TRACING ADULTHOOD IN INDIAN COMICS FOR CHILDREN

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Abstract

Comics are visual art through which a story is conveyed, like any other form of literature it is a product of cultural interaction between readers and stories. Comics enter into a child's life when his/her interest of entertainment changes from toys to books, where they get infatuated with the colorful pictures, caricatured humans, simple language and an urge to peep into the lives of cartoons. In the past few years comics books are been replaced by Web comics as a popular because they reach a large audience for free, through social media whereas the moral and social issues are diverted to politics and feminism. Now children gets more exposed to adult themes and even the pictures used to decorate the content appear sensuous. This paper is an attempt to examine the impact of comics books infused with adult content on the minds of children as with the passage of time and modernization of beliefs obvious changes did occur in the presentation of childhood where innocence is been replaced with adulthood. Thus the aim of the paper is also to analysis the manifestation of emerging adulthood in comic series and how they differ from its roots.

Keywords: Comics, Cartoons, Mythologies, Web series, Golden Era, Adulthood, Innocence, Children literature

Broadly comic are counted in the literature meant for children. Before understanding the role of comics and the changing trends it is important to define Children's Literature first. Peter Hint in his book *Defining Children's Literature* takes up this issue explicitly to incorporate the various questions and probable answers in the attempt to define it. He poses some important questions are why they emerged with name "Children Literature," How is it different from adult literature? "It differ from children in degree, not in kind and writing for children should be judged by the same standas writings for adults to fail to apply the same critical standard to children's literature is inferior to adult's literature". So he further defines children's literature as books read by, especially suitable for, or especially satisfying for members of the group urgently defined as children." The impacts here is children's literature especially comics books, and to trace its origin and development and understand the changes that have taken place over the years. Comics always remained a subversive art where its status is been considered to be subaltern as compared to other so called high art forms like novels. Secondly comics and its creators has been subject to critical adverse comments and remained unacknowledged throughout the history. The space, images, text and panels became part of 21st century media. Therefore the relationships of art and comics is intertwined in space and time.

Education was available only to the privileged few and books were scarce and expensive.

In the 18th century when children in England were enjoying books like Gulliver's travels (1726) and Robinson Crusoe (1719) here in India children were Cherishing Ramayan and Mahabharat. These books were not written targeting children but they are shared by both children and Adults. The Enlightenment in Europe raised concerns about the child and philosophers like Rousseau emphasized the need of proper nature and care to raise a conscientious child. His *Emile*dealt with issues regarding moral education of the child and the necessity of a simple life. These ideas got transformed into the Romantic notions of the child as good, innocent pure and close to God. While Romantic ideas laid importance on the natural goodness of the child and childhood it by implication also emphasized the necessity for proper care of the child so that it grouts into a worthy individual. Thus a lot of Chapbooks, nursery rhymes, ballads and similar works, mainly didactic in nature were published to install moral values in a child.

India and Britain were in close relationship during the formative years of children's literature in India and so 19th Century British Children's literature was diffused with image and visions of India creating a mystical and Mythic ambience. In the same time history of Comics in India was just around the corner re-visiting it's most smiting of the metamorphosis ever to be seen again. Pran Kumar Sharma, the man behind Indian Comics is universally admired, had created umpteen comic strips like ShrimatiJi, 'Pinki', 'Billoo', 'Chacha Chaudhary' etic during 1970's. Comparative to thecomics shops of other Countries, Indian Comic readership remained confined to children only and its content continued to be conservative and 'un-intellectual' Consciously and unconsciously thecontent matter had adult cartoons for example, Shrimatiji means Mrs, and it's about a dominant houseful who rules her henpecked husband. All this makes fun of a husband and wife's relationship but why it is targeted for the children to read is not clear to me. Are we teaching children how to argue in a marriage? How to befool your wife? How to dominate a husband or a wife? The content too was unintellectual which could appeal to the taste but not mind. In Chacha Chaudhary and Sabu's duo both the characters were for helping the people

in trouble but most of the time the target/subject to be released from the goons in a girl or woman which stresses on the fact that women are meek and easy to capture and victimize. The element of adulthood also gets traced here where the world of Chacha Chaudhary is the world of adults, children has to leave their innocence and enter in the adult canvas to understand the social problems of kidnapping, eve-teasing thefts, smuggling, terrorism etc. Even the dressing of the woman characters were appealing unintentionally gives the message that women who wear western clothes are more targeted by men.

Indian comics often have large publication and was at its peak in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Over the last three decades diamond Comics, Twinkle and Amar Chitra Katha have established vast distribution networks countrywide and are read by thousands of children in a wide range of language. Famous comic craters from India include AabidSurti, Uncle Pai and cartoonist PranKumar characters are Chacha Chaudhary, Bahadur, Detective Moochwal ,Nagraj, Super Commando Dhruv, Doga, Suppandar and ShikamShammbu. The golden era of original Indian Comics viewed the introduction of many detective characters marginalizing the thinking of children to same specific themes. Reading a detective comics urges children to play roles and they started to see themselves into these characters. Detective, Moochwala by AjitNinan (Target Magazine) was sold for Rs. 10 then, here also the more stress was paid to the physical attributes of a detective especially his 'Mooch" to depict his identity. The comic was great fun to read but what were the significance of the 'mooch'.Comics and graphic novels are increasingly regarded as a compelling part of global literature and popular culture. In India, comics in English have been popular since the 1950s. American and Japanese comics' styles have an important influence on Indian comics, though some South Asian artistic traditions such as chitrakatha could be described as early local precursors of the subsequent art form, and continue to be an important influence on artists. The burgeoning comics industry in India has recently given rise to a strong fan culture that connects young people with their counterparts around the world.

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The female characters in some of the recent comics have gained some power and started to replace the male characters which gives the message that they too have feminist themes. It has been a long existing concern as far as the status of women in India is concerned. Over the decades the women in India have not been given the right to equality to men. India is a country where the male is highly revered. It is a male dominated society where women are considered as subordinate and inferior to men. The constitution of India recognizes equal rights for men and women, in practice this is a rare sight though. In the same land where women are worshipped as Goddess Saraswati, Goddess Durga, Goddess Kali, Parvati etc., the living women are greatly trivialized. This is not a field-limited condition rather in all the fields the women have been placed in an under graded platform. Since recent years considerable efforts are being made to recognize and establish equal rights for women in India. Still, there exist a number of areas where the right of women has not been adequately discerned. Comics are one such area. This paper intends to reflect the condition of women in the Indian comics by analysing the portrayal of some women characters from major comics. Initially, the comics in India were highly indigenous and reflected the Indian contexts considerably. As mentioned earlier, the number of women characters was much less as compared to now but their portrayal was highly reflective and realistic. They were sketched with practical body types and in decent attire. No ridiculous poses and impractical outfits were seen on the women characters of that time. Diamond Comics Shrimatiji, ChhanniChachi, Bini (wife of Chacha Chaudhary) etc. are examples of such characters. One snag in the portrayal of these characters was that mostly they were assigned the profession of housewives. The women were rarely shown as bread winners. They were portrayed as beneficiaries. They were found to discuss the issues related to household and neighbourhood. This never motivated the readers to encourage the women in real life. Another snag that was found in these characters was that they either played the supporting role or apowerless one. Even when they played protagonist, it was their dumb and confused quotient that raised the conflict in the plot.

Their problem-solving quotient was negligibly reflected in the early Indian comics. Manjula Padmanabhan's Suki or Pran's Pinki exemplifies this. On a darker side, the women are now portrayed as flaunting objects. Even though they have gained their identity in the Indian comic industry yet their depiction is not of a kind that earns respect. Firstly, the outfits imposed on these characters are completely out of the social context. Be it rebellious Shakti, intelligent Chandika or powerful Devi, the outfit is highly skimpy and revealing. The attire associated with Shakti is quite indecent with the flesh being flaunted from here and there. The same is the case with vamp Nagina. Newly established Virgin Comics are a step ahead as far as the salacious outfits of women characters are concerned. While Devi is always shown in skin tight lycra dress, the Snake Woman is seen exposing her skin in a femme fatal manner. Apart from this, the poses of these characters are ridiculously awkward and outrageous. Their body type is always appealing to opposite gender but unattainable for the real world women. This portrays an idealistic image of women on male readers. As a result the irrational feeling of offense and jealousy sprouts in the women of the real life. When talking of women in Indian comics, one cannot refrain from mentioning a character that is gaining huge popularity but in the filthy world. Another female protagonist in the Indian comics that is most popular among the audiences of adolescents and adults is SavitaBhabi. There was a time when women in comics were shown slow-witted and weak but never sordid. The trend is changing now. With wit and power, came vulgarity. Pornographic characters like SavitaBhabi are displaying women as a sexual object. This is devaluing the dignity of women. However the comic industry in India has been greatly successful in improving the portrayal of the women characters. The women are now portrayed much strongly as compared to the past. But at the same time, one should not ignore the pitfalls. Showcasing strong personalities of women can't be a compensation for their provoking portrayal.

Initially, the comics aimed to educate the children of India but with the course of time the aim has undergone an alteration. From children to young

adults and even adults, the target audience has changed. The stiff competition with the satellite television and internet has forced the producers to adopt such measures that are derogatory for the women. Different marketing strategies to resist the declining graph of the readers are being incorporated.. As a result, the women are losing their reputation and dignity in the real world. To some extent, these are also proving out to be one of the major causes of crime against women. This alarming rate increment can be checked if the improper portrayal of women in comics is avoided.

Conclusion

The content of any literary writing depends upon on creative imagination of the writer and the interest of the readers. The emergence of adulthood is thus both accidental and intentional. However there is not much harm in introducing it to young minds and children as they could witness the content of the comics in real life even outside books in the society but the aim of comics should be to make them think about right and wrong, to judge better and to believe in moral values than to getting attracted towards violence, crime and the false glorification. There is gender, class and caste stereotyping all around in literature, art and media and comics cannot remain unaffected in anyway. Thus it is somehow important to expose the vices of mankind for the understanding for live better and preparation to face the world. Indian comics has totally different evolutionary circumstances since there is vast cultural difference among India and West. Thus the content too differs. Comic's studies provide the scholars to focus on the critical understanding and creating comics with strong messages to convey which should not be based on western prototypes. Most of the publishers still want to go with the riskless stereotypical writing of comics' targeted children with moral lessons, ignoring the emerging adulthood in it. However with the rise of comics conventions and new publishers in India, there emerged a wave of comics' culture and thus its high time to think and examine comics critically and to build a strong foundation reflecting culture and philosophical Indian context.

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