

VISIONS OF TOMORROW: EXPLORING FUTURISTIC TRENDS IN INDIAN GRAPHIC NOVEL, HUSH

Abstract

This research paper examines the futuristic trends portrayed in the Indian English writing. By delving into the genre of Graphic novels, the study aims to bring forth the changing trends that have emerged in Indian English writing. The importance of the study rests in reading a specific genre of graphic novel and situating it in the context of postmodern style. *Hush*, by Prateek Thomas has been selected for the present study that investigates the ways in which the graphic novel engages with and challenges traditional representations of the story, highlighting unique perspectives through illustrations and wordless narrative. The major question that the paper deals with is, what constitutes art under the concerned ism.

Keywords: Graphic Novel, Wordless novel, Indian English Writing, Postmodernism.

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I. INTRODUCTION

To begin with the study of graphic novels it is crucial to understand the meaning of Graphic novels. Merriam-Webster defines it as, a fictional story that is presented in comic-strip format and published as a book. “The graphic novel is a term first coined in English in 1964 and popularised by American legend Will Eisner and can be understood simply as a ‘fat comic’ in book form which can be aimed at adult readers” (Gravett 2015). Typically, a book-length tale written with a combination of text and sequential art, frequently in comic book style, is referred to as a ‘graphic novel’. Graphic novels are very important in many ways, and their influence goes beyond that of conventional storytelling. Graphic novels are important because of their unique appeal to the audience as it has multiple aspects that make them more approachable like visuality, accessibility and inclusivity, and emotional impact. Graphic novels give readers a distinctive and engaging experience by fusing the power of visual storytelling with narrative imagery. It is a compelling medium for readers of all ages because of the artwork, panel designs, and colour use, which enhance the narrative, emotions, and atmosphere. Graphic novels appeal to a wide range of readers, including those of various ages, socioeconomic backgrounds, and reading levels. Combining text with images makes it easier to communicate difficult concepts and emotions, which makes them especially useful for visual learners, reluctant readers, and people who have literacy difficulties. It gives illustrators and painters a stage on which to present their works of art and creative talents. In graphic novels, visual art and storytelling are combined to tell stories in unique and varied ways that push the limits of the medium and encourage artistic expression. Readers of graphic novels may experience intense emotions as a result of the text and image combination. By enhancing the narrative’s effect and fostering a more direct and immediate connection with the characters and their experiences, the visual aspects can make a long-lasting impact on the reader.

A graphic novel or comic both comes under the larger category of sequential art. It means that the text and image combination will have a logical flow to it. So, to read and logically understand the story, different are frames used. A panel—a term used to describe the page of a graphic novel—is further divided into transitions and gutters. There is always the right order to read the thought balloons to comprehend the message. These balloons are typically organised from left to right, though. Depending on the emotion being portrayed, the speech balloon's colour, size, and typeface change. This emotional involvement can promote compassion and comprehension. To convey the thoughts and words of the characters in these books, speech and thought balloons are used. In the thinking or speech balloon, visual noises are used to create sound effects, such as Boom! Bam! Fwoosh! etc. Graphic novels are not only simple, linear stories. They can take on societal issues, examine deep ideas, and provide multi-layered storytelling experiences. The complexity and richness of the tale are increased by the nuanced storytelling techniques like symbolism, metaphor, and visual motifs made possible by the integration of text and visuals. Graphic novels frequently explore cultural, historical, and social backgrounds, giving readers insights into many eras, societies, and viewpoints. They can promote diversity and inclusivity by highlighting underrepresented voices and giving a voice to underrepresented experiences. Graphic novels are becoming more and more valued for their educational potential. They can be utilised in the classroom as teaching aids to engage pupils, advance literacy, and encourage critical thought. Graphic novels are useful instructional tools since they cover a wide range of topics, including history, science, biography, and social issues. Hence, the value of graphic novels rests in their

capacity to blend storytelling with visual arts, resulting in a singular medium that appeals to a wide audience, encourages creativity, and emotional connection, and allows for the investigation of intricate topics and narratives.

Even though the origin of Graphic novels dates back to the near 1930s. The idea of representing a narrative with the help of visual images is not new. It existed since time immemorial. People have been using visuals instead of words to communicate stories since the time of primitive man. Graphic storytelling has been a popular method for conveying ideas and thoughts ever since the Cro-Magnon cave drawings and Ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs (Tychinski 2004). The Western world saw “[i]n 1933, M.C. Gaines created the first comic book, called *New Funnies*, which reprinted daily comic strips. Later that year, a company called *Humor Publications* printed the first all-original comic book, *Detective Dan*. And in 1938, everything exploded with the publication of *Action Comics #1* and its star, a guy named *Superman!*” (Tychinski 2004). It was sort of a reprint for an older newspaper that had humour comic rips and had pioneered many of the later-used story-telling techniques in comics. Famous comic book creator Will Eisner first used the term ‘graphic novel’ in 1978 when he published *A Contract with God and Other Tenement Stories*, widely regarded as one of the most significant and pioneering works of the genre in the United States.

II. GRAPHIC NOVELS AS A PART OF ART AND LITERATURE

One major question arises in the study of graphic novels, comic books, or wordless novels, can we call it a work of art? Or a part of literature? And another major categorisation of it makes us wonder under which canon of art or literature it comes. If we see the origin of such a book in the 1930s, which is the ending point of modernism and the start of the new epoch of postmodernism. In this chapter, I will try to analyse graphic novels as influential works of postmodernism by assessing the similarities between postmodern principles and graphic novels’ characteristics. So, if we read it from the perspective of postmodernism, it has the potential to be analysed under the same ism. The mid-20th century saw the emergence of the complex and multidimensional cultural and intellectual movement known as postmodernism. Modernist principles are rejected, and self-reflexivity, intertextuality, irony, pastiche, and a blending of high and low culture are stressed. These are the characteristics that define it. Hence, I proceed to read the graphic novels under the said category. Many of these postmodern traits may be seen in graphic novels. The characteristics of being self-reflexive, intertextual, having non-linear narratives, hybridity and blurring of the styles and genres, and authenticity justify the possibility that graphic novels are postmodern. Drawing attention to its form, strategies, and norms, graphic novels frequently consider their status as a medium. They might break the fourth wall, use metafictional elements, or incorporate authorial commentary into the story. These traits of self-awareness and self-reflection fit postmodern trends. It has intertextual references that come from a variety of sources and reinterprets literature, mythology, popular culture, and art history. They might also contain elements of postmodern aesthetics, such as references, parodies, and pastiches, which blur the distinction between creativity and appropriation. Graphic novels embrace postmodernism’s experimenting with classic linear narrative patterns. To challenge conventional ideas of time and causality, they may use fragmented tales, non-linear storytelling, or numerous narrative perspectives. This dispersion is reminiscent of postmodern worries about deconstruction and different viewpoints. As plot devices, graphic novels regularly use irony, satire, and pastiche. Through funny or critical methods, they may subvert or challenge accepted conventions,

genres, or cultural norms. This irony's fun and mischievous application fits postmodern ideals. Realism, abstraction, manga, and other visual traditions are frequently incorporated into graphic novels along with other artistic forms. They may mix various narrative subgenres, such as science fiction, fantasy, noir, or autobiography, to create hybrid and eclectic works that push the bounds of predefined categories. Postmodernism questions the idea of a single creator and the veracity of the artwork. With their collaborative nature between authors and illustrators, graphic novels pose issues with authorial control and the lines separating different creators. Additionally, graphic novels' use of mechanical duplication and wide distribution distorts ideas of authenticity and uniqueness. Even if not every graphic novel has every postmodern trait, many do, making them eligible to be categorised as postmodern artworks. The medium is broad and includes a wide range of styles, ideas, and methods, thus it's crucial to highlight that not all graphic novels fall into the postmodern category.

III. READING THE GRAPHIC NOVEL THROUGH THE LENSES OF POST MODERNISM

After the categorisation of the graphic novel as postmodern another doubt that comes among the people is whether it can be termed art. A significant component of graphic novels' creative quality is their visual component. Line work, shading, colour, composition, and panel layout are just a few of the artistic methods that artists use to make reading visually appealing and powerful. The use of both text and images creates a dynamic and engaging storytelling format. Many graphic novels are praised for their artistic characteristics and are considered to be works of art. In addition to being displayed in galleries and honoured with significant awards, they are studied in academic settings. The ability of graphic novels to push the limits of narrative and visual expression makes them an important component of the art world. It's crucial to remember, though, that not all graphic novels are instantly regarded as works of art. The artistic worth and perception can differ, just like with any other sort of creative effort. Others may be highly respected for their creative and intellectual achievements, while some graphic novels may be merely entertaining or lacking in depth of artistic expression. In the end, a graphic novel's creative quality is subjective and might differ from reader to reader.

The subjectivity that is associated with the understanding of graphic novels as art is an ontological study that can be justified or negated with the help of different theorists. Graphic novels can be written by lone authors or in teams, and they can cover a wide range of genres, aesthetics, and subject subjects. Graphic novels incorporate imaginative storytelling, visual design, composition, and the use of diverse artistic methods, just like any other form of artistic expression. To tell a story and arouse feelings, they use aspects of literature, art, and graphic design. Complex themes, social challenges, or original viewpoints can all be explored in graphic novels. Remember Benjamin Walter, an American theorist, and philosopher whose work, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935), puts forward the idea about the emerging changes in the notion of 'art'. His line of thought is heavily influenced by the Marxist philosophy of capital. Walter Benjamin analyses the effects of technical development in the essay specifically the mass production and dissemination of art through mechanical methods like photography and cinema. He investigates how these changes impact the sincerity, aura, and cultural significance of art in the modern day. Benjamin contends that mechanical copying lessens an artwork's aura—the sensation of originality, authenticity, and

distinctiveness connected with a work of art—by removing it from its distinctive presence and conventional circumstances. He contends that mass producing art diminishes its worth as a unique, priceless thing and instead emphasises its repeatability and accessibility. Benjamin also looks at the social and political effects of mass reproduction. He contends that making art accessible through technological methods has the power to democratise culture and dissolve social divides. He investigates the effects of new forms of reproduction on the link between art and politics, the function of the artist, and the ability of art to change society. It is noteworthy that the concepts presented by Walter Benjamin have had a profound impact on the disciplines of art theory, cultural studies, and media studies. Scholars continue to examine and debate his ideas, particularly in light of the digital age and the latest advancements in the distribution and reproduction of artistic works.

This is relevant to the study of Graphic novels also. In terms of art and literature, the graphic novel is a relatively young movement that has gained a lot of attention and popularity in recent years. This is how it became a distinctive and significant form that combines literary and visual arts that is appealing to a broad audience of readers produced by this synthesis. In the past, graphic novels and comics were frequently marginalised as lowbrow art forms or disregarded as mere kiddie entertainment. But graphic novels have disproved these notions and emerged as a respectable and sophisticated art form. They have proven their capacity to convey intricate stories, delve into significant issues, and present artistic expression, winning praise and accolades from the literary and artistic sectors. They can do this in a dynamic and immersive fashion by using panel layouts, visual metaphors, symbolism, and the juxtaposition of text and images. Readers of graphic novels are frequently invited to participate in interactive and participatory experiences and experiment with alternative narrative forms. Graphic novels are very good at addressing social concerns, fostering diversity, and amplifying marginalised perspectives. They have given underrepresented communities a platform to address issues including racial and gender inequality, sexuality, social justice, and cultural identity. Graphic novels' visual format can promote communication and social awareness while improving empathy and understanding. Graphic novels provide a wide range of storytelling strategies that go beyond those found in traditional writing. Adaptations of graphic novels into other media, such as movies, television shows, and video games, have become increasingly important. They have inspired successful adaptations that have increased the audience for graphic storytelling by showcasing its visual and narrative appeal. As a result, the original graphic novels have received more attention, which has aided in their rise to fame in the literary and artistic worlds. The integration of visual art and literature, acceptance as a serious art form, creative storytelling techniques, capacity to draw a wide range of readers, representation of underrepresented voices, and cross-media influence are all factors that have contributed to graphic novels' rise as a new trend in art and literature. Their development has enhanced the field of literature and the arts, providing fresh opportunities for narrative and compelling audiences.

IV. GRAPHIC NOVELS AND INDIA

To turn the course of study towards Indian Graphic Novel then as, Oshin Vipra Sagar in her paper titled Colloquium: The Story of Sequential Art comments that medieval art in the Western world as well as the Eastern world grew out of the cultural and social influences of their ruling empires and the iconographic traditions were generally associated with the

religious institutes, sects or groups dominant in those regions. She says about the east in contrast to the western emergence of this art form;

“...in India, the sequential art was found in the cave paintings of Ajanta, Ellora and the likes that depicted events from Buddha’s life or the stories of Bodhisatva; from Rajasthan the Phad paintings told stories of Pabu Ji and Devnarayan Ji (folk deities of the region), and Kaavads, a closeted shrine, depicted stories from Mahabharata and Ramayana; the Pichhwais from Gujarat depicted stories of Krishna and so did Pattachitras from West Bengal. Though they all represented different themes, certainly not the unanimous voice of any authoritarian religious institution like the Church, yet all of these also had somewhat religious themes running through them.” (Sagar 7)

The postmodern turn in India flourished under the redesigning of the architectural buildings in the 1960s. But then, graphic novels became the torch bearer of this style in India. There were several experiments started to happen and continue to be so. In the 20th-century Indian graphic novels as Pramod K. Nayar writes, the graphic novel in India also caters “primarily to an urban audience” (10). The graphic narrative, with its verbal-visual and critical literacy, is medium India needs to address modern issues and deliver a politically charged cultural critique, according to Nayar, who goes on to explain the crucial role that the graphic novel plays in IWE. The graphic narrative’s embodiment of critical literacy enables us to understand texts as embedded in caste, sexism, and capitalism’s unequal social fields. It also necessitates that the reader be aware of the stance they are taking towards both the text and the social domains it represents. He vehemently asserts that the Indian graphic novel is perhaps the new literary form that the nation has been “longing for” (Singh 339). He contends, “For this freedom of representation, for taking the process of critique into a medium associated with just entertainment, for its opening up an array of story-telling strategies and for its insistence on tackling more social commentary and cultural critique of the nation’s lacunae of flaws, the graphic novel heralds a major shift within IWE” (Singh 8). One of India’s most well-known graphic novelists, Sarnath Banerjee, defined the work of a graphic novelist in an interview as “the recorders of history, that’s how I consider myself”.

The River of Stories by Orijit Sen, which was published in 1994, marked the introduction of the graphic book in Indian writing in English (IWE). “Unlike its American counterpart, the graphic novel in IWE has, from its inception, commented on social and political concerns” (Gupta 3). The first comic book scenario is credited to Pran and Anant Pai from India. Pran provided India with some of its most adored and admired comedic characters with Chacha Chaudhary and his faithful sidekick Sabu. Anant Pai, better known as Uncle Pai, is the creator of the Amar Chitra Katha series and the Tinkle comics, two of the most popular and extensively read comic book series in India that are enjoyed by both children and adults. The traditional Indian comic book publishing system was upended by Anant Pai’s debut of Amar Chitra Katha in 1967, which finally resulted in the market for Indian comics expanding. To teach young children about Indian folklore and religious cult traditions, Anant Pai developed Amar Chitra Katha. The 30- to 40-page Amar Chitra Katha *comic* books had illustrated narratives that reflected India’s illustrious past. Because each Amar Chitra *Katha* magazine contained one complete standalone story that was depicted through visuals and text and organised sequentially, it is evident where the roots of Indian

graphic novels lie. Such fresh, distinctive information in a novel way is credited to Anant Pai in India. The Indian Book House and Anant Pai published India's first Tinkle, a comic book magazine, in 1980. In India, school-age children's interests are covered in the comics, articles, and columns in Tinkle, which are still published today. The 1994 release of *River of Stories*, written and illustrated by Orijit Sen, is regarded as the first graphic novel in India. It is about the impact of the building of Sardar Sarovar Dam in Narmada Valley on local people. Since then, the medium has flourished in India, and Graphic Novels have become potent sources for exploring social, cultural, and political issues that are depicted through this medium, as seen in Sarnath Banerjee's Corridor which explores the city of Delhi through the shopkeeper Jehangir Rangoonwalla. Amruta Patil's Kari, S. Anand's Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability has contextualized Dalits by depicting the autobiography of Dr. Bhimarao Ambedkar. Vishwajyoti Ghosh in his seminal work *Delhi Calm* has presented a story of The Emergency of 1975-1977. *Kari* by Amruta Patil is a graphic novel that gives voice to a lesbian. Malik Sajad's *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir*, draws the history of Kashmir from a boy's experience.

V. THE STORY OF HUSH

It is apt to quote Gravatt who says about Indian Graphic novels that, it is less of the corporate conveyor-belt production system of editors, writers, panicles, inkers, colourists, and letterers used in India to create these revolutionary graphic novels. Instead, they are frequently the creation and vision of one complete auteur or a close working relationship. Being in charge of every work enables one person or a collaborative partnership to express their views and feelings through words and images, which enhances individuality, directness, and intimacy. Some graphic novels' artwork also borrows from long-standing practices of visual storytelling, sometimes in combination with written or spoken language (2015). This stands true for the novels like *Hush* (2011) from Manta Ray comics written by Prateek Thomas and the illustrations are done by Rajiv Eipe. The article in *Hindustan Times* is "about a young girl at the turn of events who brings a gun to school" (Singh 2011). This graphic novel tells the stories of darkness, rage, vengeance, and child sex abuse through images. In an Interview with the illustrator, Eire talked about his style of illustration. He says,

"I think I used a combination of black ink drawn with a crow quill nib and a brush wash for texture and shading. The flashback sequences in the book needed to look noticeably different for the story to make sense, and so after some experiments and deliberation, we decided to use panels of pencil drawings against a black background. The cover was also a combination of ink and wash, with some digital tweaking. I believe we chose black and white ink drawings and wash to reflect the grim story. I should mention that a lot of the credit for the visualisation, pacing and design of the book goes to Pratheek Thomas, the writer. He had a very clear idea of the book in his head, and all I had to do was fill in the gaps with drawings." (Srinivasan 2022)

The protagonist of *Hush* is Maya, a child sex abuse victim who is abused by her father. The tale remembers Maya's struggle as a sufferer from silence, dread, and repression. Like Maya, her mother is a victim of fear and suppression. She is unable to stop her husband from ascending the steep stairs to Maya's room every night and finds herself in a very unpleasant situation. Maya's mother and her younger sister Anju are helpless bystanders who

cannot stop their father from fulfilling his fantasies. When Maya notices her father staring at her younger sister, she tries to retaliate. Maya responds by killing the offender and then taking her own life. The novel starts with the arresting opening panels where there is a spider web that gets larger in every frame and then a girl is shown standing with a scowl on her face and a gun in her hand. The scene is set in a classroom. The blackboard has been stained with blood and the students have the expression of astonishment. In one of the frames, there are the legs of a man who has been shot dead. This 17-page graphic novel tells the stories of silence, resentment, aggression, and child sexual assault through images. The book also has a forward, interviews, a sketchbook, and examples of the script's workings. Each frame of the black-and-white graphic conveys a sense of reality and visual accuracy. The graphic novel successfully describes the plot to readers because every image stands apart from others in the series. The pictures accentuate minute details. Each frame of the drawings creates a network of disorder, and the storyline of this silent graphic novel is what resonates with the chaos. (Aravind 2012). For example, on the second page, in one of the frames where we see a man's legs stilled on a podium in a classroom, the illustrator pays attention to small elements like the date, a pen, pencils, and chalk, among other things.

Hush is an astounding work in the history of Indian Graphic Novels. It has operated with the heart-wrenching theme of the paedophilic tendencies of a father. The narrative creates a thick atmosphere and the effect has been made by the wordless depiction of the story. Thomas has outdone all the previous works in Indian Graphic Novels and has used the wordless graphic novel technique. This kind of narrative technique requires more effort on the logical flow of the narration as well as appealing and befitting visuals. Otherwise, there is always a heightened risk of misinterpretations. The aesthetic of the genre is expressionistic in topic and style and investigates the significance of language in both the expression and management of subversive ideas. This kind of expressionistic aesthetic technique originated in the early twentieth century in Europe and the United States. It was then known as "novels in woodcuts" (Willett 112). It only uses pictures or images to tell a story and the central irony of these stories is that they explore the power of language and language's relationship to power totally without using words (112). When Prateek Thomas released his silent graphic novel, *Hush*, he created a name for himself in the indie movement. He emphasises the need to consciously improve and elevate comic book writing and art in an interview where he says,

I'm very clear that I've tried and explored as much as I can, the indie field, you know. In the non-misogynistic writing that I can. But it's, I mean the misogynistic thing gets to you a lot actually. I mean, especially this superhero fare, it's just in your face and you can't get away from it. So, I try and, I basically try and shut myself completely from superheroes. It's very, very rarely that I actually pick up a superhero comic and I try and read it but most of the time I just stick to the indie thing. Because I think it's, those are also the kind of stories that I'd like to tell and those are the stories that I tend to like also. It's the same in film also. Or in TV. Like, I don't have a TV, but I mean ... the TV shows that I see most of the time are not the mainstream thing that everybody's talking about. Even in films, I try and avoid most of the crap that comes. (Ravi 20-21)

In recent years, graphic novels have significantly increased in popularity and recognition in India. In India, the genre of graphic novels is constantly growing and changing. In India, the market for graphic novels has been expanding consistently. Graphic

books fill the desire for visually compelling storytelling, which is on the rise. The market has grown as a result of the accessibility of a variety of genres, including social commentary, historical accounts, mythological tales, and superhero fiction. Apart from this, a specialised readership is no longer the only audience for graphic novels. They are now widely accepted and have a wider audience than just comic book fans. This acceptability can be ascribed to several things, including the popularity of comic book adaptations in films and television series, the rise of graphic novel publishers, and the acceptance of graphic novels as an acceptable genre of literature. The reach of Indian Graphic novels is expanding both domestically and internationally, Indian graphic novelists have made significant contributions to the field. Critical acclaim has been bestowed upon the works of writers and artists like Sarnath Banerjee, Amruta Patil, Vishwajyoti Ghosh, and Orijit Sen who have produced thought-provoking and visually appealing pieces. Their contributions have made it possible for the medium to flourish in India. The writers of India are playing with different themes to acter the diverse population of India by employing Indian mythology, history, social difficulties, and modern life are all sources of inspiration for the great variety of themes that graphic novels in India cover. They offer a venue for the expression of various stories, viewpoints, and experiences. Thus, it is not false to conclude that the future of Indian graphic novels as well as the Indian English literature and art is bound to be better than ever.

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