

Framing Conflict: Resilience and Hope in Visual Stories from Conflict Zones

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Abstract: Childhood is often depicted as an age of carefree days, and literature for children and young adults is written with this in mind. Yet the contemporary reality of the world we live in and the childhood endured by some children presents a different picture. There is an alternate narrative of childhood unfolding in conflict zones. This Paper is an attempt to analyse how childhood is mapped in these conflict zones by analysing Debsmitha Dasgupta's *Terminal No 3*.

Keywords: Childhood, Young Adult literature, Conflict Zone, Graphic novel

Narratives of various kinds form and shape our everyday lives. They carry memories and histories and express the heterogeneity of experiences and formation of cultures. Among the many different genres of literary narratives, Children's Literature is often viewed as the literature written for children, though they don't have the agency over its production or consumption. In the earlier period, though fables and tales of a didactic nature existed, they were part of the folklore and not something exclusively designed for children. The seventeenth-century philosopher, John Locke, gave thrust to the nurturing and education of a child as the responsibility of an adult and defined the role that society should play in a child's development. Hence, most of the children's literature was didactic in nature, trying to instil a value system to develop them into ideal citizens. Children's literature traditionally didn't involve depiction of violence. The latter half of the 20th century witnessed a shift in this perspective as the world became a place of more and more violent conflicts.

Depiction of war and other conflicts as major themes in children's literature has been much debated. Some of the critics have opined that the portrayal of war is against the very essence of children's literature. They put forward the argument that war and violence are not suitable subjects for young minds, and the effects can be traumatic. Yet there is no argument regarding the popularity of books that deal with war. Barbara Harrison points out that "war is an ever-present reality for a vast number of children; we who can keep our children are minority" (87). These books that are infused directly or indirectly with war, according to Harrison, are a medium of instruction that deals with human aspiration and suffering, making readers empathize with the predicaments of the less fortunate or identify with their own experiences (Agnew and Foax, 2001:53). The publication of influential graphic novels such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1987) brought attention to the potential of the graphic novel to explore complex themes. Graphic novels present a terrain to explore themes like genocide, war, and socio-political conflicts. Graphic novels like *Palestine* by Joe Sacco explored the medium to provide a unique, informative way to depict the everyday reality of a conflict zone.

Graphic novels in India gained much popularity after the publication of *Corridor* by Sarnath Banerjee. Graphic novels, though they are in their early stage, promise a visually powerful tool to explore various facets of complex issues of contemporary relevance. This hybrid medium of text and image addresses sensitive issues and questions of contemporary society and also establishes a cultural identity through its artistic (visual) expression. Though Indian children's literature can boast of a very rich cultural and visual treasure, the genre usually doesn't explore sensitive issues like transgender issues, environmental degradation, conflicts, the plight of Dalits, etc. The graphic novel has taken a bold step in exploring these sensitive topics and presented them to readers in an attractive manner.

Childhood in India is as diverse as its cultural heritage. Yet, there are still themes and areas, such as diverse socio-political factors, that shape childhood in different regions across India that haven't been explored. Every region in India has its own rich cultural background, and hence childhood cannot be a uniform concept across India. It has immense variety to offer. But when we have a glance at the literature produced for our young adult readers, we find its heterogeneous nature is missing. Graphic novels lately have played a significant role in bridging this Gap. Some of the works have started portraying life across different socio-cultural spaces, opening new areas for young minds to explore.

The region of Kashmir has long been marked by conflict. The stories from Kashmir are often marred by violence and loss. These journalistic and political stories have often occupied the central stage in discourses on Kashmir. Stories of Childhood in Kashmir are often missing; there are not many stories that narrate the experiences of children from Kashmir. The paper explores the everyday life of a child in a conflict zone by analysing Debasmita Dasgupta's graphic novel *Terminal 3*.

Terminal No. 3 is a tale of perseverance, hope and resilience in a world divided by conflict. The novel narrates the story of a seventeen-year-old, Khwab Nazir, who dreams of becoming a world jiu-jitsu champion. The novel opens in Terminal No. 3 of Delhi International Airport, where Khwab is travelling to America to participate in a jiu-jitsu competition along with her Coach. Khwab is portrayed as a girl with big eyes, eyes that are full of dreams. To dream in a conflict-ridden land is a luxury, and to be able to work toward fulfilling it is a feat nearly impossible. Khwab was someone who dared to dream, and her journey to America is her first step in fulfilling her dream.



Khwab comes from a land where violence has become part and parcel of everyday life. She lives in a place where a familiar alley becomes a strange, unknown place in a single day. When Khwab and her friend Noor were returning from school, they found the usual way was barricaded; to their curious gaze, a young soldier replied, "26 January". Khwab and Noor are best friends who share every secret, dream, and hope. Khwab wants to be an athlete. Her father wanted to be an athlete, but his family doesn't encourage him, as they didn't think it was a viable career. Khwab wants to fulfil her father's dream. She tells her trainer Omar poignantly that "Dreams don't have boundaries". Children like Khwab from a conflict zone not only bear their father's dream; they also carry generational trauma. Khwab's ammi is always worried for her child's safety, as she witnessed the murder of her own father. Khwab's dream takes shape under the mentorship of her coach, Omar. He introduces her to the world of Jiu-jitsu, a martial art that requires not only physical skills but mental endurance too. The biggest hurdle that Khwab's dreams face is money. Her father struggles to raise money for her training. Khwab's best friend Noor comes up with the idea of "Azad Khwab", a platform to raise funds for Khwab's training. Noor invites Khwab to meet Yusuf, a young college student who is passionate about literature and poetry. Noor also shares her secret that Yusuf is her boyfriend. The illustrations are done in a colour palette of pink and tangerine, showcasing love, dreams and hope. Yusuf shares his ideas with Khwab to raise more funds.

The scene quickly shifts to one of tragedy as there is a sudden commotion followed by a blast. The whole strip illustrating the scene is painted in red, indicating

the upcoming bloodshed. Khwab is critically injured, Yusuf is dead, and Noor loses her eyesight. Khwab is shattered by the incident. Khwab's parents slowly nurture her back to health. They support her journey in fulfilling her dreams. Khwab's parents have to overcome societal pressure, as it is very unconventional for young girls to take up sports as their career and take a year off from studies. Our society usually deems it fit for women to be homemakers, and they should be trained accordingly. Khwab's parents support her dreams and encourage her to take her journey to fulfil her dreams.



Realising that she has to fight back strongly, not only for herself but for all the girls who dared to dream. Every house in the valley has a story of departure, and it's how you look back at those memories that defines your journey. Khwab took the path of hope and resilience. Khwab restarts her training. She starts to post videos of her training in "Azad Khwab", which slowly garners people's attention. "Even when we have nothing, we have dreams that nobody can take away from us." (20). Khwab is able to collect enough funds for her journey, and she qualifies to take part in the international jiu-Jitsu Competition. Khwab is able to make her voice heard; she voices her aspirations, struggles and thoughts. Khwab's voice becomes a beacon of hope for young minds in the valley. Khwab's journey is one of endurance and resilience that keeps her going.

Works Cited

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