

Revival of Gond Art Form through Graphic Novel in Bhimyana: Experience of Untouchability

Jignesh Manharlal Chavda
Research Scholar
Department of English & CLS
Saurashtra University, Rajkot

Dr. Jaydipsinh K. Dodiya
Professor & Research Supervisor (Guide):
Department of English & CLS
Saurashtra University, Rajkot

Abstract:

Srividya Natarajan's graphic novel Bhimyana: Experience of Untouchability portrays the incidents in the Life of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. The representation of the life of Dr. BRA in this graphic novel uses blotches, tempera colours and mainly in Indian origin art form. Prior pictures, sketches, illustrations or graphics were a medium for telling the untold and unwritten tells of time, place and manner as well as downtrodden voices. 20th-century literature had already broken the conventional way of expression. WWI and II excavate the inhuman behaviour and brutality of mankind, which pushed the novel experiment in literature and visual arts simultaneously. Emotions and affections busted out in the work where writers and creators exposed the surrealistic life in front of the audience. Here in this paper researcher is going to epitomize the downtrodden out-casted and discriminated voices. The novelty of graphic narratives breaks the conventions of unconventionality of the 20th century and narrators have been telling life through their own point-of-view, and a portrait of the 4th dimension. The amalgamation of words and images was previously limited to comics and for entertainment purposes only. (Add reference)A typical style of writing/illustrating comics and graphic narratives was replaced by Gond art; a tribal art painting practised by one of the largest tribes in India. The use of tribal art form, the regional colour scheme and the biographical sketch of one of the landmark an event came with the voices of the downtrodden and discriminated de-centralise the boundaries of the typical style of graphic narratives with the local flavour.

Key Words: Indian regional Graphic narratives, structuralism, folk and tribal art, history, biography.

Introduction:

The early history of emerging civilizations was portrayed in the form of paintings so far. The use of natural symbols can be seen to portray life in those painted stories; whether on caves, stones or later on walls, those pictures and sketches have been playing a role of being medium for passing the tells of their life generation after generation. Each place has its origin and the salient reason behind the development of any civilization is nature and surrounding atmosphere. This origin gets reflected in their arts too. Civilizations and individuals have been using their observations of surroundings and colour the familiar objects to convey and keep their memories alive in the form of paintings through ages. These art forms and paintings have their styles and specialities to express their tradition and culture. Our generation is blessed with range of paintings and art forms as a result of evolutions

happened to happen in almost everything. But we still have essence of those primitive art forms known as tribal art and folk art.

These tribal art forms are not only having the records of their culture and nature but also have the stories of those time, place, and sometimes of downtrodden voices. The past century had went through many ups and downs and the outcome of that jumbled era was wide and gloomy, especially the unwanted occurrences of WWI and WWII. These incidents shook worlds' faith; and the after effects were seen ghastly on artists' psyche worldwide. WWI and II excavated the inhuman behaviour and brutality of mankind, which pushed novel experiments in literature and visual arts eventually. All sort of human emotions busted out in various forms of art works where writers and creators exposed the surrealistic life. Caricatures and cartoon corners happened to take place in newspapers and magazines to put forth a unique dimension of looking towards the world, most of the time sarcastically.

"Making New" became the emblem for the artists of that age. Expressing self and the world by using all possible new means and medium were in vogue. One of those experimental medium of expression was Graphic novel - a newly emerged and amalgamated form of text and images. Initially graphic novels were written in a few languages only. That form was considered as mere extended version of sketches, illustrations and cartoons. Gradually its horizon happened to be expanded over the boundaries of its origin and reach to India too. Though, the form graphic novel is still struggling through some doubts and debates regarding its structure and genre though with all these debates it reaches to the core of Indian folk and tribal art. Nearly in two decades Indian graphic novel creators have started to make the novel in their own structure and format. Local touch of illustration is seen in this new form.

Origins of Indian Folk and Tribal Art:

In India, many tribes have their own folk art forms of paintings with this they express their culture, rituals, beliefs and history; such as *Madhubani*, *Patachitra*, *Rajasthani Miniature*, *Phad*, *Warli*, *Gond*, *Kalamkari*, *Tanjore*, *Kalighat* and more than fifty Indian folk arts are there in core of India. Because of development and frequent migration of villagers towards cities, many traditional and tribal art forms have on the verge of vanishing. These art forms are not getting much recognition nor developed other than its terrain. However, a few tribal and folk art forms are survived by generations too; for instance, Madhubani Painting, is the folk painting of Bihar state, the main centre of its is Jitwarpur village of Madhubani district of Bihar. The folklore of *Kohbar* which is a traditional room of a married couple of Bihar region is drawn in this form of paintings. Mainly the scenes of Ramayana and the images of Hindu Gods and Goddesses are portrayed on the canvas. *Mahasundari Devi* is one of the renowned artists of the Madhubani painting. Another is Patachitra folk art form of Odisha. The main attraction of this painting is Palm leaf on which the events of the life of Lord Jagannath, Subhadra and Balrama are drawn. Then a form of Gujarat known as Pithora Painting is more than ritual rather than art form for Rathvas and Bhilalas tribes of Gujarat. Kalamkari Painting means a painting made by the use of pen. Kalamkari art form belongs to Machilipatnam of Krishna district, Andhra Pradesh. A type of hand-paints or block-printed cotton textile, produced in parts of India. West Bengal's folk paintings are known as Kalighat Pat Art on the name of famous Kalighat temple of Goddess Kali. Mainly this types of paintings are drawn the characters of mythological deities. Another popular traditional art form, which is widen to different states of India with various names i.e. Floor paintings. In Uttar Pradesh it's called Chawk Purna, while in Uttarakhand it's called Aipan, In Rajasthan Mandana, In Andhra Pradesh – Muggulu, Aripa in Bihar; Rangoli in Maharashtra; Alpana in West Bengal; Athiya in Gujarat; Rangwalli in Karnataka; Kollam in Tamil Nadu; Arooph in Himachal Pradesh; and Kalma Jattu in Kerala,

Different states with different style and concept. One of the widely spread tribal art of India is Warli Art basically belongs to Worli tribes of Maharashtra. The local social life of this tribe is depicted mostly in these paintings. Thangka Paintings of Tibetan folk painting of north of India is also famous for the paintings of Lord Buddha's images, Buddhist rituals and lifestyles. Thangka paintings are used to paint on cotton or silk cloths. Other than these folk or tribal art forms are not even recognized outside of their districts or states.

Descendants of Gondi Culture:

Amongst all these tribes of different states and forests there is an art which expands its root to the boundaries of India. This tribe has the culture of their surroundings; the observation and association with their lives make them learn about the nature. This tribe of India is from Madhya Pradesh and the tribal art form of this place is known as Gond art of Gond tribe who has been practicing their diverse painting style of dots, dashes and short lines patterned multifaceted paintings. This art form is developed and later it reaches to Japan. Prior this sort of fresco painting used to draw on the walls and floors during the celebration and festivals. The strong point of Gond artists is that they use the natural pigments like vegetables, flowers and cow dung or mud for colours in their paintings. Gond artist belongs to Gondi culture; they live other than in Assam and Andhra Pradesh too. The quotation 'Literature is mirror of life' is enormously reflected in the paintings of Gondi culture; amalgam of living creature with nature and connection between each other symbolises on the canvas. Jangrah Singh Shyam is the person and young Gond tribal artist who transform the mural painting onto canvas and paper in 1981. The history of the paintings is not absolute without mentioning him. He was the person who brought the art form to Japan; unfortunately he passed away in Japan under mysterious circumstances at the age of thirty-nine. His style of Gond painting on paper and canvas is also broadly known as Jangrah Kalam. He created contemporary art with natural materials such as bamboos and leaves. In Smithsonian Museum of Natural History in Washington D.C., and London's Victoria and Albert Museum, Jangrah Singh Shyam's work was displayed. At length the subject of Gond Art is predominantly natural, with animals, trees and birds. The selection of designs and patterns are based on Gondi culture.

The early drawings of Indian graphic novels were as primitive and typical in style as one can see in comics. They were mere bunch of sketches and illustrations, afterwards graphic novelist started using oil paintings, digital graphic designs and tribal art forms to express local voices. This paper studies the use of Gond art in *Bhimayana: Experience of Untouchability* by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar. This graphic novel is illustrated by Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam the tribal pradhan Gond artists – the successors of Jangrah Singh Shyam, who developed his identical style and brought it to his disciples further.

A tale of a discriminated people illustrated and told by discriminated people is a chief element of this graphic novel. Srivaidya Natarajan and S. Anand wrote the story in Hindi language and read aloud to the artists. Vyams – the Gond artist even did not know who Bhimrao Ambedkar was. Writers narrated the stories of Bhimrao and they try to figure it out what happened in the life of Bhimrao. Artists were affected with the early years' struggle of Bhimrao, how he was marginalised in the society. After that they started painting by their own. They painted the real objects, people and places in different way but in Gond art form. Instead of train they draw snake, threatening place were painted as line's head, to express the happiness of people they draw dancing peacock. The use of this wild forestry figures symbolise metaphorical way of expressing the life of Bhimrao. The biography of Bhimrao's incidents were mostly happened in urban areas yet in the Graphic novel one can see unwrapped animals, birds and trees in landscape without sphere. Unknown about the form Graphic novel as well as about Bhimrao, Vyams' fourteen year old daughter Roshni has made the

fish-style of font for chapters heading and number in the book. The limited imagery of an artist expanded the border less drawing in the novel which is somewhere painted in colours and rest left in just sketches. The typical Gond art digna patterns are used to divide the panel where the pointed finger of Bhimrao is used to indicate to jump into another panel to move further. Turtle shape of tree represents the witness of many decades. Doted thick zigzag lines are roads on some pages, while black background shows night time. Duck shaped speech bubble used to show normal talks while scorpion tail's shaped speech bubble shows envy and humiliated language. Flower shaped and fish shaped frames are unique way to express the story where in each petals and different parts of fish body were narrated the story. To show jungle artists used the whole body of wild animal as a background while to show village artists used body of a domestic animal 'chicken'. On the page number seventy-two, Bhimrao's huge face was painted in the shape of world, on his face happy people are living joyfully; the background is painted with greenery to represent a visionary man and future possibilities. In chapter three Bhimrao was shown travelling in different province to see the situation of out-casted people, in this chapter Bhimrao's face put in front of the bus to show he who drive the people towards equality. Page number eighty-four has a very distinctive sketch, to palms drew with a flower mala, instead of nails on each finger artist drew people who welcomed Bhimrao in their village represent a voice of a man can unite many and each individual person of any group are ultimately one in its root. An out-casted man became a tree with many branches symbolise the same root with separate voice of community later the reason to build the constitution of one of the largest democracies of the world and adopted Buddhism for peace and contentment is also seen in an incredibly diverse way in this graphic novel.

The use of local imagery and tempera colour in tribal art form in this book makes this book original in its genre. An attempt of using tribal art form by Srivaidya and Anand motive other local, folk and tribal arts to uplift its diverse way of visual presentation. The mural of Gond art paintings on wall and floor reaches to national level Graphic novel is in a sense revival of a tribal art. Bhimayana: Experience of Untouchability by Dr. B. R. Ambedkar is a milestone in Indian graphic novel also it planted the seed of Graphic novel in academia as well as paved the way in mainstream literary genre.

Bibliography:

- i. "The Circle of Fate." *Tara Books*, tarabooks.com/shop/the-circle-of-fate.
- ii. "The Cloth of the Mother Goddess." *Tara Books*, tarabooks.com/shop/cloth-of-the-mother-goddess.
- iii. "The Great Race." *Tara Books*, tarabooks.com/shop/the-great-race.
- iv. Vel, Senthil. "52 Incredible Indian Folk Art Forms That We Must Protect in Indian Art and Culture." *International Indian Folk Art Gallery*, Nov. 2022, indianfolkart.org/52-indian-art-and-.