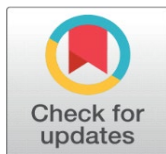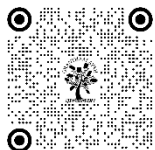# (CON) TEXTUALISING GOND ART AND PAINTINGS FOR LIFE WRITING AND INDIAN GRAPHIC NARRATIVE: REFERENCE TO BHIMAYANA: EXPERIENCES OF UNTOUCHABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The pictorial Gond style of artwork has its roots in the tribal Gond art tradition adopted for narrativising fiction *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability (2012)*, life writings of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. The Pradhan Gond artists Subhash Vyam and Durgabai Vyam interweave historical events with contemporary incidents using the Digna pattern of the Gond style visualising the stories with immense nuances and dynamics. The novel *Bhimayana* adopted Gond art to visualise and narrate the life of Ambedkar in a new way of seeing and corresponding to post-millennial trends in visual culture and comical creativity. This graphic novel *Bhimayana* is named after the hero for the comic version of the graphic narrative, sorrowful and miserable accounts of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar. The tribal Gond art and paintings had been contextualised in this fiction for interweaving the plot by bringing back story telling, symbolism, animal imageries, colours, patterns, figurative elements, and sequence of images etc. to constitute the novel, a narrative of comic and graphic strips. This paper will emphasise how this graphic novel *Bhimayana* juxtaposes past, present and future spatially on the page, linearly emphasising personal and historical modes while positioning itself on the high-brow of the literary canon of life narrative and Indian comics.

Keywords: *Bhimayana*, Gond Style, Graphic Narrative, Digna, Life Writing, Indian Comic

1. INTRODUCTION

Tribal as well as folk art and culture have a regional flavour created by individuals belong to different strata of society and genially incorporate the nomadic way of life. Along with Gond tribe, an excellent example of Indian tribal art was created by *Rathwa, Bhills and Nayka* tribes in Gujarat and Madhya Pradesh. The community's happiness and festivals are captured and themes from ordinary life may be seen in the tribal paintings which were created as home décor but now produced commercially on raw silk fabric. The bright animated deities Krishna,

Radha and numerous legends for example are shown in *Madhubani paintings*. Their original artistic community serves as the inspiration for their namesake. Other people like *Phad, Warli, Pithora and Choittora* also fall into the predominant categories of Indian ethnic art and paintings. The largest tribal group in India is Gond who live in the states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. The major figure of the Gond community, Pradhan Gonds, worked devotedly to preserve Gond tribal cultural history of India. The activists and patronages of Gond paintings dwindled over time which had a significant impact on traditional tribal paintings and art of Gond *c*ommunity. Due to this realisation, they adopted a visual storytelling style as a survival tactic to preserve their Gond Adivasi rich cultural heritage of India. For ornamental purposes, they first painted *Digna* patterns on the walls of their homes. Through the extensive usage of motifs and coloured mud of various types of tribal art, *Gond* people employed to tell the story in an ethnic form and afterwards active assistance of their talent gradually rose to prominence in the 1980's. One of the indigenous arts of Madhya Pradesh is *Gond painting* which is very significant to the *Gond* people's culture and religion. The *Gond* tribal people have a recorded history which dates approximately 1,400 years back in the regions where rock paintings from the visual ethnic era were found and their artists likely went back even further. Many of the Gond customs are Mesolithic and a particularly striking example of this is the practice of decorating walls of their homes which may have its roots in the cave dwelling traditions of our ancestors. The Gond art and paintings are customarily produced during festive occasions like *Karva Chauth, Deepavali, Holi, Nag Panchami* and other festivals. The *Gond* art generally depicts how the *Gond* tribes see themselves in the world and how their religious and philosophical convictions and daily activities are maintained. To maintain *Gond* art, Gond painters have altered the themes, hues and painting mediums utilised now compared to prior times. They show different holiday customs and interact with the natural world. The painter uses organic pigments made from cow dung, plants, and dirt with a tint similar to charcoal. The imaginative use of the line gives the static images in the mystical art form a sensation of movement and the dots and lines are assembled to create this ethereal form. The Pradhan Gonds of central India worked as itinerant bards and genealogists for their clients among the *Gond Adivasi* population before colonisation. The music, legends, dance styles and tattoos of the Gond people would all be covered in a larger study of their intangible cultural heritage. This Gond art and paintings, as the intangible heritage of the Gond people can be viewed as an expansive category which includes the realm of emotions - mystical associations and emotions that permeate their interactions with the natural world are the source of cultural practice, rituals and other forms of embodied traditional knowledge. How is this information transmitted and how are links of interdependence with the natural world created in daily life, as an intangible cultural heritage? Since the artwork of *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability (2012)* is incorporated in the Pradhan Gond style which is known as *Adivasi* or tribal Gond art, maintains a holistic connection with the tribal people. The decision to employ Gond art to illustrate and emphasise graphic life narrative of Dr. B. R. Ambedkar, an untouchable, in *Bhimayana: Experience of Untouchability* is resurrecting the nativistic art style of wretched of the earth as a collective consciousness. This somewhat makes this graphic narrative *Bhimayana* as a native production of Gond tribes in a very interesting way. The decision to take life sketch is risky since it might imply to individuals that the novel creates a dark side of India which is unfamiliar to the rest of the so-called civilised world. Ambedkar belongs to an untouchable caste who is a perpetual victim of subalternity, abjection and untouchability as belongs to *Dalit Adivasi/Subaltern group*. This *Dalit* literature, on

the other hand, is poorly read by contemporary literary critics. If *Dalit* historiography is, as the researchers suggest, a history of upper-caste fabrication and elision, then *Dalit* life writing might be interpreted as a correction to that past. Besides, as protest literature, *Bhimayana: Experience of Untouchability* has positioned itself as a revisionist history that brings *Dalits* back from the shadows as well as from a formalist revolution which pushes it from the hindrances which are considered as a literary limit. According to critical theory, hence, visual depiction of *Dalit* life in *Bhimayana: Experience of Untouchability* serves as a supplement to the upper-caste cultural monopoly. This graphic life narrative *Bhimayana,* therefore, enlightened the oppressive sides of *Dalits,* bringing back history and lost culture through the resurrection, representation, and reinterpretation of intangible cultural artistic tribal forms of India. Chakraborty (2020)
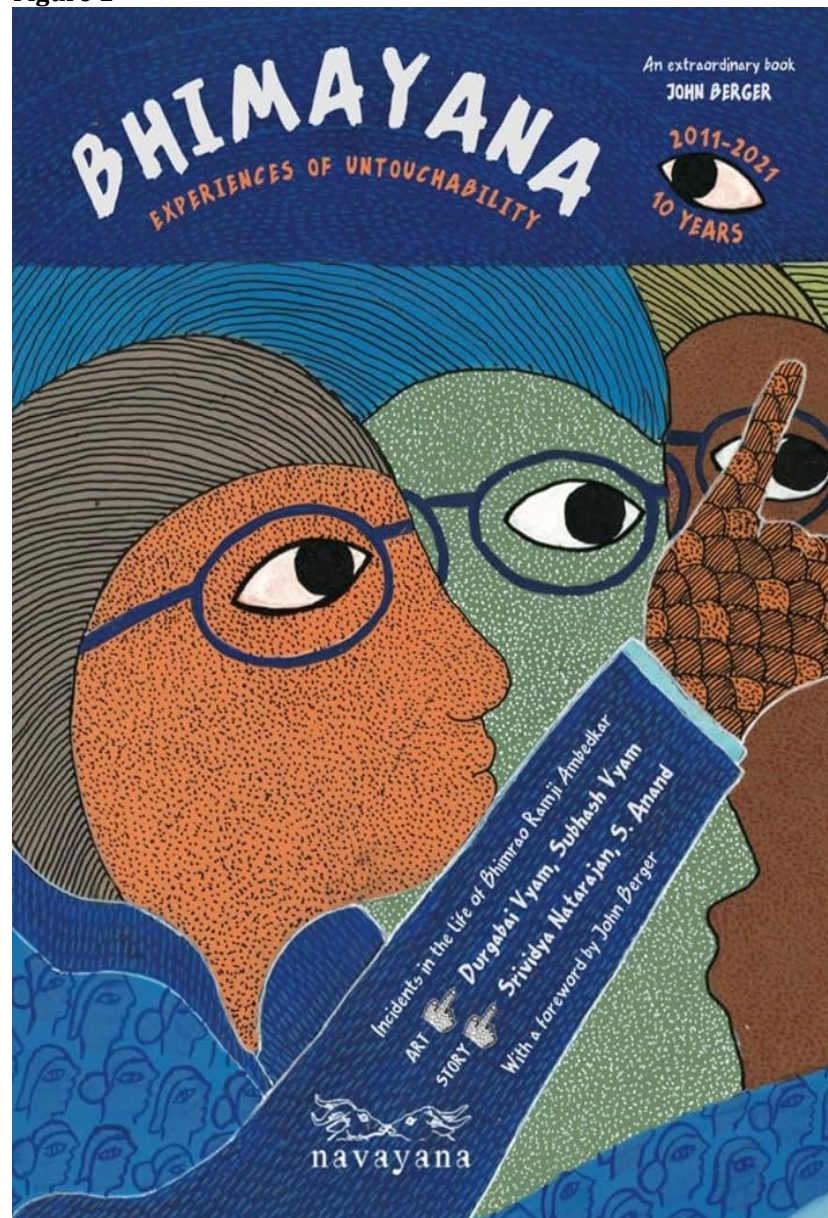
Figure 1

Figure 1 Gond Art on the Cover Page of Book *Bhimayana*: An Experience of Untouchability Taken from the Book.

Source https://www.scribd.com/document/342161221/Bhimayana-pdf

2. GRAPHIC WRITINGS IN INDIAN CONTEXT

Graphic narratives emerged as a new literary genre in India, sparking intense controversy and numerous concerns regarding their origins, cultural affiliation, language, narrative styles, and formal existence. These graphic novels in Indian perspective are comics in the novelistic form of books which deal with serious problems sufficiently and exorbitantly. Pramod. K. Nayar comments in his *The Indian Graphic Novel: Nation, History and Critique (2012)*:

> First, it is used simply as a synonym for comic books… Second, it is used to classify a format - for example, a bound book of comics either in soft or hard cover – in contrast to the old-fashioned staple comic magazine. Third, it means, more specifically, a comic book narrative that is equivalent in form and dimensions to the prose novel. Finally, others employ it to indicate a form that is more than a comic book in the scope of its ambition- indeed a new medium together. Nayar (2016), p. 4

In the literary form, graphic forms have unquestionably been classified as a new genre of literature, allowing authors to play with the structure of story in various ways going beyond the texts and conventional storytelling techniques. They fit with India's entire visual narrative history yet are considered something novel in the world of literature. It is imported from American and European continents in the graphic forms of children such as *Tintin*, *Asterix & Obelix and Superman*. It first emerged in India in the 1950's and 1960's as comic books for children and later began to gain popularity there in India. In Indian perspective, critic, and professor Pramod. K. Nayar defines graphic novel in his research paper "Radical Graphics: Martin Luther King Jr., B.R. Ambedkar and Comics/Auto/Biography":

> The word graphic here signals, first the visual dimensions of the medium and second the more popular sense of the term that highlights the explicitness with which oppression, injustice and inequality are mapped. Graphic in the narrative thus captures the impact of historically subjugating structures and events in their embodied form. Nayar (2016), 147-171

At the very beginning of the graphic narrative, readers of graphic/comic books in India were primarily privileged children with at least familiarity with the English language and were somewhat a pricey source of entertainment. On the other hand, all the comic or graphic books were inventions of the West and West-oriented popular culture in English language which reflects the comic narratives. However, a radical change occurred in Indian literature around the post 1960's. In 1960's, a leading English news paper, the Times of India and its publisher Bennet, Coleman & Co. introduced *Indrajal Comics*, a line of American-produced comic books. In due course, Hindi and other Indian languages in translated versions, like, *The Phantom* and other well-known American comics began to commercialise comics in India. The variety of comic book readers in India and Indian comics greatly increased after that point. Anant Pai, known as the *Indian Walt Disney*, launched *Amar Chitra Katha* (*Immortal Comic Stories*) in 1967. The stories from Indian epics, Indian history, mythology and religion were featured in these comic book series. Ananta Pai noticed children and young players in children's games were unable to respond to questions on Indian mythology and history. As a result, purpose of *Amar Chitra Katha* is to educate Indian children about their ancestry and each issue of this series is required to undergo extensive study to ensure that the information presented is accurate. Therefore, alteration had occurred as an alternative to Western comic series. In Indian comic series, it has been found that the first Indian superhero was not God but a common human being. As a man Fauladi Singh (Faulad Singh), was dubbed in

1978 with New Delhi's *Diamond Comics*. This character was developed using aspects from popular American comic books. Indian publishers (such as *Nutan Comics*, *Tulsi Comics*, *Fort Comics*, *Manoj Comics*, *Durga Comics, Raj Comics,* etc.) decided to seize the moment and begin releasing their unique comic books featuring Indian characters and incidents take place in India. The Bollywood star Amitabh Bachchan became a superhero in the 1980's for screening him in the Star Comics Series *Kisse Amitabh Ke* which was also published in English as *The Adventures of Amitabh Bachchan.* Surprisingly, from onwards graphic novels became increasingly popular after the 1980's and at the beginning of the 1990's. Many beneficiaries came with the form as it provided readers with a straightforward introduction to comic books because it delivered whole plot on an Indian background. Regular comic book fans who were sick of missing an issue in the middle of a storyline could now read the full story as a whole in the graphic novel format. By the late 1990's, graphic novels were added to public libraries, holdings, winning awards that had previously gone to prose works solely. The late 1950's saw the birth of a superhero comics which gained enormous popularity in the 1960's. The new super heroes symbolised by *Spider Man*, were infused with phobias and challenged as America had evolved into it a more self-reflective culture. In addition, 1960's saw the birth of underground comics such as *A Short History of Comics and Graphic Novels*, which, like the hippie revolution, showed unhappiness with middle-class norms. The humour, super heroes and other common comic books may be purchased in drug stores and on news stands. Since the early 2000's, Indian comic art has advanced significantly, reviving some of the earlier works and introducing fresh elements like new comic businesses, digitalization, graphic novels and updated stories and characters. The Indian comics industry has come a long way, but there are still many obstacles to overcome, including the need to reach multilingual, multicultural audiences. It needs to reign in the tendency to prioritise the commercial over the artistic, quantity over quality and advanced technology over engaging story telling. The business must also be watchful about the intrusion of Western and Japanese comics, over use of Indian mythological tales and the displacement of comics and their characters by artificial imitators known as *Cartoonised junk*. But the saddest fact is that this *Cartoonised junk* never applied it's positive endeavour to revive, revisit and re-animate the tribal or *Dalit* heroes' journeys in any graphics/comics /graphics literature, children's literature, movie or animation. In this regard, *Bhimayana: Experience of Untouchability* becomes an epoch-making graphic life writing in Indian perspective for unveiling social unrest, trauma, pain, sorrow and suffering of Ambedkar and his entire marginal society like a bildungsroman of English literature. Horstkotte & Pedri (2011)

3. ASSIMILATION OF GRAPHICS/COMICS WITH LIFE WRITING

A wide variety of autobiographical graphic narratives have been published in the past thirty years and gained popularity in the comics industry, popular culture, and some modern graphic memoirs. Harvey Pekar in *American Splendour* and Jeffrey Brown in *Little Things*, for example, have examined the details of daily life and concentrated on the themes of trauma and loss. The holocaust memories are examined in Art Spiegelman's *Maus*, Miriam Katin's *We Are on Our Own* and Martin Lemelman's *Mendel's Daughter*. The repercussions of illness and incapacity are covered in Brian Fies's *Mom's Cancer* (2006), Harvey Pekar and Joyce Brabner's *Our Cancer Year (1994)*, David B.'s *Epileptic* and Al Davison's *The Spiral Cage*. The comics have an odd relationship to the telling of life tales. There is currently a sizable and varied collection of graphic narratives that deal with a human subject which is either

in an extreme situation or in confronting a gruesome event. These comics or visual graphics in India may map a life both symbolically and literally due to its spatial norms. It can depict life on a single page very scientifically and systematically. The genre of graphics/comics subverts the spatial and chronological conventions to overlay or palimpsest past and present and can convey life events, especially tragic sides of life very powerfully and with a life-like visual mode. Comics are a word and image medium where words and pictures work together to construct their own literal as well as real images and unconnected story threads. Additionally, it is a form that fundamentally uses space to denote time and again by slicing precise intervals from the page's flow which can spatialise memory because it places the reader in a particular space. The term graphic life narratives describe the process of telling a life story using both text and images in a medium including picture books and comics. The word graphic describes the combination of visual images and vocal language and draws attention to the substance of texts, which, like that of other challenging picture books, may be upsetting. When authors and illustrators use texts and images to express their coming of age tales, they draw readers' attention to alternate landmarks, take them to uncharted territory and create a fresh interpretation of a well-known experience. The practice of narrating a life narrative using both texts and visuals in a format like picture books and comics which is known as graphic life writing. Therefore, the term graphic describes the fusion of visual imagery and spoken language and draws attention to the content of texts, which, like that of other challenging picture books, may be disturbing. When authors and illustrators utilise language and visuals to convey their coming stories, they direct readers' attention to alternative landmarks, lead them to unexplored territory and create a new interpretation of well-known experiences. This graphic/comic life writing is one approach to better comprehend schools or institutions with a history of excluding and segregating children based on their racial or ethnic backgrounds. The picture book memoirs and biographies discussed above defy stereotyped depictions that are frequently found in children's literature and culture and restore lives, pictures and experiences that have been destroyed by conventional history. Kothari (2013)

The name of historical comic novel *Bhimayana* is given after following the name of the epic *Ramayana*. The novel *Bhimayana* recounts the miserable life of an untouchable child named Bhima who overcomes his social, political, historical, and academic challenges as a *Dalit* hero of all time. The *Ramayana* describes the ordeal of hero Rama through many stages of life while overcoming challenges along the way. The text takes advantage of the epic's overall trip but it prevents the story from going too far in an epical emotional space. It demonstrates heroism's alternate history and subversive narrative of life writings of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. Indian epic *Ramayana* illustrates Rama's tale and the battles with Ravana that an upper-class prince had to wage to build his empire. The *Ramayana* illustrates the trials of an upper-class ruler who has defeated his opponents to create his realm. *Bhimayana* seems to convey a very different kind of impression related to life and the life cycle of Bhim. The narrative method of *Bhimayana* adopts a high style of epic proportions that is rich in formal conversational tone. The traditional hero in the novel is replaced by an untouchable boy from the *Mahar Community* and the narrative desperately chooses to depict Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's heroic journey and his battle for necessities of life. The graphic fiction *Bhimayana,* in this sense, is not only writing the story line of Bhim Rao Ramji Ambedkar but also symbolising the heroic journey of the hero and his entire community against the atrocities based on caste. Therefore, to reflect the biographical sketch, *Bhimayana* uses two deliberate structural tactics to convey dual processes such as historicity and contemporaneity.

The first tactic emphasised to re-telling Ambedkar's life narratives within a fictionalised account of contemporary India where the government's implementation of Ambedkar's proposed reservation policy has frequently exacerbated caste tensions and made members of upper castes feel victimised. The second way this life narrative of untouchable underdogs and illiterates are unable to write the literary texts to portray hero and heroism in a grand narrative or meta-narrative. This biographical sketch of Ambedkar had been portrayed through the tribal art and paintings which is more forceful and spontaneous in the deliberations of their traumatic feelings and sufferings. In modern times, these comics and graphics are more forceful parts of the expressions of the biographical discussions of Ambedkar in general. The text aims to depict the alternative historiography of India which fills the gaps between mainstream narratives and the negative sides of the struggle of lower classes. Through the life writing of Ambedkar, in this novel *Bhimayana,* authenticity of the Indian history is also questioned which had been made and narrated for the vested interest of the successive regimes of India. This *Dalit* biographical comic narrative *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability,* hence, in an Indian background becomes a very authentic record of the counter-narrative against Brahminism, its culture, politics and caste-based discrimination upon which the superhero Bhim suppressed. The *Bhimayana* as a novelistic format of graphic tale has also been used to confront traumatic experiences of the auto/biographical elements of Bhim to serve as a serious criticism of caste-based discrimination. It intermingles biography with a comic version of the Gond tribes of Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh with serious topics, aimed at adult audiences and presents a socio-political critique. It is significant as a life writing of B.R. Ambedkar to highlight the social criticism of *Bharat* spoken in public which has historically been known to have hazardous repercussions in specific times and places. The graphic novel *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability*, therefore, a biographical depiction of Ambedkar, hopes to pinpoint the unbridgeable generational divide and the risk factor of our intellectual hatred or depletion which run unequivocally and parallelly in Indian society. This phenomenal text *Bhimayana* as a graphic novel in India tries to bring a *Tsunami* over the past decade which would indicate that the genre, life narrative of Ambedkar is an appropriate graphic fiction of the indigenous style of *Dalit* hero from an Indian perspective. Hence, the native indigenous style of the Gond people had been upgraded in an unabashed and amiable situation from the local to the global platform. The conclusion of the book *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability,* propounds the ruthless caste, class, and racial discrimination against which the lower classes fight is not only a system framed by society rather it is also justifiably as a legal system to make this graphic narrative *Bhimayana* as an exemplified story of India's hidden apartheid. The media coverage and clippings which Durgabai and Subhash researched and incorporated into the text, demonstrated to the readers the oppressive system still functional in today's India. Shamshudeen (2022)

4. *BHIMAYANA: EXPERIENCES OF AN UNTOUCHABILITY* BIO-GRAPHICS OF A DALIT NAYAK

The Dalit biography, autobiography and life narratives are defining characteristics of modern national and international problems related to the emancipation of *Dalits*. With the use of real stories, this genre aims to recapture the vision and voices of *Dalit* people following the philosophy of B.R. Ambedkar. The writers of this genre are much more aware of the alternative forms of knowing and knowledge by speaking for themselves and transforming them from the mute and

passive objects of history. The texts *Joothan* by Omprakash Valmiki, *Akkarmashi* by Sharan Kumar Limbale, *Antasphot* by Kumud Pawde, *Karukku* by Bama etc. are the first generation of Dalit writings/Dalit life writings/Dalit life narratives in India. In Bengali Dalit literature, it has been also initiated by prominent Bengali Dalit stalwarts such as Manoranjan Byapari, Jatin Bala, Manohar Mouli Biswas and others. In their texts like *Interrogating My Chandal Life* by Byapari, *Life Uprooted: A Bengali Dalit Refugee Remembers* by Jatin Bala and *Surviva*l *in My World: Growing up Dalit in Bengal* by Manohar Mouli Biswas very strikingly elaborated the life narratives in their episodic novelistic form in third person narrative style as omniscient narrators. Additionally, it aligned with the idea of writing historiography, which focuses on linearly telling a story highlighting cause and effects. Hence, writing about oneself, therefore, becomes somewhat similar to genuine storytelling in a realistic manner. But the official reality seldom matches the realities on the ground. The exploitation of the Scheduled Castes/Tribes could not be stopped by the rights and invisible intellectual hatred invisibly thrives in society. The underdogs are still regarded as second-class citizens and therefore they are muted and their voices are always suppressed. Out of this vintage point, several notable members of the downtrodden began to question the wrong doings of the Hindu upper caste and realised the need to fight for their rights. Therefore, tribal Gond indigenous art style by the subaltern Gond artists was adopted for the portrayal of the underdog hero Ambedkar in his life sketch in an artistic form. The traditional Gond art and paintings of double dimensional flat figures defying common anatomical views in all of the drawings of *Bhimayana* adhere to this style of Indian native people. The images of nature as pictures in a geometric motif are realistically included. The flora and fauna are used in art to create a strong sense of ecological bond and style. According to Gond mythology and its ecological bond, folklore, imagination and tradition are combined and fused to create a new world where gods, birds, animals and man live peacefully in a harmonious way. The fiction *Bhimayana* succeeds by contributing to the visual literacy, graphic genre and taking challenges of recasting the marginalised subjection. The graphic narrative *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability* exceeds the number of these rules. The traits usually connected with this graphic novel are altered by the work of the tribal Gond community. The sequential graphics that are one of the most typical components of a traditional graphic book and what most people believe or inform about the tale are eliminated in *Bhimayana* by Anand, Natarajan, Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam. Regarding Gond art and paintings, Durgabai and Subhash Vyam comment: "We'd like to state one thing very clearly at the outset. We shall not force our characters into boxes. It stifles them. We prefer to mount our work in open spaces. Our art is *khulla* (open) where there's space for all to breathe" Maier (2012), p.102. The graphic novel *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability* purposefully incorporated the artistic form of tribal folk art into the printed page of what has primarily been borrowed from the Western form of comics meant to demonstrate a fundamentally different approach to graphic tales. The frame gutter sequence is a formal graphics technique in which the story *Bhimayana* is presented by pictures and phrases inside boxes like rectangular or square frames, each representing a specific instant in time and each frame is separated from the next by a white space referred to as the gutter. As John Berger comments in the 'Foreword' of the book *Bhimayana*: "This book offers a prophetic answer [to the loss of the stage to commercial interests] ... replace the stage of History with the Body of a community. A Body with a long past, a present of many voices, and vision of the future" Natarajan et al. (2012), p. 9.

The 'Water' portion was delineated pathetically through the childhood of Dalit hero Ambedkar in Book I of the novel *Bhimayana* like the life writing of Martin

Luther King Jr. of *King* by Anderson. Every person has the basic need for water which is a natural resource and no one should be denied this basic need for survival. However, because they were the oppressed group, untouchables were prohibited from utilising public wells, tanks and other facilities. From the beginning of the novel *Bhimayana,* we observe that a ten years old Bhim is very thirsty at his school in the village of Satara, Maharashtra. He was not permitted to have water from the tap, but he was allowed to die due to his thirst. Bhim as a little boy cannot understand why at school: "Every other student goes to the tap when the bell rings. By the time they are done, the peon has left. Furthermore, I'm not allowed to touch the tap" Natarajan et al. (2011), p.19. The peon suggested that he must trim his hair more often since it would make him feel less thirsty. The situation of the *Mahar* community in India was so dire that even the barbers would not touch them. The depths of Bhim's hunger reveal the anguish and societal struggles faced by all the *Dalits* collectively in India. Even harsher treatment than animals is meted out to humans in the shape of untouchability. The animals were free to quench their thirst from the public tanks, wells, ponds and rivers but untouchables were not allowed to drink water from tube wells and open tanks and wells. The *Dalit* groups, hence were frequently isolated from the greater society and lived in ghettos and hamlets on the fringes of the major towns. For months, the wells and hand pumps in their area ran empty. However, the untouchables are not allowed to go to other villages to fetch water from the wells that are not part of *Dalit* community. The higher caste employs henchmen with lathis to protect their hand pumps and wells because they are suspicious of the lower castes. Since young Ambedkar belongs to the untouchable caste, he is not allowed to use the water pump at school. The little Bhim is seen begging for some water with his palms extended hands. A caste system that would deprive someone of water is represented by the intelligent begging child Ambedkar at the school.
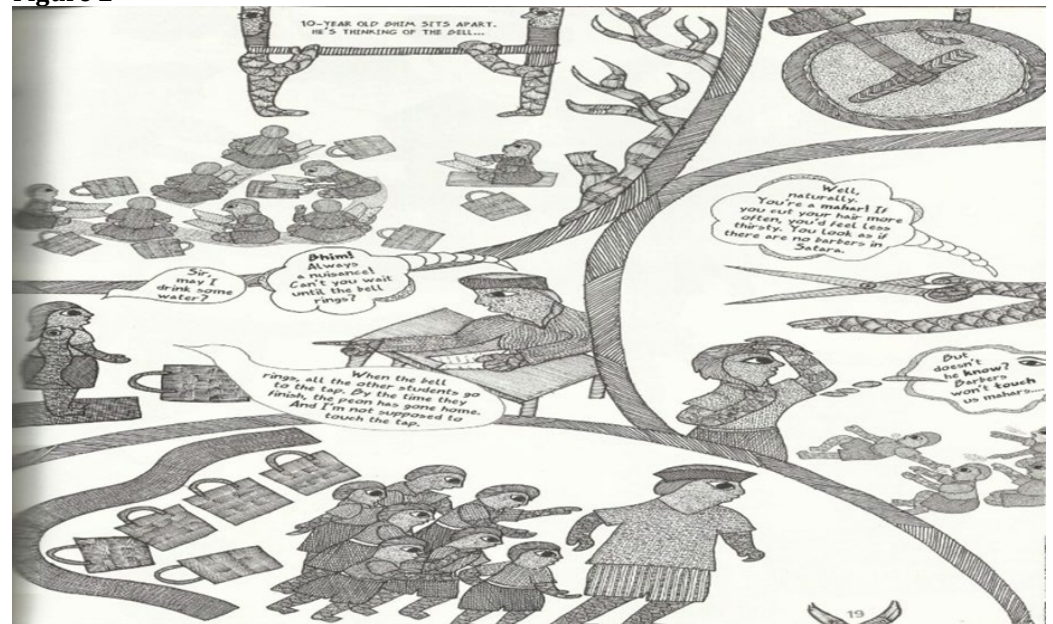
Figure 2

Figure 2 Part II 'Water' of the Novel *Bhimayana*: An Experience of Untouchability, Ambedkar is Denied Entry into the Classroom. The Image is Taken from the Book *Bhimayana.*

Source https://www.scribd.com/document/342161221/Bhimayana-pdf

Figure 3

Figure 3 Part II 'Water' of *Bhimayana*. Here little Ambedkar is Denied to Touch the Water Pump at the Schoolyard. The image is from *Bhimayana: Experience of Untouchability.*

Source https://www.scribd.com/document/342161221/Bhimayana-pdf

In the 'Shelter' part II of *Bhimayana: Experience of Untouchability* when little Bhim was a grown up as a highly educated man and returned from Columbia University with a foreign degree. He hopes to reunite with friends which will be particularly memorable as he returns to his homeland. Like everyone else, Bhim yearned to go back home to have his own land and expected love, compassion, and respect. He even wants to see his pals again but how could he ever forget that he was a *Mahar*. When asked whether the Raja would take him, Bhim said that he needed shelter to find a place to stay. This location is only a place to settle down, it cannot be home because it is unfamiliar. Ambedkar discovers an ancient Parsi inn and thinks they will accommodate him because their faith forbids untouchability and caste system. But Ambedkar is informed to vacate the room because the lodge was only for Parsi people when he reveals that he is a Hindu. They arranged and proposed to Ambedkar that he would be registered with a Parsi name because there were no other consumers here at the lodge. The Hindu and Christian friends are not interested in sheltering him and this harsh treatment has been depicted symbolically as a sharp arrow aimed at Ambedkar. The files were tossed at him at the workplace rather than given to him or placed on his desk, emptiness of their working room at home. The travelling starts with the hurdle of travelling experiences of Ambedkar and his travelling to various parts of India with other political workers at the age of 43 in the year 1934. The reminiscences of the protagonist of *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability* at the village Challisgaon with a *Tonga* which met an accident. This section 'Travel' of *Bhimayana* delineates the argument between Ambedkar and Gandhi in respect of freedom movement of India and the caste and class problems of India. In this section, Ambedkar expresses his arguments about the Dalit people of India who are devoid of political consciousness and are not at all organised in their social and political life. He, as a visionary struggled hard to provide equal rights to women through the *Hindu Code Bill*. Ambedkar is even more excited about riding on a train for the first time when he sees a lot of pictures like a walking tree, serpent-like roads, clear skies and

singing birds. Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar discovered a stunning fort while travelling around India. A neighbouring tank was touched during this time by Ambedkar, a dignified man by then who expressed his desire to wash himself as he felt parched. They were immediately subjected to allegations of harassment by a group of persons who said they were members of the *dheds* community. Ambedkar recollected his childhood days at school when he was treated with the same disrespect by the people. Likewise, Ambedkar's proclamation during the *Mahad Satyagraha* when he reclaimed the Chavadar tank as public property and argued that everyone should have equal access to water. This is regarded as a flood of water for all Dalits. In this period his book *Buddha and His Dhamma* gives a social message about the long lasted untouchability of Hinduism. He felt that conversion to Buddhism would give underdogs equality and respect which reformation zeal gave birth to the word *Jai Bhim.* Lent (2015)

Figure 4

Figure 4 Part III 'Shelter' of *Bhimayana* where Untouchability Makes Ambedkar Homeless. The Image is taken from *Bhimayana: Experience of Untouchability.*

Source https://www.scribd.com/document/342161221/Bhimayana-pdf
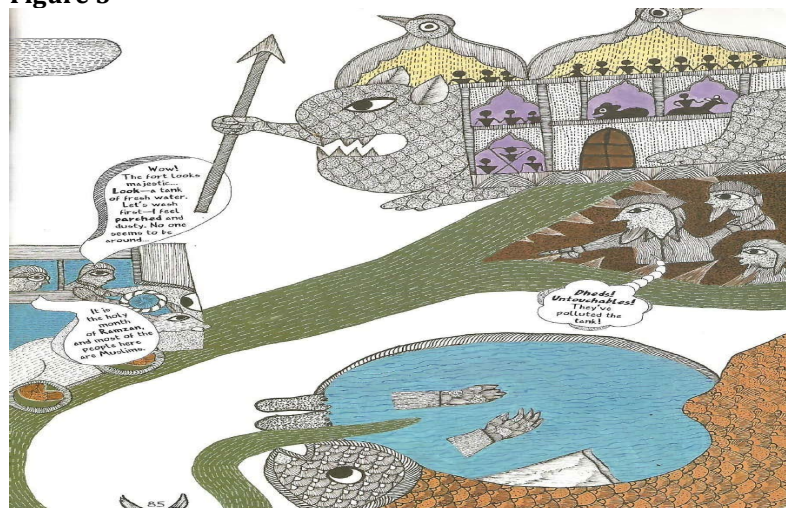
Figure 5

Figure 5 Ambedkar's Conversion to Buddhism with his Followers in Mahar Satyagraha in Maharashtra. Picture Extracted from the Book *Bhimayana*: Experience of Untouchability.

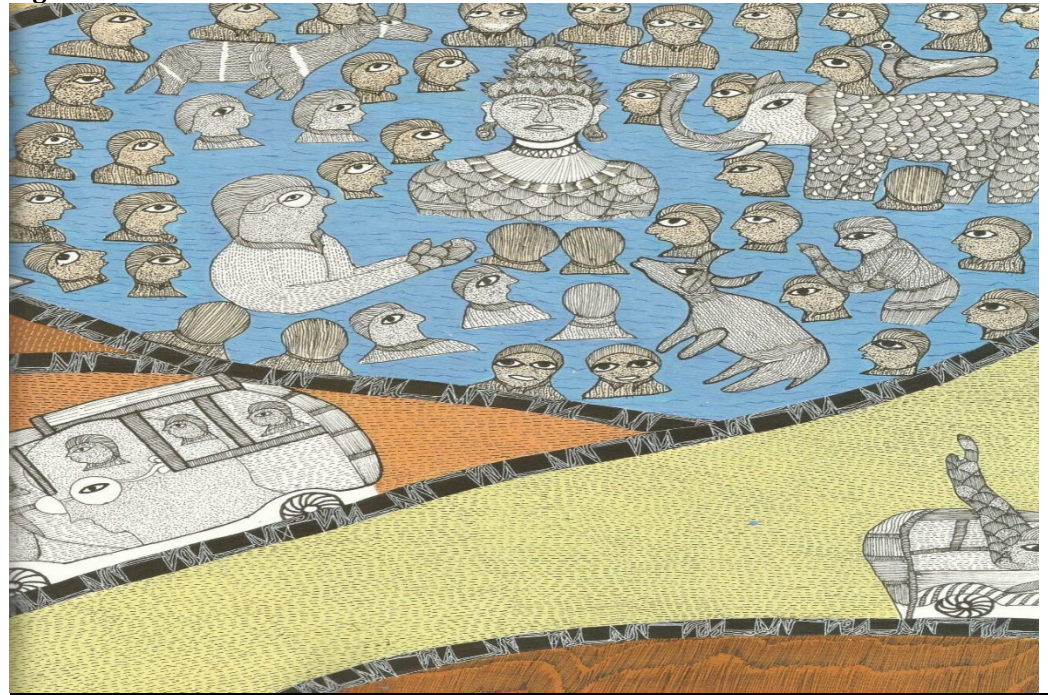**Source** https://www.scribd.com/document/342161221/Bhimayana-pdf

Figure 6

Figure 6 Being a Political Figure, Ambedkar in Part IV 'Travel' of Bhimayana Attacked by Local People for Washing his Face from a Neighbouring Tank. The Image is from the Book Bhimayana: Experience of Untouchability.

Source https://www.scribd.com/document/342161221/Bhimayana-pdf

The critics observed novel *Bhimayana* like Ho Che Anderson's biographical graphic novel *King,* questions the problems of human suffering, individual predicament and crisis through which national history and social trauma in graphic life writings are mediated and lived. Ho Che Anderson's *King* is about Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and *Bhimayana* by Natarajan and S. Anand is about Ambedkar's life. Surprisingly, both the life narratives provide a documented account of the history of social inequality, injustices and oppression in India and USA respectively. At the same time, *Bhimayana* is not only a record of the life of a subaltern hero, rather, it composes, constructs, and turns biography into an artistic iconographic exercise. In that process, struggle for existence of Dalit people becomes a unique aesthetic quality as well as a visionary and magical condition of survival. This marks a significant change in literary aura in the way tribal artists have portrayed their art and paintings. In this respect, a large portion of the Dalit life narratives deal with repressive material realities with a grim realism in both tone and style. Therefore, *Bhimayana: Experience of Untouchability* may be interpreted as a narrative and stylistic protest against the *ghettoisation* of marginalised for realism, factual and authentic testimony. Masschelein et al. (2021), Williams (2020)

5. CONCLUSION

The graphic novel *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability* combines literary and artistic elements to provide a broad range of artistic expressions which are more authentic life narratives rather than just narratives. By forcing the readers to confront socio-political challenges and oppressions of those around us, this combination helps the readers to relate to the subject on a personal level. The 'bio-graphics' of Ambedkar's *Bhimayana: An Experiences of Untouchability* still accessible

as a potentially powerful site for visualising and imagining significantly, significantly relevant to politics and aesthetics of protest rooted in Indian history both in the history of caste and in the history of folk art - even though there are currently no documented evidences of it inspiring protest movements. The graphic novel, *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability*, therefore, introduces a multifaceted complexity in which an array of symbolic art and artistic systems combine to produce a postcolonial literacy regarding caste and class of India. Discovering an open artistic medium that would embrace the idea of a casteless and liberal society to which Gond art and paintings gave a fitting tribute. The writers and artists of the graphic novel have raised their understanding of their work and the topics covered by breaking conventions of the genre. This book is not viewed by readers as a graphic novel, rather, it is an ensemble of ethnic paintings which illustrate a story and appeal to a more sophisticated readership. Therefore, underdogs' pain and trauma have been emphasised through the neglected artistic form of the Adivasi community and Adivasi artists which proves that the fate of art depends upon the hands of the upper class. But *Bhimayana* tries to create a *Dalit* hegemony and subaltern consciousness for the sake of all of the coming *Dalit* generations. In conclusion: "*Bhimayana* is a small effort to … make Ambedkar's story universal. If the lives and experiences of Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela and Malcolm X could resonate universally, Ambedkar's - and those of millions of Dalits in India - ought to as well" Conway & Sol (2022), p.103.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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