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Preface

Littscape, a journal published by the Department of English, Govt Victoria college is entering its seventh issue. This is also the second segment in our humble endeavour to reconceive a decade-old literary magazine into an engaging academic journal. Floating along the waves of changes that are happening across research in language and humanities, this issue attempts to probe the idea of text and narratives as a prospect and contingency that augment the realms of the visual, the graphic, the animation and beyond. We had proposed to consider how the idea of narrative is still central to the human conception of reality, how narratives build and break apart realities and dwell in the ambiguous terrains of truth and fiction across mediated expressions.

Megha Sasi's work is a thoughtful engagement with illustrations in serialised novels as an intersemiotic translation that creates extended domains of interpretation for the readers. She demonstrates how monochromatic sketches of Artist Namboothiri for the novel *Randamoozham* builds a narrative of its own within the tensions and conflicts of a popular retelling of the Mahabharata.

Sunitha and Arunlal's article ponders how the idea of human face and its metaphorical value has evolved in contemporary AI enabled entities of 'face function'. The story of face is no more limited to the questions of physical recognition alone but extends to far more socio-political uses of profiling.

Adhila's attempt is to show how visual narratives go beyond passive representation to invoke changes in social perception. She analyses documentaries from Palestine to see how they challenge dominant narratives and offer alternative perspectives on conflict and trauma.

Closely aligned to the same concerns about lost childhood, Hidha Kurikkal's paper on Japanese War-animes also looks at the horrendous tragedy that befalls on children during wars. She reflectively engages with the war-animes to frame layers of structured violence in the Asia-Pacific war that led to the loss of life and love for millions.

Kavya T makes an interesting use of legal storytelling to examine how the narratives emerging out of a particular case of police brutality in India is inherently a reflection of the centuries of systemic caste oppression that excluded certain communities as 'criminal tribes'.

Sutara's paper is a critique of the visual narratives of feminine ideals, the gender biased representations that construct and propagate the notion of women as embodiments of passivity and obedience. The posters of Disney films are analysed parallel to those of the mini-series *Fleabag* to bring out the contrast that emanates when an antithesis of the feminine ideal is portrayed.

Juhi Elizabeth Rajan looks into the premises of medical humanities and posthumanism to analyse how a chronicle of critical illness can recover the personal from the objective and scientific domain of medical sciences.

Cynthia Elizabeth Thomas examines how the visual driven graphic narrative of *Vanni: A Family's Struggle through the Srilankan Conflict* bears testimony to the uprooting experiences of surviving the mundane in a conflict-ridden zone through dextrous use of illustrations.

In this seventh issue, as we navigate the confluence of text and image, narrative and symbol, exploring their synergies across diverse fields, each paper contributes to a mosaic that vividly illustrates the fluidity between visual and verbal storytelling, and the profound impact such narratives have on shaping our collective understanding of societal constructs. While humbly thanking everyone who made this possible, we reassure that the journal will continue to stand as a testament to the evolving landscape of human expression, where stories are not just told but vividly experienced, challenging us to perceive beyond the written word and engage with the multi-dimensionality of our shared realities.

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Visualizing Words: Deciphering Monochromatic Illustrations as Translations

Megha Sasi

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Abstract

This article explores the intricate relationship between text and image in the context of serial novels published in weeklies. It delves into the nature of translation involved in the interplay between the verbal and visual elements within the discussed text. The role of the illustrator as a translator is also examined, emphasizing the concept of re-creation. This re-creation serves two purposes: first, to elucidate the translation process in the creation of monochromatic illustrations for serial novels, and second, to uncover how these illustrations represent the artist's response to the source story, shaped by their intellectual, artistic, and cultural background. The study investigates the multifaceted dimensions of translation inherent in the monochromatic illustrations featured in serial novels published in the Malayalam language. By analyzing existing accounts of this genre, the paper illustrates how the concept of multidimensional translation can be applied in the context of these illustrations.

Key Words: Translation Studies. Intersemiotic Translation. Regional Literature. Periodicals. Illustrations. Oral Literature. Serial Novel.

The creation of monochromatic illustrations, which rely on a single hue or variations of it, involves a unique form of visualization. The practice of interpreting illustrations as a form of translation has its roots in the ideas put forth by Roman Jakobson. Jakobson introduced the concept of intersemiotic translation in his article titled "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" (Jakobson). This notion was subsequently reinterpreted and expanded to encompass various modes of translation. Existing discussions that explore the notion of illustrations as translations primarily originated from Jakobson's concept but evolved to encompass a broader spectrum of intersemiotic translation within visual formats. Rita Oittinen, for instance, drew attention to the parallels between the processes of translating words and images, particularly in the realm of illustrated children's books. Oittinen critiqued traditional translation theories for often sidelining the visual elements of a text by relegating illustrations to mere companions to the written words. She advocated for a perspective that recognizes illustrations as integral components of the translated work as a whole (Oittinen, 101). While Oittinen engages briefly with the idea of illustrations as translations of words into

pictures, Pereira elaborates on the different ways in which pictures translate words and identifies imitation, emphasis, and adaptation as the axioms of intersemiotic translation in the domain of book illustrations. The premises recommended in this form of translation regards the text as the primary source and pictures as the derivatives. Pereira identifies the purpose of illustrations as representations of the source text in the visual format and rejects the possibility of an independent reading of these pictures, a schism which is then possibly reduced with the idea of reciprocal translation suggested by Rachel Weissbrod and Ayelet Kohn in their article titled “Illustrations and the written text as reciprocal translation: Two illustrated versions of *Anonymous Belfi ha-Gadol*” (2018). Even though they agree with Pereira's idea of representation, they do so only in parts and propose the concept of interdependence between the text and illustrations on the grounds of the contribution of pre-existing artistic traditions in shaping the translator's or the author's choice.

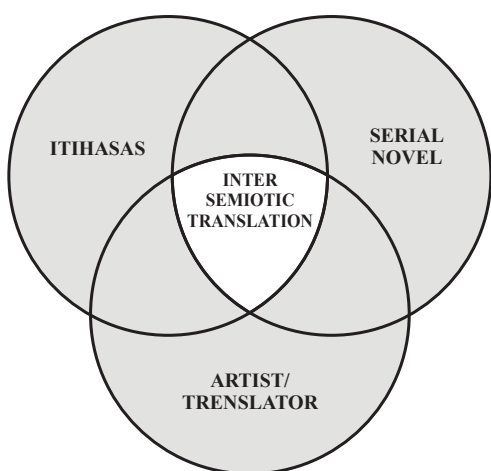
Kavitha Balakrishnan (2006) examines illustrations through the prism of media studies and opines that illustrations are media-driven graphic means for communication in a reader-oriented platform of publication. Balakrishnan's account criticizes the idea of “literature-oriented illustration” and proposes an alternate reading of illustrations by identifying multiple factors—social and political—that determine the visual curation of an illustrated weekly. The current discussion deviates from Balakrishnan's enquiry about the interdependence of multiple genres of visual forms in the twentieth century periodical publishing industry in the language of Malayalam and finds itself placed in the singular context of line art created as a response to *Ithihasic* literature. The examples of this are extracted from the monochromatic illustrations created by artist Namboodiri for the serialized version of M.T. Vasudevan Nair's novel *Randamoozham* published in the *Kala Kaumudi* weekly from the month of March to the month of November in the year 1984.

The curation of monochromatic illustrations accompanying the instalments of the selected novel is treated as a version of narrative in the visual format. “Illustrations are illustrations exactly because they are linked to a text, otherwise they would be paintings, drawings or any other type of visual work that could be placed independently in an art gallery. The question of which art was created first does not interfere with the role each plays in the book” (Pereira 2008, 105). As opposed to what Pereira suggests, this article investigates the possibility of an independent reading of these illustrations through the lens of the contribution or the role of the artist instead of the normative perception of illustrations being the derivative of the source text, where the novel, normatively considered as the source text is reduced to the status of one of the sources among many that have influenced the artist to create this line art. At the same time, the article will employ the three axioms suggested by Pereira in mapping the intersemiotic translation between the text and the illustrations. By asserting this position, the article further

opens the question about the possibility of displaying these creative expressions “independently in an art gallery” (Pereira 2008, 105). A question seemingly pursued by a group of scholars leading to the creation of the project titled “Artist Namboothiri Open Access Digital Archive” (Nair 49), Raman Nair R and others in their paper titled “Lines Conserving Cultural Heritage and Human Emotions: Archiving the Works of Artist Namboothiri” proposes the idea of creating a digital archive to document Namboodiri's work and to make them accessible to scholars and enthusiasts (Nair 49-78). However, the objective of the proposed project seems limited to documentation or preservation of the artist's work and does not intend to be a platform for a reflective engagement with the vast repertoire of his work.

Elements of Translation

When an illustration is generated on the basis of a novel, it is understood as a translation from one medium to another, here verbal to visual, hence intersemiotic. However, if one tries to identify the multiple dimensions of translation occurring in the generation of images from a text, then one can find more than one channel and more than one inspiration for the process of translation. In the case of serial novels, comic strips, illustrated books, or graphic novels, the illustration in combination with the text (words on paper) contributes to the multimodal whole desired by the reader or the viewer, hence are designed or curated accordingly to enhance the reader's experience by the author and the illustrator. However, in the case of a novel like *Randamoozham*, which is the retelling of an *Itihasa*, the reading experience is not limited to what is visible on paper—the verbal or the visual—but is coloured by the remnants of the cultural memory of the readers.



COMMON CORE

The common core represents the contributions of three different channels in the in the intersemiotic translation of the source story into illustration.

The interaction between the different channels will be discussed in the sections following the diagram.

Fig 1. Diagrammatic representation of multiple channels of translation in the case of texts chosen.

The texts like *Ithihasas* and *Puranas*, with their multiple interpretations and expressions, have spread their roots deeply and widely into the fertile land of cultural memory of diverse linguistic groups in India, of which the Malayalam speaking communities are a part. The *Mahabharata* probably has the most compelling journey in the cultural milieu of Kerala with its many detours. In his article titled “Mahabharatavum Keralavum” (2020) Sunil. P. Elayidam, maps the journey of the *Mahabharata* in Kerala meticulously with examples extracted from various cultural forms and a pitstop of which is the monochromatic illustration created by Namboodiri. The *Mahabharata* is a text well responded to, in the cultural milieu of Kerala. Ranging from verbal to scribal and visual to performative, the text has taken different forms and formats. This mapping becomes relevant in Namboodiri's context considering the exposure he has had to the multiple cultural forms mentioned by the author. With reference to the status of illustrations created for serialised weeklies, the status of the illustrator as a translator assumes a complex form. The artist is illustrating for an author who is not himself. When the translator, here the illustrator, is not the author then the process of translation is largely marked by the individual influences harbored in the creative landscape of the translator, not without the aid of the visual quality of writing as well. How do artists colour and at the same time refrain from colouring the illustrations with their memories or their take on the story; especially, when the source text is ingrained in the cultural memory of which they are a part?

In the process of translation, the artist who interprets the verbal into the visual, which in other words, is narrating through lines instead of words, is responding to the inter-textual relation with extant cultural forms that have brought the source story earlier on several occasions, in various formats. Considering Namboodiri's cultural background, a contextual examination of the possible interactions he must have had with numerous such cultural forms will enable one to get a clearer picture of what his creative landscape constitutes.

In a conversation with N E Sudheer for *Vaakvicharam* (2019), Namboodiri shared his artistic influences and expressed his interest towards the three-dimensional portrayal of various entities, as an artist. He considered temple sculptures as inspirations for his artistic sensibility and not the paintings. It is his sustained interest in sculptures found in temples which he was exposed to during the formative years of his life that determined Namboodiri's preference for three-dimensional portrayal in art. Therefore, it is only natural for him to incorporate this feature into his works of art, noticeably his line art—a telling example of which is the monochromatic illustrations he created for *Randamoozham*—making him a practitioner of the school of illustration far removed from the conventional understanding of graphic communication. “The illustrator's influences are identified in the colourful theatrical performance of celebrations of worldly passions of love and hatred in Kathakali, idealization of feminine form in Pallava-Chola art in the impressive sculptures and woodwork in the temples”

(Balakrishnan 278). As Balakrishnan points out, Namboodiri's influences are shaped by the performing traditions, sculptures and other visual artforms he was exposed to. For Namboodiri, "Chakyarkoothu possesses a technique of storytelling which is quite Keralaesque in nature and Chakyars are the roads that have led me to the stories I possess. I would visualize the narratives in my mind as I watched the Chakyar perform" (Namboothiri 44). It can be observed that the process of visualization of a story is facilitated by multiple disciplines or cultural forms.

Samaran in his article titled "Lalitamohana Varasidhi" (2023) recounts his experience of watching Namboodiri sketching Kathakali figures while playing Kathakali music in the background in a painting camp, a shared space, while demonstrating the process of sketching. Namboothiri often identified his process of creative expressions through visual medium with that of a singer, a poet, a writer, or a performer. He understood and acknowledged the multidimensional interactions among the diverse art forms of a culture.

M. T gives Bhima the centre stage in *Randamoozham*. Bhima is the protagonist, the narrator, and the audient, unlike the popular versions of the *Mahabharata* or the retellings. M.T's intention of humanizing the *Ithihasic* tale of gods prevents the novel from resorting to the common motif found in literature inspired by *Puranas* and *Ithihasas*. This tendency in storytelling opened a range of possibilities for Namboodiri to exert a similar liberty in his response to the narrative as well. The text or the description has definitely laid down an adaptable framework for the artist to function. However, the evidence of the artist's influences are visible in the several—textual, narrative or artistic—elements of these illustrations. The space given in the layout of the weekly, for these monochromatic illustrations in many of the volumes out of thirty-three, presents the impression that there was no rigid attempt to present the drawings as "literature-oriented illustration" (Balakrishnan 143). One possible reason could be the spatial economy of print. However, for a retrospective reading blurred by the distance of time, the then choice to give more space could be interpreted as a conscious or otherwise appreciation of the "Imaginative quality and assertiveness of lines" (Balakrishnan 195) depicted in Namboodiri's line art.

Generally, a text is read from left to right. Comic strips, graphic novels, and illustrated books are designed to read from left to right unless mentioned otherwise. In most of these formats, the illustrations are either posted side by side with the text, or horizontally placed against the text. Some illustrators try to achieve a rhythm to visual narration by retaining the sequential position of the characters in a continuous sequence, which is not possible in the case of the illustrations in the serial format. In a layout where words far outweigh the visual economy, illustrations resort to other techniques to incorporate rhythm into the picture. Unlike a comic strip, a nursery rhyme, or a children's book, where words

are balanced by images or sometimes more images are included to signify the chosen elements of the story, a serial novel almost always privileges words over images. Positioning of the characters to give a narrative quality to the conventionally static images by incorporating actions into the image is a pervasive technique visible in Namboodiri's creations. These illustrations do not suppress or omit information that would draw attention to the controversial aspects of the novel and hence remain faithful to the narrative by drawing attention to the same through the assertive lines on the pages. The visual economy of these illustrations is quite commendable as well. There is no attempt to omit the elements in the background or the setting.

Reading the Illustrations as Translations

Illustration I - Bhima killing a Wild Boar (pp 24, Vol 448, *Kala Kaumudi Weekly*)

The illustration appears in the beginning of the prose to the left side of the page. The possible description of the subject appears after the illustration in the print layout. The dominant figure of Bhima, with a leg over the boar after killing it with a spear in the middle of a forest, is telling of the emotions the character experienced. With his left hand raised, still holding the spear, pointed towards the head of the boar lying unresponsive on the ground, the figure of Bhima exudes triumph. The pointy nails, raised eyebrows, and a slight tilt of the head adds to the fierce demeanor. The positioning of the illustration at the beginning of the prose implies the possible direction in which the rest of the narrative will develop to. A particular character and his action are emphasized by the illustrator based on the pivotal role played by the two in the development of the narrative. The perspective is of Bhima, looking at others after defeating the animal, he is looking at the world after the most harrowing and at the same time triumphant moment of his life so far, a moment that cemented his belief in his strength, in more ways than one a rite of passage.

Illustration II – A scene inside the Palace (pp. 26-27, Vol 448, *Kala Kaumudi Weekly*)

The setting is somewhere inside the palace. Gandhari takes the centre stage. The illustration too. The picture occupies the size of three columns divided in half. Gandhari is seated on an embellished platform, surrounded by ornate pillars. All eyes are on her, the arresting posture of Gandhari is enhanced by arranging the other characters around her. One can identify the figure of Bhima holding Gandhari's hand as described in the text. The positions of the fellow princes and Kunti are also mentioned by the writer. Apart from the clues strewn across the page in the form of words, the reader is left to decipher the details in the image through a close examination of repetitive elements like jewellery, garments, setting, weapons, expressions, and perspective of the picture. Bhima is in awe of Gandhari. It is one of the moments in the novel where Gandhari who otherwise

symbolizes silent rage and dissent openly expresses her disagreement to the ways of the palace. Hence, she is given the centre stage by the artist. The artist emphasizes a set of narrative elements in this scene. One, a character--Gandhari--is given a significant space. Two, Bhima's perspective is emphasized through his posture and expressions. The exchange between the matriarch of the clan and the younger princess poignantly captures the premonitions of the impending doom.

Illustration III- Bhima in the Forest. (pp.26-27, Vol 449, *Kala Kaumudi Weekly*)

In the selected instalment of the prose, two illustrations occupy the major part of the layout, an example of images overshadowing the words on the page. The descriptions for both the images precede them in the order of occurrence. The image on the left portrays an exchange between Bhima and a few women of the tribe he met in the forest. The setting is inside an abode probably made of wood or bamboo, depicted in lines through adjacent sequential placement of panels seemed to be held together by what appears to be culms of bamboo or some other plant. A quiver of arrows is hung on the wall, beneath it a bow is kept. A female figure sits next to the bow on the floor, smiling. Two other female figures are pictured behind them, closer to the wall. Between the figures of Bhima and the female on the floor, one can see an assortment of food served on leaves and vessels made of wood. All the females are pictured to be wearing skirts decorated with bold motifs and leaves. Their upper bodies are bare and adorned with jewellery. All three of them have headdresses seemingly made of feathers. The postures of the female figures are telling of the playful exchange occurring in the scene. Figure one, the female on the floor is sitting in a relaxed manner with her legs slightly bent forward and her left hand placed on the floor behind her. Her arms and legs are adorned with jewellery commonly seen in the sculptures and paintings found in the temples of Kerala and other parts of South India. Figures two and three are positioned standing next to each other. One is seen resting her elbow on the other's shoulder, a gesture telling of the camaraderie and the shared experience of playfulness they are engaged in. The lines as they move towards the edges of elements like fingers, toes, headrests, or bows are left open, thus giving the sketch a dynamic nature. The ornate wooden shields hung on the wall reflect the artistic choice to deliberate on the details of the setting.

Bhima is featured in both the illustrations. In the first one, he is portrayed as an observer who is partly amused by the playful exchange between the women serving him food. Sat on the floor, with his legs folded and his hands bent forward to eat from the platter kept on the floor, Bhima has a slightly defensive posture. His eyebrows are raised, and head is slightly tilted towards the women as if to listen to their conversations. In the second image, Bhima exhibits a demeanor of obedience and gratefulness. The Chieftain with his elaborate headdress is given a commanding position in the image. His left hand raised in conversation resembles

Gurus or *Acharyas* expounding philosophy. The perspective presented is of an onlooker, who watches the interaction between the two figures from a distance. Notably, the figure of the chief is as tall and well-built as Bhima. An attempt to draw resemblance between the two is evident to the reader-viewer. Through such carefully placed clues Namboodiri gently guides the viewer to the core of the narrative visualized.

Conclusion

Namboodiri seems to apply permutations and combinations of imitation, emphasis, and adaptation techniques while translating the verbal to the visual through lines. Several textual elements are reproduced in the pictures however not so literally. As there is no specific order to the pictures in the serial format, there is no visible attempt from the artist's side to go beyond the structural framework of the medium. Subsequently, through a particular instance chosen from the prose based on its narrative, visual, or dramatic quality is emphasized and adapted, not to a particular ideology or trend but on a visual format. From the examples discussed in the article, characters like Gandhari take a significant space in the visual economy of the instalment, so are the women Bhima met in the forest or the chieftain of the clan. Instances of formative quality in Bhima's life are chosen carefully and intentionally by the artist as textual prompts and are then recreated as narrative devices that draw attention to the impact or consequences of the selected instances on the larger narrative. However, none of these pictures are restrictive as aids for visualization. The lines are loose as well as assertive; they flow across the pages with a quaint confidence, expressing what is adequate, and at the same time withholding enough to leave suggestions for the reader or the viewer to decipher.

Namboodiri's visual and aesthetic sensibilities coupled with his understanding of the source text proves beneficial for the translation of the narrative through pictures. His familiarity with *Ithihasas* and several cultural forms that have responded to these texts has contributed to the honest representation of selected excerpts from the text(s). The visual representations created by Namboodiri are enhanced by M. T's interpretation of the same source text(s) in the format of a novel, published in a weekly. The framework endorsed by the medium of publishing is pivotal in guiding the curation of any text and is visible in the case of *Randamoozham* as well. The degree of text-visual interface endorsed by the periodical is determinant of the quality and quantity of the illustrations. Therefore, the role of editors in determining the spatial economy of prose and the images become a significant contributor in deciding the exchange between the multiple channels constituting the translation identified. Intersemiotic translation assumes a position of reciprocal translation in the function of reading experience and the consequent meaning-making for the audience or the viewer. The exchange between the text and the artist, as well as the text and the reader contribute to the

meaning-making process a reader or a viewer undergoes. To identify the various exchanges between the constituent modals of translation involved in the media of discussion, the article examined the possible interactions from three standpoints as shown in the Venn diagram (pp.3) and the conclusions are as follows: One, the *Ithihasas*. Since *Randamoozham* is a retelling of the *Mahabharata*, the conventionally identified source text here becomes a response to the oral literature prevalent in the culture, making it a secondary source than the principal source text. Two, the serial novel. Despite the tangential position assumed by the novel, the format of publication plays a pivotal role in determining the course of translation. Three, the artist or the translator. The artist is the dominant channel through which the multidimensional interactions between the standpoints materialise.

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The Face Function: Constructing the Human Face on Screen

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Abstract

The face, a symbol of social recognition and affective intensity, has evolved significantly with the modern visual cultural revolution. It has become a locus of subjectivity and affective intensity in cinema, serving as a choreographic interface for producing meaning. The face's role in contemporary media is complex, as it illuminates the relationship between social recognition and an individual's identification within image-cultures. The paper argues that the idea of the human face and the identity of a modern subject are now in a transition phase. Digital space alters not only the way power understands a face but also renegotiates the very notion of face as an identity marker. The human face is not just a bodily feature but has a significant metaphorical value in any human society, whether modernized or traditional. The face signifies vulnerability, alterity, and individuality, and is resistant to being objectified. Digitally generated aspects of 'faciality' have become a part of life, used in various contexts such as video games, virtual reality environments, and social media profile avatars. As AI-enabled entities have their own 'face function'; in digital environments, the concept of 'face function' acquires new dimensions. The face functions as a technology in the contemporary social scenario, distinguishing itself from the head and body, and identifying speech, thought, and feelings to a data-profile.

Keywords: Face, Faciality, Face function, Levinas, Deleuze and Guattari, Agamben, Foucault, AI

Michel Foucault extensively examines the concept of biopower in his analyses of modern governmentality. Contrary to the power models positioned around individuals during the era of monarchies, welfare regimes prioritize the management and control of populations. Foucault observes that the new model operates covertly and is disseminated through methods such as monitoring,

standardization, and the incorporation of individuals into social frameworks (Foucault 16-18). In modern times, institutions such as medicine and education are designed to manage not only physical bodies, but also the various processes of life. It encompasses a broad array of strategies that shape the collective existence of populations, linking governance closely with the biological and social components of life. At a macroscopic level, this model of biopower operates by converting populations into databases. The word citizen is drained of its modernist associations with agency, rationality, political autonomy, privacy and progress as it gets co-opted into the vocabulary of Digital Governance. The citizen is increasingly a virtual data profile that loses the real potential that the modern public realm conferred it. Retina scans, fingerprint archiving and DNA profiling have all made it easier to talk about the data-profile of people. It is in this context that the paper tries to understand how the human face as a metaphor works in governmentality. The paper argues that the idea of the human face and the identity of a modern subject, two fields that have always had important interconnections, are now in a transition phase. Digital Space alters not only the way power understands a face, it renegotiates the very notion of face as an identity marker. In order to place this idea in context, a cultural history of face is attempted first. Philosophical conceits about the human face are also studied to situate the argument.

Human face is not just a bodily feature. The metaphorical value of a face in any human society, whether modernized or traditional, is substantial. In the Indian medico-philosophical system Ayurveda, the head is referred to as *uthamanga* ; literally translated, *the best body part*. Face embeds the points where a head engages visually with the surroundings, listens, breathes and tastes. It brings the world into the *uthamanga* and lets *uthamanga's* processing engage with the world. Face is humans' most active interface. Similar prioritizations of the head and face can be found in the West too. Across various fields such as theatre and medical science, the face has conventionally symbolized the concept of 'human.' It represents the potential for subjectivity using basic binary markers like male/female and black/white. While emotional states have a physical impact on the entire body, it is the facial expression that reveals the subjective state of mind during interpersonal contact. The face has great relevance in Levinas's philosophy because it signifies another person's vulnerability, alterity, and individuality. It is resistant to being objectified and transcends any attempt to reduce the other to a merely perceivable or desirably objectifiable object. The meeting with the face causes a disruption in the self's tendency to be self-centered and prompts us to acknowledge the ultimate alterity of the other person as well as their irreducible difference. According to Levinas, the face can be understood as a text, a unified and distinct set of signs that is nonetheless vulnerable and open. One 'reads' people's faces and, by extension, 'them.' Face and discourse are inextricably linked for Levinas, since it is the face that speaks—“[A]cross all literature, the

human face speaks—or stutters, or assumes an expression, or struggles with its caricature” (Levinas 11-17). The face transforms into an interface and even a mask. The face signifies signification in and of itself—“signification without context...because the face is meaning in and of itself” (Levinas 86). Agamben, on the other hand, in his *State of Exception*, investigates how the suspension of laws and the declaration of a state of emergency might result in the loss of legal rights, so obscuring the boundary between the political and the biological. While the face is a critical aspect of Agamben's 'bare life' and represents the human being as an individual, in his 'state of exception' or 'zones of indistinction' (where the normal legal order is suspended) the face comes to lose its status as an ethical and political entity. The idea of faciality also connects with Deleuze's more comprehensive theory of the movement-image and time-image, which addresses the temporal aspects of the face as it appears on screen. Evaluating faciality from various perspectives, theorists prioritize the cultural and social significance of facial representation. Others explore the political dimensions of facial representation, examining how the portrayal of faces can be manipulated to serve ideological goals or maintain power structures. Typically, the face of a human subject serves an individuating, socializing, and communicative function. The organization of the face may be undone in favour of its material characteristics, which become the building blocks, (the 'hyle') of an affect or even a system of affects (Deleuze, *Cinema I: The Movement Image* 117).

A face can occasionally be reflective, unchanging, and fixed on a concept or object, displaying a pure quality that suggests little movement for maximum unity. It can be intense, with a pure power that runs through a whole sequence of qualities, each of which assumes a momentary independence before passing a threshold and emerging on to a new quality, as if each face comprised an untapped and unexplored terrain. External signs are primarily displayed on the face. The face becomes the pre-eminent Cartesian plane of immanence, as if the soul's internal spacing is projected onto it. The face (an 'inscribed surface') and its expressions are the precise location of auto affection, which is described as the construction of a planned interaction surface or an encounter between the affecting and affected instances. Deleuze explains that the primary and fundamental meaning of a face is social. When the face becomes expressive due to passions, it transcends its social function and ceases to serve as an identifier. Affects disrupt or suspend the face's normal behaviour and meaning. When the face expresses an emotion, its surface or plane coincides with the emotion itself. It loses its independence and becomes a 'pure' affect. The face must shed its individual and social characteristics in order to become what it truly is: the 'affect face.' The face is 'a very special mechanism' located at the juncture of the signification and subjectification layers--“There is always a white wall upon which significance inscribes its signs and redundancies. Subjectification always requires a black hole in which to lodge its consciousness, passion, and

redundancies" (*Thousand Plateaus* 128). The process that Deleuze dubbed *visageite* (faciality) is an operation of "the abstract machine that produces faces based on the variable combinations of its cogwheels" (*Thousand Plateaus* 176).

With the modern visual cultural revolution, the symbolic and metaphoric functions of the face acquired significantly greater revisions. It began contributing towards the construction of cinematic meaning, functioning as a locus of subjectivity and affective intensity. Within the realm of cinema, the deliberate use of close-up images that focus on the face, together with the careful arrangement of these frames in a specific order, results in a distinct and well-defined facial composition. The interactions among different screen faces, the inferred posture of the viewer within those interactions, and the intertextual references to other screen faces in films provide a choreographic interface that serves as a significant mechanism for producing meaning. This choreographic discourse serves as a structure for examining the instructional, artistic, and performative aspects of film. The face illuminates the complex relationship between social recognition and the degree to which an individual's visage is identifiable within the image-cultures of contemporary media. This relationship can make or break a person's acceptance into the 'community'. The digitally generated aspects of 'faciality' that have now become a part of life can be used in a variety of contexts, including video games, virtual reality environments, and as social media profile avatars. These AI-enabled entities have their own 'face function' in a digital environment, as autonomous agents. As artificial intelligence technologies become capable of generating and representing human-like characteristics, the concept of 'face function' acquires new dimensions. While Foucault's traditional concept of 'author function' refers to human authors and their influence on texts, the concept of 'face function' in the context of artificial intelligence focuses on the role and influence of AI-generated characteristics in various socio-virtual contexts. Face function becomes the function of digital technology in representing and communicating meaning superseding or *in the absence of* a 'human author'. This, in a manner of saying, makes 'face' a technology in the contemporary social scenario. Because the face assumes such a prime signifying position, it distinguishes itself from the head and the body. Consequently, the human corporeal semiotics could be *wholly* facialized. The face in the current human geography is not anymore an exterior envelope surrounding a person who speaks, thinks and feels; rather, it is a code that identifies speech, thought and feelings of a person to a data-profile.

There exists an indexical relationship between what is on a face and the emotions or ideas it represents; that is, what creates the marks or expressions on the face is what is behind the face (Beynon-Davies 295-314). The face of a person indicates or communicates the inner feelings of that person; it expresses something that is concealed behind the face, yet the appearance of a face (on the face) offers access to what is concealed behind the surface of the face. The face is a part of a system of

signification that is quite separate from that of spoken or written language, as well as from traditional means of representation. This signification system is also quite distinct from that of other traditional modes of representation like painting. In some situations, in contrast to traditional modes of representation, the face might automatically represent or signal without the intention of the person whose face the markings appear on (selfies, editing tools). A face is individuating and socializing: it ensures communication both within the individual's data extensions and between two organic bodies. The concept of faciality put forward by Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari is a critical investigation of the face as a socio-political and semiotic construct, as opposed to solely a physical or anatomical trait. The visage is involved in subjectification processes, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and others.

Deleuze's thoughts on faciality are intricate and interconnected with his philosophy's broader themes (like assemblages, the multiplicity of becoming, the rhizomatic character of reality, power structures, critique of capitalism and its effects on subjectivity and desire). The face plays a crucial role in organizing subjectivity and social relations within diverse power structures. It is considered part of a broader 'signifying regime' that contributes to the stratification of society and the creation of subjectivities. It operates within systems of signification, where certain facial features, expressions, and gestures are encoded with meanings that enforce social norms and identities. This 'overcoding' serves social control and conformance, contributing to what Deleuze and Guattari call 'striated space.' Faciality is one of the numerous 'territorializing' forces that limit 'deterritorialization' and creativity in human experience. Deterritorialization generates lines of flight, thereby expanding subjectivity and expression possibilities beyond conventional facial representations. The singularity of the face has revealed a space of potential selfhood in relation to an-other that always exists beyond the I-You conditions of self-presence. This space represents the possibility of a beginning, or the beginning of the possibilities of forming new self-other relations that do not rely on pre-existing I-you relationships based on calculated self-hoods and types and markers of identity.

The face is generated through its interactions with others, i.e., through the preferences and stereotypes that are read into a face. With the growing control and regulation of the face, new ethical dynamics are arising that involve defacement and evasion. These do not prioritize mutual recognition, but rather collective transformation that is both chaotic and shared. Deleuze and Guattari argue that the face is distinct from the matter of the human body; it is a surface, a map, that constructs and defines the head and the body. They, in lieu of an ethics of exposure, advocate escape and transformation—“... if humans have a destiny, it is to escape the face, to deconstruct the face and facializations, to become imperceptible and clandestine...by bizarre true becomings that...make faciality traits themselves evade the face's organization” (*Thousand Plateaus* 171). Directors and

performers have looked upon special arrangements of faces as expressive of unwordable psychological situations. Close-ups of characters' faces were a common device utilized by Bergman throughout his filmography--to a large extent shaped by his prior experience in theatre as well as his lifelong fascination with the human mind. These close-ups were often used to depict profound emotions, psychological depth, and existential issues. Antonin Artaud saw the face as a site of powerful and honest expression, capable of transcending language and directly speaking with the audience. His ideas regarding the expressive potential of the face have struck a chord with artists, performers, and thinkers, leading to the development of novel viewpoints regarding the connection that exists between the body, expression, and the lived experience of humans. The use of close-up shots and the arrangement of shots in a specific order in films create a distinct facial structure. The way the faces on the screen interact with each other, the implied position of the viewer in those interactions, the references to other faces on screen all contribute to a choreographed interface which is a rich site of meaning-production. This choreographic exchange provides a structure for examining the pedagogical, artistic, and performative principles that form the foundation of films. The body is 'overcoded' and decimated by the face's system. An abstract machine of faciality generates face through signification and subjectification, and this machine is executed by a specific assemblage of power.

The predominately hierarchical signifiers found in faces, locate certain colours and especially genders of faciality as 'other' and even sacrificial—the racial other face of the victim of civil violence, the sexual alterity. Often, in representation of a 'nation's faces,' facial signifiers replace ethical consideration of actual bodies. Popular traditions and culture perpetuate the notion of faciality as a pure signifier of selfhood in the other, equating the enemy with the potential to be a 'me'. The evolving meaning of the human countenance is influenced by the development and widespread use of innovative visual technologies such as digital photography, visual filters, and face recognition software. The emergence and acceptance of new forms of portraying faces, such as the selfie, the AI lead us to the fact that the natural mobility of the human face has been eclipsed by the spectacle of computer generated effects. The face communicates nothing other than communicability itself. As Agamben puts it, “My face is my exterior: a point of indifference with regard to all of my properties, to what is rightfully one's and what is common, to what is internal and what is external.” He continues, “(i)n the face, I exist with all of my characteristics (being brown, tall, pale, proud, and emotional), but none of these characteristics essentially identify me or belong to me.” Agamben looks at the face as “...the threshold of de-appropriation and de-identification of all manners and qualities, a threshold at which only qualities become purely communicable. And only where I encounter a face does an exteriority and an outside occur to me” (Agamben 93).

Caught in the contradictions of twentieth century Modernism, the face was either

removed from the scene of representation, hyperrationalized, etherealized, or drastically distorted. The development of technology has reached a point where it is now possible to construct lifelike, indistinguishable representations of people in a virtual world. To participate in activities occurring in a virtual world, one must establish a virtual identity that others will recognize and with which they can interact. One's self-representation, as well as one's outward appearance and behaviours, are the result of deliberate choice. Self-referential expressions can shape the content during 'conversations'. Self-design serves multiple functions, including awareness of others and interaction with them. When using a display picture, masks and clothing can be used to alter a person's visage. While developing a perception of one's own identity, people may choose to hide or obscure their true selves. Apart from theatre and cinema, biometric facial recognition draws attention to the important function of the face in current technology systems as a means of identification and authentication. This highlights the intricate relationship that exists between facial recognition technology, individual identification, and the social milieu in which one lives.

Biometric facial recognition is a technology that identifies and authenticates individuals using facial characteristics. It has become more prevalent in a variety of applications, such as security systems, access control, digital payments, and social media platforms. Facial recognition algorithms analyse particular facial characteristics, such as the distance between the eyes, the shape of the nostrils, and the contours of the face, to generate a unique facial template or "facial signature" for each individual. These templates are then compared to a database of known features and matched accordingly. The several moments of the face ally themselves with the deconstruction of the 'author' and 'intentions.' Either the face was reconvened as a structure, in which case it was invaded and controlled by the outside world, or it was marked out and severed from both the body and the social envelopment as a whole. The face, which was thought to be the location of (authorial) intents as well as phenomenological 'presence,' came to be further retracted as a result of the elimination of the 'author'. Despite the resurgence of interest in the body in the context of technological and political forms, the face, with its unending connotations of earlier symbolic hierarchies (such as imperial, religious, and bourgeois), has been more or less erased.

Displaying images during online interactions facilitates user recognition and identification. They facilitate social connections and a sense of community and belonging on online platforms. Due to the prevalence of super-enlarged, computer-enhanced faces in advertising, television, and films, the face has been reduced to a mundane image. In film culture, the facial close-up was once a striking and mysterious image. Face swaps, also known as simulated AI faces and face converters, emerged with the advent of digital technology. The user's face is 'retouched' and filtered in these programmes, which feature built-in editing capabilities that enable for additional editing. Face shifting permits the mapping

of facial features, the replacement of faces, and the elimination of the need for prosthetics and cosmetics. Using augmented reality, it is now possible to exchange faces in real time with other individuals in the same room. Rapid developments in computer graphics and artificial intelligence (AI) now make it possible for chatbots and other computer-based interfaces to appear to have human features. In the era of artificial intelligence, the face becomes unrecognizable.

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Childhood Through Visual Narratives: Exploring Palestinian Children's Representation in *Born in Gaza* and *Children of Shatila*.

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Abstract

The politics of visibility in the context of children's representation in documentaries like *Born in Gaza* and *Children of Shatila* offers a compelling lens through which to analyse the intricate interplay between visual culture and latent ideologies. Visual culture goes beyond mere physiological perception, encompassing a deliberate political act of making certain cultural artefacts visible to informed viewers. This conscious act shapes and communicates messages, often deeply embedded within the emotional contents of images, and is subject to interpretation influenced by culture-specific visual appeals.

The documentaries showcase the power of visibility in conveying the stories of children affected by conflict. By presenting their experiences through the visual medium, these documentaries engage viewers emotionally, prompting them to decode the messages and empathize with the children's plights. The orientation of images within the public sphere reflects broader structural organizations, be it the cultural community or the state at large. These documentaries illustrate the potential of visual mediums to create empathy, highlight social issues, and challenge dominant narratives, ultimately redefining how we perceive and engage with the world around us. In the contemporary landscape, the dominance of visual culture has transformed the political sphere. The images in circulation not only represent collective identities but also shape public discourse, often marginalizing dissenting voices through visual aggression prevalent in the digital age.

In addition to challenging dominant narratives, visual narratives in documentaries can also be seen as forms of visual resistance and activism. By presenting the stories of marginalized children and their experiences in conflict zones, these documentaries amplify voices that are often unheard in mainstream discourse. Visual resistance goes beyond passive storytelling; it becomes a means of advocacy for social and political change. The documentaries inspire viewers not only to empathize but also to take action, whether through supporting

humanitarian efforts, engaging in dialogue, or advocating for policy changes that address the root causes of conflict and displacement.

Keywords: Visual narratives, Political dimensions, Childhood experiences, public sphere, visual storytelling.

"Even if I live to be 100, I would still hope to return... I would like to say that in one or one hundred generations' time when I and others are dead, promise me that Palestine will never be forgotten." (*Children of Shatila*, 00:06:48-00:07:10)

"The situation is really complicated here. We have wars every two years and we cannot stand it. Everyone close to us dies." (*Born in Gaza*, 00:02:01-00:02:10)

Visual narratives in documentaries hold the power to transcend time and space, transporting viewers into the lives of those depicted on screen. Visual culture goes beyond mere physiological perception, encompassing a deliberate political act of making certain cultural artefacts visible to informed viewers. This conscious act shapes and communicates messages, often deeply embedded within the emotional contents of images, and is subject to interpretation influenced by culture-specific visual appeals. In the contemporary landscape, the dominance of visual culture has transformed the political sphere. The rapid rise of visual media, from streets to screens, has led to a situation where the visual becomes inherently political.

The politics of visibility in the context of children's representation in documentaries like *Children of Shatila* and *Born in Gaza* offers a compelling lens through which to analyse the intricate interplay between visual culture and latent ideologies. By presenting their experiences through the visual medium, these documentaries engage viewers emotionally, prompting them to decode the messages and empathize with the children's plights. The orientation of images within the public sphere reflects broader structural organizations, be it the cultural community or the state at large. The documentaries exemplify the convergence of visual culture and politics, as they use visibility to shed light on the experiences of children living amidst conflict. These documentaries illustrate the potential of visual media to create empathy, highlight social issues, and challenge dominant narratives, ultimately redefining how we perceive and engage with the world around us.

Memory and Visual Narratives

Mai Masri's second movie in the trilogy portraying the experiences of children amidst conflict is elucidated in *Children of Shatila* (1989). In this documentary, juvenile denizens of the Shatila refugee camp engage in self-documentation, employing digital cameras bestowed upon them by the filmmaker. The Shatila camp rose to international prominence after the shocking Sabra-Shatila massacre of 1982, situated within Beirut's socioeconomically deprived "belt of misery." Home to 15,000 Palestinians and Lebanese, the camp encapsulates a shared narrative of displacement, unemployment, and destitution.

Within the broader historical context of the grandparents' forced exodus from Palestine five decades prior, the progeny of Shatila grapple with the stark actuality of their refugee existence, marked by survival through massacres, sieges, and famine. The director Mai Masri meticulously concentrates on the narratives of two Palestinian children, namely, the eleven-year-old Farah and the twelve-year-old Issa. Equipped with video cameras, these youngsters emerge as storytellers, shaping the camp's narrative through the lens of personal anecdotes, thereby articulating the sentiments and aspirations intrinsic to their generation. This poignant cinematic endeavour establishes a connective tissue to historical works produced by the Palestine Cinema Institute in the preceding decades, tragically obliterated during the Israeli invasion of 1982.

The documentary employs personal interviews, candid footage, and evocative cinematography to immerse viewers in the experiences of the children. Landsberg's theory of "prosthetic memory"¹ comes to life as viewers emotionally engage with the children's struggles and aspirations, fostering a sense of shared empathy. It defies the constraints of time and space, enabling viewers to connect with the past and distant experiences. The documentary becomes a conduit through which history is brought into the present, allowing viewers to experience the children's lives first-hand. The film's narrative structure is characterized by its integration of personal narratives from individuals belonging to various generations. These narratives include the survivors of the Shatila massacre, their children, and even grandchildren. This approach serves to bridge temporal gaps and connect viewers with the past through the perspectives of those directly affected by traumatic events. By featuring accounts from different generations, the film underscores the enduring impact of the massacre and how its consequences have reverberated through subsequent generations. The narrative structure effectively interlaces personal stories into a cohesive timeline, allowing the audience to follow the trajectory of events surrounding the Shatila massacre. Through careful editing and juxtaposition, the film constructs a seamless narrative thread that bridges past and present. As viewers witness the survivors' recollections of the massacre and its aftermath, they are guided through a chronological progression that provides context, insights, and emotional resonance.

Alison Landsberg's concept of "prosthetic memory" asserts that media can establish an emotional bridge to past events, enabling viewers to experience emotions and empathize with situations they have not personally undergone.

¹Alison Landsberg's theory of "prosthetic memory" posits that media, including visual media, can create a form of empathetic connection to past events that individuals did not personally experience. In the context of the documentaries, this theory is evident in the emotional engagement fostered between viewers and the depicted childhood experiences. The visual narratives act as prosthetic memories, enabling viewers to connect with the subjects' emotions, fostering empathy, and encouraging a deeper understanding of the children's plights.

Landsberg delves into the era of mass culture, placing specific emphasis on examining the impact of depictions of slavery and Holocaust in literature, cinema, and that of museum-exhibits on collective memory. She argues that what makes mass media so powerful in memory culture is that they allow us to "take on" other people's and groups' experiences and memories "like an artificial limb" (qtd in Erll, 3). Prosthetic memory has deeply ethical implications: it is characterized by its "ability ... to produce empathy and social responsibility as well as political alliances that transcend race, class, and gender" (Landsberg, 21).

*Children of Shatila*² strategically employs parallel storylines that run across different generations. By doing so, the film creates a sense of unity between past and present experiences. For example, juxtaposing a survivor's account of the massacre with their child's reflections on growing up with trauma establishes a poignant connection between two generations. This technique evokes empathy from the audience, as they witness the generational transfer of memories and emotions. Through intergenerational storytelling, the film also captures how perspectives evolve. The older generation's stories of survival and loss are juxtaposed with the younger generation's desire to understand their family history and identity. As articulated by Hirsch, "postmemory"³ refers to the intricate connection that the "subsequent generation" shares with the personal, collective, and cultural anguish endured by those who preceded them (5). This concept predominantly addresses the trauma of events such as the Holocaust, and the "generation after" encompasses both those who were very young during the traumatic events and the subsequent generation—the offspring of survivors. "Postmemory" should not be conflated with memory itself: it signifies an encounter with events that one did not directly live through. Nonetheless, the narratives and behaviours ingrained in the upbringing of survivors' descendants hold the emotional potency akin to first-hand memories. This dynamic presents a nuanced exploration of memory as it transforms and adapts across generations. As viewers witness this evolution, they gain insights into the complexities of intergenerational trauma and how it shapes both personal and collective memory. The documentary's narrative structure not only educates the audience about historical events but also elicits a deep emotional response. By enabling viewers to connect with survivors' stories and the subsequent impact on their descendants, the documentary promotes empathy and understanding. This emotional engagement encourages audiences to reflect on the enduring consequences of the Shatila massacre and the role of collective memory in shaping individual lives.

²Director Masri motivates the children to explore a camcorder, observing their endeavours to perceive their surroundings through a lens and even engage in conducting interviews.

³Known for her work on postmemory, Hirsch explores how memories of past traumatic events are transmitted and remembered by subsequent generations. In the context of the documentaries, her concepts of "postmemory" and "family album" could be relevant in understanding how the experiences of children are conveyed visually and emotionally.

Born in Gaza employs the concept of prosthetic memory to evoke empathy and connection between viewers and the experiences of Palestinian children growing up amidst the conflict. The visual narratives in *Born in Gaza* invite viewers to share in the emotional experiences of the children. By witnessing their challenges, dreams, and resilience, the viewers develop an empathetic bond through prosthetic memory. The documentary transcends geographic and temporal barriers, enabling viewers to connect with the children's lives despite physical distances. Landsberg's theory holds that viewers are emotionally transported into the heart of the conflict. The emotional resonance elicited by the visual narratives bridges the gap between the viewers' own experiences and the trauma faced by the children in Gaza. The power of visual telling lies in its ability to evoke emotional responses that resonate with viewers' memories and emotions.

Kuhn's emphasis on affective responses to visual representations aligns with the emotional resonance of the documentary. The visual narratives in *Born in Gaza* create affective connections⁴, inviting viewers to empathetically experience the trauma, resilience, and hope of the children. Visual narratives play a role in memory work by presenting narratives and visuals that prompt viewers to contemplate historical occurrences, establish emotional connections with experiences, and participate in ongoing dialogues concerning shared memory and societal awareness. It is cultivated through the use of visual storytelling techniques, personal stories, and intimate portrayals of individuals' lives. Viewers might experience strong emotional reactions that lead to a heightened awareness of the depicted issues and a desire for social change. Affective connections contribute to memory work by making the past and its emotional resonance relevant and impactful in the present, encouraging viewers to reflect, discuss, and take action based on their emotional engagement. Her concept of memory work refers to the active process of constructing, negotiating, and reimagining memories through various forms of representation, including the visual media. The framework also allows us to explore how visual narratives can challenge dominant narratives and offer alternative perspectives on conflict and trauma. By presenting the children's perspectives, the documentary disrupts prevailing narratives and encourages viewers to critically reflect on their preconceptions. Within the realm of visual culture and media, memory work encompasses active interaction with representations that trigger recollections, emotions, and connections. Cinematic elements such as camera angles, framing, lighting, and sound design play a pivotal role in shaping the emotional impact of visual narratives. For example, close-up shots of the children's faces can evoke a more intimate connection with their emotions, while wide-angle shots may emphasize the broader context of their lives in conflict zones. Moreover, the use of music and soundscapes in these documentaries should not be underestimated. The choice of

⁴Affective connections refer to the emotional responses and connections that individuals form with visual representations, stories, and narratives.

music can profoundly influence the viewer's emotional response. A haunting melody can underscore the tragedy of the children's experiences, while uplifting music can accentuate their resilience and hope. This sonic dimension of storytelling adds another layer of complexity to the politics of storying, as it influences how viewers interpret and engage with the narratives.

The documentaries *Born in Gaza* and *Children of Shatila* not only engage with universal themes of childhood and conflict but also present the unique cultural contexts of Palestine and Lebanon. These cultural nuances are embedded in the visual narratives and can affect how viewers from different cultural backgrounds interpret stories. For instance, symbols, traditions, and gestures that hold specific cultural significance in these regions may convey layers of meaning that are not immediately apparent to viewers from other parts of the world. This cultural specificity adds depth to the narratives and highlights the importance of considering cultural context when analyzing visual storytelling in a global context.

Conclusion

The analysis of visual narratives within the documentaries *Born in Gaza* and *Children of Shatila* offers a profound perspective on the intricate interplay between childhood experiences, memory, trauma, and political dimensions. Through the application of theoretical frameworks such as Alison Landsberg's prosthetic memory, Marianne Hirsch's post-memory, and Annette Kuhn's ideas surrounding memory work and affective connections, we attain a deeper comprehension of how these documentaries surpass temporal, spatial, and personal confines, effectively involving audiences on nuanced and multifaceted levels. The visual narratives embedded within these documentaries act as bridges that connect distant events with current comprehension, invoking empathy and emotional resonance among the viewers. Landsberg's theory underscores the power of these narratives in forming a prosthetic link, enabling audiences to virtually experience the lives of conflict-affected children. Likewise, Hirsch's concept of postmemory highlights the transfer of intergenerational trauma and memories, revealing how the experiences of the previous generation shape the narratives of the succeeding one.

Through Annette Kuhn's framework of memory work and affective connections, we recognize the active process through which viewers interact with visual representations to construct, negotiate, and reimagine memories. The emotional impact of these narratives fosters affective connections, allowing viewers not only to comprehend but also to emotionally engage with the children's experiences. The political dimensions interwoven with these visual narratives challenge dominant narratives, broaden perspectives, and generate awareness about the enduring repercussions of conflicts on children's lives. By showcasing both the resilience and vulnerabilities of these children, the documentaries empower

viewers to reflect on broader socio-political contexts and advocate for change. In essence, the visual narratives portraying childhood experiences in *Born in Gaza* and *Children of Shatila* transcend mere depiction to become catalysts for empathy, understanding, and heightened social awareness. These documentaries surpass geographical boundaries and cultural disparities, transforming distant narratives into shared human encounters. By interlinking visual narratives with theories of memory and trauma, these documentaries fundamentally reshape our perceptions of and engagement with intricate political realities, nurturing compassion, empathy, and a renewed dedication to social justice.

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War and the Marginalised: Contemplating War Through the Eyes of Women and Children in Japanese War Animes.

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Abstract

The paper explores the enduring impact of the Asia-Pacific War on the Japanese civilians, with a particular focus on children and women, as portrayed in several poignant war-themed anime films. The analysis centres on movies like *Barefoot Gen*, *Grave of the Fireflies*, *Who is Left Behind*, *Giovanni's Island*, and *In This Corner of the World*, which provide powerful and evocative narratives. These cinematic works serve as windows into the harrowing experiences of their characters, shedding light on the profound emotional and psychological trauma they endured during this tumultuous period.

The paper underscores the essential role of these films in vividly illustrating the horrors of war, emphasising the needless suffering inflicted upon innocent civilians, particularly children who lost their families and women who were thrust into the roles of family caretakers, often enduring extreme hardship. These cinematic works are instrumental in bringing to life the personal stories of these victims and conveying the harsh reality of war's brutality.

Furthermore, the paper draws from historical records and testimonials to make the events more realistic. It puts an effort to promote the vital importance of pacifism and advocates for a world in which the protection and well-being of humanity, which is a necessity even in the 21st century. The lessons drawn from these films extend far beyond the specific historical context, serving as a powerful reminder of the human cost of conflict and the need to strive for a more peaceful and compassionate world.

Keywords: Animes, Conflicts and Children, Visual Arts.

“As it had always been, it is the powerless, nameless, ordinary people, who die in wars waged by a handful of men in power.” -*Barefoot Gen*, Manga 1973.

The victims of the Asia-Pacific war cannot be limited to the victims of the Atomic Holocaust of Hiroshima and Nagasaki or the soldiers who shed their lives for the

country; myriads of Japanese civilians were also highly affected by the onset and offset of the Pacific war. Films ranging from *Barefoot Gen* (1983) to *In This Corner of the World* (2016) centre their attention on life during the Second World War, with an emphasis on children and then on women over the rest of the war days. The war anime gives a reflection on the past. Being animated movies, they could picture a clear description of the events and make it vehemently realistic compared to live action. The movie *Barefoot Gen* (1983) gives life to the events of the Hiroshima bombing. The movie speaks about Gen, a lad of six who had lost his father, brother, and two sisters along with his whole city in the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. In the 1988 film *Grave of the Fireflies*, Seita, a 14-year-old child, recounts the events surrounding the incendiary bombardment of Kobe City in March 1945. With a similar plot to *Grave of the Fireflies*, the 1991 movie *Who is Left Behind* portrays the life of a young girl starting her first grade and growing up during the war days in Tokyo (1945). The 2014 film *Giovanni's Island* narrates the tale of the two brothers Junpei and Kanta who reside on the Shikotan Island the Russians had forcefully occupied. The film's background draws attention to the lives of those who were expelled from their homeland following Japan's defeat in the World War. Another fascinating movie deep-rooted in varied visuals of the war period is the 2016 movie *In This Corner of the World* located in the port city of Kure whose protagonist is a young woman of eighteen named Suzu Urano. To summarise, all these movies reflect every day of civilian life and their attitude towards the war. The movies, in all senses, demonstrate why war is an “unnecessary evil” and promote pacifist thoughts in the minds of the audience.

John F Kennedy had said, “Children are the world's most valuable resource and its best hope for the future” (Kennedy 63), thus emphasising the importance of children to society. A child is wild and one's childhood is unique to every individual. It is a period of innocence, carefree living, and bashfulness, a stage in life where you enjoy the fullest unafraid of what the world might think. Thus, with the outbreak of the War, this period of a being's life is abused, mistreated, exploited, and manipulated drastically. It imprints a significant impact on the child's life or worse, results in his/her brutal death. The anime movie *Who's Left Behind*, by Seiji Aihara, begins with a bunch of kids playing 'kagome kagome'(The game of ring a' roses with an element of tag in it). The kids are having fun and their innocent nature to “live in the moment” is brilliantly captured. All the children including Kayoko, the central character, and her brothers are given a childish nature in their personalities. The viewers would instantly recognize it as a typical happy family. The transition as the movie evolves further into the second half is horrendous. With the increasing wrath of the Tokyo bombing in 1945, the families are asked to either move to their relatives or migrate with the City Movement groups. Kayoko is separated from her family and moves in with her Aunt at Numazu, and unfortunately, she never sees her family again. As the title implies, she and her brother, Kisaburo, are the only ones “left

behind.” According to Anna Freud, daughter of Sigmund Freud in her research of psychoanalysis of children with their War Nurseries, “Young children have to pay a very high price for removal from danger: They have to sustain the shock of being separated from their mothers—a much greater shock than the one a child receives when the house in which he lives is destroyed by bombing.” (Midgley 945). The trauma young Kayoko has to go through for this separation is seen at various times in the film. One such moment is when she gets a flashback of what it meant to be happy. She silently whispers "Father, mother" (*Left behind*. 1:04:04-7), hoping her parents can hear her missing them.

The 2014 film *Giovanni's Island*, directed by Mizuko Nishikumbo, exhibits a similar parental and familial separation pattern. Junpei and Kanta, the two brothers who carry the plot forward, are raised by their father, the head of the fighting force of the village, and grandfather, a fisherman. Both brothers experience the adverse effect of the invasion of the Russians to their homeland, Shikotan Island (currently one of the four Kuril Islands entirely occupied by the Russians). With the charge of the Soviets to the island, the Japanese folks are forced to abandon their houses and adopt the Russian curriculum in their schools. The brothers and their family move into the stables giving Russians their home. The historical accuracy of this incident can be seen in the testimony of Mr. Tawaaki Iwasaki of Etoforu Island in *The Northern Territories Described by Former Islanders: Memories and Historical Testimonies*;

“When Russian civilians came due to the occupation policy, it caused a housing shortage, because the island had buildings for only a thousand people at most. Naturally, Japanese people were forced to live in half their houses, and inevitably, Japanese were driven away.” (“Historical Testimonies.”)

The story transforms when their father is imprisoned for secretly delivering food from the Dawn Corps' emergency stores to the rest of the village. Once the father gets arrested, the children haplessly become war orphans. The children and other island members are transferred to the internment camp, where Kanta gets sick due to the cold weather. There are moments from the camp where Kanta asks for their father in despair. When their uncle Hideo says “he (father) is in a prison camp to the north. Beyond those mountains! It's just a stone's throw from here!” (*Giovanni* 1:03:44-50), the innocent and strong-spirited brothers take it literally and try to make it to the prison by foot. With the help of Uncle Hideo and Miss Sawako, they meet their father for one last time. This moment brings light to the trauma of familial separation in the families of war prisoners. Kanta, Junpei, and their father are seen grasping each other's hands across the wired fences. The innocence and young imaginative mind of a little child are revealed when Kanta says, “We came on the Galactic Railroad” (*Giovanni* 1:19:1). Kanta, soon after this reunion, fades away to death. According to *The Northern Territories Described by Former Islanders*, “The 17,291 islanders who once lived on the four northern islands were

expelled in the Soviet invasion.” (“Historical Testimonies.”). The story of Kanta and Junpei represents the life of war orphans under the Soviet invasion of 1945-1950.

The plight of war orphans does not end there. *Grave of the Fireflies*, directed by Isao Takahata, and *Barefoot Gen* directed by Mori Masaki are two of the early Japanese war animes that address the story of young kids who were tragic victims of the incendiary bombings on 5 June 1945 in the city of Kobe, and the Hiroshima bombing of 6th August 1945 simultaneously. *Grave of the Fireflies* begins with the death of Seita in a railway station which signifies his agony and loneliness. The people walking to and fro in the train station exclaim he is an outcast and wonder how uncivilised it will look if the Americans noticed the dying, rotten, skeleton-looking young boy. The story begins when his spirit comes to life after his death when a deep red tone radiates the whole scene. He says that it is September 21, 1945, the day he died. He further reunites with his little sister Setsuko who also re-emerges from the ashes of her cremated body that was stored in her favourite candy box, the Fruit Drop. The story begins when he recalls the events of their deaths. The Air raid, notably as per the historical references, happened at 7:22 a.m. (*Kobe Kushu.*), and Seita and Setsuko lost their home. Seita, a child of 14, after finding out that his mother was burned by fire, takes the responsibility of looking after his four-year-old sister, Setsuko. The next day, he witnesses his mother's death and watches as her body is burned with tons of other corpses in a large pit. On the other hand, *Barefoot Gen* starts rather differently, with a happy family of five, expecting their next child. The landing of "The Little Boy" on that one bright morning with clear skies, had the six-year-old Gen witness his friend's burned body and his family, except for his mother, burning under the weight of their house that had collapsed over them. To make things more painful, his little sister Tomoko was born on the night her family perished and Gen took responsibility for looking after them. The face of Shinji, Gen's little brother, crying for his mother to help him whilst being crushed under the weight of their burning house makes the scene extremely distressing and heart-wrenching. Both Gen and Seita, at such young ages, were forced by "war" to look after the ones who were left behind. Akiyuki Nosaka, the author of *Grave of the Fireflies*, in an interview (1987) said:

“When they lose their sole guardian, their mother, the older brother decides to become the guardian of his little sister, even if it means making an enemy out of the entire world.... During composition, the older brother became a better human being. The sister too becomes affected by the change in the environment and the change in her brother and has to grow up quickly. Eventually, she assumes the role of his mother at times, and at other times, the role of his lover.” (Ronsnowit)

Gen in *Barefoot Gen* and Seita in *Grave of the Fireflies* took the role of a "father figure." The only difference between them was the difference in their ideology: while Seita believed his father would punish the enemies, Gen's father had

imprinted inside him the callousness of war politics. When Gen warned he would be labelled a traitor if he condemned war, he said, "Traitor, coward... Those words mean nothing to me. Actually, come to think of it, I am proud if they call me all those things. This war can't be right. There are only cowards like me who dare to say it" (*Gen* 23:54-24:07). Both Seita and Gen were inflicted with excruciating pain alike, and had watched their beloveds, who were under their care, die miserably. To be precise, both their younger sisters died of malnutrition. Both the young kids were victims of war and lost their childhood to the politics of violence.

In the essay "Peace Education through the animated film "*Grave of the Fireflies*" Physical, Psychological, and Structural Violence of War" Daisuke Akimoto analyses the movie based on the model proposed by Johan Galtung (Norwegian sociologist) based on the three types of violence. According to Akimoto;

Physical violence and psychological violence are commonly understood and comprehended, but in terms of peace research 'structural violence' is more serious; it may be explained as 'denying people important rights including socio-political rights, economic well-being, gender equality, a sense of personal fulfilment from preventable diseases, and don't have access to education, affordable housing, and opportunities to work, play, raise a family, etc. (Akimoto 34)

The statement suggests that structural violence is the ultimate reason the children had to endure pain. The physical violence can be seen in the bombardments of their houses that caused death and destruction of several people, including the death of their loved ones and their future, leading to poverty. In *Giovanni's Island*, the physical violence is revealed when the father is taken to prison, when the corpses are seen thrown out on the wayside while boarding the ship back to Japan from Russia, and even Kanta's tragic death due to his ailment caused by the freezing climate of the internment camp in Russia. In *Grave of the Fireflies* psychological violence is reflected in the aunt's verbal abuse against the children, whilst refusing them the share of rice balls saying, "You think the lazy slugs like you deserve the same as people who work for our nation?" (*Grave*. 39:27-33). When Setsuko cries at night, the aunt gets furious and says, "With the nightly raids and crying, how can we sleep?" (*Grave*. 46:33-39). Repeatedly the aunt wasn't kind towards the kids who had lost everything. Despite it all, the condition that led them towards such a tragic end was still to be blamed on Japan's intervention in the war joining hands with Germany to fight against the US and Britain. In *Who's Left Behind* the father states, "Japan's allied with Germany and Italy. Even America won't be able to harm us" (*Left Behind*. 10:3-41), and the family is seen rejoicing over it. In *Grave of the Fireflies*, Seita is wearing his military uniform for a long time and does not take it off till his death, thus showing how "nationalist" the minds of the citizens of Japan were. They are ignorant of the after-effects of the war until it hits them. The children wouldn't have had to abandon their childhood if the war hadn't happened. Although both the director Takahata and the author

Nosaka Akiyuki of *Grave of the Fireflies* had commented the movie was not made to be an 'anti-war' film, every perspective of the movie points toward the trauma and suffering of the children and their “lost childhood” to the countless B-29 air raids and fires. The movie discusses every aspect of violence on children and thus categorises itself as an “Anti-war” film.

The structural violence in these movies can be seen with the government's intervention in the war only to bring colossal damage to the citizens. As per the survey conducted by the Ministry of Health and Welfare of Japan under the US occupation, “the Asia-Pacific War caused as many as 123,500 war orphans in Japan” (Kaneda. 22). These war orphans are sometimes taken care of as adopted children, but they were either sold for prostitution or treated like slaves, or eventually abused to death. This can be the reason why most of the war orphans tried to 'escape' from their foster families, just as Seita and Setsuko of *Grave of the Fireflies* did. Some of them had no option rather than to die homeless, in a railway station or somewhere else, abandoned and rotten (Kaneda. 23). Seita was forced to steal to have a meal, and Seita's reaction of “Where can I find food?” (*Grave*. 1:11:31) to the doctor's response asking to provide food for Setsuko exhibits the helplessness of a normal teenager. Gen from *Barefoot Gen* too had to go through enough hardships to bring food for his mother and his infant sister. Kisaburo from *Who's Left Behind* went off alone searching for a livelihood instead of being under the care of a foster family. Junpei of *Giovanni's Island* was in charge of looking after Kanta and in *In This Corner of the World* a young girl is seen leaving her melted, broken, and rotten dead mother in search of food. To summarise, millions of children lost their lives and families because of the war. Even when the war ended with Japan's surrender, neither anyone won nor lost but innumerable young minds lost their colourful past and happy future. The children were beaten, traumatised, troubled, abused, and finally had to bow their heads to tragic deaths. Thus, these movies portray the brutal effects of war on children.

Children weren't the only victims of the destruction of war, women too suffered similar tragic times. Most women of those times involved themselves in household chores and farming whereas men were the earning members of the family. Women had their trouble when it came to looking after homes, feeding their families, and filling their stomachs when the rations were low and food was scarce, and the war added to losing their homes and their beloveds. Women were solely the victims whom history doesn't always tend to talk about. Suzu Urano of *In This Corner of the World* is a woman who never expected her life to turn out to be a “wife in the crisis.” The movie shows a scene where she had to run from shop to shop to feed her family. Every day, while waiting for her husband working in the port to reach home, Suzu spent time cultivating her own vegetable garden, and bringing up new ideas to survive.

In This Corner of the World of Sunao Katabuchi draws inspiration from the

historical records of people living on the outskirts of Kure, a port city. The movie depicts the rural lives of Kure, mainly how the rural and ordinary civilians survived through the war days. The people had excess pride in their battleship *Yamato*, the lead ship of her class of battleships built for the Imperial Japanese Navy (IJN) shortly before the Second World War (“Japanese Battleship Yamato”). The ship represented the dignity of being a Japanese civilian and their ignorance of the hardships they would face in the upcoming war. The movie also incorporates a unique technique to bring out the anime, using purely hand-drawn animation and bringing out the exceptional magnificence of history through the eyes of the countryside women. The original Manga writer Fumiyo Kuno of *In This Corner of the World* has exclaimed that she didn't want to “...narrate the story only through the atomic bomb”. As a result, she decided to depict the war devastation in another location, Kure, yet linking the incidents to Hiroshima by creating Suzu as a townspeople of Hiroshima who married Kure. Being a movie under the genre *hibakusha* (atomic bomb survivor), it proved its striking message of war as an embodiment of negative politics that brings no good but destruction.

According to the grief researcher Dr. William Worden, “Grief can be defined as a complex of emotional, cognitive, behavioural, and physiological reactions after the loss of a loved one” (Matincekova). To the mothers who had lost their children in war, watching them burn to death was unbearable. As stated by several grief researchers “losing a child of any age is one of the most devastating experiences in human life and its impact persists for years” (Riley et al. 291; Worden 205), the grief from losing a child is more intense and longer lasting than other types of loss. Suzu and her sister-in-law, Keiko, were victims of this grief as they had lost Harumi (Keiko's daughter) to the bombs. The moment when Keiko thrashes herself onto the wall and cries out Harumi's name shows the longing for her lost child. Keiko was a proud woman, who left her husband and started living with her family. To lose Harumi provoked a trauma inside her heart. The death of her child, due to the explosion, only made this worse. Keiko is an example of every other woman who had lost their children to bombs. Suzu wasn't any different, it was her hand that held Harumi when the bombs exploded. Suzu kept creating scenarios where she could have held Harumi in her left hand instead of her right or whether she had a fence to jump onto to save Harumi and die instead. As further explained by Dr. William Worden, “Anger, which has emotional, cognitive, and physiological dimensions, appears to be an important component of grief over the loss of a child.” (Worden 197) Keiko is also traumatised by anger as she calls Suzu a murderer for her child's death. The questions like “why a mother had to accept her child burning to death for nothing?” and “What did the child do for this fate?” prevail as the war and violence never cease. A similar case is portrayed through *Barefoot Gen*. Gen's mother watched as her family was crushed to death under the weight of the burning house. It was a major blow to her heart that for an instant, she went insane blabbering things. She even commented on the burning flame as

“beautiful.” Apart from that, she had to deliver her infant on that fearsome day of the fall of the “Little Boy.” A family broke into pieces as a result of war among politicians. The mother wept watching her children die and the children begged their mother for help while she was suffering the loss of her baby to malnutrition. A whole town dissipated from the surface of the earth in the blink of an eye. The movie was created to let the world know what exactly it meant for the A-Bomb victims to live straight out of horrors. The mother who was forced to helplessly watch as her life crumbled under her arms was also a reality of what tons of mothers had faced back then.

Suzu Urano of *In This Corner of the World* is also a story of what a young bride far from home had to face during the war. She was emotionally and physically stressed by her lost arm, the air raids around her, and the life between home and shelter; as well as Harumi's death at her hands. As a young woman displaced from her family and with a husband going to serve in the Navy, it wasn't her choice to face a life-and-death battle every day. Suzu had asked herself “What is there to be glad about?” when everyone around her tried to bring a “glad” attitude towards all the disasters that had been forced upon them. Suzu portrays a realistic view of the thoughts of a rural woman. Her thoughts over the War and her longing to go back home are blended in the part where Suzu chases away the herons crying out “Go, You can't be here. Fly away over the mountains, To Hiroshima.” (*Corner*: 1:37:30-50).

In the 21st Century, the world got modern, and so did warfare. Nowadays, military attacks range from the sky to the sea and to the cyberspace. Even when World War 2 ended 77 years ago, the world could not end its conflicts. Countless wars are ongoing, countless children are dying, countless women are becoming war widows, countless men are being deprived of their happy lives, elders are dying a painful death, animals are blazing, people are starving, the environment is being destroyed and all the war crimes still prevail. From 2022 to now, the Russia-Ukraine war has claimed millions of lives both inside and outside of their country, leaving people drained emotionally and physically. People experience severe depression as a result of the trauma brought on by the war crimes and the damage caused by the war. It is enough to kill a person even if they aren't murdered in the war. In *Barefoot Gen*, Gen and his mother are trying their best to cope with their losses. Kayoko from *Who is Left Behind* tries to confront her despair and longing to meet her family. Suzu of *In This Corner of the World* desperately wishes for things to be different. In *Giovanni's Island* Junpei and Kanta are orphaned refugees in the internment camps of Russia. *Grave of the Fireflies* is a quintessence of psychological and physical violence on children. The common thread in all of these war animes is the focus on everyday life, especially toddlers and teenagers, unveiling what it means to live as a normal civilian, particularly the marginalized members of the society, during the aggressive war days. The children were innocent victims who had no choice except to accept the fate created

for them by the powers that fought battles over their bodies. To sum up, the “cruel” war politics had only taken the lives of countless children and women, leaving the lives of a family miserable. There aren't gains in war but numerous losses which civilians have to suffer, from the loss of their loved ones to their own deaths. The animes put forward various concepts of Pacifism that should be followed to vow to ensure that never a child loses one's parents, never a mother loses her child, never a family goes separated by war, and a Japanese war history is never repeated.

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Tales and Politics of Posters: Feminine Cult Ideals of Disney's Fairy Tales to *Fleabag*

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Abstract

This paper is a critique of the ideal feminine ideologies as propagated by visual representations of womanhood in popular media posters. The study identifies the microscopic politics of societies irrespective of spatial boundaries in successfully portraying their gender ideologies. It observes the age-old agenda to oppress feminine uprising as a facet of patriarchal chauvinism. It also aims at delving into the stereotypical 'fairy' construct in Disney productions as a means of unfurling an angelic demeanour to women. The paper sets out to understand the subtle yet biased notions of dominant gender agencies that encapsulate women as an embodiment of passivity and obedience. Posters become a highly methodical attempt to effectively implement the myth construct that has obviously triggered notions of idealism in women. The paper claims that gender roles are being directed as a matter of feminine civilization into the collective unconscious through the lens of popular media. This tendency, as the work argues, creates a perpetual state of intellectual slavery that ties the strings of womanhood into an incoherent existence and monotonous dependencies.

Female leads of 'fairy tales' as depicted in their posters are naïve and passive women with gullible narratives to divulge into. With adequate validations and backups from posters and its adroit means of suppression, the work argues that it is possible to fabricate cult feminine figures through visual platforms that weave deep imprints in human notions. At this juncture, the work examines *Fleabag*—a British comedy-drama television series—as a vehement attack on this stereotypical construct. The paper traverses the ways in which the series uses strategies and techniques as a counter politics to refute the apparent typecasting of womanhood in perceptible mass media images. The paper analyses how posters of *Fleabag* are highly political as they voice in volumes about the gender dynamics of the era.

Keywords: womanhood, feminine ideals, patriarchal chauvinism, male fantasies, typecasting, poster politics.

Gender bias and typecasting are two entities that work in parallel to dismantle

gender egalitarianism in a society. It is an undeniable fact that spaces, regardless of age and medium, have constructed gender stereotypes. This cultural construct works in favour of a particular beneficiary group in society, thereby fulfilling its micro-politics. This trend which could be traced back to time and society immemorial is a purposeful bourgeois policy used to marginalise and bisect the existing order. “Sex role stereotypes are culturally shared assumptions and expectations about sex differences in abilities, personality traits, activities, and roles” (Weinraub et al. 1493). It is a predefined judgement that dominates the already built binary inferior. Thereby, this efficient yet toxic construct finds its looming way to suppress and corner the underprivileged gender group which happens to be the women. This minute politics works in a mild fashion which is palpable to the interior layers of the already intricate societal core. “The Cult of True Womanhood was a double-edged sword. Women were presented as morally and spiritually superior to men, and given primary responsibility for managing the home, but their lives were tightly restricted in other ways.” (Chadwick 166). This pseudo power distribution which fakes giving out positions to women predates upon the 'othered' sex.

Popular culture becomes a major medium of cult propagation due to its unparalleled reachability among the masses. Manipulative agencies thereby transgress their hidden agenda by means of connecting agents like arts, media and various other cultural manifestations. With its immense reach and grasp among the population, arts often become a channel of targeting the human psyche to the whims and fancies of the dominant gender group.

James William Poorman in his thesis *From Mythology to Pop Culture: Myth, Representation, and the Historiography of the Amazon Warrior Woman in Ancient Art and Modern Media*, vehemently criticises these gender roles as they cause conflicts within a society: “Furthermore, these gender norms translate into the artistic works of a society such as mythology, stories (written or oral), and visual representations (vase paintings, sculpture, cinematography, posters and drawings)” (92). Visual representations attain a much greater imprint upon the target audience. The posters of Disney's fairy tales adapted from Grimm's Fairy Tales nurture such ideal feminine cult figures. Silima Nanda in her study “The Portrayal of Women in the Fairy Tales” explores the notions of beauty, fairness and all feminine aspects attributed to women presented through the fairy tales: “Fairy tales embody the ways that societies attempted to silence and oppress women, making them passive. Much of the fairy tale literature reinforces the idea that women should be wives and mothers, submissive and self-sacrificing. Good women in stories are to be silent, passive, without ambition, beautiful and eager to marry” (248).

Creation of the Cult Women: Gender Politics in Posters across the Timeline

Judith May Fathallah argues that the hegemonic gender construction is tactically

weaved through the visual depictions of fictional characters. She speaks about the evident gentleman construct in Sherlock Holmes as “The position of White masculinity in Sherlock, particularly in relation to women and other ethnicities, is primarily one of command and mastery” (59). Similarly, the stereotypical masculine creation of James Bond as a casual all-rounder styled gentleman and a rebellious protector has been widely debated in the realms of gender studies. Such depictions have normalized gender roles and have forced men to be like those fictional characters, who are epitomes of perfection. All these type-heroes became an ideal for men of all ages and such visual codifications have engulfed even the psyche of people's existence. Similar is the case with the cunning construct of the ideal female figures by the infamously invincible patriarchal agencies. Many critical studies prove that women are often portrayed as 'damsels in distress' confronted with the problems that need to be resolved by some male figures. Observing the recurring female portrayals in posters of films and series reveals the pattern of discrimination and type construction of women in films.

Nichole Bogarosh in his research dissertation titled *Blockbuster Movies and What They Teach Us about Women in American Society* examines various film posters of different ages so as to analyse the portrayal of women. Biased portrayal or a total absence of depiction of feminine figures in posters could be seen as a tool used to build male supremacy. Film posters that exemplify this deliberate type of establishment include the posters of *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *Peyton Place* (1957), *The Graduate* (1967), *Fatal Attraction* (1987), *Titanic* (1997) and *Spider-man 3* (2007).

In nearly all the film posters that underwent study, female figures, despite their relevance in the film, are either missing or underrepresented. This cornering is but a crooked marginalisation of women. Posters of films such as *The Bridge on the River Kwai* omits female presences both within its plotline and posters. Women are not presented in a favourable positive light; instead, they are objectified to the very core. Bogarosh harshly criticises the film posters of *The Graduate* as women are illustrated as mere sex objects to quench the lust of men. The victimisation of women and their portrayal as tender, naive and helpless souls in *Titanic* and *Spider-man 3* are problematized in the particular study. Mary Jane Watson, the heroine of the hugely famous Spider-man trilogy could be seen as an epitome of victimisation. A noteworthy and mentionable character in the film, Mary Jane gets little or no representation in the posters of the film. She is a typical 'damsel in distress' who is rescued multiple times by the heroic protagonist and the explicit hegemony lies in the aspect that she is thrilled with each of the hero's arrivals to save her. Thereby, hyper masculinity of men and passive recipient facet of women get several forms of visual representations in film posters, transgressing all aspects of time.

Apart from the ever successful Spider-man trilogy, action films including

Mission: Impossible 2 (2000), *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* (2003), *Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest* (2006), *Night at the Museum* (2006), *Transformers* (2007), *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen* (2009), *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (2011), *The Dark Knight* (2008), *Iron Man* (2008) and *Iron Man 2* (2010) schemingly omit the representation of female leads in their posters. This kind of portrayal of women in a negative light promotes negative attitude towards women in societies and the particular trend could be universally observed. The constructed feminine ideals therein become a touchstone upon which the quality of women is measured. A result of the extremely chauvinistic and fascist masculine construct, film posters inundate this age-old cult propagation which in turn is a hurdle for gender equality.

Disney Princesses in Posters: Agents of Angelic Feminine Idealism

The literary expressions of early societies, stocked densely with mythical entities following folk tradition and fairy tales are sagas of wonder and magic. In most of the cultures, the streams of myth and fairy tales are not packed in airtight compartments. "Fairy tales are also referred to as wonder or magic tales having originated from a wide variety of tiny tales, perhaps thousands of years ago. They were related to beliefs, rites, values and experiences of pagan people and are important pieces of children's literature that have had a lasting impact on our society" (Nanda 246). By narrating the tales of fairies, fairy tales glorify fairness, youth, beauty, love and generosity. Taking its cue from the oral tradition of storytelling, fairy tales of each cultural milieu encompasses the legacy and heritage of that particular society. Ancient in its origin, there is no surprise and wonder that fairy tales enunciate age-old stereotypes regarding gender and codes of daily life. Following this pattern, fairy tales have become unique markers of cultural codifications including the mould of gender construct and roles. Vivid varieties of adaptations and versions of the same have appeared over the years of which visual versions are of chief relevance and reach. Though the metanarratives of fairy tales have undergone subsequent and gradual change in the progressive sense, the core structure and the subject matter remain untouched.

Of all the adaptations of the fairy tales, Disney's remain unparalleled and all-time famous. "Disney princess culture serves as a master narrative that shapes our culture's understandings of gender roles and expectations of girlhood" (Inman and Sellers 40). They strongly advocate that Disney's versions of princesses give little or no agency to women, which in fact is the conventional stand of the entire fairy tale tradition. Disney has represented gender qualities in such a politically lethal way that it has been a discourse marker upon which gender roles are being analysed. In general, the Disney princess cult could be seen as a problematic phenomenon in areas of class, race, gender and age. Disney's feature films based on fairy tales include: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Cinderella* (1950), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), *Beauty and the Beast*

(1991), *The Princess and the Frog* (2009) and *Tangled* (2010). The self-reflective posters of all these films which voice their own tales, mirror the purposeful creation of female figures in their way. The films *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, *Cinderella*, and *Sleeping Beauty* depict naïve and young girls who are remarkable for their prettiness. The defining traits of these maidens happen to be their charm and youthful vigour. Portrayed as innocent and helpless, these young girls suffer at the hands of spiteful villains.

The poster of the film *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* captures the ingenuous titular girl wearing a long gown. The attire of the princess mirrors the type of costume designed during the Victorian era. The overall appearance of the heroine is of a girl with an innocently pleasant face and a pleasing look. Her head could be seen decorated with a beautiful tiara which adds to the angelic demeanour she possesses. She evidently becomes the centre of attraction in the poster and it is clear that she is an embodiment of feminine duties. As her name itself suggests, Snow White's fairness is given prime focus on the posters. She does not have an independent existence as she is surrounded by dwarfs who immensely care for her. The colourful and showy posters of the film *Cinderella* feature the titular beautiful girl with golden locks of hair. Romanticised to the very core, the posters are self-explanatory that the film is a love story. Cinderella therefore becomes a typical feminine figure destined to fall in love and get married to a wealthy prince as depicted in the poster. The richness of the castle and the proposal of the prince hint at the "happily ever after" cliché to follow. The fair and young girl wearing a long and flowery gown becomes a victim who needs to be rescued in a caravan by a charming prince. All the notions of love and feelings equated with financial aspects are evident through the visual depictions. Similarly, the posters of *Sleeping Beauty* capture a fair, golden haired girl who sleeps with a gentle smile on her face. Her naïve and passive existence is evident from the way in which she is depicted. The predicament of the titular girl to receive the kiss of her true love so as to redeem from a curse is portrayed in the poster.

Posters of the film *The Little Mermaid* features the titular figure with a type-woman body. The stereotypical structure of a feminine body and the spread hair attribute girliness to the little mermaid. A girl with an enormous eye, the little mermaid becomes a victim of the male gaze. The posters of the Disney films from this point of time have transgressed giving focus to the female physique. Romanticising of feminine body and beauty marks an overall aesthetic change in Disney posters. On the other hand, the captivating posters of *Beauty and the Beast* portray the titular beauty falling a martyr to authoritative male figures. "She presumes to fall in "love" with her controlling captor and marries into the role of princess" (Reilly 54). The toxicity of the relationship between the beauty and the beast is glorified to the extreme extent. The girl with all her feminine qualities could be seen as lacking identity and individual existence as she submits for the beast's affection. She becomes a sacrificial scapegoat to the whims and fancies of

male agencies.

The poster of the film *The Princess and the Frog* features a shadowy figure of a supposedly beautiful girl. Her extremely feminine body arches, a stereotypical symbol of female beauty is given the prime focus. *Tangled*, the Disney adaptation of the Rapunzel fairy tale portrays the beautiful girl with long golden hair. Dressed typically in a feminine garment, the girl's innocence and beauty are given supreme focus. Though the arguments in favour of the positive outlook possessed by the Disney princesses of the day exist, it is however notable that the crux of the 'fairies' remain unchanged. Incarnations of beauty, innocence, selflessness and duty, they are designed meticulously in such a way as to 'please and please' men of all ages. By schemingly sketching and glorifying women into a 'fairy', they are burdened with the expectations of being admirable, virtuous and morally rigid. "Reframing Disney's iconic princess archetype through these four generations offers promising patterns of evolution in the franchise" (Reilly 60). Yet, the archetypal imagery of fairness constructed minutely by them is more or less the same; they spread out biased notions regarding gender and gender roles. Though such a change in the trend provides a ray of hope and a positive trajectory, the overall base of fairy tales and the stigma that are rooted in human minds cannot be erased.

The Woman in *Fleabag* Posters: A Blowing Antithesis to the Cult Propagation

The BBC original comedy mini-series *Fleabag* captures the sexually promiscuous life of a complex woman, Fleabag, who is driven by the guilt of her best friend's death. Independent and unique in her own way, Fleabag struggles to trace her own identity in the already chaotic society. Feministic in genre and treatment of the matter, *Fleabag* presents a gripping, sarcastic and multi-layered life of a middle-aged woman. Fleabag, played by the producer and writer of the show, Phoebe Waller-Bridge, often speaks to the audience facing the camera, thereby breaking the fourth wall narration. This peculiar use of stylistics in the series makes the work attain a modernistic outlook. The life and uneasy events of an independent woman portrayed in an utterly unconventional fashion break the entire stigma made by the male chauvinistic society. The series beautifully encapsulates the power dynamics between the female characters. It is also remarkable for its truthful and honest portrayal of female experiences in a world engulfed by male dominance.

Fleabag takes a cutting turn from the traditional female-centred serieses which normally portray caricatures of women following the normal trend of gender roles. "What makes *Fleabag* unique is a mix of different elements such as the protagonists' witty nature, the awkwardness of people's relationships on the show, the unexpected dark turn of events and comic reliefs" (Ceylan 6). Phoebe Waller-Bridge herself has opined that a feminist show should deepen the already complex female characters and *Fleabag* is a typical example for such a show with tough

feminine leads. Such a master craft work, *Fleabag* explores facets of female experiences in ways it has not been dealt with before. Though a strong woman lead has been a part of the visual cult, *Fleabag* and her stubbornness break the idealism cuttingly. With all the humane trauma and vulnerabilities, *Fleabag* becomes realistic and relatable.

The posters of *Fleabag* abbreviate this amalgamation of all the mosaic heterogeneity. Phoebe Waller-Bridge's inherent scepticism of the world and the patriarchal agencies find their ways through the pictorial representation in posters. One of the most innovative and revolutionary posters released by the *Fleabag* crew involves the titular *Fleabag* replacing the conventionally seen image of Jesus Christ. Atheistic and questioning in nature, *Fleabag* cracks even the crux of religions and belief systems, especially that of the Catholics. With a little hamster in her hands—which in turn is a symbol of her own guilty conscience—*Fleabag* extends a message of peace, similar to the gesture created by Jesus. With a divine aura around her head, religious agencies all around, and a calm expression, *Fleabag* definitely attacks the existing systems. This bold replacement of Jesus Christ—a male figure worshipped and admired by many—itself is utterly radical. The calm and serene expression in her face is but an evidently mocking sarcasm against gender stereotypes.

Another captivating poster of *Fleabag* has in it a close-up picture of *Fleabag*, all dripped in tears. Her makeup visibly comes off from crying so bad. Make-up when seen as a feminine attribute is depicted as coming off—a symbolic way of dismantling all the gender stereotypes. The poster minutely captures the pains of unresolved conflicts and trauma as well as bewilderment towards the world around. *Fleabag* thereby replies to the ephemeral smiles as seen in the faces of Disney princesses. She directly proclaims that life is not always about 'happily ever afters' and no prince would come to save a woman's life. Her dejection and hopelessness in love are visible in the posters. When the Disney princesses are always surrounded by many men and rescuers, *Fleabag* is left all alone to deal with her own complexities.

Known for the stylistics of narration, *Fleabag* posters also break the fourth wall thereby facilitating direct communication with the spectators. The angle with which she glances is of chief importance. Though the series depicts various other characters, the makers of the posters have successfully made sure that only the lady protagonist is represented in it. Faces of disgust and scepticism, posters of *Fleabag* concentrate on the facial depictions of emotions. When the Disney princesses live in their fantasies, with many people helping them, *Fleabag* has to deal with her own life. The aptly added quotes about loneliness add to this essence. *Fleabag* smoking a cigarette in one of the posters depicts an unconventional and daring woman who is unquestionably independent. Therefore, the pleasant appeal created by the fairies is cuttingly contradicted by the *Fleabag* posters. The posters

of *Fleabag* thus weave a powerful reply to the age-old construction of gender stereotypes. *Fleabag* becomes a vehement attack against the system that forces women to be fairies in some wonderlands.

True to the saying that for every thesis there is an antithesis, posters of *Fleabag* dynamite the cult of fairy tales thereby nullifying all the constructed entities. It becomes a tirade against the wondrous creation of the 'happily ever after' tales of fairies. Though all these posters capture varied facets of women, the woman of *Fleabag* is a contrasting other when compared to the feminine angels of fairy tales. The intentionally unnamed protagonist of the series, Fleabag is a complex female character and all her inherent toughness is assimilated together in the interesting posters of the series. The conventional narrative of women as passive angels who please the male counterpart is broken. Fleabag, in opposition to the archetypal construct of women as fairies of eternal goodness and virtue, negates all the set notions of gender and gender roles. The posters silently announce that women need not be fairies as the societies demand, but could be Fleabags instead.

Lethal in doses and development, injection of gender construct happens at every single corner, space, and time. Regardless of the medium, patriarchal agencies always find a way to dismantle this gender equality. Posters, like any other medium, have been a means through which such propagations of gender-based ideologies happen. Revolutionary posters such as that of *Fleabag* have tremendous power to transform and dismantle primordial systems which give primary importance to men. The study has but investigated the minute ways in which the counter politics of *Fleabag* posters work in opposition to Disney's Fairy Tales. An antithesis to the masculine construct of female notions, *Fleabag* is but a promising art work which, through all means, questions the gender prejudice set forth by the production companies like that of Disney.

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Narrative Resilience: A Posthuman Analysis of *Past Perfect: Letters to Aditi*

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Abstract

The early 1980s saw the beginning of the narrative turn in a number of fields outside of literary studies. Currently, theory and practice within all fields of study have begun to incorporate narrative concerns thoughtfully. As the institution of life narration became more accessible, individuals are increasingly embracing narratives as tools for self-discovery. Personal illness narratives have gained popularity in medical humanities as a means by which patients rescue themselves from medical dehumanisation, regaining individual identity and agency.

By exploring the multidisciplinary areas of medical humanities and posthumanism and by highlighting the significance of personal narratives in the present era, the study seeks to analyse and manifest a posthuman model of inter-human relationships in the debut memoir *Past Perfect: Letters to Aditi* written by Anna Varughese where she chronicles her past, starting from age four, when she was diagnosed with a serious chronic illness called ulcerative colitis, a rare abdominal disease. She elucidates the throes in her life in a jovial tone, thus enabling us to know her arduous life better. From a posthumanist perspective, she encourages the reader to look beyond the constructed identity of illness and to care more deeply and considerately for the ill, which strengthens the ill to survive.

Keywords: Narrative, illness narrative, posthumanism, chronic illness.

In the present era, narratives have gained widespread popularity and life stories play a crucial role in shaping our humanity. The early 1980s saw the beginning of the narrative turn in a number of fields outside of literary studies. Currently, theory and practice within "science and technology, philosophy, the human sciences, sociolinguistics, sociology and anthropology" (Engel, et al. 41-42) all began to incorporate narrative concerns thoughtfully. Telling stories, either about oneself or others, is an ubiquitous human activity. From both evolutionary and individual perspectives, language development in human life leads to the elaborate use of metaphors and other figures of speech and, thus, narratives evolve. The

significance of narratives lies in the fact that they are one of the primary means by which people experience, perceive, and evaluate their own actions. Life narratives offer valuable insights for portraying illness and disability, providing new avenues to delve into the ways in which the body mediates identity and personality. Illness narrative is a subgenre of life narratives in which patients' stories give voice to suffering that falls outside the domain of the medical narratives. Recently there has been a significant surge in the number of literary works, such as memoirs and auto/biographical accounts on illness and disability.

In the words of A H Hawkins in *Reconstructing Illness*, an illness narrative is a personal testimony within the medical world that "returns the voice of the patient to the world of medicine, a world where that voice is too rarely heard, and it does so in such a way as to assert the phenomenological, the subjective and the experiential side of illness" (12). The narrative concept was initially regarded irrelevant in the social scientific study of illness. However, in recent years, narratives play an important role in capturing different aspects of illness and its experiences. Narratives about illnesses can be fictional as well as non-fictional. Patients and caregivers alike can write them. In the latter half of the 1970s, a new tendency emerged in which autobiographers criticised the dehumanising effects of modern healthcare. The proliferation of illness narratives resulted in various changes in culture, medicine, media, and literacy over the last century, including medical professionalization and modern health care. Moreover, today, the sick people are less stigmatised as a group, the public is more sympathetic to the idea that sickness has social, psychological, and political dimensions, and literature scholars are more receptive to the specific challenge propounded by illness towards the theory of life-writing.

Posthumanism offers a fresh perspective on the future trajectory of critical inquiries within the medical humanities. Traditionally, humanist perspectives have played a pivotal role in shaping this field, with a particular emphasis on individual narratives and the dynamics of human interactions, such as the doctor-patient relationship. Viewing the medical humanities through a posthuman lens prompts us to consider the intricate webs of relationships that extend beyond the human realm. This encompasses not only the interactions between patients and healthcare professionals but also the larger economic structures that underpin healthcare systems.

Through the memoir *Past Perfect: Letters to Aditi* (2013), Anna Varughese chronicles her past life from age four when she was diagnosed with a serious chronic illness called ulcerative colitis, a rare abdominal disease. It is quite embarrassing how a woman with such a unique medical condition can pen down a captivating story full of humour. Nowhere in her lines there is a trace of sadness or panic. Through this book, she engages in a personal battle against both her illness and emotional turmoil she has endured. She has been under medication since

childhood, dominated by severe food restrictions, doctors, and hospitals. At age thirty-one, she underwent a liver transplant, it being her only means of survival. Waiting for a cadaver organ for nine months made her write about herself to her five-year-old daughter, Aditi, as Anna's survival was only a probability. She suffered from a progressive disease that had no complete cure. She had diarrhoea, and itchiness of the skin from her childhood, and her body adjusted to it as she grew up. "...my body is used to it, that I can carry on as usual" (208). She tried everything: Ayurvedic medicines, homeopathy, and others. As a person with long-standing ulcerative colitis, there are also chances of colon cancer. Her health deteriorated daily; the presence of bile salts in her blood developed an itching sensation, and she kept scratching her body so badly that her cousins mockingly called her "Scratcher in the Rye" (121).

Understanding illness solely through a singular medical perspective is inadequate. Instead, gaining insight into illness through personal and subjective narratives enhances understanding, leading to more effective cures and treatments. The patient's storytelling about their illness constitutes an autobiographical act, and such narrative must be read as a literary text. In the study of chronic illness, narratives have become integral for understanding how individuals cope with their life circumstances, especially the identity challenges associated with such conditions. Chronic illnesses are often seen as disruptions in a person's life, it changes the patient's connection with their body, self, and environment. Consequently, for those dealing with chronic conditions, the process of reconstructing their life story becomes imperative. It is at this point personal narratives on illness gained currency in posthumanism, which opens "new lines of empathy, affinity, and respect" (Wolfe 127-128) towards the patient in medical humanities, thus deconstructing the dominant concepts of normalcy and difference, which resulted in the marginalization of experiences and voices of the ill and thus helping them to manifest a posthuman self in which the medical and the human coexist. For Anna Varghese, her writing was a source of liberation from the traumatic experiences of illness, Consequently, it establishes a profound connection between Anna and the reader, fostering a healing process through empathy and affinity.

Although the term "medical humanities" has been in vogue since the 1940s, it gained popularity only in the 1960s and 1970s. "Medical humanities has brought to the foreground, the person behind the diseased body and thus, the patient's perspective of the illness experience, expressed as stories and personal narratives, became the focus of serious analysis" (Rajagopal 58). A posthumanist perspective offers something to the medical humanities; it encourages the doctors/medics to care more deeply and considerately for patients by seeing them beyond the sick role to a human identity worthy of individual care and attention, more than what medicine and treatment can do. Through the narration of seemingly mundane details, Anna provides doctors and caregivers with a deeper understanding of the

challenges she faces in her difficult life. Her big family, friends circle, and the medical world, including doctors and medics, gave her strength to survive, and that helped her to accomplish all her roles as a woman, although she was sick throughout her lifetime. They never made her feel inferior or weak. From a posthumanist perspective, its goal is to promote care by treating patients as unique, whole, and autonomous persons. In the memoir we can see that the doctors constantly care for Anna, giving timely advice and making her feel it is normal to get married and pregnant, though her health is deteriorating. Anna's enduring strength throughout her life may be attributed to her family that consistently showered her with love and affection. With the support of her family, she was able to face the challenges in her life. It is evident from the words of Sarah, the elder daughter of Anna when she says, "... the focus in your family is still on you" (247). Moreover, Anna had faith in herself.

Though she started writing for her daughter Aditi, the book turned out to be an inspiration for all women fighting against some illness or other. Unlike stories of illness, Anna, with novelty and in a cheerful tone, narrates her life and her days of illness, which is well balanced as she interpolates different characters and incidents. Through this, she is saving herself from medical dehumanisation, and reclaiming her own identity. Anna makes her past life a perfect story of survival. No line reflects her sadness but her will to survive.

The human subject and its embodiment were radically reframed in the late twentieth century. Much of this reframing came from feminist, biopolitical, and posthumanist thinkers. Narrating personal experience with illness is essential in this era because it helps us to look beyond the constructed identity of the illness. Being sick is part of being human. It is the extended side of humans. Being sick is to become a prosthetic extension of the human rather than its other. Thus, it displaces the humanistic view, which considers humans the unique and unified source of meaning and agency. The medical humanities community, medical professionals, and students are challenged by this posthumanist intervention to rethink how we conceptualise illness by taking into account the rhetorics of autonomy, holism, and humanization. Such personal narration helps the ill as well as the reader as they provide guidance on how to reconcile with personal experiences of illness, helping individuals determine what aspects of their own experiences to embrace and what to distance themselves from. The benefit of personal illness narratives is that they help us acknowledge and reckon with the presence of the disabled or ill among us. It encourages self-disclosure. As narratives and illness are inherent aspects of the human experience, people with illness turn to narratives as a means to mirror and make sense of their own experiences.

Moreover, such narratives help doctors, caregivers, and medics to change their approach toward the ill person. It allows the medical world to examine how

personal illness narratives help patients recover their voices from modern medicine's scientific narratives. They also examine how narratives related to literature, popular culture, and medicine—from the individual to the national—reflect and influence the experience of illness. It also encourages medical professionals to pay attention to, respect, and understand the stories of those suffering. According to Jeffrey P Bishop:

The medical humanities and narrative medicine are just the latest, and a more palatable means of control, of acknowledging the narrative overlay, the mythic cover, in order to master the material beneath. Thus, the narrative overlay becomes the tool by which the doctor can sway a patient, to make him or her feel better, to create a therapeutic relationship; indeed, narrative sensibility becomes a therapy itself. (22)

Posthumanism's significance in the modern medical sphere lies in its attempt to reshape the connection to the human experience. Despite these efforts, it remains tethered to liberal humanism, which views the whole person as a source of all understanding and thus promotes compassionate and empathetic engagement within medicine through personal illness narratives. It also asserts that no body, regardless of its perceived normalcy or abnormality, should be unequivocally labelled as whole. In the case of Anna, from a small age she views ups and downs of her health through the lens offered by her doctors. She has consulted many doctors; they all provided her with timely diagnosis, care, medicine, treatment, and advice that gave her hope to live. The compassion, empathy, and respect that Anna received from all corners empowered her. This encouraged her to narrate the throes of her life in a jovial tone, thus embodying a posthuman-self that succeeds in life against all odds. Moreover, it highlights the importance of illness narratives in the posthuman era, gradually awakening interest in medical humanities to look beyond the constructed identity of illness and to care more deeply and considerately for the ill, strengthening the ill to survive.

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Rajakannu vs. the State of Tamil Nadu: Politics of Legal Storytelling

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“Legal process often takes on a larger cultural meaning through the idea of story” (Ferguson 37).

Abstract

Legal storytelling has been a subject of much discussion amongst academics and practitioners of law. The story aspect of a judgment contain many possibilities for research and present paper is an attempt in this direction. I would analyze the Madras High Court judgment on a writ petition submitted by R. Parvathi, a Kuruva woman locating multiple stories embedded in the verdict. I attempt to gauge the socio political and historical relevance of the case as it is useful to study how legal narratives and larger societal perceptions intersect. By placing the verdict at the intersections of legal, historical, political discourse an attempt is made to untangle various stories contained in it. I draw extensively from the scholarship of Anastasia Piliavsky to establish my point.

Key words: Legal stories, Tribal community, Narratives, Criminal tribes, Police brutality, Constitutional rights, Justice.

Introduction

As a text, a judicial judgment is polyphonic. It is a complex amalgam of opposing ideologies, philosophies, history, language, geography and the like. Legal storytelling has been a subject of much discussion amongst academics and practitioners of law. According to Posner, “In a trial, the plaintiff and the defendant each tell a story—actually a translation of their “real” or raw stories into the narrative and rhetorical forms authorized by law—and the jury chooses the story it likes better.” (345). I am tempted to question who all can provide such compelling stories within the defined system of law. However, setting aside my disagreements with the statement on several levels, the story aspect contains many possibilities for research and the present paper is an attempt in this direction. I would analyze the Madras High Court judgment on a writ petition submitted by R. Parvathy, a Kuruva woman, locating multiple stories embedded in the verdict. I attempt to gauge the socio political and historical relevance of the case, because it is useful to

study how legal narratives and larger societal perceptions intersect.

In the first part, I will break down the judgment into different chronological frames employed by the petitioner, and defendants. This would help to cognize the context of the judgment and the method of narrative adopted by the parties involved. In the second part, I will untangle various tales enmeshed in the legal narrative. In conclusion, I wish to posit further questions that might open scope for more research.

Part I Context

The judgment begins by a report on the context of the case. In the year 1994, the High Court of Madras decided on the writ petition submitted in the form of habeas corpus filed by R. Parvathi against the State of Tamil Nadu. The events leading up to the case as recounted by both plaintiff and defendant occurred from 20th March 1993 to 22nd March 1993. According to Parvathi's testimony, on 20th March 1993, at about 12 noon, the Sub Inspector of Kammarapuram Police Station, Anthonysamy, accompanied by five police constables, visited the petitioner's village. She identified one of the constables namely, Veeraswamy. They took Parvathy along with her two sons, twenty five year old Mariappan and thirteen-year-old Ravi into custody. The police also took her fifty-five year old brother in law Ratnam into custody. At the police station Parvathi, her children and brother in law Ratnam faced extreme police savagery. Rajakannu who went in search of a job on the same day at 6 a.m.. returned the next day. He went to the police station on 21st March 1993 at noon and eventually, the police detained him. On 22nd March, Parvathy reached the police station in the morning. On the same evening she returned to the village at the order of the police. She reached her village at 6 P.M. and heard the news of Rajakannu's alleged escape.

The defendant's testimony refers to a complaint of theft filed by a man named Kadirvel Padayachi, a resident of Gopalapuram village. As per the accusation, on the night of 19th March 1993, jewellery of about 43 sovereigns valuing one lakh thirty thousand rupees were missing from their house. Suspicion fell on some men of the Kuruva community who came to the village on the night of the said theft. According to the fourth defendant, on 20 March 1993, he traced down Rajakannu. He could discern discrepancies in Rajakannu's statement and of his wife. However, on 22nd March 1993, Rajakannu escaped custody around 4.15 P.M. The defendants' statements focus on police procedure followed in the investigation process. Accordingly, the S.P of South Arcot District at Cuddalore received a petition on 23rd March 1993 from Parvathi. After an initial scrutiny of the petition, he directed to register a missing man case and instructed the DSP to commence an inquiry. At the instruction of his superior, the Inspector of Police registered a case and began the probe. The third appellant narrates that Rajakannu met Paneerselvam at Mandarakuppam village, Neyveli, at about 9.00 P.M on the day he went missing (Chennaiptarika).

The plot of the case contested through differing testimonies of petitioner and defendants gives ample insight into the narratives adopted by both the parties. However, their testimonies follow similar time frames although there are subtle variations. To differentiate the real from the fiction, the truth from falsity, one will have to dig deeper. This distortion of events, not temporality, caused the court much conundrum in getting at the truth. Hence, the court ordered a fresh probe into the case. B. Perumalswamy IPS investigated the case afresh and found that the body of Rajakannu was disposed of by the culprits forty kilometers away in Tiruchirapalli District, under the jurisdiction of Meansuriti Police Station.

Part II Entangled Tales

This judgment does not engage with moral conundrums created by draconian colonial laws that rendered indigenous communities into a precarious existence. Even so, these stories do speak volumes to an ardent reader conscious of the history of violence against marginalized communities. A close reading of the testimony of Parvathi as quoted in the judgment would reveal the residue of colonial laws in the police investigation process. R. Parvathi belongs to the Kuruva community. As revealed in the judgment, she lives in a *poramboke* land without any legal documents. She has four children with the deceased Rajakannu, three boys and a girl. According to a report in *Times of India*, her son died enduring the trauma of police violence. It is their identity as Kuruva people that rendered them helpless before the system. According to the testimony, the police even called for a doctor to check on Rajakannu and once the doctor left, they continued to beat him up. They forced the hapless wife away and asked her to bring food for the victim.

The verdict directly quotes from her affidavit multiple times. For instance,

- "Without any provocation, the fourth respondent started beating me with a cane all over my body. Afterwards, at several places I had swelling."
- "To my horror I saw my husband tied to the window bar and was being beaten up on both sides. When I went and questioned the action of the fourth respondent, he and his subordinates once again beat me."

This verdict draws examples from multiple judgments pertaining to instances of police brutality. The case of Padmini is cited as an example of custodial death is similar if not more precarious to that of Parvathy. On 30th May 1992, the Arcot Police men took Padmini and her husband Nandagopan, under illegal custody on charge of theft. The police raped Padmini several times before her husband and murdered him at the police station. In *Nilabati Behera v. State of Orissa*, *All India Reporter 1993 SC 960* referred in this judgment points to another custodial death. Suman Mehera, aged 22, convicted on charge of theft, was found dead on the railway tracks on 2 December 1987. His body sustained several injuries and his mother appealed for compensation to court evoking article 21 of

the Indian Constitution.

That the cause of Parvathi's plight lies in the colonial legal system requires further elaboration. As per an article by Noor Mohammad and Sion Kongari in *ActionAid India*, the Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 notified 200 tribal communities as born criminals. This enabled surveillance and control of certain tribes across British India. This act vested immense power on the police to detain these people without warrant and put them in 'reformatory'. As per the act, adult male members of the community should report to local police often and it restricted their mobility beyond their assigned territory. Although India repealed this controversial act after independence, a new act came into effect in its stead. The new act, Habitual Offenders Act 1952, only furthered their status as criminals. According to the former Tamil Nadu judge K. Chandru, the police act is in line with the Madras City Police Act of 1888. There are millions of nomadic and notified tribes languishing at the peripheries of society. They do not own land and mostly reside illegally in the Government properties. The irony of this situation is a bitter pill to swallow. It is in the context of these facts that we need to place the case at hand.

However, a simplified reading of the context is not sufficient in addressing the problems of Dalits, Tribes and other marginalized communities. A question like, why this discrimination persists would lead us to the history of the tribes in Precolonial India. Social Anthropologist Anastasia Piliavsky's research would enlighten us on this enigma. Criminal tribe “was a label of much older vintage on the Subcontinent.” (Piliavsky 325). In narrative literature like Vedic Aaranyakas, the epics Ramayana, Mahabharata, ancient and medieval stories, and Jataka parables of Buddha's lives (329) images of thieving tribes are abundant. They most often prey upon merchants and travelers. The pariah status, systematically built through descriptions of their peculiarities, also reinforced the dominant Brahmanic narratives of social and political exclusion. Thus, they are, “riteless, void of sense, inhuman”, “frightful and terrible”, “flesh eating” “wine drinking”, “bird hunting”, “parrot roasting”, and “human sacrificing” savages (330). This kind of systematic 'othering' process is not limited to the Hindu texts alone. The fifteenth century Jain narrative *The Adventures of Rauhineya* contains vivid descriptions of tribal “thief settlement” (331).

It is this systematic social exclusion of pre-colonial narratives that metamorphosed into legal and political exclusion of tribal communities in post independent India. In this reading lies the answer to the long road to justice Parvathi and others like her had to take. Although they are denied the hearth of constitutional rights and protection, the same constitutional principles imparted semblance of justice and hope to the marginalized.

Conclusion

By a close reading and further away from the plot, a larger narrative of discrimination at social and institutional level emerges. The judgment and events

that led to it occurred in 1993. Nevertheless, a visual reiteration of the events of this case in *Jai Bhim*, a film released in 2021 cements the importance of storytelling, visually or legally, as a political process. Both the cinematic and narrative interpretation of the case help us to reimagine the problematic enunciations of caste politics inherent in the present system. By constantly reminding us of structural inequalities, ethical and moral issues permeating the society, the story of Parvathi and Rajakannu challenges dominant narratives. As Indian Penal Code, the Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act are being replaced with Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam as part of the ambitious project of reclaiming 'Bharat's' legacy from the colonial past and to cater to 'modern democracy and aspirations of people' (Ahmad), a pertinent question that might be asked in the context of these legal stories could be, whose legacy would the new bills reclaim?

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The Literary and the Graphic: A Reading of *Vanni*

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Abstract

Literature encompasses riveting forms of articulations and showcases novel approaches of thinking about the world. It opens hitherto unexplored avenues to understand the woes and concerns of people and societies. To denote the variety of the world, life in it, and the experiences people have that are found in literature, it may be better articulated through the term text as it can appropriately be more inclusive and owing to the reason that text comprises all forms of communication and expression. Thus comes the significance of graphic narratives and how they hold themselves up under literary scrutiny. It is in this context that the paper intends to read *Vanni: A Family's Struggle through the Sri Lankan Conflict* written by Benjamin Dix, and illustrated by Lindsay Pollock. The paper attempts to understand the workings of this burgeoning medium as a text, and how it gives forth an inventive reading.

Keywords: literature, text, graphic narrative, reading

The entailments of literature are many and varied. Scholarly debates take multi-directional approaches for an inclusive definition of the term, which in turn have proved to be an almost unfeasible task to accomplish. One of the most commonly recurring takes on it would be “pieces of writing that are valued as works of art, especially novels, plays and poems” (“literature” 898). The element and definitions of this kind have seemed to waive are the traits which qualify a piece of literature as a work of art. Thus it fails to fully acknowledge every piece of writing that perhaps could be literature. The definition has also been historically linked to canonicity which is interwoven into the domains of power within culture. The work of art has now been largely replaced by the more adaptive term, the text, which could potentially include any piece of culture under study, without legitimising one over the other. As Barthes notes, “the Text does not stop at (good) literature; it cannot be caught up in a hierarchy, or even in a simple distribution of genres” (58). He also asserts that, “The Text ... decants the work ... from its consumption and recuperates it as play, task, production, practice” (62). This postulation of literature democratises what reading and writing alongside it represents the notion of worthiness. This paper will discuss *Vanni: A Family's*

Struggle through the Sri Lankan Conflict by Benjamin Dix and Lindsay Pollock, a graphic narrative which is a burgeoning variety of text.

The graphic narrative is a long-contested term, diversely categorised as a format, genre, medium, even as an offshoot of comics. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this paper it would be understood as “an intricately layered narrative language—the language of comics—that comprises the verbal, the visual, and the way these two representational modes interact on a page” (Chute and DeKoven 767). Graphic narrative requires a frequent interplay of images and words wherein one is not privileged to the detriment of the other, these constituents ought to form a nexus which functions in synchronism. The form intrinsically traverses between two representative entities; the pictorial and the verbal, thereby, amplifying “the viability of graphic narrative for serious academic enquiry” as observed by Chute and DeKoven (qtd. in Stamant 1). “Drawn images, in other words, can now be accepted as valuable representations of the world itself.” (Baetens ch. 8). Indeed, *Vanni* does demonstrate the principle tension between the context in which it is set, expressly, the terrain of political conflict which Sri Lanka is under and the arduousness of narrativizing that experience into a graphic content. As the character Antoni comments, “I thought comics were just for Donald the Duck and children's things” (Dix 258), this is indicative of his struggles with articulation of the language. Alongside that of Benjamin Dix who was a member of the staff with the UN stationed in the region and his illustrator- collaborator Lindsay Pollock, he is required to transform a crucial experience into the graphic medium.

The duo is quite forthright about their lack of firsthand experience of casualties. Nevertheless, they are rigorous in their research and are committed to a recounting as truthful as possible and are evidently aware of “the problem of temporal gap between the observation of an event and its graphic reproduction” (Baetens ch. 8). Dix and his colleagues were removed from the domain and the putting together of *Vanni* came later, after he found an associate in Pollock. The graphic narrative may be fashioned by one person or by a set of collaborators (Duncan and Smith ch. 1), and *Vanni* is an example of the latter. The “narrative implies not only an abstract storyline, but also very concrete forms and techniques of storytelling, which inevitably hint at the active presence and intervention of a verbal and visual narrator whose agency affects the material he or she is representing to the reader and viewer.” (Baetens ch. 8). The breadth and depth of the life lived is displayed by a range of viewpoints. The team is attuned to a fact-based presentation, as Winston propounds “the creative treatment of actuality” (qtd. in Baetens ch. 8). This specifically attempts to discuss and evaluate the pictographic, and the concord it makes with the lexical.

The juncture between the written word and the visual expression is vital to the development and progression of a graphic narrative. In regular parlance, the graphic could perhaps be defined as anything relating to the visual art whilst a

narrative, an account of events. These parameters will suffice for the initiation of this paper's central concern. The brutalities of the aggression that occurred in Sri Lanka serves as the foil to calibrate the crafting of this piece. This arguably is what Eisner pivots about: the evolution of this form would account for “the innovation of exposition” (141). He advances his stance with the claim that “The future of this form awaits participants who truly believe that the application of sequential art, with its interweaving of words and pictures, could provide a dimension of communication that contributes ... to the body of literature that concerns itself with the examination of human experience” (141-42). This forecast has its fruition in *Vanni*. In addition to Eisner, Baetens too remain in the affirmative about the probable traction the graphic narrative would gain as it “is part of a shifting mediascape, which forces it to stay competitive in comparison with other forms and media ... will have to continue to enlarge its scope, style, and types of narrative, and this will inevitably profit the elaboration” (ch. 8) of its variant expressions. McCloud too focuses his attention on the normative trait of sequence as drawn from Eisner, and the former asserts, “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence” (9). The intention paid to the arrangement is indispensably connected to the conveyance of the material.

Vanni presents throughout its course a huddled layout, a conspicuous example of the type of positioning that is crucial to the graphic form. Testimony to this is found when Antoni and his family are pushed out of one camp to the other at the height of the civil disturbance and the dreadful became mundane, which prompts the comment “It became unremarkable to see people shuffling past with horrible injuries” (Dix 145). The chaos and despair are communicated through a thronged layout, which is likely a deliberate choice. Groensteen mentions “a creator might conceive of a story as unfolding in a continuous ribbon, but the page demands that the creator exhibit an awareness of effective layout to aid the reader's progression through the story” (59). The panel is probably the smallest unit within a page and it signifies the temporal specificity of the drawn picture, Stan Lee and John Buscema set forth, a panel is “a single illustration on a page” (15), Saraceni elaborates on what panels are with the assertion that “their contents are actually much more varied” (7). In other words, a panel could be reflective of one fleeting moment, or a long episode or occurrence.

Vanni has quite a few specificities regarding the appearance and organisation of its panels, ranging from bordered panels to the non-bordered, panel breaks and additional panels where the border is evocative, rather than drawn. The latter kind is found when exposition is made on Antoni and the family's stay at the grove of Pushpa and Vimal as illustrated by Pollock (84). This adds to the elucidation of precarity that both the families are under as the panels appear almost as if they are suspended in thin air. The sorting of panels without borders is to be beheld as instances in the pages on the amputation of Jaga's leg as Pollock draws (36). Jaga was a neighbour to Antoni prior to the dislocation due to the hostilities. The loss of

limb is invoked through the lack of border, furthermore, every single panel in that particular page is of equal size barring one, contributing to the transfer of the subject matter, as maintained by Postema, aspects like these are “variations that creators use to construct panels” (79). “Sometimes the images extend to the edge of the page” (Rey Cabero et al. 11) which is designated as a bleed. In *Vanni* by Dix and Pollock the breaking of the panel such as a bleed occurs a few times, one of the noticeable examples is the event of tsunami wreaking havoc in the island country of Sri Lanka and the drawing of the aid workers and people queueing in to get provisions and other amenities are done as bleeds so as to testify to the urgency and emergency under which they are moving (58-59). Regardless of the nature of these aesthetic and literary choices made by the writer and the illustrator, Dix and Pollock respectively, “the frame is always an invitation to stop and scrutinise.” (Groensteen 54). The layout, panels, bleeds and framing are all conduits between the reader and the content, even a factor as miniscule as the gutter, “the space between panels”, as Eisner denotes it (163) cannot be left overlooked. No element in a graphic narrative exists nominally, but to create a nexus that functions as a whole.

The space between the panels or the gutter is filled in by the reader-viewer and there is constantly “a tension between reading and seeing, between capturing all the images at once and focusing on a particular one.” (Rey Cabero et al. 12). In *Vanni* this is illustrated pointedly when the tsunami-struck land and its people are scattered, and are without bearings (50-53) and the reader-spectator is to do the mediation on their own. “This phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole has a name. It is called closure” (McCloud 63). Tying the argument back to his position on the deliberateness of the form, McCloud details that closure “is far from continuous and anything but involuntary” (68). The germ of this notion may be inspired from Eisner when he wrote “the in-between” actions are supplied by the reader out of his own experiences” (140). However, he does not make any supplemental information available. Closures are fragmentary paradigms which are redone into an entire entity.

The assemblage of panels is done in a way as to ensure an organic movement to the narrative. Out of the multitude of ways this can be established, one is the usage of symbolic transition, which is interpreted by Abel and Madden as the juxtaposition of one panel against the other so as to bring about a visual metaphor between the two (44). In *Vanni*, when Priya, sister-in-law to Antoni, is away at the combative camp she and her friend hold hands in one panel, which is located near to the panel in which they are to move in action as sketched by Pollock (153). The panel which focuses on their held hands serves as a perceptible image for the steadfast camaraderie they found in each other. Visual metaphor is one of the most compelling features in graphic narratives; it is “an image, a thing, a place or an object by way of similarity” (Rey Cabero et al. 17). In the example above, the act of locked hands pictorially reminds the quality of loyal friendship.

The visual driven nature of a graphic narrative together with its verbal can come into a consensus in a plethora of ways. McCloud tabulates them into seven of them and the picture specific combination occurs when a sequence is told visually (153) as in the panel when Nelani, neighbour to Antoni, is anxious about her missing children and is taken out in search of them by Ranjan, Antoni's brother, on a motorbike. Here the panel does not include any verbal matter, but the swiftness is conveyed only through the hastened spinning of wheels. In this setting the pictorial depiction is adequate to move forth the narrative. The vividness of the symbolic is apparent in the use of what Walker specifies as “emanata”, which are marks or motion lines drawn around a character or an object to create an effect. As Walker puts it, emanata “can come from things as well as people to show what is going on” (29). Emanata is adeptly integrated into *Vanni*, when Antoni's family is in a camp and are sustaining on various aids; they kindle a bonfire, the smoke that is thus emitted from the fire, is an instance of emanata. The panel focuses on the family and the other members of their group staring listlessly into the open, without the accompaniment of a caption or a dialogue. Despite the prioritising of the visual at certain junctures such as this, more often than not, the word and the image are bound to one another as a unit.

Word and image in conjunction are presented astutely when Antoni loses his mother. As he does the interring of the corpse himself, the readers are brought to acquaintance with the events that are then currently unfurling in the family's life. Each panel of verbal description is alternated with a drawn one (as noted in 134). This method, described by McCloud as an interdependent combination, is “where words and pictures go hand in hand to convey an idea that neither could convey alone” (155). This becomes an indication of the symbiotic existence the two share to facilitate meaning generation. This association is to be found elsewhere in the narrative as well. A feature typically transpiring in the text is a distinctive usage of the speech balloon as “to indicate expressions” (Rey Cabero et al. 15) with an extended tail that points to the speaker that moves along as an elongated chain to either narrate an event or as suggestive of the speaker moving onto imaginary terrains. This may be sampled as Jagga's family looks for him and their father after the strike of tsunami in the region (57). The desperation and the disorientation of the family is indicated through the complex drawn out chain of speech balloon and tail. Eisner argues, “The arrangement of balloons which surround speech-their position in relation to each other, or to action, or their position with respect to the speaker, contribute to the measurement of time.” (26). It also proposes the passage of time which is to be notified to the reader.

The question of the temporal is central to the graphic narrative when Ranjan and his companion are hounded down by the armed forces, they are brought on their knees, stripped and disposed of (213). This is outlined to the reader-viewer. Eisner speculates on time, “We measure and perceive it through the memory”, he details, “the manner in which these images are employed modifies and defines” (103). The

content as the drawn posture of the two tells a more poignant tale of vulnerability. This would not discount the fact that “there is also the problem of temporal gap” (Baetens Ch. 8) between the incident and the reproduction, it has within the graphic narrative. Nonetheless, Eisner comments on posture as “a movement selected out of a sequence of related moments in a single action” (105). It testifies the susceptibility that the pair is under. It is brought out with the single image of them on their knees. The reader-viewer is required to be in accord with the subject matter, quite likely, this is what McLuhan states as the “highly participational” (167) feature of narratives of this type. This form would conceivably expand into broader dimensions as Baetens anticipates, with “the possibility to pioneer new forms of word and image hybridization and to explore new frontiers ... via their innovative use of subjectivity and page layout.” (Ch. 8). The graphic narrative is to reach new horizons and widen the boundaries of what a text may include.

The graphic narrative dexterously combines the pictorial and the written. Regardless of its normative shortcomings, or its merits, this serves to be a testimony to the lives and experiences of people all over as exemplified in *Vanni*. Thus the ambiguities of truthfulness and falsity, the locations of narrativizing, the traits of a text, may not have brought into an actualisation in this paper as it is beyond the scope and theoretical rigour of it. Nevertheless the paper has made a discussion on what literature is posited as, and how the understanding of the word has advanced and reworked itself. Taken together, the keynote made in the paper on the relevance of the graphic narrative under the wider spectrum of the text, has been bolstered. The reading of texts of this kind would work into an ingenuous exercise. In sum, literature would continue to grow and incorporate into its body, materials based on ingenuity and singularity rather than platitudes.

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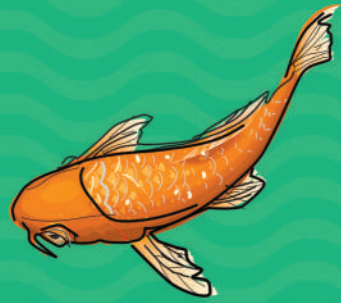
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