



BOOK REVIEW

Kashmir Pending

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Kashmir Pending

Naseer Ahmed,
and Saurabh Singh

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Kashmir Pending (2007) is a graphic narrative comprising a short prologue followed by three loosely structured chapters, rendered in stark, high-contrast visual panels that privilege mood over linear progression. Written by Naseer Ahmed and illustrated by Saurabh Singh, the book adopts a testimonial form, with fragmented episodes rather than conventional chapter demarcations guiding the reader through memory, incarceration, militancy, and return to a non-violent life. This open narrative approach mirrors the suspended condition suggested by the title itself: the state of “pending” as both legal status and lived reality. One of the earliest and most significant Indian graphic novels to engage directly with political violence, memory, and the production of political subjectivities within a contested borderland, *Kashmir Pending* resists narrative closure in favour of repetition, silence, and visual recurrence. Although *Kashmir Pending* was published in 2007, this review was written in the wake of the April 2025 terrorist attack in Pahalgam, in the aftermath of which Kashmiri students were assaulted, threatened, and forced into hiding in several Indian cities, presumed guilty by virtue of their place of origin alone. Such moments reveal how borders travel inward, reappearing on bodies marked as perpetually suspect.

It is precisely within this atmosphere of border-induced precarity that *Kashmir Pending* demands to be reread. The graphic novel reconstructs the coming-of-age of a Kashmiri boy, Mustaq, whose childhood unfolds alongside the slow militarization of everyday life in Srinagar.

Rather than offering a linear political history of the Kashmir conflict, the text privileges lived experience, affect, and fractured remembrance, using the visual grammar of comics to render the intimate consequences of living in a space where sovereignty remains unresolved and citizenship conditional.

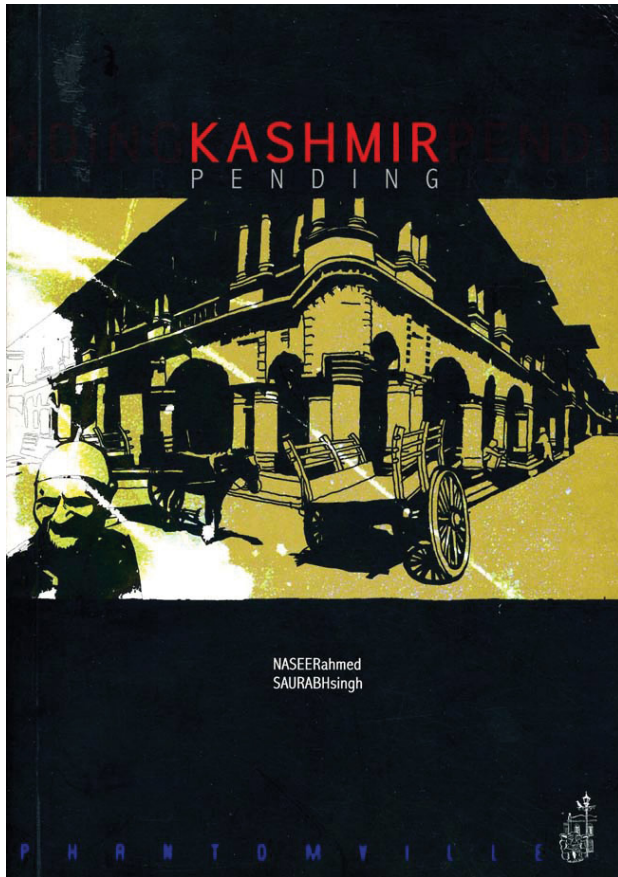
A brief historical context clarifies the stakes of the narrative. The conflict in Kashmir dates back to the partition of British India in 1947, when the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir became a disputed territory between India and Pakistan. War, an unfulfilled plebiscite, and decades of political instability culminated in the late 1980s with the outbreak of armed insurgency in the Kashmir Valley. Since then, Kashmir has functioned as one of the most heavily militarized regions in the world, governed through emergency laws, surveillance, curfews, mass detentions, and prolonged states of exception. The border, both the Line of Control and its internalized equivalents, has structured everyday life, producing a population that lives simultaneously inside the nation and outside its protections.

Kashmir Pending emerges from this border regime but refuses to narrate it through the language of geopolitics or nationalist rivalry. Instead, it traces how borders are lived: through power cuts, food shortages, radio broadcasts listened to in secrecy, protest marches that collapse into street battles, and prisons that become formative spaces of political education. Resistance, in this narrative, does not arise from ideological clarity but from accumulated indignities and routine humiliations. Childhood games like stone-throwing at the river blur imperceptibly into acts that are later criminalized as insurgency and militancy. The border here becomes a condition that shapes time, movement, and possibility.

Visually, the novel relies on a stark palette of red, black, and muted browns, producing an atmosphere of permanent dusk. Red functions as a recurring signifier of

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blood, rage, sunset, and water turned hostile, most notably in repeated depictions of the Jhelum River, once a site of play and later a witness to violence. Heavy shadows, silhouettes, and claustrophobic frames dominate scenes of incarceration and interrogation, reinforcing the sense of the region as a carceral borderland where the distinction between civilian and combatant is deliberately blurred. Silence is equally important: extended wordless panels compel the reader to confront waiting, fear, and suspension as the dominant temporalities of life under militarization.

A crucial intervention made by *Kashmir Pending* lies in its demystification of militancy itself. Mustaq's gradual association with a militant outfit is shown to be both misinformed and underinformed, shaped less by ideological conviction than by circumstance, coercion, and truncated knowledge. Training camps

across the border in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK) initially appear as spaces of purpose and clarity, yet they soon reveal a grim symmetry with the structures of repression left behind. Factionalism, hierarchy, suspicion, and expendability persist on both sides of the border, exposing how both competing regimes, state and non-state alike, mobilize the language of liberation while pursuing their own strategic and organizational interests. The narrative makes clear that the conflict is ultimately not about nations or ideological differences, but about power: who controls bodies, who commands loyalty, and who absorbs loss. In this economy of violence, Kashmiri youth function as pawns rather than political agents, their repression reproduced regardless of which authority claims jurisdiction. The border thus fails to offer an ethical alternative; it merely reorganizes domination, ensuring that the repressed remain repressed under shifting banners of sovereignty and resistance.

As a work of graphic narrative, *Kashmir Pending* showcases the unique capacity of the medium to represent life in the midst of protracted conflict. Fragmented panels mirror fragmented memory, repetition replaces chronology, and visual gaps stand in for what cannot be spoken. The text anticipates later graphic narratives of conflict while remaining distinctive in its restraint and intimacy.

Revisiting *Kashmir Pending* in the present is thus not only an act of literary recovery but also a political intervention. At a time when Kashmiri identity is once again being collapsed into the figure of the terrorist within the national imagination, the graphic novel insists on a more difficult truth: that violence in Kashmir cannot be understood without reckoning with borders as lived structures of governance, exclusion, and abandonment. The text reminds us that the human costs of unresolved borders are not confined to frontier zones but rather reverberate across the nations, resurfacing whenever crisis licenses collective punishment.

Kashmir Pending refuses both nationalist and militant resolutions and gestures toward a different ethical horizon: one that demands the dismantling of border regimes that sustain violence while imagining forms of political belonging not predicated on suspicion, confinement, or perpetual exception.