

Published on 14, April - June 2026

ISSN:2320-4842 (P) 3049-2688 (O)

Kappa ga Nozoita Indo: A Japanese Multimodal Visual discourse narrative on India

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Abstract

Travel writing flourished during post-war Japan, as Japanese people undertook travel to various parts of the world and documented their experiences through travelogues and, journals. Kappa ga nozoita Indo what may be translated as Kappa peeks into India, was published in the year 1957 and is pioneering in its perception of visualising India in the eyes of a Japanese person, through written discourse and sketches. The paper attempts to analyse Kappa's unique perspective as a writer and artist whose work encapsulates a comprehensive view of India through a lens of an artist and a writer. The work is significant in portraying India through written discourse and visual narrative where neither is dominant over the other, not supplementary and yet equally significant in covering many aspects of the country that the author travelled to and documented his experiences therein. Amongst most narratives which are writing centric, Kappa's work provides a unique perspective of looking at India through the two media of sketches and writing. The paper analyses his work through the Theory of Visual Grammar propounded by Kress and Leeuwen along with a thematic qualitative analysis of various subjects covered in the work to comprehend the author's view of India. The sketches provide a unique perspective in addition to the written narrative, revealing significant aspects of how the author thinks of the many facets of India-places and people and experiences.

Keywords: Kappa ga Nozoita Indo, Theory of Visual Grammar, Kress and Leeuwen, Travel account, written narrative, visual narrative.

Introduction

Amarinimo hirosugiru (Too huge), *Toorisugita dake no tabibito ni wakaruru hazuga arimasen* (Not a place that is possible to comprehend by just visiting), is how India is described in the afterword of the book *Kappaga Nozoita Indo*. Capturing the expanse of India in totality, in all her glory with her multitude of languages, cultures, people, and cuisines, is indeed difficult for anyone, as the author Kappa confesses in his book a pictorial travel account with sketches made by the author himself as part of the visual-discourse narrative on the country. The book is a culmination of his travel experiences on a wide range of places, people, things, culture, habits and customs in India.

Senoh Kappa visited India twice in 1978 and again in 1983 for approximately the duration of a month each, based on which he wrote the account. While comprising of elements that would be

included in a guidebook like travel account, with detailed descriptions of many places across the length and breadth of the country, the book offers a unique perspective which is different from existing accounts of the time. The paper attempts to explore the work that offers new perspectives through the visual images and the writing on India.

Objective and methodology for interpreting Images in written discourse

In *Kappa ga Nozoita Indo* (Kappa's peek at India) a travel account on India written as a visual discourse narrative, images (sketches) do not have a secondary role of adding relief to a predominantly written narrative, but of taking the narrative forward. The papers aims to explore how this multitude of perspectives help in Kappa's understanding of India and define a new perspective on seeing India.

While most societies traditionally may have been writing centric whether it be literature or language texts wherein language was central to the discourse, the approach that the author assumes in the book is one of conveying something to a new friend, using pictures for what cannot be conveyed through text and using text for what cannot be conveyed through pictures. (Kappa: 1991, 281)

Images in Literature (Imagology) has gained momentum as a recent field of study. It is an attempt to study a discourse and not the society that it portrays therein. (Manfred Beller, Jope Leerson: 2007 Foreword) The Imagological studies are interested in how 'others' are characterised (hetero images) vis-à-vis self-images. It is important to note that literature became a more encompassing term inclusive of travel writing, autobiography, etc from mid nineteenth century since conventionally such non-fictional writings were not recognised as literature. (Leerson 2007: 352)

The text which has been chosen for the purpose of analysis in this paper contains images in discourse and as pictures. Written text in the works assume equal and varying significance; without more to this approach by the author's own admission in the selected book (Kappa: 281) It is significant to note that the skilful utilisation of sketches made, can also be attributed to him being an illustrator by training. It is a genre which may fall under the

large umbrella of an illustrated travelogue and a guidebook. "A travelogue is not necessarily a factual account of a journey..." (Fessler, 2004: 2) Even as Kappa documents his journey through India in a journalistic way going into details of the many places he visits, he also keeps a guidebook like structure to it. At the same time there are snippets of his experiences as a person who interacts with the locals as much as an observer of sights and scenes as a tourist.

The book has been divided thematically and analysed for the perspective it assumes in portraying aspects of India; and the sketches are divided into categories based on theme and possible patterns in technique which may help to understand and reveal the author's understanding of the country and his experiences.

2.1 Theory of Visual Grammar

Given the multitude of modes that are employed in writing the book, this paper would analyse the images in discourse through the theory of visual grammar as propounded by Kress and Leeuwen (2006) which is set in the larger framework of social semiotics. Visual grammar however is not a universal language and different components of the visual may connote different things for the person viewing it- first the author who sees something and translates it into an image, followed by the reader who then consumes it. The two-pronged approach as propounded by Kress and Leeuwen is considered appropriate for the study of interpreting images in discourse especially since the work selected for analysis in this paper is written by a person who by virtue of being an artist trained in the visual medium understands the impact of Images and the power they possess as semiotic units.

Historically, the field of study of semiotics has been richly contributed to by Barthes, and Saussure, as some of the pioneering scholars of the 20th century who had given codes for seeing linguistics as part of semiotics. However, many of these studies did not account for the inclusion of visual images in discourse, a field which has assumed significance only less than a century back. When analysing a travel account written about India by a Japanese using written discourse and images in the form of multiple sketches drawn by the author along with the written narrative, it is signifi-

cant to mention that Kappa approaches India thematically, and through the eye of an artist, as much as a foreign traveller.

3. Non-fictional writing on India and Kappa's contribution to the field

Travel to places outside the country and travel accounts on India, written by Japanese people abound in the post war era. Besides Senoh Kappa's works, Fujiwara Shinya's *Indo Horo*, 1984 Hotta Yoshie's *Indo de Kangaeta koto*, 1957 (Thoughts in India) followed by Shina Makoto's *Indode Washi mo Kangaeta koto* (I also thought in India), 1958, are significant in documenting travel to India in this genre written around the same time.

The uniqueness of perspective that Kappa's work assumes is the multimodality of semiotic approach that it provides on the many things, places and people that the author experiences and encounters. At the same time, the way that the author treats the subject of the book-India is not just aimed at accuracy alone but is empathetic to the realities of the local people and circumstances employing a two pronged approach of written discourse along with sketches to capture and grasp the totality of India as the author witnessed and experienced, and thereafter convey it to the predominantly Japanese readership.

3.1 Senoh Kappa's life and literary contribution

Senoh Kappa was born in 1930 in the city of Kobe in Japan. As a young boy, he was talented in art and drawing. He is best known for his travel accounts which he has written on various countries with the title which reads Kappa saw ~ or Kappa peeks in~. His books are characterised by his sketches, a component which also defines his work *Kappa ga Nozoita Indo*, discussed in this paper. His representative works include *Kappa ga nozoita Yoroppa* (Kappa's peek at Europe), *Nippon* (Japan), *50nin no Shigoto ba* (A workplace of 50 people), *Toire Mandala* (Toilet Mandala), with only one novel which is autobiographical in nature and called *Shonen H* (The boy names H).

Kappa ga Nozoita Indo is divided into twenty-three chapters namely, *Karukatta* (Kolkata), *Seinaru Kawa* (The Holy river), *Seinaru Ushi* (The Holy Cow), *Khajuraho* (Khajuraho),

Agura (Agra), *Taji Expressu* (Taj Express), *Derii* (Delhi), *Kasuto seido* (Caste Sytem), *Futatabi Derii* (Delhi once again), *Bombay* (Bombay), *Haidorabado* (Hyderabad), *Madorasu* (Madras), *Kanchipuramu/Mahabaripuramu* (Kanchipuram/Mahabalipuram), *Madorai* (Madurai), *Tetsudo no tabi* (Travel by train), *Sainan Tan* (The southernmost tip), *Kochin* (Cochi), *Mysore* (Mysore), *Bangaroru* (Bangalore), *Ajanta/Erora* (Ajanta/Ellora), *Udaipuru* (Udaipur), *Jaipuru* (Jaipur), *Surinagaru* (Srinagar). The book as discussed above, covers the expanse of length from the northern most state of Kashmir to the southernmost tip; though the breadth of India remains largely unexplored.

With a guidebook-like structure, the work touches upon the major places in India. It is significant to note that while Agra (Taj Mahal) and Delhi and some of the major cities that would find their place in the itineraries of most Japanese travellers do find their place in the book, the scope of Kappa's writing is much more extensive. Infact, the titles of the chapters are deceptive to the extent that they not only talk about the place mentioned, and tourist spots that a guidebook would include, but include minute details of people, things and unique customs which are evident only to a keen and interested eye.

As discussed above, illustrations are a significant medium to take forward the narrative, at times supplementing the written discourse while at others exclusive to it. In both cases what the writer choses to write about in the work, is not only what is expected from a book about India but also about what catches his own interest and attention in the process of travel.

Images and their interpretation

Before analysing the types of images – both written and pictorial that the book contains, it would be important to categorise them based on themes they address or on the technique employed to capture the themes. As Kappa's work uses illustration as an equal and effective mode of narration, not secondary to the written narrative, it is important that this thematic categorisation of the images along with possible patterns of techniques that may emerge in the illustrations be considered.

When it comes to capturing the multitude of scenes that the author Kappa encounters and experiences in India, whether it be the scene capturing people offering a prayer in a mosque, the south Indian way of serving meals on a banana leaf, the railway platforms swarmed with people, the steam engine, or the many vendors the sketches are self-explanatory appended with some text explaining them. What is also significant to note is that the author does not skip documenting through his account and sketches street sellers of food in different part of the country. Rather the fish seller, the tea stall finds their place as sketches in southern Indian states as much as they do in northern India as well.

Even when there is a reference to the local culture of the places it is not through fleeting references but a detailed explanation of the same such as the Kathakali dance finds mention, with a sketch of the elaborate makeup that it entails. The author covers Srinagar's houseboats as much as Kerala backwaters, with equal enthusiasm and attention to detail. What is significant is that they get as much space in the book as Ajanta Ellora which are places which typically are sites that Japanese people would choose to visit in India. In fact, the Taj Mahal like structure Bibi ka Maqbara is sketched inside the book.

The book ends with Srinagar – just when the author thought he had seen the many aspects of India; he goes to Srinagar to witness snow by which he is taken aback- an aspect that most accounts on India may not cover since India is perceived as a hot country in most accounts. Broadly there are images about - People, Places and Things. Since the number and variety of images are many, the above said categories would be used for categorising and analysing images in the book.

People as Kappa sees them

In the process of travelling and keenly observing the street vendors of food and drinks, Kappa breaks his resolve of not eating and drinking like the Indians, in the hope of attempting to understand the people through their food. (10) He sketches the coconut water stall, the milk tea seller, who is illustrated just like the coconut water seller with his snacks along the street. Similarly, the sugar cane juice seller is sketched with his equipment and details of

how he operates the machine and serves fresh sugarcane juice to the customers. Street vendors include the person selling fresh curd or yoghurt, the *paanwala* (betel leaf seller) illustrated as the *Tabakoya*, the street snacks vendor selling the deep-fried snack samosa, or the *Chapaati* (flat bread) maker dolling out freshly baked chapatis from the *tandoor* (large clay oven). Indian food and its variety with the sellers especially on streets are portrayed with a lot of earnestness including the price of the things on sale as well. The detail with which these food vendors are covered is significant in throwing light on what attracts Kappa about India- the regular, commonplace and mundane things and people around.

When it comes to people, another set of Indian people that are described besides the street vendors are the people that Kappa gets a chance to interact with over time such as the taxi driver. He mentions how Indians such as the taxi driver or others leading a hard life may be wanting to charge more from a foreigner who comes from a seemingly wealthy nation like himself. But the author instead of criticising this attitude of the locals is sympathetic.

The author also gives a detailed description of shops that he comes across on the street such as the tailor, the spice shop, the miscellaneous shop of groceries, the tea shop, the sandal shop, among others. All these are very minutely illustrated with people, customers, the odd cow on streets giving a very 'realistic' picture of the place. The places capture a reality of India which is unique to it such as the tailor, the tea shop, etc as mentioned above, perhaps exoticizing the place. However, the fact that the author not just looked at the places fleetingly from a distance but includes it as part of his experience is something significant since it is an outsider's view which attempts to immerse itself in experiencing the culture of the place.

If one were to analyse the images, visually the images are seen from eye level from a slight distance, and while the author's interaction with the people sketched may not have been very close, barring a few people at the tea stall that he met and the taxi driver, it is important that common people are portrayed with lot of care and detail and occupy significant space in

the book. The portrayals can be said to be journalistic and true to detail.

The few people who Kappa focusses on visually to illustrate are famous people- such as Annadurai where he draws a portrait while comparing it to that of Gandhi. In the case of Gandhi his portrait finds mention along with his slippers, which capture Kappa's attention. Besides the closeup of a Kathakali dancer with full makeup, or the miniature artist at work, the representation is more of scenes with common people whether at the many food vendors or shops.

Among commoners who are depicted as individuals are a lady make cakes of cow dung to dry on a wall to use as fuel, the waiter in the train in Taj express, a step-by-step illustration of a lady draping a sari, a Kathakali dancer getting into his costume and make up, or a miniature painting artist.

4.2 Places

The chapters of the book list the major places, that the author visited in India. However, the names of the chapters do not necessarily reveal much about what it is in these places that the author writes about or depicts in Images through his sketches. A mix of expected places and those which may not find much space in similar books plays an important role in providing a unique perspective.

The Images that capture the detailed dimensions of rooms of hotels, from a bird's eye view are interspersed with written narrative and with sketches that capture the sights on the road, and experiences of a person who mingles with people in various places be it taxi driver, the people at the tea stall as discussed above.

Since the author covers a rather large number of cities through his travels in the country, he had the opportunity to visit places that were famous such as the Taj Mahal whose sketch also adorns the cover page of the book, there are places such as the High Court of Madras, Markets in Madras, and sites and scenes from Kanchipuram, Mahabalipuram such as bus stops, the temple gopurams, salt fields. In what is typical to many of the famous temples or monuments he illustrates, is that the author chooses to view the place from a height and not from the ground where he would have

viewed them from. This urge to climb heights and then sketch the view from the top is seen throughout the book especially to with respect to places, hotel rooms.

While the author himself narrates that he does this to make the illustrations interesting, the fact that Kappa reserves the high-end angle for only buildings and monuments while depicting people from the eye level consistently throughout the books also shows his awareness of the grammar of visual Images, wherein a high angle of people would give a position of power of over the subject. However, the author interestingly uses this angle (the top down) high angle of illustration only when sketching places and not people for whom he reserves an eye level view. He does this with the intention to make the book interesting by his own admission.

4.3 Things and others

Many of the objects categorised as things for the purpose of analysis are found in the places visited by Kappa but are given a special focus through explanation or illustration. The things that capture Kappa's imagination are things largely peculiar or unique to India such as the post boxes, posters that call for family planning, a cycle rickshaw, Gandhi's sandals at the museum, Indian tiffin carriers, the three wheeled auto rickshaw, miniature temples, in short an amalgamation of the many things utilised for leading life in India. Besides these miscellaneous things or objects the animals that have been illustrated and discussed are cows, and elephants. A realistic portrayal of these animals on the streets can be seen in the book. As for things that cannot be categorised under places are detailed portions of temple architecture which the author has reproduced in a more magnified way such as those from Khajuraho, the intricate carving work in Tajmahal, a statue of Gomateshwara carved out of a single stone as major examples. Since the author Kappa is an artist himself, the eye for architectural detail, and the care with which the images are represented in the book through his sketches seem as an attempt at realistic representation of the things and people as he witnessed them without distortion visually or through a biased perspective of a foreigner.

5. Offering a comparative, self-reflective

perspective

The narrative of the book besides approaching India from a multitude of perspectives of Image and discourse is also unique in looking at India vis-à-vis Japan of earlier years. For instance, the attitude that the author assumes when writing about Indian railways is one of admiration and acknowledgement of the fact that India had railways running some 20 years earlier than Japan; and was home to the widest area covered by railways in the whole of Asia. The author continues to explore the compartment size with respect to how it is in Japan, or with the experience of other Japanese people. AC first class and second-class travel are compared to being as different as heaven and hell by Japanese at large is again something the author reflects upon, citing that while he is travelling by the AC first class, he would be keen to come back to a second-class travel experience to really comprehend Indian rail experience. The author in other words does not fall into the trap of age-old stereotypical notions about India which may have been formed by fellow countrymen as well.

This stance also translates into how he expresses or evaluates the air-conditioning in the train as well. While acknowledging that the air conditioning was not as effective as it may be in a train in Japan, it certainly was cooler when one experienced the outside temperature in India. In fact, the author half-jokingly says in Japan the air-conditioning is more *reito* (freezing) than *reibo* (cooling).

The author is taken aback witnessing the many people including children are lying on the platform listlessly. He himself is overcome by the desire to experience what it felt like to do the same and lies down. But soon he realises how some beggars flock to him asking him for money. The experience makes him realise that merely mimicking these people would not make him experience the lives they lived daily, again illustrating a self-reflective and empathetic view of the author.

6. Capturing India through its glorious, mundane, and often overlooked aspects

It is clear from the work how the author has an eye for detail and gives minutely detailed illustrations of places, things, people, and experiences including details through the visual

and written media, which may miss the eye of a tourist. For instance, when he visits the Rajghat museum -a place built in memory of Gandhi, it is not just the usual things that he documents such as the place of worship, the photographs, etc but it is Gandhi's slippers which catch the author's eye and which he also sketches, narrating the wonder and admiration he had of these slippers which took Gandhi across the length and breadth of the country. He also admires the tenacity of Gandhi when compared to politicians who have much shorter terms.

What is especially interesting is how the author changes his gaze from so called oft repeated ones considered important to those which are mundane and commonplace such as the lunch boxes (lunch carriers) and their unique design illustrated with precise measurements as well. This eye for detail in mundane things, in the everyday commonplace people helps to build a perspective which especially finds expression through the many illustrations by the author. As Ghosh mentions "There is a recognition here that what is common sense for him need not be so for the rest of the world. For this recognition to exist there has to be a certain openness to surprise, an acknowledgement of the limits of knowingness of the witness." (ix) in reference to the Chinese traveller Zhou Daguan.

This is the reason that glimpses of daily rural life, agricultural activities in the field find a detailed mention since the Images are not just fleeting or covering only major cities, or stereotypical motifs such as the Taj Mahal alone. Even as he goes to the major cities of Delhi, Bombay, Chennai, Hyderabad and Calcutta, and Bangalore, it is not only the places he narrates about but also his experience of how he perceived the people and the atmosphere of the respective cities. For instance, Kappa perceived people of southern states of Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu as being different from what he experienced in the northern states, comparing it to be like his experience in how he felt when he travelled to Northern and southern Italy as well. He thinks they may be a little shy when in comparison to the people he may have met in the northern India.

In doing so it is significant to note that as an illustrator Kappa is aware that while some of

his sketches are made from a bird's eye view especially when it comes to places, temples, monuments and hotel rooms if visualised from the top or a bird's eye view which theoretically amounts to distancing oneself from the target and when it comes to people his eye level drawings are suggestive of a stance of equality and not one of assuming a superior standpoint even in the literal sense.

7. Conclusion

The paper attempted to analyse a contemporary Japanese journalistic travel account that employs the written and visual modes of narrative. By doing so it emphasises the significance of approaching the analysis of a text through a multi modal approach as propounded by Kree and Leeuwen giving equal significance to the visual image as the written narrative, moving away from the conventional method of analysing visual images as semiotic codes that are supplementary and not independent of the written narrative.(18) By using both modes of representation, Kappa showcases his skill as an illustrator and a writer with equal finesse.

Even as the visual images in the book range from those that are from the eye level and a distance especially of people, and markets and street vendors they are largely from the point of view of an observer or a journalist than a person who is ready to be a part of the narrative especially in the visual medium. The only people whose sketches are made at an individual level are those whom he did not meet in person but are significant with respect to documenting a book on India. These include famous people such as Gandhi and Annadurai, or people whom he sketched as individuals in a role such as a lady (model) teaching how to tie a sari, a waiter in the Taj Express, and a miniature artist.

When it comes to places, the book covers a wide range, without a bias for the few stereotypical ones which may find their way into a typical guidebook on India. While covering places, the author takes an independent stance and itinerary to give significance to cities, town, streets, temples, and the many things that characterise everyday life in India.

The account is one that showcases India through two modes enabling the author to both

capture India as he witnesses it visually while explaining his perspective on what he witnesses and his experiences. This two pronged approach to represent India gives it a realistic journalistic perspective of documenting things and places as seen, while at the same time enabling the author to reflect and compare these with his own experiences from other places he may have travelled to, and also Japan in the written narrative, wherein he assumes an empathetic and understanding view of the place, its people and customs which while characterising India at times by their uniqueness, also offer a more empathetic and understanding view of the same. A multi-modal approach to understanding India by the author makes it different and more layered than what may have been possible for a purely written or visual discourse perhaps and lends a better lens of understanding of the subject India. Further studies in this sparsely explored area of visual and written narratives could be explored through advertisements, social media and literature alike.

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