Introduction to the Author:

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ABSTRACT

In the world history of major revolutions, the Islamic revolution of 1979 holds a significant place not only in the terms of political upheaval but also the social and cultural change it brought to the Iranian Society. One of the major impacts which brought out in Iran is the strictly controlled panorama of life. After the Revolution everyone became under the pressure and mandatory rules and regulations of the government. No one could express their feelings and experiences. All forms of artistic expressions are controlled. If someone wanted to write something it needed to be submitted to the watchful eyes and the firm hands of authority. But now the situation has changed through the use of graphic images or with the entry of graphic novels. My article intends to explain the power of graphic images in Iranian context based on the novel Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi.

Key Words

Iran, Islamic Revolution, censorship, graphic novels
Seeking freedom of Expression Through a New Medium: The current relevance of Graphic Novels in Iran – An analysis of Marjane Satrapi’s Persepolis.

After the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iran has totally transformed into a pure Islamic country. The Islamic fundamentalist regime came into power in 1980. Under their government, the ideologies of secularism were wiped out. They gave more importance to their religion and its preaching. Under the leadership of Ayotollah khomeini, they practiced mandatory rules and regulations upon their citizens. People faced extreme public segregation in those days. They have experienced great pressure not only in their public life but private life also. Wearing veil became mandatory for women. So under the circumstances many writers are joined hands to protest and advocated Secularism. They did their best to bloom modernism through their writings. But Ayotollah’s government terribly oppressed such writers and their freedom of expression. “Pens which do not write for Islamic values must be broken” – That was the determination of Ayotollah Khomeini.

In other words, The Islamic Revolution in Iran Sought to sound the death knell for all forms of artistic expression. If someone wanted to write something, it needed to be submitted to the watchful eyes and the firm hands of authoritarian Iran. “Freedom of expression” in essence gives us the freedom to voice one’s opinion publicly without any fear. But in Iran it is strictly controlled. After the revolution, writers, poets and intellectuals felt the pressure of censorship in Iran. There are so many writers who have lost their lives in the pursuit of freedom of expression. They have faced heavy obstacles to express their feelings sand experiences. They were crushed, arrested, imprisoned and even executed. Whenever intellectuals write about Iran, they are forced to change their story, characters and dialogue to comply with the restrictions of Islamic Iran. In order to avoid censorship many writers emigrated to the foreign countries where they could enjoy complete freedom and the permission to publish their works.
In contemporary time, censorship and self-censorship have reached its highest level. Artists self-censor; in the fear of risking harassment, arrest logging or worse still imprisonment. But now a group of writers have emerged with a new method of storytelling that can hide direct focus on what they really intend to portray. These writers employ graphic images, symbols and metaphors. Today it has gained its own position as a unique genre - Graphic novel.

In the past, writers and intellectuals thought that graphic novels were simple, fragile or bubble like art. Most of the writers ignored the significance of graphic novels and they underestimate the power of graphics believing it would entertain only children. In their view graphic novels were thought as inferior nonacademic, alternative to serious literature. But in contemporary literature, graphic novels have created a spring and a serious impression has been generated in the graphic novel. In modern times, these comic like graphic books provide a major outlet for sequential art. The entry of this novel forms the reader to reconsider how a story can be told. It is universally acknowledged fact that, the introduction of the images into any novel presents a new set of possibilities for the writer and a new way to converse with the reader. Graphic novels which tell real and fictional stories using a combination of words and images, it is similar to a painting or a movie. It innocently deals with heavy topics or issues of contemporary society in an interesting manner. In a country like Iran it would act as an armour for the writer. In other words, the entry of graphic novels into Iran could act as an armour for writers and intellectuals. Today most of the writers in Iran use the stream of graphic novels. When a writer wants to deal with a political or erotic subject, he plays with words, and says indirectly, leaving the censor unable to comprehend the message. Now many Iranian writers use this method. For modern Iranian writers, it is an escape from the danger of censorship.

Among these writers, Iranian born French graphic novelist, film director and children's book author, Marjane Satrapi is famous. Her graphic novel "Persepolis" is an outstanding motion
picture that acclaimed worldwide appreciation for such narration of her childhood day in Iran during the Islamic revolution.

Marjane Satrapi was born in Rasht and grew up in Tehran in the middle class Iranian family. Her well to do parents were highly educated members of an urbanized stratum of Iranian Society. She is related to Qajar dynasty through her maternal grandmother. From her childhood itself, Marjane begins her protest against those mandatory rules and regulations practiced by Muslim fundamentalist authorities in Iran. That is what we see from her book *Persepolis*. Her novel *Persepolis* paints an unforgettable portrait of daily life in Iran and of the bewildering contradictions between home life and public life. This is a beautiful and intimate story full of tragedy and comedy, raw, honest and incredibly illuminating. The magic of Satrapi's work is that it can condense a whole country's tragedy into one poignant funny scene. Another important thing is that the advancement of women in Iran has been considerable in this novel.

At the forefront, Marjane's biographical work Chronicles the Iranian revolution in the 1980's. However, within the book Satrapi's incredible story centres on a few prevalent themes and motifs. It portrays the culture of revolutionary Iran through the eyes of a young girl. The novel openly criticises the practice of wearing veil and other restrictions imposed upon women. But here we pleasantly notice her medium of storytelling. It is only through this medium that she could easily portray her revolt or protest among the public. Only with the help of these graphics, she could bring out her country's tragedy into this world. By selecting this mode of narration, she has revealed her crookedness. Otherwise she would be entrapped into the shackles of censorship of the authorities in Iran. Narrating erotic and heavy topics in an inane way is the best way to achieve reader's appreciation all over the world and it is the reason for its international acclaim. That is what Marjane's memoir *Persepolis* deserves it internationally. Now it becomes a great motion picture which brought about a new perspective to Iran’s history to the rest of the world.
Satrapi’s graphic novel is different from most graphic novels in which she depicts memories and experiences that take place in a geographical location rarely mentioned in comics previously. Totally unique and utterly fascinating, Satrapi’s simple style reveals the complexities of a veiled off world. Through the powerful black and white graphic images, *Persepolis* draws as memorable portrait of daily life in Iran. Emotionally gripping and intellectually provocative, this book addresses many challenges of that period of Iranian Revolution through an expressive combination of words and images. She uses the graphic novel form to great expressive effect in *Persepolis*. This graphic presentation focused specifically about the ways in which the different levels that graphic novels can create and representation between protagonists and their society through their visual juxtaposition. Satrapi’s words are similarly intense and variable. Sometimes they are a child’s shouts, angry, rebellious or joyous or they are the poignant and honest insight of a woman examining her past. Sometimes her words capture the voices of other characters, from her loving independent grandmother to narrow minded teachers and threatening morality police. Each of Persepolis’s panels can be considered sometimes both individually as one casts a specific moment in time and single perspective as well as with sections and complete narrative work. A series of images can read without their text to string their own narrative. The text is in relationship to the panels, it is attractive to and at the very least it challenges the role of language. Sometimes Satrapi allows the reader to interpret the idea of images without she write any word for the panels. There are many panels that can be seen without words. So from these panels we could realize the fact that communication needs no words or language. Another important feature of her novel is its realness. Marjane’s reality is real. Her drawings are intense, strong lines curve and slave across the page, blocks of black ink define bodies and objects, patterns of light and dark create spaces that can be comforting or menacing. Her style is deceptively simple at times, reflecting a child’s perspective; at other times it uses comic book conventions like shifting
proportions and scale to express fear or anger. In other scenes, the intricate and rhythmic array of forms evokes Persian miniature.

Even though Marjane Satrapi faces many restrictions in her country for her portrayal of life during the repressive regime, her residence in France allows her to bring out the motion picture. Her medium of narration also helps her to sidestep the rigid norms of censorship to a great extent. Anyway it does bring a different view of Iran to the rest of the world opening a rethinking of a prevalent, accepted opinion and stereotypes. There is no doubt that this medium of literature supports her freedom of expression in a genuine manner. She has done it through this graphic images.
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