpoints. The examples (Hergé and Anton Kannemeyer's work) discussed under the heading 2.1 on page no. 12 illustrate how graphic narratives engage with the legacy of colonialism and persisting postcolonial issues. The analysis in chapters 4 (heading 4.2) and 5 (heading 5.2) furthers this argument since selected graphic narratives deal with important socio-political issues from two different parts of the globe. This establishes that graphic novels stand as a unique visual medium informing a perspective on global issues in today's visually-driven and interconnected world. Overall, the visual culture of graphic narratives plays a significant role in disseminating global issues.

The analysis of Joe Sacco's graphic narrative *Paying the Land* answers research question no. 2 in chapter 4 of this thesis. It reveals the complex interplay of visual-verbal techniques that effectively challenge the dominant narrative surrounding the Dene crisis in Canada, offering an alternative perspective on the situation. Its visual aesthetics (discussed under the heading 4.1 and sub-headings from pages 32-39) underscore the deliberate construction of Sacco's narrative on Dene history, colonialism, and resource extraction. Its cover design and title play key roles in framing the main conflict within the graphic novel. By juxtaposing traditional Dene life with modern industrialization, it encapsulates the overarching theme of the narrative's dualities. Moreover, Sacco's naturalistic drawing style further captures the essence of Dene people and their crisis. His deliberate interplay

between personal observations, witness testimonies, and technical images convey a multifaceted perspective that challenges oversimplification of Dene problems. His use of irregular page layouts, omission of panel borders, and use of splash pages effectively deconstruct ontological binaries and emphasize the impact of cultural assimilation on indigenous communities. Moreover, the narrative construction also reshapes perspective on the Dene crisis. The analysis reveal that the circular narrative structure of the novel reflects the cyclical nature of Dene life, and the strategic placement of Sacco's avatar within the narrative aligns readers' observation with his intent. Furthermore, Sacco's inclusion of interviews in the narrative facilitates a space for victims' voices to dominate, emphasizing the importance of indigenous voices in shaping the discourse regarding Dene's struggle against the colonial oppression. Lastly, Sacco's self-reflexivity in the novel, acknowledges the inherent complexities and challenges of representing such narratives as an outsider.

Moving further, the analysis engages with the concept of necropolitics to underscore how Sacco's work portrays the violence, dispossession, and exploitation inflicted upon the Dene people analyzed under the heading 4.2. Sacco exposes the dehumanization and cultural erasure of Dene. Through meticulous documentation of historical events like the residential school system, Sacco uses graphic narrative as a platform for voicing indigenous narratives that challenge the mainstream portrayal of their history. The concept of resurgence politics further reveals how the graphic novel showcases Dene resilience and activism against colonial oppression which again amplifies indigenous voices and confronts the dominant discourse. Sacco's portrayal of Dene connection to the land is read as a form of grounded normativity which emphasizes indigenous values of reciprocity, respect, and coexistence, and offers a counterpoint to capitalist and colonial ideologies.

In essence, *Paying the Land* not only challenges and subverts the dominant political discourse about the Dene in Canada but also foregrounds the importance of indigenous perspectives, agency, and cultural resilience. Through its multimodal aesthetics, it not only acts as a vehicle for truth-telling, but also advocates the indigenous rights and self-determination.

The analysis of Malik Sajad's graphic narrative answers research question no. 3 in chapter 5 of this thesis. The analysis underscores that Malik Sajad employs a wide range of graphic elements to problematize the complex issue of sociopolitical violence in Kashmir

(heading 5.1). Through its material framing, drawing style, panel arrangement, and narrative structure *Munnu* offers readers a profound understanding of the Kashmiri struggle. The material framing, discussed on pages 48-51, marked by the evocative cover illustration, featuring a hangul deer, and the deliberate title choice, sets the tone for the narrative that defies simplification and probes global perceptions of the Kashmiri conflict. The analysis shows that Sajad's drawing style (heading 5.1.2.), characterized by abstract and anthropomorphic representation, serves as a powerful tool to depict the dehumanization of Kashmiris and their intricate relationship with the environment. The composition of panels, with their regularity and occasional disruptions, mirrors the routine violence and sudden chaos in Kashmiris' lives, inviting readers to emotionally engage with the characters' experiences. Additionally, the graphic writing of onomatopoeic sounds illustrated by Sajad adds a sensory layer to the storytelling, immersing readers further into the narrative. Moreover, the analysis reveals that the narrative framing of the novel (heading 5.1.3.) encompasses both chronology and diverse perspectives. The linear progression of chapters introduces the characters and their lives, whereas the interjection of the "Footnotes" (Sajad 190) chapter challenges dominant historical narratives and forces readers to reevaluate their understanding of the Kashmiri crisis and engage critically with the historical discourse surrounding the conflict.

Furthermore, the analysis effectively captures the multi-faceted nature of necropolitical violence in the novel analyzed under the heading 5.2 on page 56. Sajad's portrayal of militarization, cultural suppression, and gendered violence makes readers witnesses the oppression and loss of fundamental human rights faced by Kashmiris and encourages them to engage empathetically with their experiences. The analysis also reveals that *Munnu* celebrates the resilience and communal strength of the Kashmiri population, emphasizing their determination to assert their rights and challenge oppressive forces by underscoring the significance of indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, and community empowerment (heading 5.2.2.). To conclude, *Munnu* serves as a powerful critique of sociopolitical violence in Kashmir owing to its graphic novel format.

Concluding, the analysis of the selected graphic narratives in chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis aligns with the thesis statement highlighting the sociopolitical significance of graphic narratives in representing marginalized voices and addressing global issues. Both graphic narratives exemplify the potential of graphic novels to serve as mediums of agency

that contribute to sociopolitical discourse, challenge dominant narratives, create solidarities and advocate for human rights and justice.

6.1.Social Implication of the Research

This research project has significant social implications. It offers insight into how graphic narratives are a useful medium in documenting global issues. Just like comics strips that are found in the newspapers and are considered unique for their satirical commentary on social and political issues, the same way graphic novels provide a lens to see the socio-political issues in a unique manner exploiting their image-text conflation. As this research studies the indigenous Kashmiri text *Munnu* to highlight the Kashmiri crisis, it reinforces this fact that this popular medium can help in the representation of local issues of this region to the world outside, thereby presenting it to a wider audience at a global level. Moreover, these narratives not only convey local experiences but also connect them to broader global issues such as human rights, indigenous rights, and cultural preservation which emphasizes the interconnectedness of struggles faced by marginalized communities in different parts of the world. By presenting the Dene crisis in Canada and the Kashmiri struggle in parallel, this study invites researchers to consider the commonalities of oppression and the potential for cross-border solidarity in addressing these issues. Therefore, this research carries social and political implication and urges that issues besides socio-politics can also be read and analyzed via the medium of comics.

6.2. Recommendations for Further Research

Further studies on the selected graphic novels can be explored in the field of Human Rights (HR) graphic novels, focusing on human rights activism through the analysis of graphic elements that were not discussed in this thesis due to space constraints and the limited scope. Such an extension would give a deeper understanding of the subtle nuances of documented crises in the selected graphic narratives.

Moreover, using the theoretical framework of this thesis, Joe Sacco's graphic novel *Palestine* (1993) can be analyzed alongside *Munnu* (2015) to explore both the Palestinian and Kashmiri causes together in a graphic novel format to demonstrate solidarity and collective dissent at a transnational level. Similarly, to foster anti-colonial solidarity against the colonial projects of India, Israel, and Canada, thrice of the graphic novels *Munnu,*

Palestine, and Paying the Land can be studied together by drawing parallels between the social and political violence faced by indigenous communities in Kashmir, Palestine, and Canada.

In the current scenario of the Isreal-Palestine war, the sociopolitical framework of this thesis can also be applied to the texts, graphic novels or otherwise, to show necropolitical oppression of the settler state of Isreal and how through the bottom-up rehabilitation Palestinians can preserve their indigeneity and show resistance in the face of the oppression.

From the local context, graphic novels such as *Grey Matter* (2021) by Sabdezar Irfan, *The Roles We Play* (2021) by Sabba Khan, and *Dissident Club* (2023) by Taha Siddiqui can also be studied to encourage research in comics scholarship in Pakistani literary scene.

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