

Justice: A Tale of the Nepali Civil War (The Complete Graphic Novel - Library Edition)

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An affecting graphic novel about political persecution in the midst of a civil war, Justice captures a perilous period well.

A family tries to survive the turmoil of war in Ram Khatri's historical graphic novel *Justice*.

Tara was a child during the Nepali Civil War that ran from 1996 to 2006. Now, she returns to her former home and recalls the events that led to its abandonment. Extended flashbacks are devoted to her poor but happy farming family, whose members were pulled into the conflict in 2003 when Kamal, their Maoist neighbor, began pressuring them to stop farming because their rich landlord was receiving half the crops as rent.

The Maoists sought to topple the Nepali monarchy and form a new government. As pressure from Kamal and others intensified, Tara's parents were threatened with dire consequences if they didn't send their son Sudeep to join the Maoist forces. When some teenagers came looking for Sudeep, claiming to be his friends, Tara told them where to find him. Later, she was wracked with guilt to the point of attempting suicide.

Setting up a chain of events marked by tragedies and joyful reunions, the book's portrayal of a typical, nonpolitical family trying to navigate the dangerous uncertainty of a civil war is keen. And Tara's dual role as a young heroine and a reflective narrator enables the text to marry innocence and naivete with the deep understandings of a survivor well. A map and overview of Nepal and a glossary of Nepali terms sets her family's story in context too. However, the political implications of people's choices are not always covered with depth: when Tara's parents are jailed, for example, her uncle's explanation is limited to "Your parents have angered some very important people." Here and elsewhere, though, the mysterious "fog of war" aspects of the story do contribute verisimilitude.

The frequent use of boldfaced words throughout the text is excitement inducing if sometimes overdone, resulting in distracting emphases, as when Tara's father responds to his wife's announcement that they should again look for Sudeep by saying "If that's what you want." But the art itself is an effective storytelling element, in part thanks to its clear visual details, as with the colors and styles of Nepali clothing and its articulations of the differences between rural farms and the bustling cities in Nepal.

Justice is a compelling historical graphic novel about survival during a time of violence and hardship.

PETER DABBENE (April 29, 2024)

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