



Deciphering Distress: Investigating Trauma Treatment In Prominent Indian Graphic Novels

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines trauma treatment within the framework of prominent Indian graphic novels. Through meticulous analysis of narrative structures and artistic expressions, it explores how trauma is portrayed and addressed within the graphic medium. By dissecting thematic elements, character development, and visual storytelling techniques, this study aims to uncover the nuanced layers of distress representation. It traverses a diverse spectrum of graphic narratives, spanning from mythological tales to contemporary urban chronicles, to capture the breadth of trauma portrayal in Indian literature.

The analysis also considers the socio-cultural context of India, offering insights into the unique influences that shape trauma representation within the country. Moreover, the study delves into the psychological implications of these portrayals, highlighting the potential therapeutic value inherent in graphic storytelling. By synthesizing literary theory, visual studies, and psychology, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of trauma discourse in Indian culture. It advocates for interdisciplinary dialogue, bridging the realms of artistic expression and psychological interpretation, and underscores the transformative potential of graphic narratives in navigating and healing from experiences of distress.

Keywords: Trauma, Graphic Novels, Indian Literature, Psychological Representation, Narrative Techniques, Character Development, Artistic Expression, Cultural Context, Distress, Treatment

1. INTRODUCTION

In the burgeoning landscape of Indian graphic literature, a profound exploration of trauma and its treatment has emerged as a compelling thematic thread. Graphic novels, with their symbiotic blend of visual imagery and narrative storytelling, offer a captivating canvas for artists and authors to delve into the complexities of human experience, including the profound impacts of trauma. This paper embarks on a journey through the corridors of select Indian graphic novels, where the depiction of distress and its subsequent treatment serves as a focal point for artistic expression and narrative exploration.

Entitled "Deciphering Distress: Investigating Trauma Treatment in Prominent Indian Graphic Novels," this study endeavors to unravel the intricate layers of trauma representation within the rich tapestry of Indian cultural narratives. As we navigate through the pages of these graphic narratives, we are confronted with a diverse array of storytelling styles, artistic techniques, and thematic motifs that collectively weave a vivid tapestry of trauma discourse.

At its core, this paper seeks to illuminate not only the ways in which trauma is portrayed within Indian graphic novels but also the underlying therapeutic potential inherent in these narratives. By delving into the narrative structures, character arcs, and visual symbolism employed by graphic novelists, we aim to uncover the nuanced strategies through which trauma is both depicted and addressed within this dynamic medium. Moreover, we endeavor to contextualize these representations within the broader socio-cultural

landscape of India, recognizing the myriad influences that shape the portrayal of trauma within the country's diverse cultural milieu.

Through a synthesis of literary analysis, visual studies, and psychological inquiry, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of trauma discourse within Indian graphic literature. By shedding light on the transformative power of graphic storytelling in navigating and healing from experiences of distress, we advocate for the recognition of graphic novels as a potent medium for engaging with and addressing the complexities of the human psyche.

2.OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. Analyze narrative techniques employed in prominent Indian graphic novels to portray and address trauma.
2. Explore the visual language and artistic techniques used to represent trauma in graphic storytelling.
3. Contextualize the portrayal of trauma within the socio-cultural landscape of India.
4. Examine the psychological implications of trauma representation in Indian graphic novels.
5. Foster interdisciplinary dialogue between literary analysis, visual studies, and psychology to enrich academic discourse and practical applications in trauma treatment and narrative therapy.

3.SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of the study encompasses a comprehensive examination of trauma treatment as depicted in a selection of prominent Indian graphic novels. This includes an in-depth analysis of narrative techniques, artistic representations, and thematic explorations employed by graphic novelists to portray and address trauma within their works. The study seeks to explore a diverse range of graphic narratives spanning various genres, themes, and artistic styles, aiming to capture the breadth and depth of trauma representation within Indian graphic literature.

Furthermore, the scope extends to contextualizing the portrayal of trauma within the socio-cultural landscape of India, considering the historical, cultural, and societal influences that shape these representations. Through this contextual lens, the study aims to uncover the unique insights and perspectives offered by Indian graphic novels on the experiences of distress and the subsequent treatment thereof.

Additionally, the study encompasses an examination of the psychological implications of trauma representation in Indian graphic novels, including the potential therapeutic value inherent in graphic storytelling. By engaging with interdisciplinary approaches, the scope extends to fostering dialogue between literary analysis, visual studies, and psychology, contributing to a deeper understanding of trauma discourse within both academic and practical contexts.

Overall, the scope of the study is to provide a comprehensive exploration of trauma treatment in Indian graphic novels, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of distress representation and its significance within Indian cultural discourse.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

The exploration of trauma within the realm of graphic novels has garnered increasing attention in recent years, with scholars and researchers delving into the complexities of how distress is portrayed and addressed within this dynamic medium. One notable contribution to the study of trauma in graphic novels is the work of Hillary L. Chute, particularly her seminal book "Disaster Drawn: Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form" (2016). Chute examines the role of graphic narratives in bearing witness to traumatic events, highlighting the unique power of visual storytelling to convey the immediacy and emotional impact of trauma. While Chute's focus is primarily on Western graphic narratives, her insights into the intersection of visual art and trauma provide a valuable framework for analyzing Indian graphic novels.

In the Indian context, scholars such as Prajwal Parajuly have explored the evolving landscape of Indian graphic literature, highlighting the diverse range of themes and narratives being explored by Indian graphic novelists. Parajuly's analysis sheds light on the emergence of graphic novels as a potent medium for addressing contemporary issues within Indian society, including themes of trauma and resilience (2015).

Furthermore, studies such as Rimi B. Chatterjee's examination of trauma in Indian literature offer insights into the broader cultural and historical contexts that shape the portrayal of distress within Indian narratives. Chatterjee's exploration of trauma as a recurring theme in Indian literature provides a valuable backdrop for understanding how trauma is represented within Indian graphic novels (2012).

In addition to academic scholarship, there is a burgeoning body of criticism and analysis within the realm of comics studies, with researchers such as Scott McCloud offering theoretical frameworks for understanding the language of comics and its narrative possibilities. McCloud's concepts of closure, panel transitions, and visual metaphor provide valuable tools for analyzing the narrative techniques and artistic representations employed in Indian graphic novels to depict trauma and its treatment (1993).

Overall, the existing literature provides a rich foundation for the study of trauma treatment in Indian graphic novels, offering insights into narrative strategies, artistic representations, and cultural contexts that shape the portrayal of distress within this dynamic medium. Building upon this foundation, this study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of trauma discourse within Indian graphic literature, exploring the thematic depth, visual language, and psychological implications of trauma representation in select Indian graphic novels.

5. RESEARCH ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

This paper establishes the foundation for the relevance of the research study and addresses the question: Why study graphic novels at all? It examines the graphic novel *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* (2015) by Malik Sajad and the novel *Curfewed Night* (2008) by Basharat Peer, both of which deal with the theme of insurgency, to analyze how the same theme can be treated in two different genres. Additionally, it includes an analysis of another graphic novel, *Bhimayana* (2011), alongside Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935), both addressing the caste system.

"Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak" (Berger 3). This famous quotation from John Berger's groundbreaking work *Ways of Seeing* (1972) attests to the importance of images in a person's world from a very early stage. Berger argues that our place in this world is established by images, despite being surrounded by words. From early times, images were used to represent something not present. Later, it was realized that an image could last much longer than the actual object, and the manner in which an object or person is perceived also became significant. Berger attributes this development to an "increasing consciousness of individuality accompanying an increasing awareness of history" (10). He further asserts that "no other kind of relic or text from the past can offer such a direct testimony about the world which surrounded other people at other times."

By examining these texts, this study highlights the unique power of graphic novels to convey complex themes through visual storytelling, providing a richer, more immersive experience that complements traditional narrative forms. This exploration underscores the importance of studying graphic novels to understand their impact and relevance in contemporary literature and society.

In this respect, images are more precise and richer than literature" (Berger 10). When Berger wrote this statement, literature was almost synonymous with the written text, and popular literature, along with the visual medium, was not considered part of literature at all. It is only with the growing popularity of Cultural Studies that popular literature has been acknowledged as part of the literary canon. Since then, the term has expanded to incorporate many different forms and genres.

Although images depend largely on the way we see things, the perspective of the viewer is also crucial. This concept of perspective dates back to the Renaissance in European art, where everything is focused on the eye of the beholder. Keeping these ideas in mind, it can be said that graphic novels, through their use of images, offer a unique epistemology that is enhanced by the power of words. Berger contends that images stand in for absences; hence, images in a graphic narrative can help articulate the inexpressible experience of trauma and its aftermath.

Early writers on trauma insisted that trauma is an unrepresentable event. Adopting a psychoanalytic post-structural approach, Caruth considers trauma as "...an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language" (Balaev 1). This approach heavily depends on Lacanian theory, viewing trauma as an absence that fails to represent the original experience in linguistic terms and possesses only a referential value. Caruth's model of trauma foregrounds language indeterminacy and aporia, making the unspeakable a dominant feature of trauma as represented in literature.

Through the lens of these theories, the study of graphic novels becomes essential. They uniquely combine visual and textual elements to convey complex themes, such as trauma, in ways that traditional literature may struggle to achieve. This duality allows graphic novels to represent the nuances of traumatic experiences, providing a richer and more precise medium for storytelling.

The modern concept of trauma developed in the West through an engagement with law, psychiatry, and industrialized warfare, as explored by Roger Luckhurst in *The Trauma Question* (2008). From the time of the Second World War to the present, this concept has been medicalized and linked with "wider political frames: survivor narratives, responses to persecution and prejudice, and to the Holocaust and other acts of mass atrocity and genocide" (Buelens). Consequently, after examining early readings on trauma, it can be argued that graphic narratives and novels provide a medium for studying trauma by representing what was once considered indescribable.

Kristie S. Fleckenstein, in her article "Images, Words, and Narrative Epistemology," writes: "Metaphors based on language as the dominant agent in constituting thought, self, and reality, however, are unnecessarily limiting: they fragment thought, self, and reality without providing a means of unification. They potentially decenter without centering" (915). Fleckenstein suggests that we need metaphors that fuse image and words, as both work together to form our sense of being. The growing importance of images is evident in fields such as philosophy, cognitive psychology, and analytical psychology.

Susanne Langer, in "The Origins of Speech and its Communicative Function," claims that the entire system of symbolization is first worked out in visuals before it is transferred to audio and auditory faculties. In the field of cognitive psychology, Susan Aylin offers a theory in which mental imageries are an essential element of cognition. Images provide an alternate way of organizing thought, self, and reality, comparatively free from the coercive forces and structural limitations of language.

Through these insights, it becomes clear that graphic novels, which combine visual and textual elements, serve as a powerful medium for exploring and representing trauma. They can unify fragmented thoughts and experiences, offering a holistic approach to understanding trauma that transcends the limitations of language alone.

Pramod K. Nayar, in the introduction to *The Indian Graphic Novel: Nation, History and Critique*, states that graphic novels generate a 'visual-verbal' literacy, aiming to both show and tell history. He claims that graphic novels offer "not only a democratizing of forms of socio-political commentary but also a democratizing of the language of cultural analytics" (7). Nayar believes that the Indian graphic novel provides cultural legitimacy by bringing contentious social issues into the popular realm, away from the legal and juridical spheres. This shift increases the potential for creating social awareness and initiating reforms. Despite being critiqued as elitist and catering to the higher end of society, the availability of low-priced editions has mitigated some of this criticism.

Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (1992), raise questions about the relationship between literature and testimony, and the act of witnessing and testifying. Felman, a literary critic and educator at Yale, and Laub, a psychiatric educator trained to decipher human trauma, explore the tension between the text and its context, and the new insights that might arise from this interplay. They discuss how witnessing can "make tangible to the imagination" traumatic events. These frames of reference are largely constructed by language, prompting this dissertation to explore the efficacy of the graphic medium in addressing trauma.

By integrating visual and textual elements, graphic novels serve as a powerful tool for exploring and representing trauma. They can unify fragmented thoughts and experiences, providing a holistic approach to understanding trauma that transcends the limitations of language alone. This study will examine how graphic novels can effectively articulate the inexpressible aspects of trauma and contribute to social awareness and change.

Pramod K. Nayar, in his article "Towards a Postcolonial Critical Literacy: Bhimayana and the Indian Graphic Novel," states that Bhimayana situates debates about caste, discrimination, and human rights within the popular cultural realm by appropriating the comic book medium. He argues that Bhimayana's adoption of popular-populist regimes of the verbal-visual (or image-text) radicalizes the form, while also contributing to a critical literacy about casteism, atrocity, and human rights. This critical literacy forces readers, through narratives and autobiographies, to link personal experiences with socio-historical and institutional power relations (4).

Bhimayana, published by Navayana in 2011, was launched in 2003. The storyboard was developed by Srividya Natarajan and S. Anand, with illustrations by Durgabai Vyam and Subhas Vyam, who utilize Pradhan Gond art, practiced by the tribal Gond community of Central India. The Pradhan Gonds have preserved their clan's cultural heritage through performance narratives, but these traditions were becoming increasingly obsolete. Jangarh Singh Shyam started an organized movement to preserve Gond art, immortalized as Jangarh Kalam. Bhimayana is dedicated to Jangarh Shyam, who committed suicide in 2001 in Japan. The use of this art form is significant, as it originates from the Pradhan Gonds, a tribal community that often remains marginalized and invisible in society. Incorporating their art into a text is a powerful act of resistance.

The book is divided into five sections: 1. One Day, 2. Water, 3. Shelter, 4. Travel, and 5. The Art of Bhimayana. Even before the beginning of the novel, there is a section providing a journalistic description, in the form of news items, of atrocities against Dalits, including a reference to the Khairlanji incident, where the Bhotmanges were beaten to death for demanding the right to education and a better life.

The first section, "Water," begins with a struggle for water and recounts Ambedkar's experience as a young schoolboy in 1901. He is not allowed to touch the tube well to quench his thirst. Significantly, this is the same year Lord Curzon introduced educational reforms intended to enable Indians to obtain jobs. The struggle for water is an intrinsic part of Dalit life. Ambedkar has to wait for his turn for the peon to pour water for him to drink, but he is often left thirsty because the peon refuses to pour water, making excuses that he was late. A panel from Bhimayana provides tangible proof of this struggle. The helplessness of the lower caste and the barbarity of the upper caste are clearly depicted. Ambedkar is made to sit apart in class, emphasizing his perceived inferiority through visible physical separation from the rest of the students. Another illustrative technique used is the separate speech bubble for the teacher, which resembles a scorpion's tail, hinting at the sting behind his words. When Ambedkar asks permission to drink water, he is considered a nuisance, and his alienation and isolation are vividly portrayed in the panel, especially when he exclaims, "When the bell rings, all the other students go to the tap. By the time they finish, the peon has gone home. And I'm not supposed to touch the tap." (19)

This analysis underscores how Bhimayana uses the graphic novel medium to vividly and powerfully convey the experiences and struggles of marginalized communities, fostering a deeper understanding and critical literacy about social injustices.

The thought balloon used for young Ambedkar illustrates his surprise that the teacher is unaware of the fact that barbers would not cut the hair of a Mahar. Through these images, the struggle for water and the pain of being deemed untouchable due to his caste are vividly depicted. Ambedkar's enforced separation in class serves as a stark indication of his social exclusion.

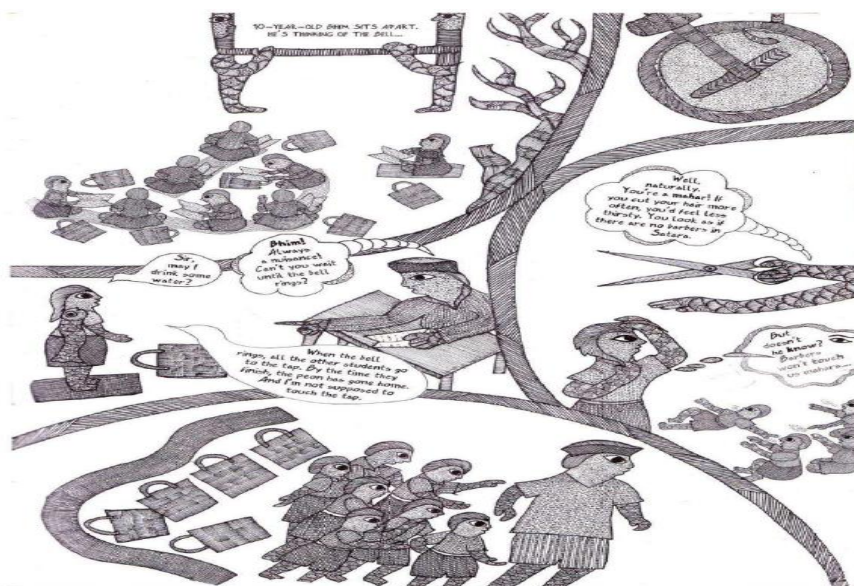


Figure 1 from *Bhimayana* Page no 19 shows the ill treatment meted out to Ambedkar in school.

Book 3, "Shelter," focuses on the reality that Dalits do not feel at home even in their own country of birth. In 1917, Ambedkar goes to Baroda and faces significant difficulties finding accommodation. Ultimately, he is driven to take shelter in Kamathi Baug public garden after being expelled from a Parsi inn. His Christian friends also refuse to help him, and numerous speech bubbles with eyes represent the prejudiced gaze of

society against the untouchables. Ambedkar realizes that his alienation is pervasive and that no amount of education can erase the stigma of untouchability.



Figure 2 from *Bhimayana* Page no 69 shows the alienation of Ambedkar in a new city where after being refused shelter by his friends he takes refuge in a park.

Book 4 begins in 1934, when Ambedkar, on a trip with his colleagues, faces discriminatory behavior. Upon reaching a fort, they feel thirsty and approach a pond to drink water. This scene is depicted with two hands covered in fish scales reaching into the pond, symbolizing thirst. However, they are not allowed to drink, and the fort's Muslim caretakers treat them offensively. The recurrent fish image, indicative of thirst, appears again, and the fort is depicted as a ferocious lion, representing the accusatory and violent attitude of the caretakers.

Book 5 provides a description of the experiences of the writers and illustrators. The writers recount how the Vyams had not heard of Ambedkar, making it a challenge to familiarize them with his life and works. The Vyams chose to discard conventional panels and presented their own artwork to illustrate Ambedkar's life. They were introduced to Ambedkar by their 14-year-old daughter Roshni, who recognized him as the statue near New Market. The Vyams identified with Ambedkar's pain as they too faced discrimination when they visited Delhi. They incorporated newspaper reports of incidents like Khairlanji into their work. *Bhimayana* not only tells Ambedkar's story but also highlights the experiences of Dalits during his time.

Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*, published in 1935, raises important questions about the caste system still practiced in India. Despite Gandhi's presence on the national scene, the plight of the lower castes remained unchanged. *Untouchable* tells the story of Bakha, born into a low caste assigned to clean others' filth. Bakha aspires to lead a life like the Europeans and Anglo-Indians, imitating their mannerisms. Anand highlights how the untouchables struggle to fulfill basic needs like water, a common concern in both novels.

Whenever Bakha enters public spaces, he must be on guard as his touch is considered defiling. Even the gods appear alien to him, as he and his kind are not allowed in temples. Another point of convergence in both novels is the denial of healthcare facilities to lower caste people. Bakha's father recounts begging a doctor to look at Bakha when he was sick. *Bhimayana* also includes reports of injustice against pregnant Dalit women who were thrown out of hospitals.

Social exclusion is evident in the demarcation of separate spaces for untouchables, relegating them to the outskirts of villages. This is described by both writers. *Bhimayana*, on pages 14 and 15, depicts the lives and living quarters of the Mahars. The panels show life on the outskirts and the unjust treatment of Mahars and other untouchables. Page 14 illustrates that other castes, like the Malas in South India, were treated similarly, highlighting the enormity of this social evil. Page 15 shows an animal close to a high-caste man, while a Mahar is handed leftovers from a distance, emphasizing the social exclusion and discrimination they faced.

They clean out the filth, have to wait for their turn outside the shops, and collect leftovers from the village, vividly portraying the inhumane treatment they endure. The village people prefer to keep the animals close to them but keep the Mahars at a distance. The panels in *Bhimayana*, with minimal text, aptly depict the

condition of the Mahars in a distinct manner, leaving no doubt in the reader's mind. The iconography clearly illustrates the discriminatory social structure.

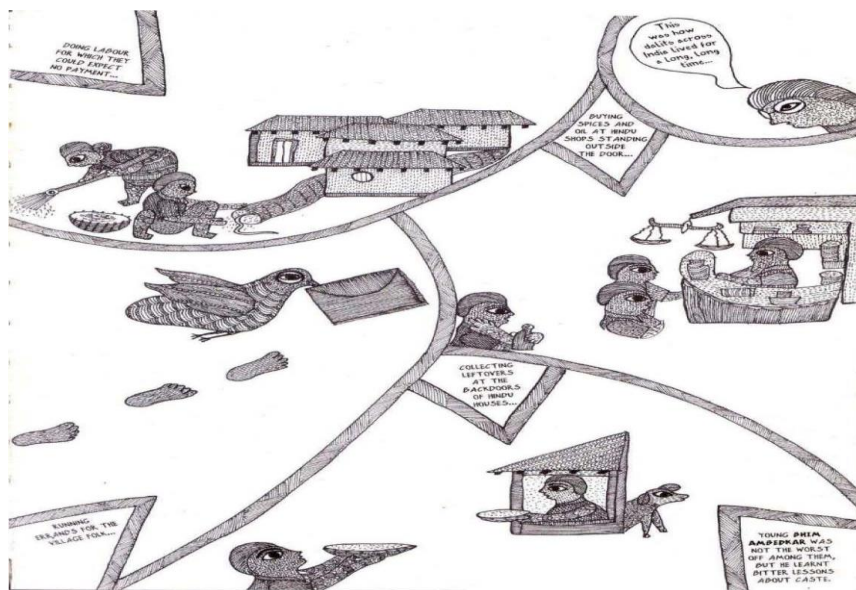


Figure 3 from *Bhimayana* Page no 15 shows the Mahars made to stand outside the shops and being made to clean the sewers.

The footprints can be interpreted as representing the invisible and unaccounted work of the Mahars, while the snake coming out of the drain illustrates the hazardous working conditions they face.

The speeches of Ambedkar and his autobiographical work, *Waiting for a Visa*, provide the background to this work. The title is a play on *Ramayana*, focusing on the exclusion of Mahars from basic necessities such as water, shelter, and travel. *Bhimayana* presents a different form of epic, not in terms of volume but rather in the magnitude of its impact on society, further enhanced by an alternative form of heroism. Incidents like *Khairlanji* are effectively used to thematically interlink the three main events of Ambedkar's story: *Mahad Satyagraha*, differences with Gandhi, and the *Hindu Code Bill* and *Constitution*.

The two texts used for an analysis of caste highlight the denial of basic needs such as water and shelter to the untouchables. Medical facilities are also denied to them. Despite the time gap between the two texts, the concerns remain consistent. However, there is a need to present the issues in a more evocative manner, and the use of the graphic medium seems to be another effective way of doing so.

The foreword to *Bhimayana* aptly captures the need for a changing form to represent the dynamics of a changing nation: "No more proscenium arch. No more rectangular framing or unilinear time. No more profiled individuals. Instead, a conference of corporeal experience across generations, full of pain and empathy, and nurtured by a complicity and endurance that can outlive the Market" (Foreword, *Bhimayana*).

The *Pradhan Gond* art form offers a unique perspective on urban space, with free-falling animals and birds against a sky without a horizon, reflecting the plight of the artists. In *Bhimayana*, modern means of transport, like the train, are depicted as snakes, while the fort where Ambedkar faces insult is portrayed as a lion. Ambedkar's thirst for power is symbolized by a fish, a motif used repeatedly throughout the narrative. This imagery is utilized creatively, such as in Ambedkar's speech at *Mahwad*, depicted as coming out of sprinklers, described as "the most imaginative and original use of the gutter space in the history of modern graphic art" (Anand, S. 102). Thus, *Bhimayana* foregrounds the issue of casteism using an art form not typically showcased in galleries, providing greater visibility to both a lesser-known art form and an ignored social evil, especially within a worldwide readership.

To further substantiate the argument regarding the efficacy of the graphic medium, it might be fruitful to examine another example concerning the analysis of two texts dealing with Kashmir and the problem of insurgency. *Curfewed Night* by Basharat Peer and *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* by Malik Sajad belong to two different genres: a novel and a graphic novel, respectively. Both texts begin with the narrator as a young boy and present the narrative sequentially as the narrator grows up. Themes such as changes in their school, the disruption of emergency services, and the failed relocation of Kashmiri Pandits are

featured in both texts. Therefore, analyzing how similar concerns are depicted in two different mediums would be a fruitful exercise.

Curfewed Night by Basharat Peer provides a first-hand account of Peer's coming-of-age experience. The novel begins with a quotation from James Baldwin's *Stranger in the Village*: "People are trapped in history and history is trapped in them." Peer appropriates this quotation to provide the history of insurgency in the Kashmir Valley, along with the personal stories of its victims. The narrative begins with the idyllic childhood of Peer in Anantnag. In 1988, he is admitted to a boarding school in Aishmuqam, and by 1989, Kashmiris start questioning their uneasy relationship with Indian nationalism. Tensions escalate, and in 1990, calls for Azadi intensify. The writer's "political education" begins with the appearance of military camps and the disappearance of Kashmiri Pandit friends from classrooms. In 1993, Peer attends Aligarh Muslim University, where he experiences being treated as an outsider. His career as a journalist leads him to understand the various facets of India, beyond the militaristic power it seems in Kashmir. In 2001, Peer is assigned to write about Kashmir by his editor, prompting him to return home and voice the stories he feels should be heard. Peer's account focuses on the history of Kashmir's formation and the tumultuous political landscape of the region.

In *Curfewed Night*, Basharat Peer meticulously charts the trajectories of various military organizations over the years, incorporating folk tales, personal memoirs, and incidents that have almost become legendary due to the horror and trauma associated with them. He fearlessly recounts black episodes during the Indian Army's deployment in the Valley, such as the notorious detention center Papa-2, described as "...the most infamous torture center run by the Indian forces in Kashmir" (Peer 137). Survivors of Papa-2 are left both physically and psychologically crippled, with many abandoning hope of marriage and family due to the emotional and physical incapacitation caused by electrocution.

Peer also mentions incidents and individuals accused of treason by the Indian government, like Syed Abdul Rahman Geelani, an Arabic lecturer at Delhi University linked to the attacks on the Indian Parliament on December 13, 2002. He references renowned writers and their works related to Kashmir, evoking a genre that emerged from those traumatic times. Peer frequently alludes to Agha Shahid Ali, whose writings on Kashmir capture the fear, tension, anger, and hopelessness of the experience. Another writer mentioned by Peer is Saadat Hasan Manto, particularly his short story "Khol Do," which portrays the post-traumatic behavior of a young girl repeatedly raped during Partition violence. Drawing from this context, Peer writes about women like Mubeena, known as the "Crossfire Bride," who was raped by BSF soldiers on her wedding day.

Literary interpretations like these provide insight into the responses of the literary world to the real-life trauma and pain experienced by people in Kashmir. Another significant aspect of the novel is its sections about Islam, used as propaganda to justify militant acts. Many militant groups attempt to give their activities a religious justification, referring to them as Jihad or holy war. Peer acknowledges the influence of Hindu and Buddhist pasts on Islam in Kashmir, and vice versa, highlighting the complex cultural and religious dynamics of the region.

Peer also discusses the relocation of Kashmiri Pandits and the failure of efforts to rehabilitate them in Delhi, illustrated through his visit to his school principal Kantroo. The narrative concludes with the inauguration of the bus service between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad in 2005.

Curfewed Night provides a factual account of events from Basharat Peer's birth until 2005, weaving together multiple strands in his narrative, including his family life, the history of the state, the growth of militancy in Kashmir, and individual stories of people who were part of the valley's traumatic history. In contrast, *Munnu*, published in 2015, appears to offer a more personal account.

The first section of *Munnu*, titled "Family Photo," begins in 1993 and features a family photo introducing the various members of Munnu's family: his three brothers, Bilal, Adil, and Akhtar, his sister Shahnaz, his mother Haseena, and his father Gulya. Munnu aspires to follow in his father's footsteps and practices designs and calligraphy on paper. He is also fascinated with the AK-47, a common attraction among the youth in the valley.

The closure of schools due to the arrest of the Principal forces Munnu to continue his education at home. Raids on civilian houses are frequent, with men forced to parade while informers point out suspected militants. The atmosphere in the valley is tense, as depicted on Page 8, where schoolboys take to the streets, leading to an altercation between the army and civilians. The panel shows a protestor being beaten by the police, highlighting the violence inflicted. The defiant response of the protestor, shouting "WE WANT FREEDOM," clearly indicates the allegiance of the people. In the next panel, tear gas envelops the

boys, disrupting the morning assembly. Munnu describes the situation as akin to being blinded, portraying it as "...A CITY OF BLIND PEOPLE ON FIRE" (Sajad, p. 8).



Figure 4 from *Munnu: A boy from Kashmir* Page no 8 shows the unrest and the turmoil that is seen at the city center.

The subhuman status of native Kashmiris is depicted through the Hangul, an endangered species of deer, while the military is represented by human figures. This imagery can be interpreted in two ways: firstly, it symbolizes the reduction of Kashmiris to a subhuman status, deeming their lives inconsequential; and secondly, akin to the Hangul facing extinction, Kashmiris are losing their identity due to the atrocities committed by the Army and the unsympathetic attitude of the central government. Thus, the graphic narrative not only portrays the dire state of affairs in Kashmir but also critiques the government using the same visual panels.

In the section "Chocolates, Toffees, Almonds, and Cashews," Munnu's Papa takes him to the old city, pointing out places that were dear to him as a child. However, Gulya fails to find shops willing to buy his woodcarvings, with shopkeepers suggesting he engrave on copper utensils instead due to the absence of tourists who once frequented the valley. Meanwhile, jealousy among neighbors leads to a raid on Munnu's house, showcasing the growing suspicion in previously friendly neighborhoods. Crackdown days become frequent, with Gulya and Bilal forced to participate, while the family lives in constant unrest. During one such crackdown, Mustafa is killed, leading to mass mourning and protests.

The funeral of Mustafa, a militant, depicted in *Munnu* on page 35, shows a sea of human beings carrying two corpses. The frenzy of the crowd is palpable in the panel.



Figure 5 from *Munnu: A boy from Kashmir* Page no 35 shows the huge gathering seen at the funeral of the martyrs.

This particular panel also showcases the empathy of the crowd towards those killed by the army. The gathered multitude is evident, portraying how these individuals, deemed militants by the army, are viewed as martyrs by the common people. Amidst such conflicting perceptions, the panel also captures the underlying trauma and anxiety within the Kashmiri psyche, driving them to seek safety in numbers and solidarity. They unite to protest against the atrocities inflicted upon them, revealing both their rebellious spirit and their compassion towards their fellow Kashmiris.

Following Mustafa's burial, Munnu begins to experience nightmares. In the section "Pomegranates and Salt Tea," Munnu's fears and apprehensions come to the fore. The darkness reminds him of Mustafa's grave, instilling a deep sense of unease and discomfort, making it difficult for him to sleep.



Figure No 6 from *Munnu: A boy from Kashmir* Page no 58 shows the trauma faced by Munnu after witnessing the death of Mustafa.

In the section titled "Abba and Nanni," Munnu's father falls ill due to the emissions from the fuel lamps used in carving the copper utensils, highlighting the hazardous conditions Kashmiris endure to earn a livelihood. The family is experiencing financial strain, exacerbated by Munnu's father's illness. During this time, Abba and Nanni, both blind, come to visit. However, even their home is not spared from army raids, despite their disabilities.



Figure 7 from *Munnu: A boy from Kashmir* Page no 78 shows the atrocities on the blind grandparents of Munnu.

Meanwhile, army attacks on militants persist, and road blockades, anxiety, and trauma continue to plague the lives of the people. In the section "Koyas Koyas," Munnu's school is depicted as located in Balgarden, where students are instructed to speak in Urdu rather than Kashmiri. The school building itself is a converted home abandoned by a Kashmiri Pandit family, and the discovery of an idol of Lord Shiva stirs controversy among the students, showcasing the fate of abandoned homes of Kashmiri Pandits.

In the section "Ink and Orange," elections are announced, presenting a dilemma for the people. Voting is necessary to avoid the ire of the army, but it also brands people as traitors in the eyes of militants. Munnu's family decides to fake their participation by marking their nails with homemade ink. They temporarily leave their home to live with Abba, finding some respite from the turmoil.

"A Shoe and A Nylon Bag" begins with Bilal's academic struggles and his father's decision to open a successful shop for him. However, Munnu encounters a disturbing incident when he faces a pedophile alone at the shop, revealing the exploitation faced by native Kashmiris, even by those in the Army.

"Inside Out" portrays Munnu's entry into a Public High School in 2000, where his interest in editorial cartoons grows. "Scrapbook" follows Sajad (Munnu) as he develops as a cartoonist, relying on his scrapbook for inspiration. He faces interrogation by the Army after a controversial cartoon but is ultimately saved by the photo editor.

The section "Footnotes" provides a comprehensive history of the Kashmir Valley, illustrating complex subjects in a lucid manner. It culminates with the formation of the Hurriyat in 1993, showcasing the effectiveness of graphic narratives in presenting intricate subjects.

Sajad gains popularity, and Brother, a publisher, proposes a graphic novel project. Sajad becomes engrossed in collecting stories of violence victims but eventually realizes the limitations of their impact. "Paisley" depicts Munnu's continued trauma and his encounter with a U.S. artist working on Kashmiri traditional art, highlighting the destruction of artifacts during the occupation.



Figure 8 from *Munnu: A boy from Kashmir* Page no 252 shows how dissenters like Band Pather are reduced to the status of figurines by the totalitarian regime.

In "Installation Art," Munnu's artwork is showcased at the Habitat Centre in Delhi. His mother worries about potential trouble, and indeed, Munnu faces interrogation by the army after a misunderstanding. Despite being taken away by the police, he is eventually released. This incident opens Munnu's eyes to the plight of many Kashmiris unjustly imprisoned due to their "suspicious" identity (*Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir*, page 186).

In "Endangered Species," disruptions to medical services during curfews are detailed. Even emergency services are hampered by the Army, endangering the lives of civilians (*Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir*, page 192).



Figure 9 from *Munnu: A boy from Kashmir* Page no 319 shows the disruption of medical services in the Kashmir valley

Meanwhile, Munnu decides on a title for the graphic novel, preferring "Endangered Species," symbolizing the plight of Kashmir. However, he must rename it "Kashmir Intifada" to appease his publishers. Invited to discuss Kashmir with European Union Ambassadors, Munnu is disappointed by their lack of interest in the region's struggles. Despite receiving a solar-powered flashlight as a gift, Munnu reflects on his journey home through the dark night, witnessing a disturbing incident of sexual violence. This experience leaves him disillusioned with the unchanged state of affairs in Kashmir, vividly depicted through the visuals in the narrative.

Both "Curfewed Night" and "Munnu" share numerous points of convergence, as they both explore the theme of Kashmir. Beginning with childhood reminiscences, both narrators delve into how their lives were transformed by the conflict. This narrative structure, common to both the novel and the graphic novel, intertwines personal experiences with the broader context of Kashmir's history and the rise of insurgency. The allure of militant groups is portrayed through the eyes of young individuals, with Basharat and Munnu both expressing admiration for those who take up arms.

The militants depicted in "Munnu" remain ambiguous, lacking specific names or identities, whereas Basharat Peer readily assigns names to similar characters in "Curfewed Night." The graphic novel also incorporates discussions on the history and myths surrounding Kashmir, including the origin myths of the state itself. Malik consolidates these elements into a single section, maintaining the reader's engagement through visual storytelling. This approach is particularly effective for younger audiences, who are more familiar with dynamic visuals than static text. Even when presented with text, modern readers often encounter it through screens, such as e-books, rather than traditional printed volumes.

After analyzing the four texts, it becomes evident that the graphic medium can effectively address sensitive issues and capture the attention of young readers who are constantly exposed to visual stimuli. It has the potential to engage students, readers, and researchers from diverse disciplines beyond just literature. Graphic novels can serve as an effective tool for understanding the impact of trauma and its aftermath. With the increasing popularity of fiction, the graphic medium can tackle important issues using minimal text while the visuals add depth to the narrative. These images vividly depict how trauma is experienced and internalized by victims, conveying the dynamics between perpetrators and survivors within a limited space. Moreover, illustrators can use words and images symbolically to critique sensitive topics. Young adult fiction and graphic novels, often synonymous with comics, have typically faced less strict censorship rules. Targeting the young generation, the leaders and citizens of tomorrow, is crucial. They need to be made aware of national and existential issues. Therefore, graphic novelists often choose subjects that are pertinent and require immediate attention. While the written word remains important, visual imagery creates a more immediate impact and can have a lasting effect on readers' psyches.

Themes such as caste and insurgency are inherently sensitive, and graphic novels provide a platform to address them with nuance. They can serve the dual purpose of presenting these issues sensitively while also attracting the attention of young adults who will play influential roles in the future.

This paper delves into the portrayal of trauma in two novels and two graphic novels, exploring two inherently traumatic issues: caste discrimination and insurgency, and identity. Graphic novels offer a highly effective medium for addressing issues like trauma, which can often defy conventional representation. As Richard Comshaw notes in "The Future of Memory," trauma is something that challenges witnessing, cognition, conscious recall, and representation itself (quoted in Bond 4). Therefore, a medium capable of providing some form of representation is needed to comprehend trauma in all its complexities, and graphic novels, with their powerful imagery, can fulfill that role. Readers and viewers are also afforded the freedom to interpret nuances on their own, as illustrators incorporate multiple issues into a single panel.

Anna Whitehead, in "Trauma Fiction," observes a new trend in literature where novelists are seeking "new ways of conceptualizing trauma" (quoted in Bond 5). She notes a common interest among various cultural groups in representing specific historical instances of trauma, resulting in numerous significant works of contemporary fiction (quoted in Bond 5). Consequently, graphic novels emerge as a contemporary form that can effectively analyze trauma and its aftermath. The subsequent chapters aim to analyze the representation of trauma in select Indian graphic novels within the context of nature, gender, and nation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of the selected texts reveals the potency of graphic novels as a medium to address sensitive and complex issues such as trauma, caste discrimination, and insurgency. By juxtaposing visual imagery with textual narratives, graphic novels offer a unique platform to explore and represent trauma in its various manifestations. The interplay between images and words allows for nuanced

interpretations and engages readers, particularly young adults, who may be more receptive to visual storytelling.

The works examined demonstrate how graphic novels effectively capture the impact of trauma on individuals and communities. Whether depicting the struggles of Dalits in *Bhimayana* or the experiences of Kashmiris in *Munnu*, the visual representations serve to evoke empathy and understanding among readers. Through vivid imagery and symbolism, graphic novelists convey the psychological and emotional toll of trauma, as well as its social and political dimensions.

Furthermore, the analysis underscores the interdisciplinary nature of graphic novels, attracting readers and researchers from diverse fields beyond literature. By addressing themes of national identity, social injustice, and historical trauma, graphic novels become powerful tools for education and advocacy. They have the potential to raise awareness, provoke critical thinking, and foster empathy among readers of all ages.

Moreover, the inclusion of detailed references adds depth to the analysis, grounding the discussion in both literary theory and cultural studies. Drawing on insights from trauma theory, postcolonial criticism, and visual studies, the analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of the graphic medium's capacity to engage with complex issues.

In summary, the study highlights the significance of graphic novels as a dynamic and impactful form of storytelling. By navigating the complexities of trauma and social injustice, graphic novels offer a compelling narrative experience that resonates with readers on a profound level. As such, they play a vital role in shaping public discourse and promoting social change.

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