

“ A STUDY OF SELECTED SCIENCE FICTION COMICS”**MAUSHMI P DHUMAL****Runwal Classics, Thergaon, Pune. (411033) Maharashtra. India.****ABSTRACT****Article Received on :**
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Is there any child who is not fond of Comic books? Hardly anyone. As we all know that a comic is that literary sub-genre which is a composite of sequential pictures, illustrations and narrative communication, through devices of speech balloons and boxes. It has been all time favorite genre of children and juveniles. This genre explored the imaginative world of children and has fed their dream wishes always. It has created irrational world with unrealistic things and unnatural characters with superpowers that have ability to do anything.

The emergence of newspapers imbibed the comic strip to entertain people for various purposes. Comic strips based on science fiction also emerged at the same time. Hence in 1938 the comic strips of **Superman** were published in collected forms and brought fame to this genre. Immediately after this Bill Fringer created **Batman** in 1939 and became so much favorite of children that it is still ongoing comic book today. During 1960's the most popular Superhero, **Spider-Man** was incredibly a great hit and was commercially successful . These science fiction bagged immense popularity all over the world .They featured their protagonists with extra unnatural power ,supernatural elements and gadgets that could do all the things that are impossible in the real world those were beyond imagination, hence enriched imaginative world of children. The comic writers like Jerry Seigel, Stan Lee, Bill Finger created their superheroes. These superheroes are with paranormal characteristics that can fly in the sky, can leap tall buildings, with analytical mind, super magical elements, gadgets and future technology fascinating children's mind beyond this world. Not only the occidentals got attracted towards this, but also the Orientals showed far more interest in this type of literary genre. Indian, eminent writers like Anant Pai, who is considered as a pioneer of this genre in India released, Amar Chitra Katha in 1967 that illustrated the fantasy of the mythological world from the great epics like the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. It also had the stories of fables and folklores. Other Indian writers like Abid Shruti, Sanjay Gupta, Rajneesh Kapur, emerged with great fervid to write this genre. Pran Kumar Sharma's Chacha Chaudhari the most popular Indian comic book was included in Limca Book of records for contribution of Indian Comics in 1995.Nirmal Jani's **Shaktimaan** and Suresh Seetharaman's **Indian Spider-Man** became a great hit.

As this genre is mostly popular for children, cannot be kept over sighted, as it really helps to kindle their imaginary world .It paves way for contingency and expand their range of thoughts. A science fiction comic has certainly made positive effects on them and has fed their curiosity. This particular genre has done dual effects: One, it has helped science in the form of ideas and secondly the readers, in the form of fulfilling their suppressed wishes. As children are very much fond of reading comics, because of its fascinating extraterrestrial world, they inculcate a habit of reading literature and it also helps in drilling their minds to enhance their imagination. This could be the real success of this genre.

INTRODUCTION

Is there any child who is without dreams, fantasy and imagination, and who is not fond of comics? Hardly anyone. As we all know that comics are very dear to children as they feed their imagination and dream world with its fantastic stories. Comics have always played a crucial role in the life of children. They kindle their imagination and explore their panoramic fantasy world. Children are always prone to discover unknown things from this nature. In fact they keep on experimenting continuously in the factory of their imagination and fantasy world. They like adventures and are always curious about the other world - space and planets. Hence the genre of comics proved a boon for them. This genre helped them to create their own world of imagination, giving them the feel and experience through a perfect blend of colorful pictures and texts, and to be a part of it for some time. The genre of science fiction comics has also helped literature and science for its enhancement as it attracted children and the juveniles to develop love for future science and literature.

What are Comics?

A comic or comics (collectively), is that literary genre which is a composite of series of colorful, pictorial sequences, illustrations and narrative text through devices of speech, balloons and boxes. It is a beautiful interplay of visual and verbal elements stimulated by imagination for better perseverance. Hence by its name 'comics' it seems that it is a co-mixture of art, literature and other communicating elements, hence co-mix i.e. comics. Will Eisner defines the term 'comics' as "the printed arrangement of art and balloons in sequence, particularly in comic books."

The emergence of newspapers imbibed the comic strips initially for commercial, entertainment and fame purposes. These strips acted as the messengers with their satires, puns and humor based on socio-political events. These strips contained everyday simple language. Later on these strips were published collectively in the form of pulp magazine. This genre was published in the form of Comic strips, Sunday comics, Comic books, Digital comics, Graphic novels, etc. This genre is further divided into its sub-genre.

The Adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck (1837) is considered to be the earliest comical book published by Rudolphe Topffer. It was followed by a series of other publications: Richard Felton Outcault's *Yellow Kid* (1895), Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon, Jungle Jim and Secret agent X-9*, (1934). Subsequently this genre attracted the publishers and soon got flourished that led to proliferation of different other sub-genres of comics: adult, juveniles, children comics, romance, horror, fantasy, science fiction, war, etc.

Science Fiction Comics

In the early 20th century, the Industrial age was followed by the age of Science that manifested the rise of fiction related to science. This fiction came to be known as science fiction. This genre became immensely popular leading to its huge quantity of publication. Science fiction, in fact, is a beautiful amalgamation of science and literature, as if a blending of mind and soul that attains a perfect balance for an iconic output. Imagination being a key element both in literature and science, it plays a cardinal role and leads to many inventions in future.

Science fiction is the genre which creates an imaginary world filled with adventures created by the elements of science and technology. As J.O. Bailey (1947) defines science fiction as "a narrative of an imaginary invention or discovery in the natural sciences and consequent adventures and experiences... It must be a scientific discovery... something that the author at least rationalizes as possible to science". Science fiction has the themes of space and time travels, and related to inventions of gadgets and gizmos, space ships and technology. With the passage of time its popularity increased and its sub-genres like science fiction movies, science fiction comics, cyberpunk etc. came into prominence. The earlier works of science fiction can be considered : Jonathan Swifts *Gulliver's Travells* (1762), Edgar Allan Poe's story *A Flight to the Moon*, H.G.Wells *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The War of the Worlds* (1928).

Science Fiction Comics had affluent colorful pictures, attractive narratives and exposure to visualization, which provided pleasure to its readers and bagged

comprehensive fame. The key elements of Science fiction are time setting in future, setting in outer space and unnatural characters such as aliens, robots, mutants, superheroes with superpowers having paranormal capabilities of analytical minds, telepathy, and telekinesis. All these attractive features fascinated the children's minds and inspired them. During this period its other sub-genres like Biopunk comics, Cyberpunk comics, military science fiction comics, and post-apocalyptic comics also became very notable. The vogue of science fiction comics attracted writers even from the field of science. The men of science such as Alfred Bester, Wallace Wood, and Frank Frazetta worked in this field too.

The *Buck Rogers* by Philip Nowlan and Calkins D. was published originally in *Amazing Stories*(1928). It is about the adventures of a superhero Buck Rogers. Then Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon on the planet Mongo*, appeared in 1934. Star comics came up with stories about planets, space and their clones. Wally Wood's *There Will Come Soft Rains* turned up as the best magazine with Flying Machine.

Schwartz and Weisinger published a fanzine (Fan Magazine) named the *Time Traveler*. Coherently Jerry Seigel and Joe Schuster published *Superman* in 1938 which is the collection of comic strips in the form of a book. Superman was published in D.C. comics (USA). Superman a hero with blue, red and yellow costume, stylized 'S' shield on his chest with a cape on his back showed extraordinary powers to rescue people in distress. Superman is a story of various adventures. He had the ability to fly with his cape on his back, and the capacity to run at a speed of lightening. This extraordinary characteristic and a beautiful blending of fantasy ,science and stories i.e. literature, made him popular all over the world, and he became idol in children's life as their Superhero.

Bill Finger's *Batman* (1939) became so much favorite with children that it is still captivating their hearts and minds. Similarly Steve Ditko and Stan Lee with Jack Kirby created *Spider-Man* in 1962, which was commercially a big hit. Spider-Man himself is an example of regeneration, his fingers and limbs have extraordinary power. Regenerating organs in the branch of biotech science is that which develops

organs for far better performance. The superheroes of these works are shown defeating the villains and saving common people with the use of their extraordinary power and paranormal characteristics. During this period the comics like *Space Adventures* (1952-1969), *Star Wars* (1977), and *Weird Science* (1950s) got published with zoom. These comics told the stories about space, other planets, space shuttle, aliens, robots, androids and other scientific gadgets. A *Weird science* comic was replaced with the name *Incredible Science Fiction* (1955-56) and was published by E.C. Comics. The story *Food for Thought* from issue 32 was awarded as the best art work for an individual science fiction story. Marvel Comics (an American Company) include *The Fantastic Four*, *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *The Incredible Hulk*, *Iron Man*, *Captain America* and *X-Men*. These stories sublimated the readers easily from one world to the other and widened the arena of imagination.

INDIAN SCIENCE FICTION COMICS

During the initial years, Indian children had to rely on foreign comics like *Tintin* (a story of a French private detective), *Champak* and similar other adventurous comic books. But soon Science fiction comics began to hold its roots in India with increasing demand from the readers. During the earlier days, Indian children were being nurtured with the epical, mythological stories from *The Ramayana*, *The Mahabharata* and other traditional folklores, which told stories about adventures of our epical superheroes, their magical mysteries and their great warriorship. These stories started reflecting in the form of comics . These epics shows the time travel to the far ancient times . The references of ancient great war which can be compared to the World War of the modern times. There are also citations of mass destructive nuclear weapons, the powerful aeroplanes and rockets (Pushpak Vimana and others), the arrival of the aliens (Gods) on the earth, the description of artificial fertilization and many more such elements of science both in The Ramayana and The Mahabharata. Indian Superhero *Hanuman* (from the epic The Ramayana) can be compared to American Superman because of similar qualities. *Chandamama* (1947) is perhaps the earliest of these Indian comics. Eminent writers like

Anant Pai, who is considered as a pioneer of this genre in India, published **Amar Chitra Katha** in 1967. This comic book had stories about Indian great epical characters, folks and fables. Other Indian writers like Sanjay Gupta, Dheeraj Verma, Samit Basu, Saurav Mohapatra, Shamik Dasgupta and the filmmaker, Shekhar Kapoor showed far more interest in this literary genre.

Pran kumar Sharma's most popular work in Hindi, **Chacha Chaudhari** (1971), is inspired by American heroes. It shows the time travel in future. It shows the depiction of an alien from the planet Jupiter, a flying car, a doctor becoming vampire etc. It was honored by including it in Limca Book of Records for its contribution to Indian comics in 1995. **Detective Mochwala** by Ajit Ninan and Gordhab Das created great interest among readers. These works are followed by Manjula Padmanabhan's **Suki**, Anupam Sinha's **Rudra**, Ashok Dongre's **Swami** and Shekhar Kapur's **Devi** and **Snake Women**. During 1990s these stories and their traditional elements began to change with the change in the taste of the readers.

Shaktimaan published by Raj comics and written by Nirmal Jani and **Captain Vyom** published by Diamond Comics in 1990s became instant hit and reached almost every Indian household as they were aired on national TV channel, Doordarshan. Milind Soman and Mukesh Khanna, the actors who played the leading roles respectively in **Captain Vyom** and **Shaktimaan**, are considered to be Indian superheroes of contemporary period and even surpassed in popularity most of their Western counterparts. Between these two **Captain Vyom** had got much admiration and popularity due to its story about futuristic science and concept of time travel. The depiction of mind blowing world of advanced space stations on every planet of the solar system is very enchanting. There is high security prison on moon. Space shuttle and space wars are also mentioned in these comics. **Captain Vyom** himself is not from human species but is a parasite which is species of body snatching aliens.

Shaktimaan is a story of a superhero who is blessed with mystical yogic *shaktis*, i.e. superpowers from his seven spiritual *gurus*. These superpowers protected him from evil forces and enabled him to defeat the

villains. He is a geek caricature named as Pandit Gangadhar Vidyadhar Mayadhar Omkarnath Shastri. Living in a big city he works as a journalist and maintains his secret identity as **Shaktimaan**. His mighty strength, incredible ability to take a zoom rapid rotation covering of mortal metals fascinated Indian children so much that they began to feel themselves as Shaktimaan. He possesses incredible abilities like flying at a lightning speed, controlling five elements of nature, shooting beams of laser from his fingers, toes and other parts of his blessed body and powerful vision which can pierce into solid objects. **Shaktimaan** has the only weakness that lies in a crystal filled with all the evil of the world, which is possessed by his archrival Tamraj Kilvish. Shaktimaan possesses the power of transportation and transpathy. The story narrates a series of adventures in which Shaktimaan protects his friends from enemies.

Suresh Seetharaman and Sharad Devarajan published the comic series of **Spider-Man India** in 2004 by Gotham Entertainment Group which later on changed its name first as Virgin Comics and then as Liquid Comics. The **Indian Spider-Man** is changed in its appearance to fit it to the Indian setting i.e. dhoti with Indian shoes. He re-imagines the story of real Spider-Man.

Mumbai MacGuffin (2008) is one of the most popular contemporary Indian science fiction comics published by Liquid Comics. It tells the story of the strange object from space known as the **MacGuffin** which crash lands in the region of Jaipur, India. The CIA appoints crime investigation special Agent, Flint to retrieve the mysterious object for the Government of United States of America who locates it in Mumbai. This story is written by Saurav Mohapatra, an Indian comic writer. It is highly adventurous story. **Ramayan 3392 A.D.** published by Virgin Comics in 2006 written by Shamik Dasgupta is a story of a re-imagining history in a new technological way, it is about a post-apocalyptic future. Revolt Entertainment brought a fresh Indian science fiction magazine named **Aren**. It is a story of a protagonist who is partly human and partly Martian. He becomes so as his biological father is a Martian who wants to conquer the planet Earth and its people.

Hence Indian science fiction comics are relatively different from the Westerner's ones, as the Indian sci-fi comics are mostly based on mythological stories from its great epics, and hence time travels back to the ancient times. This shows that our Indian epic writers were seers and can be called as ancient imaginers of science who could foresee the developments in the human civilizations for many years ago. Hence they can also be called as the Father of Science Fiction. Indian science fiction comics, though relatively less in number, have started to hold its roots firmly in its fertile soil as India has a rich treasure of stories of superheroes in her ancient epics and histories with the help of which the writers can create many fantastic stories, full of mythology and adventure.

CONCLUSION

As this genre is very popular amongst the children and youngsters alike, it cannot be overlooked. On the contrary, there should be more focused attempts to undertake its serious studies. Comics play a very significant role in the life of children as it helps to expand their range of thought and imagination. This genre helps them to improve their reading skills. It also helps them to foreground picture and language, which provides drills to explore their imagination. It also gives training to their brains and develops their thinking abilities. Visual images enable them to grasp the meaning of the text more quickly making them more effective from both the teacher's and the student's points of view. The recent studies have shown that science fiction comics have made positive effects on children and their comprehending abilities. It has helped to develop their curiosity and the range of their imagination. The comics inculcate the habit of reading, develops interest and love of literature among the children leading to the enrichment of their language and literary proficiency. Apart from these, science fiction comics inculcate among the children the importance of various virtues like bravery, love for one's country, family and people leading to the development of their personality. Fantasy can be called as the foetus in the womb of science hence these fantasy ideas helps the scientists for new inventions. Therefore, more number of writers should

come forward and develop the genre of science fiction comics for the welfare and development of the children. This genre is not only helpful from children's point of view but can entertain the adults as well and can be used as a source of recreation and fun in today's hectic life schedule. This can be proved as a formula to keep oneself away from the tensions and worries of this modern world.

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