

Anthropomorphism in Indian Visual Narratives

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Abstract—The study of images begins to flourish because of the ubiquity of visual representations in communication. A visual medium communicates across ages and languages. Each artifact, like strokes, colours and gestures, has its specific meaning that highlights human behaviour. In stories, animals in human form delight and capture the audiences' attention. The selection of animals and their projected ways reflects more than what is expressed directly in the text. As a result, anthropomorphism (nonhuman entities that talk and act like human) is widely used as a communicative tool to insist on sensitive themes. Simultaneously, there is a belief that anthropomorphism misattributed human-like abilities to nonhuman which can risk the people's approach towards nonhuman. This paper identifies some of the degrees of anthropomorphism noted in Indian visual narratives from Malik's *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir*, Gupta and Rastogi's *Chhotu: A Tale of Partition and Love*, Amar Chitra Katha's *Animal Tales from India*, Samhita Arni's *Sita's Ramayana*, Amruta Patil's *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest* and Samit Basu's *Tall Tales of Vishnu Sharma: Panchatantra*. The study researches the role and importance of anthropomorphism in visual narratives.

Index Terms—visual narratives, anthropomorphism, graphic novels, illustrations, children's literature, India

I. INTRODUCTION

"Welcome to the age of images; the signs are everywhere - for those who can read them." (Burmark, 2002, p. 2)

Visual narratives are trendy and more popular than traditional narratives in children's literature. Visual narratives are also known as 'visual storytelling', narrating the story using photos, videos, and graphics. Illustrated tales are built in a sequence of events and documented as picture books, comic books, and graphic novels. It balances the visual space and scripture space. These narratives follow the format, including text, images, panels, word balloons and sound effects. According to Osewalt (n.d.), children understand the narrative by connecting themselves with the text, raise curious questions, visualise the scenes in mind, look for clues, identify the characters, check the understanding level and try to express what they have learnt from the text. Visual aids captivate, allow children to understand the entire story and, eventually, encourage them to react to real-life situations. However, visuals and text combine both processes and give a child a clear view of text and the world around them.

Fantasy, mystery, and adventures are key denominators in children's books, notably when characters are imaginative. Animals with human features in the stories add to the excitement and effectively convey the theme. Children's love for animals is inevitable; they love to have pet animals. Their continuous interaction with nature and curiosity (Burke & Copenhaver, 2004) motivates writers to create human-animal characters in children's literature. This 'not-quite-human yet not-quite-animal characters' mesmerises the children and rekindles their imagination. Animal stories, in general, begin with a problem, and a solution is found in the course of the book. These books generally involve children to know the fundamentals of morality and end on a happy note. The animal characters help premature children to explore complex topics. It grades up children's relationship with animals and nature. The humanised feature of animals in stories is known as anthropomorphism; they talk, act, dress, think, and feel like human—this anthropomorphic device in books connects human with the universe. Commoner's (1971), the first law of ecology, 'everything is connected to everything else' suggests each thing has a connection either with the physical (environment) nature or the inner (character) nature. Nothing exists; peaceful existence is always better than mere existence without nature. In a way, anthropomorphism takes advantage of the visual components to develop the reader's inner nature.

In literary history, anthropomorphism plays a significant role; primitive storytellers use animals as an antagonist to dramatise man's ceaseless struggle against the forces of nature. Moreover, they are in didactic stories like Aesop's fables too. Some of the well-known anthropomorphic children's books are Kenneth's *The Wind in the Willows*, Beatrix's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, Dr Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat*, Lewis's *Alice in Wonderland*, A. A. Milne's *Winnie the Pooh*, and E.B White's *Charlotte's Web*. The research focuses on distinguishing features of anthropomorphism employed in visual narratives.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The representation of animals is found in ancient paintings and carvings; the stories are the creation of human with animal bodies and animals with human behaviours. For example, *Panchatantra*'s story Turtle and the Geese was

sculpted in Nalanda Temple (7th century CE). The natural resources are worshipped as deities, as the human feel one with nature. According to Bailey (2010), anthropomorphism portrays Gods and supernatural powers who appear and act like humans, both outside and inside the world. Human and animal representations may be combined by the gods, as in animal-headed human beings. Greek mythical characters Bastet, Thoth, Horus, Anubis Sphinx and Hindu mythological deities Hanuman and Narasimha are great documentaries for the presence of anthropomorphism from antiquity.

Animal stories dated from the sixth century, like well-known *Aesop's Fables*, teach good behaviour in children. Blount's views, *Aesop's Fable* used the allure of animals and narrative to reach out to his audience in a unique way, and the strategy has been picked up, expanded, used, and replicated till the animal moral story grows tedious after a while (Blount, 1975). Animal stories offer an innate connection between children and nature. Thus, Fraustino (2016) voices in article named "The Rights and Wrongs of Anthropomorphism in Picture Books", that nonhuman characters in literature simplifies the severe subject of death while also resolving the problematic human-nonhuman relationship. It exposes children to reality or life truths such as death, poverty and sufferings, which is basically absent in children's literature.

You (2021), in his paper titled "The Necessity of an Anthropomorphic Approach to Children's Literature", disclosed anthropomorphism as a touchstone for exploring aesthetics and ethical problems in children's literature. His research exhibits anthropomorphic tales that resist allegorising nonhuman as a person and animal-related themes and builds other significant comments to young readers about human-animal relations in the Anthropocene.

Epley et al. (2007) state, Anthropomorphism is the tendency to instil human-like features, motivations, intentions, or feelings into the real or imagined behaviour of nonhuman agents. His article titled, "On Seeing Human: A Three-Factor Theory of Anthropomorphism" explains three psychological determinants: elicited agent knowledge, reflectance motivation, and sociality motivation. This theory on robot gives insights into the human-computer interaction and the inverse process of dehumanisation. The extension of this theory is followed in "When We Need a Human: Motivational Determinants of Anthropomorphism", where he examines motivational determinants: sociality and effecting motivations. This theory offers unique predictions regarding anthropomorphism's dispositional, situational, cultural, and developmental diversity (Epley et al., 2008). Waytz et al. (2010) assert that "Psychologists have used the term anthropomorphism rather loosely to describe everything from mistaken inferences about nonhuman agents to almost any kind of dispositional inference about a nonhuman agent, definitions that do not fit with the actual dictionary definition of ascribing 'human characteristics or behaviour to a god, animal, or object'" (p.221). Eventually, his article titled "Who sees human? The stability and importance of individual differences in anthropomorphism" focuses on an individual variation in anthropomorphism are used to forecast how much moral care and concern an agent is given, how much responsibility and confidence is put on an agent, and how much an agent acts as a source of social influence on the self (Waytz et al., 2010). It addresses how understanding anthropomorphism influences the growing study of nonhuman as well as the traditional concerns that underpin the perception of a person.

Leshner (1992) stated that Xenophanes (6th BCE) coined anthropomorphism to characterise gods and other supernatural beings. So, he introduced two divisions: the first includes assigning human-like physical characteristics (such as a face or hands) to nonhuman. In contrast, the second entails attributing a human-like intellect to nonhuman (e.g., intentions, conscious awareness, secondary emotions such as shame or joy). May Hill Arbuthnot, a critic of children's literature, categorises animal stories into three: firstly, animals dress and act like human; secondly, animals talk but act naturally and thirdly, in which animals were 'objectively' described (Markowsky, 1975). Ms Burnford suggests that the categories of Hill express a child's reading chronology. Children enjoy dressed animals, then progress to more realistic and objective treatment. An anthropomorphism makes the unfamiliar appear to be more familiar to the reader. Juliet Kellogg Markowsky gives four reasons for the authors to employ anthropomorphic activities in writing for children. The first reason is to enable the readers to identify with the animals; the second is for the fantasy's flight; the third is for variety, and humour is the last reason. In "Four Degrees of Anthropomorphism", Emslie (2007) presents common approaches towards creating animals. Displaying human emotion with animal behaviour; animals communicate amongst themselves but remain animal-like human; animals as human types, but they retain specific animal-like characteristics; completely humanised behaviour. The lack of study in the field of anthropomorphic methods, notably in Indian visual narratives, necessitates this research.

III. METHODOLOGY

The textual analysis method is used in the study to analyse anthropomorphic depictions in Indian Visual Narratives. This study focuses on recognising the degrees of anthropomorphism in Indian graphic narratives like Malik Sajad's *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir*, Gupta & Rastogi's *Chhotu: A Tale of Partition and Love*, Amar Chitra Katha's *Animal Tales from India*, Samhita Arni's *Sita's Ramayana*, Amruta Patil's *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest* and Samit Basu's *Tall Tales of Vishnu Sharma: Panchatantra*. Despite the definition of the term 'anthropomorphism' as 'the attribution of human characteristics or behaviour to a god, animal, or object', the research is limited to talking about animal characters and animals that display anthropomorphic behaviours. The paper touches on visual artifacts like shades/strokes and colour and gradually analyses image format from black & white illustration to digital art. However, the cynosure of the article lies in the degrees of anthropomorphism as conceived from May Hill Arbuthnot's animal stories categorisation and Pete Emslie's theory on anthropomorphism.

IV. DEGREES OF ANTHROPOMORPHISM IN VISUAL ARTS

An illustration is an interpretation or explanation of text that expresses additional details about characters to elicit an emotional response. The story elucidates with a dynamic blend of illustration and text. For improved comprehension, it adds emotions and background information to the text. As a result, visual storytelling educates, informs, and entertains the audience. Images have connotative and denotative meanings. It symbolises the emotion and struggles while outlining everyday actions. Visual narratives enable the fantasy world in children and mould them with different perspectives apart from text ideas to deal with life hitches. The successful explanation of abstract concepts is accomplished by integrating new innovative ideas of modern technology into visual art. It also works as a documentary on people's daily lives in the current era. Illustrations convey the sensitive issues and realistic depictions effortlessly but effectively without disturbing in the reader's environment. From an illustration view, anthropomorphism is to engage the readers and communicate the message (Dallacqua, 2012). In literature, anthropomorphic animals enable a child to relate to a character as their peer. Animals as characters create emotional distance from personal, powerful and painful themes. A visual narrative has a precise meaning in relation to the context, including line, colour, shape, words, space, and texture. Variations in artifacts are assigned to narrate actual happenings other than the plot and elicit the audience's emotion.

Degree A: Fully Recognised as Human in a Human World

Storytellers prefer anthropomorphic representations to explain people's daily lives. Malik's *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* is an anthropomorphic book in which Kashmiri people are depicted as Hangul, their national, regional animal. It is to spotlight the Kashmiri people, and Hangul are endangered species. The story is about Munnu, a little Kashmiri boy and his early life experience. The illustrator provides visual cues to identify each character, such as wearing a tie. His sketches of dogs, hangul deer, and human representation distinguish Kashmiri people from the Indian army. The author draws the influenced from the works, Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Joe Sacco's *Palestine*. The everyday life of the Kashmiri people, their struggle and their politics are illustrated through anthropomorphism. The illustration gives minuscule and rich details about the background. A feature of anthropomorphism is that humanised animals behave similarly to human, such as moving on legs, conversing, dressing up, carrying props and blending into the human world. The below Figure.1 artwork from the novel depicts drawing, drinking, weariness, driving, sobbing, and pleading. A reader can understand the illustration without written description that Hangul loosening his tie implies he was exhausted; the bike riding signifies that they are in a hurry in the middle of the army forces.

The text reflects a person's idea or dialogue, but the illustration provides additional details to the text about the incident's context, scene, and tone. The combination of text and illustration brings the people's emotions before the reader's eyes. Colour is a designer's tool for reflecting the chroma, hue and value to induce reaction with the context. The colours, black and white, are employed to emphasise the stark gloom of reality. To convey the variety of intensity, thin and heavy strokes are used rather than shades. Visual narrative is conceivable for the sight of horror and violence occurring in the complex nation. It provides eye-opening knowledge to readers who have never envisioned the suffering of Kashmiris.



Figure 1: Munnu: A Boy From Kashmir

Degree B: Replacing Human Face with Animal Face

Another aspect of anthropomorphism is replacing the human face with an animal face. An animal face illustration symbolises the character's nature, like dog-faced characters denoting monitoring and protecting ability. The relationship

between the emotional response evoked by visual artists' strategies anthropomorphising animal faces or dehumanising people's faces and bodies, on the other hand, is an invitation to narrative empathy proffered by graphic storytelling (Keen, 2011). In Gupta & Rastogi's *Chhotu: A Tale of Partition and Love*, multiple animal faces are merged with the human body. It is a story of an orphan boy Chhotu who tries to recognise his life's meaning across religious and cultural identities in the Indian partition period. Illustration tries to explore religious unity, class struggle and divisions in the form of anthropomorphism. Presenting the past through animals' eyes transforms the readers to create changes in the future. The new variety of using multiple animals faces with the human body is to pin the diverse people's presence in India. Illustrators make use of the background to picturise the context through texture. This creative combination of illustration and language binds the reader with this unique style as it widens their imagination to unbox the metaphor usage in novels. The background with the grades of darkness is to level the period's violence and highlight the inner emotion of a person as blank and dark. Visual allusions with the running texts, "we're all animals after all" (Rastogi & Gupta, 2019, p.143) and "Indians and dogs are not allowed" (Rastogi & Gupta, 2019, p.22), convey that both human and animals are equal. It suggests that the reader, a human to think of himself in the place of represented animals. As expressed by Markowsky (1975), anthropomorphism allows readers to relate with performing characters while amusing them with knowledge, and leads to abrupt changes in their life.

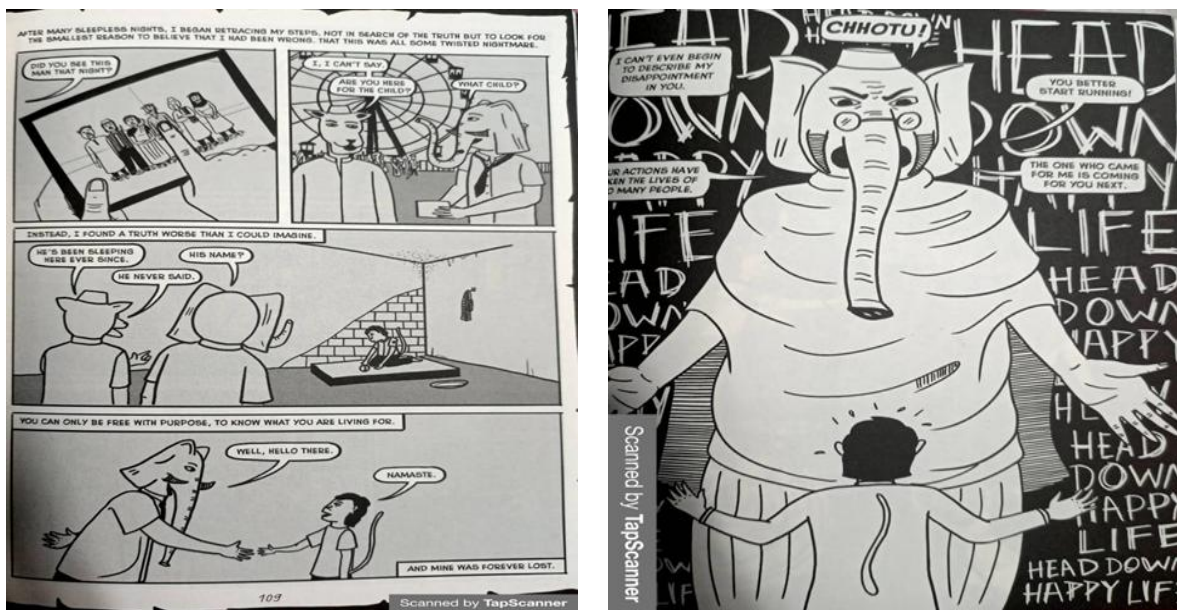


Figure 2: Chhotu: A Tale of Partition and Love

Degree C: Animals with Biological Identity and Talking Ability

Animals are presented with a biological identity and talking ability through speech balloons. Amar Chitra Katha's *Animal Tales from India* are ancient stories intended to teach morals and lessons. It is not just a story for and about children but serves as a nostalgic reminder. Each story from Amar Chitra Katha is tailored to India's cultural phenomena. Social issues, the environment, and animal rights are addressed in the stories. Using Anthropomorphic figures in writings creates environmental awareness and a love for nature. Unlike digital illustration, Indian visual storytelling emphasises inherited ideas from the past. The costumes, settings, and colour choices in handmade artwork express various emotions, postures, and gestures. The below illustration from Amar Chitra Katha contrasts the idea of the food chain that the rat helps the cat on the right side of Figure 3 and the tiger and the fox having a harmonious conversation. Thus, the animal stories appeal to the children more than dealing with scientific facts, it insists on moral values.



Figure 3: Animals Tales in Ancient India

Degree D: Animals Pictured Partially with Human Traits Integrated Into the Human World

Anthropomorphic animals are pictured as if they were human. Generally, humans are classified into man and woman, but in animal stories, the classification differs as men, women, and anthropomorphic characters—these humanised animals are believed to be one among human. According to Arni's depiction of Hanuman in *Sita's Ramayana*, a monkey in human form acts like a human. Even though the plot is based on the classic epic *Ramayana*, it is told from the women's perspective. Anthropomorphic characters can be observed from the opening of the text; the illustration of a crying flower empathises with Sita, "who was she? The forest wondered. What was she doing here? And why was she crying? She knew the forest watched her, and she heard the whispered questions" (Arni, 2011, p.8). Maricha turned into a golden deer to attract Rama's attention and screamed out in animal form, "Sita, Sita." (Arni, 2011, p.19) Both depict the aspects of anthropomorphic utilisation to soothe and distract people by appealing to their emotions. Finally, the vanaras, Hanuman, Vali, and Sugriva, are regarded as humanoid beings with animal qualities. This anthropomorphic portrayal of human symbolically represents the idea of social class stratification. The novel illustration is unlike other graphic illustrations following the Patua style of art with solid and assertive strokes to hold the traditional culture. The earthy colour palette in the work provides the impression that the characters come from the soil, which denotes the skin colour of Indian people and makes the readers feel one with the text. It does not mean Indian texts are meant for Indian readers but as a depiction of rich Indian culture and a literary source for those who want to learn more about India. Despite the story's powerful themes of death, war, violence, and betrayal, the illustration balances the intensity of the theme that does not affect the reader's emotions.



Figure 4: Sita's Ramayana

Degree E: Normal Animals with Human Emotions

Anthropomorphic elements are deployed to represent the character's inner emotion. In graphic storytelling, animals define the character's personality (Jardim, 2013). It is reflected in Amruta Patil's *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest*. Natural analogies and allegories describe human lives and personalities in this story; aside from these metaphors, Figure 5 illustrates an animal communicating with a man. The black panther is a representation of the character's (Katyayani) inner self. Katyayani, the protagonist of the novel, enormously indulged with nature, finds herself within the forest. In her isolation, she communicates with the black panther and her grove. Figure 5 displays the understanding of an animal towards human's emotion. The uniqueness of the illustration is hand-drawn and water-coloured, making the images with running texts more translucent and luminous.



Figure 5: Aranyaka: Book of the Forest

Degree F: Animals to Replace the Human Characters or Animals in Human Form With Moderate Animal Identity

Animals replace the human characters to convey the message in a human acceptable way. "Inanimate objects can do what people are not able to, or cannot" (Derby, 1970, p190). *Tall Tales of Vishnu Sharma: Panchatantra* is a graphic novel about searching for a guardian to protect the ancient story *Panchatantra*, which includes ancient to modern-day story characters. It is a coming-of-age story that attempts to preserve the essence of Indian folklore from extinction. Actual *Panchatantra* is an ancient fable intended to inculcate moral values in three princes of the ages with traditional cultural values; this novel covers how westernisation tries to merge and affect ancient values and culture. Various kinds of animals depicted in the novel are compared to a rallying cry of people to defend their ideals. It is not to project India, particularly as a multicultural nation but to celebrate an individual's uniqueness. Figure 6 displays human characters being replaced by animals; an old tortoise for an older man and two cranes for a woman. The connotative meaning of Figure 6 is an effort of the animal to communicate with readers. It is reflected in the action of the animal crew members' taking human form to speak with the guardian, such as the cow, lion, and monkey transforming into a human, which is exposed on the right side of Figure 6. Graphic illustration attracts modern readers and provides multiple meanings according to the context and position of the illustration. The dark space and empty blank page full of black colour denote the story's pause and the horror effect of the upcoming age.



Figure 6: The Tall Tales of Vishnu Sharma: Panchatantra

V. CONCLUSION

Graphic Novels in India are known for their idiosyncratic illustrations with running texts. In India, anthropomorphic representations can be seen in illustrations, carvings and puppets. Although some researchers believe that anthropomorphic portrayal is a wrong perception of animals that leads to inaccuracy, anthropomorphism is popular among people because of its diversity and humour. Anthropomorphism, on the other hand, allows readers to discover the hidden context behind the artwork while simultaneously conveying delicate issues in a more straightforward manner. Though the sketching style is different to artists, the artwork speaks more on the artist's intension than the text. This research examines illustrations from Indian graphic storytelling and assigns degrees to various types of anthropomorphism: Degree A: animals act in the same way as human do in order to understand people's daily lives; Degree B: substituting animal faces for human faces to emphasise the diversity of people across the world; Degree C: animals having the ability to communicate to reinforce cultural norms; Degree D: animals are humanised is to empathise nature; Degree E: replacing human character is to convey the message in an acceptable human way; Degree F: the reader's feeling was linked to the anthropomorphic figure through animal depiction. This is a preliminary investigation into detecting various degrees of anthropomorphism in different texts; for further study, each degree of anthropomorphism may be examined in detail in specific novels.

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