

Amruta Patil

Playing with Words, Worlds, and Images: An Interview with the Indian Graphic Novelist Amruta Patil, by Philippe Bornet, Stefanie Knauss, and Alexander D. Ornella

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Playing with Words, Worlds, and Images

An Interview with the Indian Graphic Novelist Amruta Patil, by Philippe Bornet, Stefanie Knauss, and Alexander D. Ornella

Abstract

In this interview conducted by issue editors Philippe Bornet, Stefanie Knauss and Alexander D. Ornella in April 2021, Amruta Patil discusses how the unique possibilities of playing with images and words in the medium of the graphic novel allow for a creative critique and reimagination of ancient mythologies as well as contemporary social questions. Her use of the figure of the storyteller, sensuous visual style, and continuous micro-subversion of traditional motifs invite viewers/readers to enter into the story and make it their own, while at the same time encouraging a capacity to see each other and to engage constructively even with people or viewpoints one might critique.

Keywords

Kari, *Adi Parva*, *Sauptik*, *Aranyaka*, Graphic Novel, Mythology, Queer, India

Biography

Writer-painter Amruta Patil is India's first female graphic novelist. She is the author of *Kari* (2008), the *Mahabharat*-based duology *Adi Parva*. *Churning of the Ocean* (2012) and *Sauptik*. *Blood and Flowers* (2016), and, with Devdutt Pattanaik, *Aranyaka*. *Book of the Forest* (2019), which sits at the cusp of ancient Indian philosophy and ecological-feminist stirrings. Patil was a speaker at Jaipur Literature Festival and London Book Fair and artist-in-residence at the University of Chicago's School of Divinity and La Maison des Auteurs (France). In 2016, she received a Nari Shakti Puraskar from the 13th President of India for "unusual work that breaks boundaries" in art and literature.

Philippe Bornet: Amruta, thank you very much for sitting down with us here on Zoom: it is great to have you. To begin, maybe you can tell our readers about your artistic development, your trajectory if you wish, starting with your graphic novel about a queer woman in Mumbai, *Kari*, in 2008, and then up to *Aranyaka*, published in 2020.

Amruta Patil: It may appear like I have been creating very, very diverse books ranging from queer urban tales to something that springboards

from the *Bṛhadāranyaka Upaniṣad*. But in fact, I don't see it as a disjointed journey. To me, they're part of a continuum. My first book, *Kari*, was, like a lot of first books, very close to the skin. Actually, as a South Asian woman telling queer stories, I could have hit a different kind of mainstream success, even internationally, had I kept on that wave. But, back then, I was unconvinced about more exhibitionistic autobiography and the two books that followed, *Adi Parva* (2012) and *Sauptik* (2016), had a natural turning outward of the gaze. From telling my story, I went to trying to recount stories that belonged to many. I continued to explore personal themes even in these more "detached" works, whether it is the unsentimental mothers of *Adi Parva*, or injured masculinity and jealousies in *Sauptik*.

The first three books were really written as explorations of my own questions, with the additional benefit that somebody else might also resonate with what is going on there. My fourth book, *Aranyaka*, was more self-consciously the first that explicitly relates to who I write for. It is, after all, a book about *darśan* – a bidirectional visual relation, a shared gaze, between an individual and divinity, or as I propose, between one individual and another – it is about learning to see the other. I'm a loner in my work, but it made sense that a book about *seeing the other* was actually done with someone else, Devdutt Pattanaik. Those who enjoy the abstract, open-ended form of *Adi Parva* and *Sauptik* rebelled against the more defined structure of *Aranyaka*.

Stefanie Knauss: Could you also talk about what influences your art?

Patil: In my own imagination, I see myself as a writer first. So primarily, it is the words that move me. I am drawn to writers of cosmogonies, books about everything under the sun, the beginnings and ends of worlds. My influences are not comic books really. A couple of them hit that note, but most graphic novels don't inch in the direction of that complexity or ambition. I have loved Eduardo Galeano's *Mirrors* (2010), Nassim Nicholas Taleb's *Antifragile* (2014), Isaac Asimov's *Chronology of the World* (1991), Frank Herbert's *Dune* (1965–1985/2005–2019) and Craig Thompson's flawed but ambitious *Habibi* (2011). I am moved by stories of marrow, blood, gristle, the juices of life, like Tarun J. Tejpal's *Story of My Assassins* (2013), David B.'s *Epileptic* (2006), or Jason Lutes' *Berlin* (2018). It has always troubled me that this sort of roaring, leonine voice is so rarely deployed by female writers – Jeanette Winterson and Margaret Atwood are exceptions.

Artistically, my books are all over the place. For a long time, I had an imposter complex, a sense of not being as good as I would have liked to be –

something that has led to each book being a new visual experiment. In *Kari* I was operating in a far more timorous space of someone unsure of her *métier*, drawing a clear divide between “illustration” and “painting”. In the later books, I started to paint, take more risks, gain more control over the media.

Bornet: Could we talk some more about the connection between the visual elements and the text in your work? How do you conceive the relation between both? Does the medium of graphic novels open up new ways of expression for you? Why is this medium particularly suited for what you want to say?

Patil: The connection is hard-wired. From age three or five onwards, I have known my brain to be boot-camped into the writing side and the drawing side – text and image have always worked in tandem. It was only a matter of figuring out how to put the two things together. After college, I joined an advertising agency in a hyphenated copywriter-art director job description. Even there, text and art were happening together. Maybe I could have written scripts for films? Done animation? But the idea of working in large groups isn’t appealing to me. So the graphic novel became an attractive proposition: you get to art-direct it *and* you get to write.

You have to remember that in the 2000s there was no “scene” to speak of in India for those interested in sequential art. Books were hard to find, and forbiddingly expensive. It’s still a bit of an underdog medium. Nobody knows quite what to do with my books. I always say this, that Indian publishing has been avantgarde in that mainstream publishers have taken on graphic novels in their lists, and publishers do not segregate writers of literary fiction and writers of graphic fiction when inviting people to lit fests, but the books still don’t get nominated for “literary” awards, because people have yet to make that leap of imagination.

While I didn’t choose my medium in a sly way to capture a market, I recognise the benefits of being a graphic novelist and a first mover. Many people can write a good book in words, but not that many can do it with text and image. Globally, sequential art is one of the fastest growing segments in literature – people’s fractured attention spans and visually led cognition have ensured that. It’s only a matter of time before India tunes into this fact as well.

Knauss: You just mention people’s short attention span, but when I was reading/viewing your novels, I realised that they need *more* attention: I had to pause and take time to look at the page as a whole, the words and the image.

Patil: What you’re saying about my books needing attention is true – it’s a learned skill, reading sequential art is just a bit more intuitive than reading sheet music.

The content I was dealing with in the mythology books, had it been dealt with purely through text, its readership would have been far more limited. I would have been heading into William Chittick territory, which means my readership would have been PhD students and flaneur-scholars. Personally, I like those books, I need those books, I need others writing them for me. But my own intent in choosing this medium is to disarm people into being receptive.

Some readers tell me, “The pictures are hypnotising, but I don’t fully understand what you’re saying.” Others skim through the visuals, following the trail of words. And you know, both those ways are okay! We underestimate the amount of transformation that happens in visual and sonic spaces. Sometimes a beautifully designed monastery will do more for your mental state than an unimaginative spiritual guide.

Alexander D. Ornella: You deal with quite complex issues in your work. Would you say that what you are doing is philosophising through art and graphic novels? And also, you mentioned transformation in visual spaces: could you expand on what you mean by the transformative?

Patil: I shy away from putting a label on my books. But it could be said that what *Adi Parva*, *Saaptik* and *Aranyaka* are trying to do is *make the complex accessible*.

And about the transformation of visual space, my work isn’t exactly sequential art. It uses text and visuals in a more hybrid way. *Kari* and *Aranyaka* are much more “sequential art” than *Adi Parva* and *Saaptik*. The images are often points of contemplation, a foil to heavy-duty text, or a lush counterpoint to a spare line. I pull the balance off more confidently in *Saaptik* than in others. So ideally, text and image dance with one another, one leads, the other follows, then they swap roles.

Ornella: You said you wanted to explore the topic of learning to see the other. Is there anything in particular that prompted you to explore that theme?

Patil: In 2017, Devdutt Pattanaik and I noticed a very extraordinary continental drift in India between the right wing and the left/liberals. As a nation, we have come a long way from founding fathers like Jawaharlal Nehru, who brought together people who believed in things *utterly* different from their own ideas to build a free India. Today, we cannot even read a Facebook post that is not saying exactly what you want.

An important question for creating *Aranyaka* was this: what does it take to tune into a point of view that isn’t exactly like our own? Can I look at someone who isn’t an ideological or physical clone and truly begin to em-

pathise? What do I need to do to slip under the skin of such a person? One part of the process is, of course, about tuning into the other person, but a bigger part of the process is about overcoming oneself. Devdutt and I were talking about this and decided that it was time to create this book about human preoccupation, and the forests that exist within and without us. He gave me carte blanche to create the universe and the cast of characters, and there came along Kātyāyanī, the protagonist of *Aranyaka*, who truly makes an effort to see others. In getting better at that, she becomes invisible because that favour is not really returned to her. Very few people are operating at a level of sophistication where the gaze can be reciprocal.

Bornet: In your books you make use of the figure of the storyteller: could you reflect on how you situate yourself in the tradition of the storyteller, and how it evolves in India today?

Patil: *Saaptik* is my favourite amongst my works, because it is the hardest, the least “successful”, the underdog. *Adi Parva* has incandescent, affirmative feminist stories about unsentimental mothers and ambitious queens, it’s a Go-Girl kind of a book. *Saaptik* requires you to acknowledge your dark side, it complicates the discourse by taking on heroic masculinity from the inside, via an injured male character. The reader needs to be ready for that sort of thing.

I’ve realised that whether we want it or not, like it or not, we’re always playing *sūtradhār* [the one who holds the threads, i.e., the storyteller]. When Yogi Adityanath gives his hot take on Islam and Indian culture, he turns *sūtradhār*; or when Modi tells the Hindu *rāṣṭra* story, he turns storyteller. When I tell a story, I’m a storyteller. A lot of societal hokum and narrowness is because the storytelling is bigoted and unimaginative. People like me are now too ashamed to have anything to do with *sanātan*, and we’re handing over priceless traditions on a platter to a group of fundamentalists.

After *Kari* my readers were confused by the shift in track: why has this cool chick gone godly on us? But while I’m *persona non grata* in the larger picture, I had a clear sense that it was my role to leave some grains buried under this soil to germinate when it was time. Flawed as they are, the books are around for those who want to find them. I am relieved that the three books are done; I would not have embarked on the journey now: the socio-political situation is just too toxic. I have done my bit. Now other storytellers can come and take over.

You asked about how I see myself in that storyteller space or tradition. The Sufis have a concept *futuḥ*, or opening, and they believe that it is giv-

en to certain prophets to speak without reflection. Theirs is a gnostic, not epistemic, equation with seeking. They cannot intellectualise their process. I sometimes feel that my relationship with this material is like that; when I start taking a position that even hints at any kind of authority over this material, words are being snatched away from me. So my approach to the material is more that of a *sadhaka* [practitioner], rather than a *pandit's* [teacher].

Bornet: Let's turn from the figure of the storyteller to your visual style, which is very striking: the colours are so bright, sensual, luscious. Why did you choose this kind of style? How does this style resonate with narratives around mythologies, the body and so on?

Patil: I talked about the transformation that comes about because of visual spaces. I'll give you one example: In 2013, I attended the Dalai Lama's teachings at the Tsuglagkhang Temple in McLeod Ganj. I sat there with my folding cushion for three days and found that the thousand-armed gilded Avalokiteshvara located to the left of the stage that the Dalai Lama sat on was the thing that was causing some bizarre and wonderful effects. My state of heightened whatever-the-hell-it-was had more to do with that monumental statue than with the teachings. I realised after that experience that we underestimate and undermine the effect of the visual and material.

Ornella: Your visual style is very colourful, but it also has a tactile dimension [fig. 1]. You said elsewhere that you want your books to be touched. But since we're so immersed in digital media and this digital environment – and even now, we're having this conversation over Zoom – how is it that the tactile, the material element is so central to your artwork?

Patil: In extension of the earlier vein of thought, there are people whose silent presence can make others in a room feel good, no words need to be articulated. And we should recognise that. It is an important mode of transmission. We over-valorise the intellectual, but the sensual-erotic touches something more visceral. And that path, too, is very much within the *sanātan* tradition, of wisdom that is body-out. You need to get discursive, you need to offer yourself up to the sound, smell, the saturated pigment. I would like my readers to locate the stories *within* themselves.

Knauss: This resonates with something you said earlier about being interested in the gristly stuff of body and spit and flesh and blood. It seems as if that thematic interest is reflected in the way you tell stories, how you combine visual style and text.

Patil: In *Aranyaka*, I could well have used the metaphor of love and sex instead of the metaphor of food. But my purple, deep-diving, cavorting al-



Fig. 1: Patil's visual style: for example Lakshmi in *Adi Parva* (Patil 2012, 90; printed with permission).

lusiveness and excess needed to be tempered by Devdutt's logical, analytical, pared-down style. The artwork is more restrained and quite different than the complex jewel palette of *Adi Parva* and *Saaptik*.

Bornet: Let's now turn to religion. We are all working in the study of religion and so we were very much interested in your use of religious motifs and mythological themes, from the *Mahābhārat* to the *Rāmāyaṇa*, Vedic literature etc. Why did you choose these kinds of texts instead of other more secular mythologies or motifs? Sometimes it seems as if you use specific religious motifs to tell more universal stories: how do you understand their interaction?

Patil: Improvisation is part of the DNA of a living tradition, an oral tradition. The details and motifs are *meant* to be adapted in new times, so long as fidelity to the essence is retained. A storyteller in what A. K. Ramanujan describes as a *pūram* setting is meant to have the finger on the pulse of the land: local politics, local calamities and scandals. The aim of telling stories is to offer insight into the human experience, to allay fears and traumas. What interests me about religions is the stories they came

up with as means to this end. No modern story can compare with epic lore, because it is not a lifetime's work, it is not ten people's work. It is a *distillate* of collective wisdom. History and science are similar in spirit. Mythology is a form of psychology, which is why it remains compelling. Stories stop being relevant because people stopped retelling them.

I realise that there is something counter-intuitive about writing books as an ode to oral traditions. But my way of countering that is to use storytellers and audiences as a narrative device. There are people who are listening, people who are sleepy, sceptical, bored, contrarian, lost. They pre-empt the *zeitgeist* and also do not present the *sūtradhār* as infallible. So little in our public or private discourse leaves room for such a possibility: I'm saying *this*, but how about we make it open-source, and you fix the part that I got wrong? Over-certitude is scary to me. For whatever flaws, too much certitude is something I've tried to not embed in my work.

Knauss: But these mythologies were narrated in contexts that were quite hierarchical, and similarly with history: the history we know tends to be the history of a particular elite. This raises questions of (in-)equality and hierarchy, of who gets to speak for whom. How do you deal with that in your books?

Patil: My method of dealing with this is to get an underdog to lead the story. Kari is a queer, androgynous, socially shy person whose most exciting life and best repartee is in her imagination. *Adi Parva* has a slightly sinister Queen/River as its *sūtradhār*, not some bearded brahmin. *Sauptik* takes it one step further – a heroic story is told by a resolutely unheroic *sūtradhār*, a man who has assassinated his childhood friends' sleeping children, a man who is naked and crawls about like a feral thing [fig. 2]. *Aranyaka* has this woman of large body and large appetites living in a cerebral setting that eschews hunger and excess. The minute you change the lens through which a story is seen, the story itself changes – how could it not? How can the *Mahābhārat* possibly sound the same with a jealous, wounded, abject narrator, rather than a predictable Arjun or Karna?

Within the story, too, there are people who question figures of authority and their actions. That is my method of saying: I'm not sitting in blind devotion at the feet of a self-proclaimed *satgūru*. Calling-out is part of this, but I don't over-valorise that either – the lens shifts between respect and irreverence and respect. I'd like to keep what's good, too. I have a deeply loving relationship with the material that allows me to scrutinise it. You can take the best sort of liberties only with what – and who – you love.



Fig. 2: The introduction of Saupatik's narrator, the wounded Ashwattama (Patil 2016, 6; printed with permission).

Ornella: You said that mythologies are distillations of the human condition, but they have been distilled in these hierarchical contexts. Would you say that there is still value in these stories or mythologies? After all, you could also say: let's get rid of them, and let's create new stories. You're doing some heavy lifting here by looking at the underdog in them and shifting the perspectives. What value do you see in these mythologies with all the positives they have, but also with all the flaws that they might also have?

Patil: Right now, "people like us" in India aren't able to separate their anger at politically motivated fundamentalism, their anger at versions of the stories they received from family. I have friends who resented my working on epic lore because they had been traumatised by some bigoted version of the *Mahābhārat* or some misogynistic telling of the *Rāmāyaṇa* they received. It's a huge collective loss. And, back in 2009, I saw it as my responsibility to do my bit with not throwing the baby out with the bathwater.

It's like what Anant Pai set out to do with Amar Chitra Katha [ACK]. Does ACK stand the test of time? Sometimes not. Was Pai's effort staggering nonetheless? Without doubt! Should ACK be cancelled because it toes some regressive-uncle line now and then? No. It merely needs to be seen in context, as a product of its time and context, marked by the attendant blind spots in its creator, Anant Pai.

I guess I'm just against cancel culture and pretensions of any kind of purity. I have friends with whom I do not agree politically, who are problematic to my other friends, and I'm alright with that. I'll take what is good in them, and it's the same with this material.

Ours is a living tradition. There are innumerable versions of the *Mahābhārat* and *Rāmāyaṇa* and the Puranic stories, which I've been told in very different ways in folksy traditions continually. If there is something ossified and problematic about a story, *fix* it. This is not apologist behaviour, it's the process of keeping a living tradition aerated and alive!

People are getting wedded to hard-line, binary stances, though. I have been accused of being an apologist for the epics, an apologist for Brahmin men. People are out gleefully setting up cultural bonfires, discarding and disowning stuff, so the only people talking about *sanātan* will soon be the lunatics. If you read my work carefully, for all its flaws, there is more that's iconoclast there than apologist [fig. 3]! But my role with this is nearing its end. I gave all my fertile years to this stuff that sells 5,000 to 10,000 copies. Maybe I should write shows for Netflix after this. *[smiles]*



Fig. 3: An unorthodox rendering of Krishna in *Sauptik* (Patil 2016, 63; printed with permission).

Bornet: We talked earlier about your readership, about the mixed reception of your books because they are difficult to label. Could we return to the question of readership? And also, of language? Who do you have in mind when you write?

Patil: The books are critically well received, but they are demanding, so clearly it will always be a niche readership. The reception in Europe and North America has been disappointing but understandable, they are not a 101 Primer for Hindu Stories. They assert their place unapologetically and necessitate some amount of homework from the readers – even *Aranyaka*, which I thought was much less daunting, much more linear. In India, the work has never gone out of print, so that's good. You make peace that you're not going to be making mega bucks, there's no other way to get the work done otherwise.

Bornet: How about publishing in vernacular versions?

Patil: *Kari* has appeared in Italian, in French. You cannot do a vernacular run of *Adi Parva* or *Sauptik* because, full-colour and hardback, they would be way too expensive. With *Aranyaka*, we made the decision to not spill past a certain page count, to go paperback, so that the book remained accessible. I may think of planning future books in such a way that they remain black-and-white, so they can be ferried across easily into other languages.

Bornet: Perhaps to be really subversive by popularising the story you're telling or to change people's views, you would have to use the vernacular, because English is already westernised or seen as more liberal?

Patil: It's a delicate territory, Philippe, because one more thing to remember is that traditionalists don't like my work, it's too iconoclastic for those who see Hinduism uncritically. Which would also include vast swathes of people in North America! I used to wonder why people in Thailand or Bali are not reading *Adi Parva* or *Sauptik* despite the religious connection. They're not reading them because the books are too weird! My work is queer work in its truest sense, the form is queer, the interpretations are queer. I wouldn't bet on ever hitting mainstream.

Ornella: I'd like to return to the topic of religion again. You don't draw only on Hindu mythology but also on non-Hindu religious stories. Do you understand them to be part of these grand narratives, what you said earlier, distillations of centuries of experience? Or do you have other reasons for drawing on them?

Patil: The primary reason for my drawing on mythologies of all kinds is not so much that I think they are the best stories in the world. I have to explain with a small example. There is this Hindi film song with Manisha Koirala called *bāhon ke darmiyān*, meaning, "holding in the arms, in em-



Fig. 4: A “Last Supper” in *Kari* (Patil 2008, 58–59; printed with permission).

brace”. Now, one day, I was in India, and rain was pouring down, and I was standing outside of a market stall, and this song *bāhon ke darmiyān* started playing on the radio. And in one second, everybody from cobbler to cowherd, from the shopkeeper to a gentrified person like me, we were all in an escalated romantic, yearning mode because of the notes of that song, we were united by the metaphor of that song. And I find something similar happens with the epics. So when I say, “Don’t be a *Śakuni Māmā*” [a character of the *Mahābhārat*, the mastermind behind the war between the Kauravas and Pāṇḍavas], or “Stop behaving like *Mantharā*” [a scheming character in the *Rāmāyaṇa*], or “He’s fast asleep like *Kumbhakarna*” [a demon, brother of Rāvaṇa, known for having mistakenly asked the gods for the boon of infinite sleep], you speak a viscerally familiar language for a large tract of South Asians. What else can cut to the chase like that? I don’t need to develop my own language, instead, I can tap into an existing idiom. And that’s what I find this sort of lore does.

I grew up in Goa which has a fair presence of Roman Catholic Christians, so I grew up with that idiom as well. You can see it in the references that appear in *Kari* [fig. 4].

Ornella: Today in Europe and in particular in the UK, there's a very low rate of religious practice and people aren't familiar anymore with the kind of religious lore you use. What might that mean, for society or for your work, when you're trying to enter people's bloodstreams through these stories, but people aren't familiar with them anymore?

Patil: I deal with this continually, on multiple levels. In France, where I lived for a decade, there was a great suspicion towards anything not "laic", it was all seen as a cult, except Mahayana Buddhism which got a clean chit, just as de-Islamicised Sufism does. I have met many fundamentalists amongst secular people, because fundamentalism comes in many stripes.

Back home, there is now a vast segment of Indians, upper-middle class and elite, that is English-speaking and completely deracinated. They receive their university degrees and intellectual value system in the west, usually North America or England, and return to India with that gaze as their only convincing reference point. They not only absorb the good critical traditions, but also the inherent biases towards non-academic systems, towards *sadhakas* and their gnosis. They come at spiritual traditions with a lot of dismissal or self-loathing, as if whatever there is, is frozen in some dated "book" like the *Manusmṛiti*, stuff that cannot be adapted or spring-cleaned, just called out or burnt. But we aren't a people of the book! Our systems were open-source, and need to be taken in that direction again. It is hard, on an ongoing basis, to explain my choices, because people are actually not as liberal as they would like to believe.

Bornet: That's very insightful; we have people who are religiously illiterate, who cannot understand religion because they are so afraid of it, who don't even want to learn about anything religious.

Patil: Psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar has written about the role that religious systems played in offering psychological care for people. The reason why people weren't institutionalised is that the system managed to pull them into the fold and give them some structure.

So many of my fundamentalist, irreligious friends are reading tarot cards, keeping feng shui turtles in their room and rose quartz crystals in their drinking water, attending yoga-pilates and mindfulness meditation classes. They're still yearning and seeking but they just do not even have the vocabulary to ask for the right thing in the supermarket to plug the existential hole in their heart.

Knauss: Let's turn to a different topic for a moment: one recurrent, important

theme of your books is ecology, nature, other-than-human animals. Could you tell us more about why this is so central for you?

Patil: *Aranyaka* does it most explicitly, but all my work stirs with a strong sense of the spatial, a sense of responsibility towards, and connection with, nature. Kari is very alert to the decay in the metropolis around her, the smell, the polluted water. There is an underlying anxiety about the state of the crumbling urban world. In *Adi Parva*, a river is the narrator. In *Sauptik*, the river is still in the backdrop, now gone dark and oily. *Sauptik* articulates the war between human inhabitation and the forest.

I grew up in Goa, which is as close to nature as one can get in India. This is part of my life and it is important to me. I have now started living much more in Kātyāyanī [the protagonist of *Aranyaka*] territory. It has been my own journey to move from an intellectual concern for ecology to a lived experience of being close to the ground.

One thing I always struggle to explain to my European friends is that you really understand *Kālī yuga* [the last, and darkest, of the world's four ages] when you live in India, you really know apocalypse. When you live in Europe, you feel immortal, like you deserve to go forth and multiply. Not in India, being here is a prophylactic. Dissolution is imminent here.

Bornet: Amruta, thank you so much for taking the time to sit down with us. This conversation has been so insightful and thought-provoking. One last question to conclude: can you tell us about your future projects?

Patil: I am writing a book called *The Sum of All Colours*. It straddles India and Europe, it is an alternate ethnography that uses the language of art and colour, theory and eros. The book was meant to be a sequel of *Kari*, but it has its own mind. It's been a bizarre, important year of stasis. My work has always been solitary, but I sought affirmation and resuscitation in physical escapes. But now there is no leaving. We'll see what that does to the work.

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