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Munnu: A Boy From Kashmir



Synopsis

A beautifully drawn graphic novel that illuminates the conflicted land of Kashmir, through a young boy's childhood. Seven-year-old Munnu is growing up in Indian-administered Kashmir. Life revolves around his family: Mama, Papa, sister Shahnaz, brothers Adil and Akhtar and, his favourite, older brother Bilal. It also revolves around Munnu's two favourite things – sugar and drawing. But Munnu's is a childhood experienced against the backdrop of conflict. Bilal's classmates are crossing over into the Pakistan-administered portion of Kashmir to be trained to resist the 'occupation'; Papa and Bilal are regularly taken by the military to identification parades where informers will point out 'terrorists'; Munnu's school is closed; close neighbours are killed and the homes of Kashmiri Hindu families lie abandoned, as once close, mixed communities have ruptured under the pressure of Kashmir's divisions. Munnu is an amazingly personal insight into everyday life in Kashmir. Closely based on Malik Sajad's own childhood and experiences, it is a beautiful, evocatively drawn graphic novel that questions every aspect of the Kashmir situation – the faults and responsibilities of every side, the history of the region, the role of Britain and the West, the possibilities for the future. It opens up the story of this contested and conflicted land, while also giving a brilliantly close, funny and warm-hearted portrait of a boy's childhood and coming-of-age.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

“A remarkable and important graphic novel” | It is testimony to the skill of this debut work “

penned by a 25-year-old “ that, while Munnu seems uncritical of these characters, we see their ugly side” Independent “A dense, intense and arresting read that will tear your heart apart and have you sweating with vicarious fear. Those who already relished Marjane Satrapi’s PERSEPOLIS, Belle Yang’s FORGET SORROW or Kunwu & Otie’s A CHINESE LIFE are going to love this. I’m thinking particularly PERSEPOLIS, for this too centres on the strength, reliance and resourcefulness of a family in the wake of oppression | There’s so much about life in Kashmir which I didn’t understand. Since the terrifying nuclear brinksmanship in 1999 which I remember so well, it’s rather fallen from our news cycles, hasn’t it? This great graphic novel, I am convinced, will bring it back to the forefront of our attention” Page 45

Malik Sajad was born in 1987, in Srinagar, Kashmir. His illustrations and stories have appeared in various local and international publications. He studied Visual Art at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Beautifully told story of Kashmir and the price that citizens pay for a conflict that they have no control of...I’d recommend this book to everybody who is even remotely interested in knowing about Kashmir... This is a fresh perspective and you can’t help rooting for Munnu who is as real as the author himself.

This is a beautifully illustrated book, and very well written. I don’t usually read comics or anything like that, but this book is much more than a "comic book". Great read, well crafted, illustrated, and written.

Incredible achievement!!

I just finished reading this book for the second time, and wow. "Munnu" is a book of actions, not words, but carries the reader through these actions with the curiosity and guilelessness of a child. I feel as though graphic novels often tell stories of regions from the outside looking in, but the protagonist in "Munnu" is on the inside, looking just slightly further beyond himself, to the everyday ways that the violence in Kashmir manifests. Seemingly ordinary details - such as the fact that Munnu’s home is set back on the street, shrouded by trees - are implements for (sometimes at once) pain and victory for the young boy in this graphic novel. The rare flourishes that exist strictly to impress upon narrative land with even more poignancy as a result, such as when a man falls to the

ground like a coat sliding off its hanger. The book explores with honesty the incommensurable space between a citizen and the broadcasts written about his hometown; the way violence on one's front door is both distilled and magnified in our news and in our nightmares. It's no secret that Kashmir is a "hot-button" issue in South Asia, and one where everyone is certain of his or her side. But this book transcends as it inoculates itself from "sides" and political posturing. It is not tragedy porn. It is not a call to arms. It is not a book seared in anger. Like Book One of Karl Ove Knausgaard's "My Struggle" series, it simply cracks wide open one single life, curiously turning the shards over in the author's hand. Kashmir and Srinagar, where the book is set, is entirely foreign to me, and this book is ungenerous with its explanations for several cultural elements (For example, salt tea? I'm baffled.) and so I often turned to google during my reading, but I preferred that, as it offered a more situated storyline, which never self-exoticizes. Even the book's chief conceit, that Kashmiri men and women are depicted as the endangered Hangul Deer while all others are presented as humans, is executed with such familiar tenderness that it doesn't come across as cheap. I won't reveal how this book develops or ends, but I will say the ending left me bewildered, melancholy, and slightly confused. When I closed the book I was reminded of the film director Sam Shepard, who said, "I hate endings. Just detest them. Beginnings are definitely the most exciting, middles are perplexing and endings are a disaster. The temptation towards resolution, towards wrapping up the package, seems to me a terrible trap. Why not be more honest with the moment? The most authentic endings are the ones which are already revolving towards another beginning." I hope to see "Munnu" on more bookshelves in America and look forward to reading Mr. Sajad's next work.

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