

Can the Subalterns Sketch? A Critical Semiotic Analysis of the Novel 'Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir'

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Abstract

This paper is formulated under the conceptual framework of Gayatri Spivak's theory of Can Subaltern Speak? And explores the potential permeability of visual resources as a form of discourse through which subalterns found opportunity to counter media hegemony and make their voices heard. In order to analyze the selected graphic novel *Munnu: A Boy From Kashmir* (2015) the present qualitative study applies Grunter Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen's model of visual design (2010) that connects the representational meaning to the interactive one. The analyst reflected upon how the interplay of visuals images and words together displayed the theme of Kashmir's subjugation as well as how this genre has proved supportive to author to counter the said hegemony. Hence, the study found consent, political domination and media control as the broad elements that can be seen in the novel and also the study concludes that counter hegemony is possible through such literary genres, as the novel's narrator has communicated those aspects of hegemonic situation in Kashmir to a large audience through literary discourse of graphic novel genre that are chiefly absent from mainstream media's treatments of the Kashmir's conflict.

Introduction

In visual social semiotic approach there is a division of labour between words and images, where words provide facts and explanation and interpretation is provided by the images of ideologically coloured viewpoint. The interpretation is not explicit but it is done by connotation and suggestions.¹ Visual Social Semiotics is one of the perspectives from which visual communication is studied, which involves the description of semiotic resources. Socio linguistic approach to multimodality in representation and communication examines language use in interaction

to investigate power, inequality and ideology in communication. Some studies assume that speech or writing is always prime in carrying the soul of meanings whereas other than that simultaneously operating modes can simply exemplify or expand these meanings. On the contrary, yet other studies focus to a wide range of different modes and their mutually modifying effect and forefront the significance of particular modes by transcribing them in conjunction with speech or writing. They emphasize their different potentials from a semiotic perspective on representation and communication. In particular the Linguists studying in Ethno methodology and Conversation Analysis have focused on the effectivity of gaze, gesture, drawing and texts alongside language in interaction². Viewing through prism of semiotics, a graphic novel is a multimodal text with text and visual imagery.³

In the 1970s Graphic novels emerged as a sub genre of comic books that gave a new meaning to it by connecting text with images. The emergence of graphic novels did not only give vitality to the genre but expanded its audience too. Historically this genre has been around for some time in the form of Comic and graphic stories in Europe and the United States. They flourished as a means of personal and public satire in England in the 17th century. Slowly they took the shape of detailed stories in comic strips, commonly came to be referred as comic books. Enjoying a seventy years history in Europe and the United States, comic books developed into a more flourished literary genre of Graphic novels in the late 1970s.⁴

Definitions vary widely for the term "graphic novel". Their multilayered narrative with an autobiographical element, black and white format and publication in a series characterizes graphic novels. Often they treat serious topics, present a socio-political critique and are for adult audience. Elaine Martin quotes Roger Sabin's work (*Comics, Comix and Graphic Novels* 1996) and writes that the writers shifted to graphic novel for humour and political satire which could have been punishable by law in the written form.

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¹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 2008).

² Charles Goodwin, *Practices of Seeing Visual Analysis: An Ethnomethodological Approach*, 2007.

³ Elaine Martin, "Graphic Novels or Novel Graphics?: The Evolution of an Iconoclastic Genre", *The Comparatist*, 35:1 (2011): 170-181, doi:10.1353/com.2011.0015.

⁴ *Ibid.*

The two volumes of *Maus* (1986, 1991)⁵ is one of the celebrated early examples of graphic novel as used by Art Spiegelman. Spiegelman's technique of using graphic novels to write about the traumatic events of Holocaust is one of the early example of this genre. *Maus* became a model work, that standardized the genre. He turned the comic and the supernatural subject matter into something serious, tragic and traumatic. Spiegelman has not portrayed himself as a mouse but as a masked human that portrays the chaos in his life. The role of graphic novels in terms of their thematic content and the nature of art has remained iconoclastic. To this list one might add sophisticated visionary storytelling.

Likewise, Kashmiri artist Malik Sajad's first graphic novel, *Munnu A boy from Kashmir*,⁶ is a amazing portrayal of the situation in valley of Kashmir as witnessed by the writer and his narration is greatly drawn upon his own life as he grows from Munnu to Sajad. One of the most notable things about Malik's book is its use of anthropomorphism: all the oppressed Kashmir natives are illustrated as endangered humanoid hangul deer the national animal of the region. In the monochromatic tiles of *Munnu*, Sajad negotiates the private identity with the public calamity that has wrapped up the valley. This makes the book feel a lot like Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. Comparisons to Art Spiegelman's *Maus* are inevitable because in *Munnu* the Kashmiris are drawn as Hangul deer, while their poachers are humans. Spiegelman assigns an anthropomorphic quality to every nationality: the canine Americans, the porcine Poles. Sajad assigns, ironically, anyone not native to the valley a human form; the Hangul deer — his mother, father, siblings, neighbors, and mates — are pitted against the *Homo sapiens*. The sentimentality in such a choice is difficult to overlook. Sajad remains steadfast in his Hangul identity, never flitting between species. Malik Sajad's born in 1987 in Srinagar, spent his seminal years in Kashmir at the time of curfews and crackdowns, a distressing experience documented in *Munnu*. This turmoil was the result of the long-term political and cultural crisis that followed Partition, with both Pakistan and India arguing over the Kashmir valley and thus dividing and harming its citizens, some claim that Kashmir belongs to one of the two nations, while others demand its independence. There are many factors which could be taken into account while analyzing the history of Kashmir and finding the root

⁵ Art Spiegelman and Art Spiegelman, *Maus* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 2010).

⁶ Malik Sajad, *Munnu* (London: Fourth Estate, 2015).

cause of the issue and Malik Sajad in his the graphic *Munnu a boy from Kashmir* recounts many of these historical root causes.

Ghosal⁷ reviewing Malik Sajad's graphic novel *Munnu a boy from Kashmir* writes that while considering India's occupation of Kashmir and the Kashmiri's demands for freedom, Sajad holds the Indian army's atrocities, the Pakistani leaders' opportunism, and the Kashmiri militants' corruption accountable for the bouts of mass homicide in the valley, but at the same time Sajad refuses to adopt any one polarized position and stipulates that besides international audience, it's the native Kashmiris and South Asians who need to recognize the brutal history and the treacherous realities of living in the conflict zone.

Statement of the problem

Whenever mainstream electronic and print media-based platforms cover subjugation or resistance in the disputed land of Kashmir as a bilateral issue they exclude a tripartite perspective and largely follow a plethora of tinged opinions of the dominant representatives who speak on the behalf of the dominated populace, making the subaltern as the mediated subaltern.

Delimitations of the study

This paper is delimited to the images and dialogues only depicting the theme of counter-hegemony with respect to author's autobiographical glimpses in the selected graphic novel. Besides, this study doesn't discuss other aspects and constructs of the novel such as cultural nurture, family affiliation and psychological effects of child abuse.

Research questions

Q1. How effectively the interplay of images and words together depicted the subaltern Kashmiries?

Q2. To what extent has graphic novel *Munnu A boy from Kashmir* as a discourse been supportive to counter media-hegemony?

Literature review

The people of Kashmir have always stood for their freedom against their captors but the reality in Kashmir remains shrouded behind the smoke screen of propagandas, children are being killed for crimes not committed by them, girls are being raped and young men are tortured and put to death for nothing but a search for freedom. Where we find a

⁷ Torsa Ghosal, "Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir", *South Asian Popular Culture*, 14:1-2 (2016), 128-130, doi:10.1080/14746689.2016.1241349.

large documented data, which records thousands of abuses committed by armed groups while many activists also appraise that a large number of such violations go unreported due to some legal provisions of the Indian law and also the laws that encourage excessive use of force.⁸ Hogan, (2014) studies narrative structures in *Kashmir pending*, a graphic novel published in 2007⁹ about such homicide in Jammu and Kashmir employed around a character Mushtaq who became a militant insurgent in Kashmir but in the end became disillusioned with the revolutionaries. In the analysis it was found that this graphic novel is biased and shows more killings by the militants than the government.¹⁰ He further philosophizes that this situation is because of in group/out group divisions and due to the colonial relations. Specifically, identity categories created by colonial situations tend toward such polarization. Initially the division was organized and systematic at the end of the colonizers but finally the colonized also began to develop institutional structures and responded to the colonized situation in a more organized way.¹¹ The political leaders and politicized crowds are strongly motivated, as by the bestowal of label the martyr they give them some purpose, to interpret apparently meaningless deaths and through a leadership this planning and systemization are hierarchically structured. He concludes that colonialism leads to violent situations of firing on unarmed civilians by the colonizers. Similarly, the violence is liable to spiral with the revolutionaries same as it is to spiral with the colonial forces, therefore, it is likely that the revolutionary groups will blend in the population and will get what they want by using arms that they took.

The media, think tanks and the policy makers believe that in order to dilute the conflict situation, there is always a possibility of finding a viable solution even during bloody political, ethnic and racial conflict. Nyla Ali Khan is residing in Srinagar Kashmir and teaches at the University of Oklahoma, and also a member of Scholars Strategy Network. She taught translations of Kashmiri short stories to her students and came up with real opinions of the youth of Kashmir. On one hand the story depicts the tedious atmosphere created by gloomy politics, and on other hand the fabricated beauty of Kashmir. She investigated the role

⁸ Human Rights Watch 18:11 (c), 'Everyone Lives in Fear' Patterns of Impunity in Jammu and Kashmir. <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/Reports/india0906web.pdf>. Papa, I. I., and Bijbehara Massacre. "Human rights abuses in Jammu and Kashmir."

⁹ Patrick C. Hogan, "Kashmir Pending: Narrative And Ideology In A Graphic Novel", *Narrative Works* 4, no. 2 (2019), doi:10.7202/1062102ar.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

of discourse in identities construction and that to propagate the values that form the identities of the dominants and the dominated. The strengthen domination strategy along with the structures of knowledge tend to give rise to such a gulf between the margins and the center that cannot be bridged. Its interests are replicated, as the dominant order propounded the ideology. The voices that are on the borders of society are silenced by those in the center who are the producers of discourse of power in all domains such as religion, politics and academics. This is done by creating hegemonic order of unquestioned authority. Thus the authoritative hegemonic discourse that is, the expression given by mainstream Indian and Pakistani media, politicians, academia that separates itself from the demands of Kashmiri people. The continuous insurgency and counter insurgency with its accompanying traumas and terrors have greatly damaged the cultural identity of the people of Kashmir. Still they have maintained a rich heritage, which the bad politics of the neighboring states could not reduce.¹²

The intersections between knowledge production and the continuation of unequal power relation have been explained by the theories of discourse, hegemony and ideology. The notion of ideology used by Marxist theory to describe within a society the process through which the interests of a ruling economic class are reflected by dominant ideas. Antonio Gramsci illustrates the ways in which hegemony is maintained in capitalist societies through the state.¹³ The political, cultural and social aspects tend to extensively expound the Hegemony.¹⁴ The connection between hegemony and discourse has reached enough considerations from Antonio Gramsci (1971) in the Critical Discourse Analysis. Gramsci argues that there are three different ways in which the social groups express their supremacy as domination and as moral and intellectual leadership. Hegemony is defined as exercising of power by consent rather than any use of explicit physical or coercive force. Non-coercive means make hegemony actual in social domain, such as hegemony carried by the distribution of forms of discourse. In field of discourse, hegemonic powers are much concerned with the whole activities, transitivity and lexical level, that engage the participants,

¹² Amazon.Com, Last modified 2020, <https://www.amazon.com/Parchment-Kashmir-History-Society-Polity-ebook/dp/B009C8WDD8>.

¹³ Mark C. J. Stoddart, "Ideology, Hegemony, Discourse: A Critical Review of Theories of Knowledge and Power", *Social Thought and Research*, 2007, doi:10.17161/str.1808.5226.

¹⁴ Benedetto Fontana, *Hegemony and Power* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

explore the way of one particular domain of our experiences and inform about the significance of selection of words in particular context.¹⁵

While covering the resistance in the third world the media attempts to capture and represent the voice of the subaltern. In a search for social change, this subaltern thus becomes the mediated subaltern. The global media reinforce the subalternity.¹⁶ Trillò (2018) also investigates in his netnography, the use of the subaltern sphere of the Web 2.0 in the Indian context. The mainstream media has been historically controlled by the state and the upper castes, especially Brahmins, but with the Web 2.0 the subaltern have found a way to articulate their interest in a more pluralistic media sphere. The study aimed to mainly explored that how castes critics and feminists employ Web 2.0 platforms, with a focus on Twitter, including women's use of the Web from feminist perspective in one of the case study and an emphasis on Dalits in other of the case studies. Arguably, feminist and Dalit interests intersect.

The history curriculum is, nevertheless, permeable to subaltern narratives of the nation. The study discusses the ways in which hegemonic and subaltern discourses alternatively evoke different, and opposing, notions of the nation and how they might productively coexist within the history curriculum.¹⁷ The study is based on the analysis of the construction of the Catalan nationhood in school textbooks and teachers' and museums' resources in Catalonia under theoretical framework Homi Bhabha's conceptual tools of pedagogic and performative narratives of the nation. In Bhabha's account (1990, 2004), the nation is dialectically constructed in the space in between these two types of knowledge (the pedagogical and the performative). "A space where the history may be half-made because it is in the process of being made; and the image of cultural authority may be ambivalent because it is caught, uncertainly, in the act of 'composing' its powerful image" p.3.¹⁸ The study found that History education, as a curriculum subject and through other subjects or

¹⁵ Ming Liu, "Representational Pattern of Discursive Hegemony", *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 3:2 (2013), 135-140, doi:10.4236/ojml.2013.32018.

¹⁶ Tommaso Trillò, "Can The Subaltern Tweet? Reflections on Twitter as a Space of Appearance and Inequality in Accessing Visibility", *Studies on Home and Community Science*, 11:2 (2018), 116-124, doi:10.1080/09737189.2017.1420404.

¹⁷ Edda Sant, "Can The Subaltern Nation Speak By Herself In The History Curriculum?", *Educational Studies*, 53:2 (2017), 105-121, doi:10.1080/00131946.2016.1238376.

¹⁸ Homi Bhabha. *Nation and Narration* (Routledge, 2013).

school activities (e.g., historical texts, artifacts, monuments, commemoration of national festivities), is particularly relevant in the schooled construction of the nation. Pictures are not essentially more realistic than written texts, but in the analysis they seem to be more open, dynamic, and permeable to subaltern narratives. In this respect, the subaltern nations are speaking for themselves through their visual representation. How they are being interpreted remains an open question. The study thus suggested a complex dynamics between hegemonic and subaltern discourses, rather than fixed conceptualizations.

Joining potent visual imagery with text, graphic novels present the actual world issues. These novels are similar to books in terms of "activeness" and like movies they are sensory and immersive¹⁹. Thus graphic novels have the capability to combine film and prose to access their subject matter, in their ideal form, in bringing a cognitive and emotional experience together. They take a narrative approach towards political actors and frame their action to uncover intangible concepts of identity that are vital to constructivist theorizing in international relations. Three such novels "Palestine", by Joe Sacco (2001), "Exit wounds", by Rutu Modan (2007), and *Waltz with Bashir*, by Ari Folman and David Polonsky (2009) raises relevant themes of life under occupation, tensions within Israeli society, and the shadow of terrorism, the intractability of conflict, the sources of violence, and collective memory and identity. Joe Sacco's *Palestine* is based on author's actual conversations on the streets, hospitals, and homes with the Palestinians, and a personal account of thought and emotions as he witnesses the brutality of life in 1991 and 1992 during two months stay in the West Bank and Gaza Strip under occupation. Sacco serves as a reporter than as a facilitator. As he uncovers the complexity and dynamism of Palestinian life, by merging the political and historical realms with the personal one. In *Palestine*, the graphic novel, Sacco discusses the issues of life under occupation, the violence, the obstinateness of the conflict, and status of Israel as the only democracy in the Middle East. Conventional prose cannot bring out such aspects of reality that graphic novels can. In *Palestine*, the information is conveyed through the background drawings. The sky is dark and cloudy whenever Sacco is outdoor, and the frames are muddy. Seeing overwhelming presence of mud depict the economic deprivation and struggles in the life the West Bank and Gaza, similarly, as illustrated by Sacco, resentment embedded in the society, when he

¹⁹ Thomas Juneau and Mira Sucharov, "Narratives in Pencil: Using Graphic Novels to Teach Israeli-Palestinian Relations", *International Studies Perspectives*, 11:2 (2010): 172-183, doi:10.1111/j.1528-3585.2010.00400.x.

walks through the toddler with the grandmother on her knee or the refugee camps, depicting that Jews are dogs. Sacco's Palestine is a description of violence and evil of a nation, where Israeli soldiers see their enemies as "sub-human", and Palestinians militants compete for their teenager's adherence. Unlike "Palestine" The graphic novel *Exit Wounds*, by Rutu Modan also portray the Palestinians perspectives within the society and gives a description of life under terrorism. *Exit Wounds* applies a narrower and less overtly political lens. It centers on the politically complex relation of Israel with the Diaspora, focuses on the suicide bombing victim, and the threat of terror is central to the novel. Another work, which is politically more complex than *Exit Wounds*, is "Waltz with Bashir" by David Polonsky. It is a detailed meditation of Israeli-PLO war surrounding the 1982, and collective guilt about Israeli invasion of Lebanon.

Hence the format of the graphic novel allowed for an all-embracing cumulative storytelling, where even minute details and urban landscapes build a growing sense of familiarity for the readers. Graphic stories and novels have often documented daily life, whether it is Bosnian War, Joe Sacco on the Palestine conflict or the works of artist, in conflict-ridden regions around the world.

Conceptual framework

The term 'subaltern' which refers to having an inferior position in the military was taken up by Gayathri Spivak in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?'²⁰ (1988) in which she observes that often it's the other who speak on behalf of the subaltern so as to represent them, even if the subaltern can speak, they are entangled in such echo less arena that they are often not heard. These voices are unheard mainly because of the hegemony. So the term subaltern has emerged as similar to marginalized and hegemony is often made actual through no coercive means of discourse distribution²¹. The present study links the notions of Spivak's approach to the speaking of the subalterns to the hegemonic structures of print media, where the voices of the subaltern Kashmiri public often do not find a space to get heard. However, this deeply, perilous grounded hegemony needs to be countered on similar grounds. The media which is hyper-globalised now can extensively help in making the subaltern speak

for themselves to challenge the existing power structures and to gain social mobility²² Referring to Gayathri Spivak, Ramapurath comments that Spivak herself notes that subalternity is not a static identity but a dynamic one that has the capability of changing in these times of electronic media and globalization thus it responds to time and context. Therefore the present study attempts to evaluate effective utility of graphic novel to counter the prevailing hegemony.

Research methodology

The present qualitative study applies Grunter Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen's model of visual design (2010)²³ that presents a theory and helps in interpreting images. According to them the structure, participants, social distance, circumstances, point of view, modality act as visual resources system of communication establishing relation between participants; and the visually composed meanings. These meaning-making metafunctions and visual resources namely representational, interactive and compositional can not only be described, but also interpreted.

Representation as the first metafunction describes the patterns of i.e., encoding experience visually either by narrative and conceptual structures. A narrative structure unfolds events, actions, change as a process and spatial allocation in the image. Applying this to the image, for instance the participants being represented in the image, may identify the viewer by directly looking outside of the picture. The dialogue balloons represents speakers utterances and thought balloons their thinking. Whereas Conceptual structures signify participants in terms of their classification and relation with each other usually of superordinate and subordinate.

The second metafunction "interactive" shows the pattern of interaction among the participants involved in visual communication. The three dimensions of interactive meaning of images are image acts, social distance point of view. The first one is related to the direction of the gaze of the represented participants, the gaze can be directed at the viewer, which means a demand from the depicted or the depicted being offered as spectacle for the viewer. Facial expressions and gestures are used for emphasis, which may establish an imaginary relation with the viewer. Social distance on the other hand is influenced by different sizes

²⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can The Subaltern Speak?", *Die Philosophin*, 14:27 (2003), 42-58, doi:10.5840/philosophin200314275.

²¹ Ming Liu, "Representational Pattern of Discursive Hegemony", *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 3:2 (2013), 135-140, doi:10.4236/ojml.2013.32018.

²² Sudheesh Ramapurath Chemmencheri, "Subaltern Struggles and the Global Media in Koodankulam and Kashmir", *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 38:2 (2015), 187-199, doi:10.1080/00856401.2015.1013184.

²³ Gunther R Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, n.d.

of frame applied to humans, objects, landscapes and buildings. These frames are namely as close-up, medium or long which also may lead to different relations between the depicted and the viewers as the size of frame in the focused image is a close-up shot establishing a close social distance and may an informal relation. The point of view is 'the angles of image' to depict Participants that indicate different relations. For instance, the frontal horizontal angles show involvement while an oblique indicates detachment. The high vertical shows power and the low representing participants more powerful, or can be eye level maintaining equal relations between the depicted and the viewer.

The third metafunction "compositional" refers to the ways in which representations are made coherent into the kind of meaningful whole what we term 'text'. The three meaning constructing systems are information value, framing and salience. Information value has three visual areas. The left side indicates the familiar information while the right side brings in the new information. The essential information is at the top and the information placed at bottom depicts the product itself, by more specific or practical information. Salience presents the element as more important or attractive than others is another important system in the composition. The salience is indicated by the visual clues such as cultural factors, colour contrasts and perspective.

Critical discussion

Malik Sajad's art of anthropomorphism is one of the most notable visual elements about this graphic novel *Munnu a Boy from Kashmir*²⁴. Its cover features Hangul deer, with expressive large diamond-shaped eyes that seem to reflect the complexity of their existential and political condition. The deer's profile is at the center of what looks like a wooden window frame. The novel's title and the writer's name plate are thrown into relief on a black background. As we open the black and white illustrated book, we realize that all Kashmir natives are drawn as hybrid creatures with human body and Hangul deer's face while Indian army and every community apart from the Kashmiris such as tourists are drawn as humans. The uncertainties of these hybrid creatures are metaphorically characterized as an endangered species similar to Kashmir's state animal the Hangul which is also at risk of extinction due to the conflict's impact on its natural habitat.

The contrast of black and white color scheme is used in this novel as a salience of visual design. If we look further into the psychological significance of black, it is linked with mystery, depth, with

death, which is unknowable, with night, which is full of hidden things of fear and agony. The very first page of black and white illustrated graphic novel where Munnu is located within the space and locale of the family and nation.²⁵ Figure 1 shows the entire family in the photo frame. Beneath the photo frame, the picture gives a topographical view of Srinager, Munnu's hometown within a larger map depicting the neighbouring countries like Pakistan, India and China in the light and the dark shades. Malik Sajad keeps on sketching the images with dark shades in black color throughout the novel where Kashmir is peopled with the dead, its narratives are framed by the dead, and its stories are stories of the dead. On page 5 for instance, the first panel, Kashmir is marked by memorials and tombstones as running the breadth of the page, shows us a borderless image of tombstones; the tombstones are themselves the border or frame for the entire page and its other panels, placed beneath this one.²⁶ Therefore, the tombstones are not just image-frames for the page but are cultural frames of death and memorials through which we read Kashmir. Throughout the text there are images of the dead, tombstones, graves and mass mourning (p. 34-6, 37, 41-3, 51, 64-5, 67-8, 189-191, 204, 210, 231, 234).²⁷

The ragged speech balloon indicates strong emotions contained the cries of Mubashir in school 'th-they killed my father'.²⁸ Another small panel shows the head of a dead man on a stretcher with black streaks that show blood. In the next panel his body cut with razors is shown as explained by Mubashir.²⁹ The first panel on the next page shows a man hanging from the ceiling and an Indian army man ready to cut him with razors.³⁰

The format of the graphic novel as a representational metafunction allowed for an extensive storytelling, where minute details and inner city landscapes construct a growing sense of social contact for the readers with various text balloons. From the images and words on pages throughout the novel it emerges that ordinariness of daily life in Kashmir with all its space for love, education and ambitions is deeply internalized with curfews and crackdowns where every child grow up learning to untangle kites from barbed wires and to zigzag on their bicycles past checkpoints. Growing up in Batamalo, Munnu takes a

²⁵ *Ibid*, 2

²⁶ *Ibid*, 5

²⁷ *Ibid*

²⁸ *Ibid*, 124

²⁹ *Ibid*, 125

³⁰ *Ibid*, 126

²⁴ Malik Sajad, *Munnu* London: Fourth Estate, 2015

keen interest in his artisan father's walnut wood carvings. The young Munnu chooses to draw Chinar leaves, care chinks, and trace defaced corpses from the newspaper over homework. The drawings and narration of such episodes in which Munnu meets their 'growing demand for AK-47s' by carving a stamp of the assault rifle from his eraser (p.6), ironically offers an affective depiction of what childhood is really like in the valley. The narrations share the experiences that how his family escapes several raids of the Indian army and how during the crackdown parades where the men of the house have to appear before the army so that informers might identify the 'terrorists'.³¹ On crackdown days Munnu observes 'Mamma's face would swell from blood pressure'³² while other families wait for their men-folk to come back from the parade (p. 33).³³ Malik Sajad amplifies the affective aspect of such an alteration in the family in several instances as after the Indian army kills a young boy from acquaintance, Munnu's fear is illustrated having nightmares about a distorted landscape with floating bodies in a page-length panel.³⁴ In the nightmares, the recently dead youth takes on the appearance of Bilal who is the elder brother of Munnu.³⁵

Sajad's interest in experimenting with the visual conventions of comics is evident everywhere in the novel. In the earlier sections Munnu sketches Indian Army as bears in his cartoons.³⁶ A snake biting his tale end with words below in caption "Words like peace and War had become Cliches"³⁷ and "draws kashmiris as giant Gullivers with words Hurriyat surround and fastened hard by miniature army men like Lilliputians".³⁸ In the later sections, he advances to play with more subtle boundaries of dreams, reality, memory, and news. In the section entitled as 'paisley' Munnu's dream is an amalgamation of his unconsciousness, pleasant memories and unpleasant realities which plunges readers into a stressful state. The narrator wants the reader to feel the anguish for a while that they themselves live with but is something never realized by outside world. In the next section, entitled as 'installation Art' portrays the identity labels for Kashmiris that hegemonic electronic and print media circulates when in an episode where Munnu (Sajad) is suspected as terrorist for browsing news for Kashmir sitting in a Delhi's internet

³¹ *Ibid*, 12, 13.

³² *Ibid*, 33.

³³ *Ibid*, 33.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 51.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 58.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 166.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 173.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 174.

café and dragged to police station.³⁹ Munnu's world is full of uncertainties and ingrained with violence, where the private affairs and the political affairs are inextricably interwoven, as much as is the story of every native Kashmiri; a conflict generation who grow up susceptible and manipulated by outdoor forces for unknown political reasons that end up ignoring the real rights of the Kashmiri people. For instance when the tourist seeks permission from the kashmiries to take a photo of them, Munnu replies her; PERMISSION? NEED NO PERMISSION from an Indian in KASHMIR while the other depicted participants are shown with no gaze of any surprise or any interest.⁴⁰

On an invitation by some famous journalists from Delhi Munnu is hopeful for a positive feedback on his cartoonist expressions but is welcomed with more professional and lesser sensitive comments "The Children in the illustrations should look like the ones living in disputed Kashmir, and Munnu tries to explain; "but Kashmir is not disputed, it's an occupation! It doesn't belong to India or Pakistan".⁴¹ When a journalist questions his knowledge of Kashmir's history, the 17-year-old Munnu manages to retort 'I might not know where the bullet came from but I could tell her who this bullet hit'.⁴² The narration symbolically describes Munnu's lying posture with words as "the tongue- twisting words that make history books sound official and like the holder of sacked truth had the same effect as sleeping pills on Sajad".⁴³ In the later sections the narrator continues to concentrate more with temporal arrangements and everyday experiences of the Kashmiris over patronizing political rhetoric advanced by the various stakeholders as in section entitled as 'global warming' he charts down how the families of his neighbors and friends are in woe and wail,⁴⁴ reporting that "around 120 civilians mostly youths in their teens and twenties were shot in the span of three months"⁴⁵ and "more the two thousand were injured , many of them were left crippled" and in another panel images of media news are portrayed with several balloons and boxes "Meanwhile, A top military official delivered his side of the story on the TV....Our strategy is to shoot at the legs so as to disperse the protesters, the trouble is, kids are short, so our bullets hit their heads.....they are not protesters, they are

³⁹ *Ibid*, 298-306.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 269.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 191.

⁴² *Ibid*, 193.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 191.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 330.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 331.

agitational terrorists”.⁴⁶ the next page soon sketches the images of these helpless and unarmed innocent kids named as terrorists on media felling down miserably with every bullet from the armed side⁴⁷ and in between this images of bloodshed to images captures the eyes, one image showing a boy shot straight in the head with words written “SRING OF 2010 WAS STAINED BY THE DEATH OF KASHMIR YOUNGEST GENERATION”⁴⁸ and another image which catches the eyes is an image of Munnu(Sajad) talking on phone simultaneously sketching a hybrid caricature of Kashmiri boy with human body and Hangul’s head with words highlighted as “ENDANGERED SPECIES”⁴⁹ and the next pages fills the images where we see how the vicious cycle continues as the unrest in Kashmir over the summer of 2016 echoes that violent summer and we see Sajad in images of having phone calls from a friend suggesting him to replace his title of Endangered species by the word Kashmir Intifada of 2010 “But it’s Arabic word, isn’t it? We are not Arabs...THE WORLD ISN’T JUST EAST AND WEST. WHAT IF YOU WERE WTITING ABOUT THE FRENCH REVOLUTION, WOULD YOU CALL IT FRENCH INTIFADA?”⁵⁰ The acquaintances often patronize him, however, as Munnu matures, the clear demarcations between the politics of the invaders and that of the revolutionaries fade to some degree and his dilemma finds a very lucid expression in the pages⁵¹ where Munnu physically doing daily routine tasks is engaged all the time in arranging word and arguments in his mind for the expected meeting with International publishers visiting kashmir; “KASHMIR IS NOT INDIA, PAKISTAN OR CHINA, SIR! WE WANT INDEPENDENCE WELCOME TO KASHMIR” (p.341)⁵² but all his expectations fall in disappointment to find these publisher taking more about the cultural and territorial beauty of Kashmir, enjoying the food during meal than the serious issue of conflict, one of them replies “OFCOURSE, BUT THAT WOULD BE INTERFERRING MATTERS IN THE INTERNAL MATTERS OF INDIA, WE DON’T HAVE THAT AUTHORITY”. The image analyzed here creates an imaginary relation between the represented foreign visitors and the real one by using a

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 281.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 332.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 332.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 333.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 334.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 335-348.

⁵² *Ibid*, 341.

demand act. *Munnu* looks directly at the viewer, creating, thus, a visual form of direct address.

One of the important compositional and interactive meta function to consider in examining this politically oriented work is it’s dialogues revelation to the intended target audience. There are some indications in this graphic novel that the primary target audience of this graphic novel is Kashmiri natives and humanitarians of outside world alike as the fact that the publication is a graphic novel in English suggests that it is appealing to the growing body of humanists often with liberal political views, who have recently taken to reading and interpreting graphic fiction. While narrating history of Kashmir, the Afghans, Mughals and Sikhs are shown in panels butchering herds of Hangul deer, and monologues ‘If there is a paradise on earth...it is here! It is here! It is here!’ gives the scene a dismal touch.⁵³ Narrator’s use of typography highlights the point of view when with a cartoon of endangered species Munnu writes in capitalized font “INDIA, PAKISTAN, THE DOGRAS, THE SIKHS, AFGHANS, MUGHAL OR HUNS, WHOSOEVER INVADED, BOUHGT OR SOLD KASHMIR...”⁵⁴ referring to brutal history of Kashmir’s subjugate and whenever Munu is providing viewers with historical facts they are either placed on the left side, While the right side is usually seen reserved to new information in the novel, to something that requires special attention with use of capitalized font, prominent typology and bold words. This element best underscores the incisive discussion between Sajad and his friend when they observes that “THERE ARE GRAPHIC NOVEL ABOUT EVERY CONFLICT ZONE EXCEPT KASHMIR...I WANT THE WORLD TO KNOW ABOUT KASHMIR”, “AND WHEN INDIA AND PAKISTAN BUY AMMUNITION AND F-16 FROM AMERICA, YOU THINK THE U.S. GOVERNMENT BELIEVES THAT INDIA AND PAKISTAN ARE GOING TO CELEBRATE EID OR DEWALI WITH THOSE WEAPONS”⁵⁵ and “OUR INTELLECTUALS NEVER GET SICK OF POINTING OUT FLAWS IN OUR OWN COMMUNITY, THEN THEY SAY THEY’RE SICK OF THIS CORRUPT SOCIETY AND POLITICS AND WHEN IT START COLD HERE THEY CALL IT GLOOMY AND SAY THAT THE DESERVES BETTER”⁵⁶ and his these flickering thoughts while waking in a dark night among nature brings him to say “don’t let your conscience

⁵³ *Ibid*, 201.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 215.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 221.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 222.

sabotage this soothing moment. If it still stings, don't seek forgiveness from god, draw. Confess your guilt, write a story".⁵⁷

Conclusion and findings

Through the graphic format and the interplay of images and words, the author wittingly presents the theme of subjugation of Kashmir. Malik Sajad's careful consideration that adds to this graphic design is his choice of basic color scheme, tactful handling of typography; the inclusion and interplay of images with different font sizes of text which provides a much ample opportunity to him attract readers' attention and to illustrate hegemonic control over media and other sources of communication, helping the world living outside Kashmir to see the picture behind the front. Greater part of the populace in Jammu and Kashmir is troubled, dispossessed and mocked by the processes of democracy, by United Nations resolutions, by armed insurgency, by counter-insurgency, by militarization, and by revisionist histories. The failure to address these abuses in literary discourses is the challenge that Malik Sajad has embrace in his graphic novel. Hence, the study concludes that counter hegemony is possible through such literary genres, as the novel's narrator in a state of ambivalent emotions towards his own natives eventually sensitizes readers to the likelihood that the issue of emancipation of Kashmir is not a bilateral issue rather it should be seen as a tripartite subject in order to restore Kashmir's peace.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 345.