

## GRAPHIC NOVEL: INTRODUCTION, HISTORY AND FUTURE IN INDIAN SUBCONTINENT

Kavita Saini

M.A, M. Phil, NET in English

Research Scholar, Kalinga University, Raipur

### ABSTRACT:

Graphic novel is 21<sup>st</sup> century novel. Richard Kyle coined the term graphic novel first time in a magazine named *Capa-alpha*. The Dictionary Merriam Webster gives a proper definition of graphic novel, 'Call it a fictional story that is presented in a comic strip format and publish in a book'. The word graphic novel is used in border term because it includes fiction, non-fiction and anthologizes books. Graphic novels are different from comic books. There is a difference between a book in normal language and a book with images Graphic novel is better than the text book because it better depict a particular idea or scene. It uses the interplay of text, images and illustrations in a comic strip format to tell a story. To construct a narrative, graphic novel uses graphic elements such as panels, frames, speech, and thought balloons etc. instead of depending on text only. It uses these graphic devices in a sequential way to create and evoke a story in a reader's mind. Graphic novels are not glorified comic book; they are novels using images as well as words to tell a story. In comic books images give an overview of the story which encourages the child to read the whole book. Graphic novels contain high level vocabulary than comic books. Graphic novels are great for visual learners. It offers the opportunity to learn important reading skills like inferences than text books because they depict an idea or a scene in a better way.

### INTRODUCTION:

Some people are of the view that graphic novel is the name used for the modern comic book. But we must understand that graphic novel is a long book in comparison with comic book. A comic book describes multiple issues which are not very serious; on the other hand, graphic novel describes serious political, historical issues, and mythological themes. A graphic novel is like a novel and it is complete in itself. A comic book has rough and cheap pages and the printing technology is also not very good while the graphic novel's pages are of good quality, printing and graphics art are awesome. So, the graphic novels are very expensive in comparison with comic books. Comic books arouse humour but the graphic novels are written as a parody to the contemporary society. They are a kind of satire addressing the people. Graphic novel, graphic narrative, manga and comic book are the name of the book that presents text and images together.

The positive point of graphic novel is that it gives you an exact idea, pure and perfect imagination. It makes the reader connected to the writer but it has negative point too because it blocks the free flow of imagination of the reader. While reading a normal book you have a free flow of imagination and it is the most romantic part of reading. But in graphic novel, you have image with text which blocks your free imagination. It is the drawback of graphic novel. The graphic novel is basically a narrative which used both picture and words to narrate a story. It can be understood as two stories in one- textual narrative and visual narrative.

These narratives are placed in juxtaposition to one another. It is used to draw our attention to differences and contrasts as well as to unexpected similarities between the two stories. Reading the two narratives together is a strange experience. We read a graphic narrative to consider how the words and images on a page are juxtaposed with one another rather than reading the visual narrative as a mere complement to the textual narrative. Hillary Chute used the term 'graphic narrative' and says:

I use 'graphic narrative', instead of the more common term 'graphic novel', because the most gripping works coming out now, from men and women alike, claim their own historicity even as they work to destabilize standard narratives of history. Particularly, there is a significant yet diverse body of notification graphic work that engages with the subject either in extremis or facing brutal experience (2008b:92).

Christie Marx is of the view that today's comic book or graphic novel originated with the development of print culture all over the world. We can trace the origin of these books in many years ago in cave painting, and rock art. Most of the people think that comic books are for children but picture story books are written for mature readers. We must keep in mind that comic book is different form graphic novel. Graphic novel has a depth in story to represent real life situations and its targets are mature reader. Because of these things we can call graphic novel a work of literature like other works and it also deserves attention of the critics. It tells the reader about the society, culture and people in which it is written. That's why graphic novel should be study as a literary work. Hillay Chute writes in *Comics as Literature* about graphic novel as follows:

Graphic narrative has echoed and expanded on the formal inventions of fiction from modernist social and aesthetic attitudes

and practices to the postmodern shift toward the democracy of popular forms. In the geaphic narrative, we see an embrance of reproducibility and masscirculation as well as rigorous, experimental attention to form as amode of political intervention (2008:462).

In India graphic novel is also a new format and it challenging the old convention of storytelling within which the stories were being conventionally told. The graphic novel is a new development in Indian Writing in English. In India there are not many books published which favour graphic novel in positive way. In this context, I would like to mention Pramod Nayar's book *The Indian Graphic Novel: Nation, History and Critique* (2016). This book appreciates this new genre in Indian Writing in English. "This present book forwards the claim that the medium possesses enough formal and thematic complexities, not to mention political edges, to deserve the same ( if not more) sustained academic attention as traditional genres in Indian writing in English", says Pramod Nayar(2016:6).

In India there are only small percentiles of people who study and appreciate graphic novel. There is really a need to be attentive towards this genre like other genres in Indian writing in English. Before indulges in this discussion on graphic novel Pramod Nayar tells that this genre is for elite people. Moreover, it includes images along with text which makes it very expensive in cost. It is not like black & white text book which we Indians are habitual of reading. The graphic novel tells that there is no history outside what is presented in the graphic narrative.

In the graphic narrative, there are pictures which tell the story so; an average Indian reader can easily understand what is going on in the text. These images are like visual stimuli that we see in Manmohan Desai's colorful film poster. We have a tradition of *Amar Chitra Katha* or *Chandamama* series

where the Indian mythological stories are told to the Indian children in very easy way. The Indians are very easily interrupted towards the visual stimuli. Pramod Nayar first mentions the graphic novel *Hush*. It represents only visual no word. So, it is different from a conventional work of fiction. It is written by Pratheek Thomas, illustrated by Rajiv Eipe and published by Manta Ray. It tells the story of a school girl who becomes a victim of child sex abuse. So, this work aware people against child sex abuse which is big problem that Indian children are facing today. *Hush* is a short story of seventeen pages about a school girl, Maya who killed her own father, the vice principal of the school. It is a silent story of child abuse.



Figure 0.1: Thomas, Pratheek and Rajiv Eipe (Illustrator).*Hush*.Banglore: Manta Ray, 2010.1.

The graphic illustration describes accuracy in each frame. It makes incident real in front of readers. The graphic novel successfully conveys the plot of the story. Every frame represents minute details, for instance, on first page third frame describes pen, duster and chalk and date is mentioned on the black board (see figure 0.1). The dark background describes past incidents and trauma of Maya's life. The story of *Hush* educates and guides parents about child abuse. It represents the dark side of human relation. Most of the girls are exploited by their own family members and because of shame the police complain is not filed. One third of India population is children

and child abuse is increasing rapidly. The writer Pratheek Thomas and illustrator Rajiv Eipe very realistically draw the story of child abuse and educate the reader.

Drawing the line: Indian Women Fight Back is another graphic novel written by Zubaan. It presents a series of stories based on violence which every Indian women faces in her day to day life. It was written as a response to Delhi gang rape case 2012. It contains fourteen stories which describe Indian women's struggle, and difficulties. Apart from these, there are some other works which give graphic fiction movement a progressive outlook. *A Gardner in the Wasteland: Jotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty* is another graphic novel in this contex. It was written by Srividya Natrajan, illustrated by Aparajita Ninan and published by Navayana publication in 2012. It describes the life story of historical figure Jotiba Phule, a social activist. The writer has freshened up the memories of Jotiba Phule after a time span of one hundred and fifty years. Here the writer attacks the traditional Hindu mindset who believes in untouchability and caste-system. Srividya Natrajan also criticized the Hindu mentality in *Bhimayana*. Dr. Ambedkar was of the view that a person who believed in caste-system must believe in untouchability as they are related to each other. There are many other graphic novels which describe real history of India and present the story in very convincing way. So, graphic novels not only represent light issues but also represent serious historical, political and ideologies issues.

It is also important to throw light on the history and background of graphic novel genre in India. The first comic series *Amar Chitra Katha* began in 1967 and it enjoyed a great success. But the graphic novel went through many changes and has a history of its own. The progressive graphic narrative is a collaborative effort of writer who writes the text and

illustrator who draws the picture. In short, it is a collective representation of text and picture and together they express the thoughts and feeling of the graphic novelist.

Here is the series of Indian graphic novels which presents contemporary political, historical and environmental issues in a very interesting way. In this series, we talk about first graphic novel *River of Stories* (1994) published by Kalpavriksh. It is based on the building of Sardar Sarover Dam on the Narmada River and its impact on the local inhabitants. *Delhi Calm* by Vishwajoti Ghosh represents situation of emergency in India which took place during the year 1975 to 1977. It is one of the memorable moments of Indian democracy. There are some other graphic novels which focus on the urban India. This kind of novels describes the issues of urban cities. In this respect, Sarnath Banerjee is one of the leading figures who raise the contemporary India's hidden realities behind the developing metropolitan cities. In *Corridor* Banerjee describes the hidden lives and fragmented realities through the story of a Delhi shopkeeper. Here we understand the book through visual narrative because the writer writes this graphic novel keeping in view the elite reader. Pramod Nayar states that it is the visual stimuli which can only attract the Indian audience towards the graphic novel and this visual narrative or stimuli is the only charm which makes graphic novel a success in Indian context. Pramod Nayar believes that there is no history outside the representation and it is true in Indian context also.

Some graphic novels represent the controversial issues like child sex abuse, lesbian community etc. These are most inflammable issues of today's India. *Kari* by Amruta Patil is such a graphic novel which took lesbian community as a theme. *Hyderabad: A graphic novel* by Jai Undurti and Harsho Mohan Chatterji is a graphic novel that talks about

many changes that the city had gone through. It talks about the histories Hyderabad goes through before becoming an IT hub. As we have earlier told that graphic novel emerged from painting in caves and rock art so, it has a traditional value too. The two novels namely *I See the Promised Land* and *Sita's Ramayana* are two novels which represents Patua scroll art. Here the artist first develops hand painted panels and then arranging them into pages of the books. So, the two different things are woven together to make a single book. It was a kind of experiment which was not successful. It is difficult for the traditional artists to cope up with the new printing technology but this effort is notable. The publisher even thought and took it as a challenge and gave a shape of book. *I See the Promised Land* is based on the biography of Martin Luther.

The anthology named *This Side That side: Restoring Partition* is another book in the genre of graphic novel. It represents 28 stories on the theme of partition. These 28 stories are narrated by different persons and by different perspectives. It is published by Yoda Press in 2013. This book brought together the artists from India, Pakistan and Bangladesh who experienced partition in some way or other way. It is very interesting to read this graphic narrative along with visual narrative. It is the most exciting graphic novel of South Asia.

The graphic novels are written on mythological themes also. *Amar Chitra Katha* is the best example of this. There are many more graphic novels namely *Adi Parva: churning the Ocean* (2012), *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers* (2016) by Amruta Patil. In *Adi Parva*, the word *Adi* means beginning and it describes the beginning of great Indian epic Mahabharata. The graphic novel *Sauptik* tells the story of son of Guru Dronacharya named Aswathama who was killed in Mahabharata war by Pandawas. *Ramayana 3392 AD* is also based on Indian mythology.

But we must accept that graphic novels will remain lesser level in comparison with novels in text form. It requires text with picture and printing of picture requires big investment. No doubt, graphic novels are liked by people but they are not best seller yet. In India I have read only one book which favors and support graphic novel is *The Indian Graphic Novel: Nation, History and Critique* by Pramod Nayar. In this book he presents a concept of narration.

It adds a new dimension to narration ..... events and contexts and conditions .... The visual- so that multiple ways of telling are available on the same page: the documentary and the aesthetic the satiric caricature and the traumatic realist (2016:7).

The graphic novel has an important place in South Asian literature. It represents cultural identity, memory of the past, Indian history and satire on the contemporary Indian society. Many graphic novels represent history of Indian before independence and the social evils prevalent in India at that time. In Indian context, perhaps the first graphic narrative is written by Oriji Sen namely *The River of Stories* There are many other graphic narrative writers who enrich the graphic narrative in Indian writing in English namely Vishwajyoti Ghosh, Amruta Patil, Sarnath Banerjee, Shrividya Natarajan, Gautam Bhatia and others. The graphic novels are more expensive; more sophisticated and have a reach to small population of India. The graphic novels have all the literary elements like plot, theme, character, but it adds one more thing that is visual, images and figures.

The register used in graphic narrative is adopted from the political cartoons in newspaper. It is the funny way to satire the politician and their policies. This type of visual and text appeal to the wide audience. But paradoxically these graphic novels are very expensive and can understand by only urban or educated people. This book offers a new look to a new way of writing. The graphic narrative must be taken serious as any other text in Indian Writing in English.

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