

Visual-Verbal Diegetic: A Study of Amruta Patil and Devdutt Pattanaik's *Aranyaka: Book of The Forest*

Dr. G. SURYA

Assistant Professor

PG & Research Department of English

Vellalar College for Women (Autonomous), Erode

Abstract

Graphic novels began to receive attention in the literary world in the late twentieth century and continued to flourish in the twentieth century. India's first female graphic novelist, Amruta Patil, and her collaborative project with mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik-*Aranyaka: Book of the Forest* proves how graphic novels provide more real-life morals than real novels, and retell myths centred on women stories. This article attempts to gain insight into Amruta Patil's graphic novel *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest*, and explore how graphic novels help children and students improve their vocabulary, visual literacy, and reading skills. Take it as an example, it also ensures that graphic novels are in the process of promoting students' critical literacy and language acquisition, rather than real novels that help the country build through STEAM education.

Keywords: graphic novels, ecofeminism, aranyakas, visual literacy, critical thinking, elt, steam.

Graphic novels began to receive attention in the literary circles in the late twentieth century and continued to flourish in the twentieth century. The term "Graphic Novel" or "Picture Novel" has only become popular in the past few decades. The most famous definition of "graphic novel" is the "story presented in the form of comic strips and published as a book" given by Webster's Dictionary. *The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck* was the first major graphic novel that was published in the United States, by humorist Rodolphe Toffler that was originally appeared as a series in a weekly humour magazine called *Brother Jonathan*. Some iconic works of this genre include Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' *Watchmen*, Daniel Clowes' *Ghost World and Ice Haven*, Debbie Drechsler's *Dad's Girl*, Phoebe Gloeckner's *Girl Diary*, Brian Azzarello and Eduardo Risso's *100 Bullets* and so on.

Since the word "graphic novel" was coined, there has been constant criticism about whether a work is a "comic book" or a "graphic novel". A comic book is a traditional, stapled, serialized booklet or periodical that tells the story of continuous art. A graphic novel is a book-length story, fiction or non-fiction, written and illustrated in a comic book style. Comic books are usually fantasy and science fiction. Graphic novels are more realistic, usually history, autobiography or memoirs. The mood of comic books is

usually suspenseful and stimulating, while the mood of graphic novels can be more serious and reflective. Graphic novels, as the name suggests, are novels that tell a complete story through illustrations. It contains the beginning, the middle, and the end, and it provides the type of solution one expects from a novel, even if it is part of a series. The obvious difference between graphic novels and text-based novels is that graphic novels allow their images to do most of the storytelling, and speech bubbles and narrative boxes help illustrate the story.

The readers often encounter other confusing concepts, such as whether a graphic novel is a Literature or literature. Literature ultimately provides lasting value, and literature does not contain the lasting value. Literary works with a lowercase letter "l" include all written works, such as cookbooks, travel magazines, billboards, and technical journals that convey daily information or entertain society. Depending on the author's contribution, it can be creative writing or non-creative writing. Literature can be used for academic research where literature cannot be used. Graphic novels tell stories about very touchy subjects such as *Maus*, which is about the Holocaust; *Persepolis*, which is about growing up in Iran during the Islamic Revolution; *V for Vendetta*; *300* and even a retelling of Grimm's *Fairy Tales*, among many others. It is considered more to be Literature than literature and here,

the Contemporary Literature, the Indian graphic novel *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest* by Amruta Patil has taken up for the study.

Amruta Patil was born on 19 April 1979. Her debut graphic novel, *Kari*, commissioned and published by VK Karthika at HarperCollins India, explored themes of sexuality, friendship and death; and heralded Patil as India's first female graphic novelist. Her two subsequent graphic novels *AdiParva: Churning of the Ocean* and *Sauptik: Blood and Flowers* make up the Parvaduology which retells stories from *the Mahabharata* from the viewpoint of the narrators (Sutradhar) Ganga and Ashwatthama respectively. Her collaborative project with the mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik—a graphic novel *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest* proves how graphic novels provide more real-life morality than real novels and retell the mythology with women as the centre.

Aranyaka is drawn with watercolours and pencils. The prose seems simple, and his thoughts resonate deeply with the present relationship with the environment, the firm invasion of forests by humans, the gender war that the #MeToo movement galvanised and other concerns. The book is set in the Vedic Age (1500-500 BC), Patil resurrects the Vedic rishikas and the book is a robust feminist tale. It is also about “the forest within us and outside of us” and “the fear and hunger that underpins all human interactions.” (Pattanaik and Patil) Both authors bluntly stated that *Aranyaka* was not a direct adaptation of the Yajnavalkya story, but used the story of the Upanishads as a springboard to create an original fable that served as the carrier of the Vedic philosophical concept of various media. To quote Devdutt Pattanaik, “...We mingle the Upanishadic story of Satyakama and his cows with the Puranic story of Dilip, who protects his cows from a lion in the story of Upakoshala. There is also a reference to Avadhuta Gita, the song of the mendicant who sees teachers everywhere in nature and culture.”

This book is told from the perspective of Katyayani, who was exiled to the forest (aranya) for eating food for the gods. Everything about her is a great-her body, her appetite, her sexuality, and her observation of nature and people. When she discovered that Y was a man who “observed the world” from a termite mound, she provided

him with food and sexual services, and eventually became his wife. Contrary to his “physical” wife, Y is a “wise” man who seeks knowledge that human teachers cannot provide. When they started their family life outside of Aranya, he became a teacher himself and he attracted students—such as Upakoshala, The Weaver and The Fig.

The book is full of amazing illustrations. An illustration entitled “Kumbha” in which Katyayani made a pot. She sits behind the pot, the shape of the pot perfectly matches her body. Each illustration has layers, and a careful and unhurried reader will find many things to unravel. Unlike most myths centred on men, *Aranyaka* is centred on women. *Aranyaka* explored how each character reacts to nature. Y, a man, refuses the wilderness and the grove because the classroom is what he thinks is superior. Even when Katyayani, who has a close relationship with Anaya and the woods, showed him the value of learning from nature, he still chose to transfer the lessons to his classroom in a metaphorical way instead of sending the classroom to the grove. He is willing to let his students be the apprentices of Katyayani, but he still thinks that what she can teach them is not as good as what he taught in class. This annoyed Katyayani, but she learned to accept the idea that “he is not me”. (90) The understanding is that every woman has her strengths, her desires and her own choices.

Amruta Patil writes, in this “*Making Aranyaka*” section, “I think we have accomplished our goal of creating a complex story that is ‘disarmingly simple.’ A lot is going on if you care to see. Beneath its surface are many narrative undercurrents—the ecological one, the feminist one, the one where food is a stand-in for many other sorts of human appetites.” In “Rigveda”, the fairy poet kept the sun and moon, sacred fire, thunder and lightning for the manly male god, and only gave the forest to the goddess Aranyani. Patil's Katyayani is Mother Earth, so she was ignored and taken for granted by the male intellectuals in the upper forests - the saints. The book called the *Aranyakas* are part of the later Vedas like the Brahmanas and the Upanishads which are said to be the works of practitioners living in the forest, so they are named “Aranyaka”-“Forest”. Katyayani is also a part of the forest. As a provider of food and shelter, she understands the

forest in their way, expounding incomprehensible theories like Advaita and Shunya, and has never learnt to do it. The fairy doesn't understand nature, she does. Katyayani reconstructs for the reader an origin story before life dawned on Earth ("Even the Gods came later").

The main conflict of *Aranyaka* is also between the blind instinctive body and the rational logic of the mind. "There are Ys around us everywhere, otherwise remarkable people who think that the only way to sagesse is by 'going beyond' the body, by privileging the mind over the stomach, by renouncing rather than embracing the corporeal," says Patil. As Katyayani came to Y and came "the students in front of him showed that if the body is not supported by nutrition, the mind is just a container of weakness. The book is full of allegories and metaphors about our daily lives and decisions and (wo)man's relationship with nature. Whether it's beetles used to make dyes, Y's Harrapa men's clothing, or M's MohenjoDaro dancers, there are plenty of references about nature/mythology/history. The book also beautifully weaves history and mythology and does this in works of art and narrative. Karthika V.K., who has edited and published all of Patil's books - the first three while she was at HarperCollins India, and now *Aranyaka* at Westland affirms her author's deep and quiet certitudes. "Editing Amruta's work is a bit like editing film," she says. "You have to closely attend to continuity of colour, background, the outward appearances of characters."

The writer DevduttPattanaik and the illustrator AmrutaPatil have imaginatively transformed countless ideas into a novel- the key is that observational elements and the natural world have changed the way humans think. Patil's artwork is very beautiful-closely following the storyline, with a variety of vibrant shades and hues. The drawings are excellent, and the quality of the illustrations blends seamlessly with the characters. The bold use of colours, minimal lines and brushstrokes attract artists among readers. AmrutaPatil has the magical ability to weave deep knowledge about individuals, love, and forests into amazing words, symbols and images. Her characters are whole, her analogies profound, beautiful.

The paper also asserts that students are attracted to graphic novels because of their attractive images rather

than sentences that can be read in a short period. The graphic novel format invites them to express the last word about themselves and their experiences in a different way than pure prose. The study also attempts to explore how graphic novels promote education through STEAM education. The graphic novel pedagogy proved to be an important part of the ESL classroom because it uses visual literacy and critical thinking models. The graphic text represents a medium worthy of research and analysis, which provides teachers with useful background and vocabulary for attracting students' interests. A major aspect of media literacy is the concept of visual literacy. Teachers can allow students to participate in different levels of visual literacy training. For Burke (2003), bringing the visual into the classroom means providing students with an additional tool in their thought processes. Language mode, visual mode and gesture mode are all important to graphic novels and can produce meaning. Robust STEAM education can train critical thinkers, problem solvers and next-generation innovators. Therefore, this research proves that graphic novels provide more real-life ethics through images than real novels, and can be used to improve students' reading ability. The further scope of the research includes enhancing language learning in Indian classrooms through graphic novels.

References

1. Chun, C. W. "Critical literacies and graphic novels for English-language learners: Teaching". Maus. *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, 53(2), 144-153. 2009
2. Eisner, W. *Comics and Sequential art*. Paramus, NJ: Poorhouse Press. 1985
3. Frey, N., & Fisher, D. (Eds.). *Teaching Visual Literacy: Using comic books, graphic novels, anime, cartoons, and more to develop comprehension and thinking skills*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. 2008
4. Ganguli, K.M. *The Mahabharata, VanaParva*. MunshiramManoharlal Publishers. 1883
5. Hiemstra, G.(n.d). "Aranyaka, Aranyaka, Aranyaka: 13 definitions".Wisdom Library. Retrieved from

- <https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/aranyaka>. April 5, 2020.
6. Jha (Singh), V., and Chandran, M. "Reading a Retelling: Mahabharata in the Graphic Novel Form". *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, vol.9, no.4, 373-390. 2017
 7. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/citedby/10.1080/21504857.2017.1355823>.
 8. Krishnaswami, K.R. *The Amazing life of the Sage Supreme Yājñavalkya and His Towering Role in Brihadaranyaka*. 2007
 9. Muller, F. M. *Trans. The Upanishads*. Oxford, The Clarendon Press. 1884
 10. Patil, A, and Pattanaik, D. *Aryanka: Book of the Forest*. Westland Publications Private Limited. 2019
 11. https://www.livemint.com/mint-oung/features/amruta-patil-on-forests-and-the-making-of-her-graphic-novel-aranyaka-573225972729.html#box_11573225972729
 12. <https://www.thehindu.com/books/amruta-patil-aranyaka-book-devdutt-pattanaik/article29734233.ece>
 13. <https://www.womensweb.in/2019/12/aranyaka-book-of-the-forest-review-dec19wk4sr/>
 14. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lksMLBPdEEs>