

**THE RECONSTRUCTION OF SOCIAL
IDENTITY OF TRANSGENDERS IN THE
SELECTED SOUTH ASIAN COMIC
FICTION**

BY

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**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES
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ABSTRACT

Title: The Reconstruction Of Social Identity Of Transgenders In The Selected South Asian Comic Fiction

The undertaken study scrutinizes the two comic fictional series, *Basila and the Street Crew* (2020) and *Transgender Persons in Science mini-series* (2016), written and illustrated by Pakistani and Indian writers, respectively. The primary focus of this dissertation remains on the representation of transgender characters and their emergence in new social roles. It argues that the positive portrayal of transgender bodies in selected South Asian comic fictional works dismantles their traditional image in fiction by reconstructing their new impression and new social identity. The exploration of diversity and newness in their representation is associated with their performative roles and their active participation in social works. Transgender characters are defying stereotypical gender norms, gender behaviors, and gender expectations through their active creation and assertion of their identity. This nuanced and diverse portrayal is achieved through their physical appearances, manners, and their interaction with society through their social roles. The analysis is carried out in light of the key tenets of Performativity theory posited by Judith Butler along with Stryker's idea of Transgender Performativity in relation to Erving Goffman's theory of Impression Management. Drawing on the constructive nature of gender identity and impression management, the social identity of transgenders will be debated that how their gender identity, which is a social construct, is usually associated with lower social categories and the impression of their identities can be managed through various mechanisms. The research employs Kress and Van Leeuwen's multimodal method of analysis to study the selected works by focusing on the scrutiny of texts and illustrations. The careful examination of primary sources of the study provides support to the main argument that these texts have the potential of subversion against the misrepresentation of transgenders and pave the way for changing public perception of them. Performativity, in its various manifestations, can be explored as a reliable strategic mode of resistance employed by other subaltern communities portrayed in the realm of SA comic fiction.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

THESIS AND DEFENSE APPROVAL FORM	ii
AUTHOR'S DECLARATION	iii
ABSTRACT	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
DEDICATION.....	ix
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Comprehending the term 'Transgender' in the Context of South Asia	1
1.2 Representational Dilemma through historical overview of South Asian transgender community.....	3
1.3 Locating Selected Comic Fictional Works in South Asian Comic Fiction	5
1.4 Situatedness of Researcher	8
1.5 Delimitation	8
1.6 Thesis Statement	9
1.7 Research Questions	9
1.8 Plan of Research	9
1.9 Significance of the Study	10
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	11
2.1 Review of Literature	11
3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	24
3.1 Theoretical Framework.....	24
3.1.1 Theory of Performativity & Transgender Performativity	25
3.1.2 Theory of Impression Management	28
3.2 Research Methodology	31
3.3 Research Method	32
4. REIMAGINING TRANSGENDER PERFORMATIVITY IN PAKISTANI COMIC FICTION: BASILA AND THE STREET CREW.....	36
4.1 (Re)constructing social identity of Transgenders through the power of representation.....	37
4.1.1 Strong Characterization and Narrative Building.....	37
4.1.2 Physical Appearance as Sign Vehicle.....	48
4.1.3 Challenging the Status Quo through Manners	51
4.1.4 Names Politics and Identity Reconstruction	52

4.1.5 Social Settings and its Impact on the Identity Reconstruction	53
5. NARRATIVES OF RECONSTRUCTED SOCIAL IDENTITY OF TRANSGENDERS IN INDIAN COMIC FICTION: TRANSGENDER PERSON IN SCIENCE MINI SERIES	57
5.1 Reconstructed Social Identity vis-à-vis Social activism and Professional Advancement:	58
5.1.1 Subversive Characterization and a Challenge to Gender Norms.....	58
5.1.2 Sartorial choices and negotiation of Social Identity of Transgenders	68
5.1.3 Kinship System against the narrative of Guru- Chella	70
5.1.4 Representation against stereotypical image of weakened minority	72
6. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS	75
WORKS CITED	79

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

MDA	Multimodal Discourse Analysis
SA	South Asia

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mother, whose selfless and generous love enabled me to accomplish this task, and to my late father, who has always been a source of motivation for me.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This research study aims to investigate the negotiation and possible (re)construction of social identity of transgenders with building of their new impression in the selected South Asian comic fiction. Exploring their (re)constructed impression and social identity involves carefully reading their representation in selected works. In the backdrop of multilayered marginalization and dehumanization of transgenders, this area of study offers significant contribution towards the understanding of their new subjectivities.

1.1 Comprehending the term ‘Transgender’ in the Context of South Asia

The existence of Transgender community in South Asia has been recognized thousands of years ago in Sanskrit epics like the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. They are said to have existed in South Asia for nearly 4000 years. Their prominent inclusion in auspicious occasions like weddings, *Badhai*, new born child celebration denotes their major role in the celebratory events. They are associated with conferring blessings to the newborn and newlywed couples. The transgender community has been acknowledged in various global cultures since ancient times. Different cultures recognize this community in unique ways, often using various terms, and historical evidence of their existence can be found in early records.

The general understanding of the term transgender is crucial to the following study as the undertaken research project sheds light on the representation of transgenders in the context of South Asia. “Transgender” is defined differently in different cultures because there is no single universally accepted definition for the term. From the Euro-American perspective, this gender category is referred to as “gender variant” individuals whose gender identity, gender behaviors and expressions don’t conform to the sex they are assigned at the time of birth.

According to Encyclopaedia Britannica’s definition, transgender is a self-applied term by a person whose gender identity is different from their biological sex and it incorporates behaviours and traits traditionally associated with the opposite sex (Tauches). The term is widespread as well as widely mistaken for many other

identities. The simple categorisation of the term clarifies the misunderstandings that often arise, bringing clarity to the perception of the term that may otherwise be perplexing.

According to American Psychological Association Style guide, Transgender is an umbrella term which includes many identities. It consists of different categories of gender nonconforming people. APA guide posits gender as a non-binary construct that eventually allows the formation of multiple identities. Transsexual category, which involves the transition process through medical intervention, is referred as gender or sex reassignment. People belonging to this category undergo a castration process. Other category includes the people who cross-dress. It is a form of gender expression and the people who cross-dress don't intend to change their sex. Drag queen and drag king are the perfect example of this category. Genderqueer refers to the people who identify neither with male nor with female. They may define their gender category somewhere between these two or separate themselves from this binary. Other than these categories, multigendered, androgynous, third gender, and two- spirit people also come under this umbrella term. The definitions of these terms vary with time and with people; however, they deal with the idea of gender blending or alternating genders.

Western notion of the term transgender is different from the way the term is used and understood in South Asia. From the Euro-American perspective, the term 'transgender' is understood differently from the term 'Intersex'. However, in South Asia, the term 'transgender' also stands for intersex people.

In contemporary India and Pakistan, the terms *Hijra* and *Khawaja Sira* are umbrella terms, just like 'Transgender', and cover a variety of identities like intersex, gender non-conforming, eunuchs, homosexuals, etc. In South Asia, the term "Transgender" collectively stands for the people who are intersex, transgender, and non-binary. The reason lies in the fact that both Pakistan's Transgender Persons Act, 2018 and India's Transgender Person Bill, 2019 define transgender person as the individual who may have intersex variations or may have a gender non-conforming identity or may have gone through sex-reassignment surgeries or a trans man or trans woman, etc. (Transgender Persons Act 2).

In South Asia, transgenders are recognized by different titles ranging from *Hijra*, *khawajasira*, *khusra*, *kinner*, *aravani*, *aruvani*, and *jogappa* etc. *Hijra* is a title

used commonly by both Indians and Pakistanis for transgender community. This term is a sort of derogatory because of the negative connotation attached to it. Other terms which are considered more respectable are *Khawaja Sira* and *Kinner*. *Khawaja Sira* is generally recognized in Pakistani culture while *Kinner* is mostly used in Indian Culture.

The present study uses the term “Transgender” to refer to the community which is commonly recognized as *Hijra* in South Asia. It is used for both the intersex and gender variant people.

1.2 Representational Dilemma through historical overview of South Asian transgender community

The historical portrayal of transgender individuals in both mainstream and print media reveals a modest progression over time. However, their representation remains largely confined to societal norms and expectations. Unfortunately, they continue to face stereotypes and stigma, which hinder their true visibility and depth in contemporary media. This misrepresentation not only undermines their dignity but also perpetuates societal prejudices, highlighting the urgent need for a more nuanced and respectful portrayal of transgender lives and experiences.

The precolonial past of the Subcontinent was a flourishing period for transgender community. In the Mughal era, they were granted prestigious positions in *Harems* and were given important roles in kings’ courts. They held the position of most trusted royal servants and were given respect. Hindu mythology also demonstrated transgender figures as supernatural beings with sacred powers as observed by Sarah E. Newport in her research study "Writing Otherness: Uses of History and Mythology in Constructing Literary Representations of India's Hijras" (2018).

The inclusion of transgenders in Hindu mythology upgrades their position in social hierarchy as according to Hindu '*dharma*', they are important part of social rituals and gatherings surrounding the auspicious process of fertility such as weddings and births. Without their presence, these ceremonies lack blessings and aren't completed. Therefore, they are "conceptually respected as a necessary piece of the social jigsaw" (Newport 44). Since they are the worshippers of goddess Bahucharaji, they are believed to be blessed. Their sacred and blessed existence is also linked to

lord Ardhanarishvara, who is a combined figure of god Shiva and goddess Parvati in Hindu mythology and is "neither deviant nor marginal but instead ultra-positive" because it consists of two gods which eventually increases its status and power (Newport 47).

This third gender or non-binary category is respected in the old literary texts of the subcontinent. Their representation in old Indian texts was doing justice to their identity back then. In Hindu epic *Mahabharata*, we see that the character of the great warrior Arjuna has undergone sexual transition during the period of agyatvas and was not criticized, rather respected and loved.

The mention of their esteemed status is also evident in another Hindu epic, the Ramayana. In which we see them as blessed figures who were granted the power to curse or bless others. They were given this power from lord Rama who "granted them the ability for their words always to come true" (Newport 51). This historical reference to transgenders in Hindu epic shows their positive portrayal. However, with the advent of British rule in India, their fortune ended and they were deprived of their basic rights and respect. With the change in their status and position, their representation also changed. Their public image transitioned from that of a sacred being to that of a cursed being.

Criminal Tribes Act of 1871 directly aimed at transgenders of the subcontinent to decrease their population and to make them invisible in public spaces. British rule successfully implemented the act and reduced their status to a marginalized community. This drastic change in their status affected their representation too.

In the postcolonial era, the representation of transgender individuals has emerged as a complex and problematic issue in South Asia. However, in the wake of transgenders' rights that were granted in the first two decades of 21st century to the transgenders of the subcontinent, they got some representation in mainstream media. However, comparatively less attention has been paid to the print media. Little literature has been produced on them, and they are scarcely presented as true selves. It is debatable because they identify as a third category and participate in the population of India and Pakistan. The general estimate about the population of transgender community in the world is 2 %. Their existence in South Asian countries has been officially recognized in different years. Talking about India, transgender population was recorded for the very first time in its national census of 2011 in which 4.87 lakh people reported themselves as transgender (Naik).

In Pakistan, On the order of the Supreme Court, the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) recognized them as separate gender category in sixth national census of Pakistan that took place in 2017. According to the Dawn's report, the total transgender community's population is recorded to be 10,418 (Khan). This commendable initiative was taken by Lahore High Court, which issued the order to the government for recognizing transgender population in Pakistan and making them part of the national census. The dilemma here is that despite being a part of a larger population group, they have been misrepresented. The challenge lies in the fact that there was a striking lack of meaningful evolution in their portrayal.

Transgender identities in postcolonial India and Pakistan are often stigmatized. They are frequently portrayed through narrow stereotypes that cast them in a negative light, leading to widespread discrimination within society. In South Asia, they are typically identified with "Hijra Clap", which has become their identity marker.

The media, which wields significant power in shaping narratives, has also contributed to their misrepresentation. Research study has been carried out on "*The Nation*" newspaper and it has been concluded that one of the leading Pakistani newspapers' portrayal of transgenders is biased and stereotypical (Jamil and Shahzad 36). It has been shown that how they equalize with criminals. The research highlight their status as victims. It shows that even after being given legal rights, transgender community is misunderstood by people a lot when it comes to their social identity.

Mainstream media of South Asian countries generally conform to their stereotypical image in their act of representation. They are often depicted with heavy makeup and a distinctive style of speaking that has turned them into humorous figures. They have been referred with derogatory terms like *Hijra*, *Khusra*, and *Shemale* etc. It is very common practice in both India and Pakistan to and them with such offensive influence of media is undeniably profound, as it shapes and reinforces specific perceptions and ideologies that permeate our society.

1.3 Locating Selected Comic Fictional Works in South Asian Comic Fiction

Comic fiction is a significant form of art, which can truly reflect the realities of life by narrating a story through pictures or illustrations, and can be a good pedagogical tool. It can perfectly be defined as the form of serialized narrative based

on illustrations. Narrative images have long been a part of human history as we can trace their significance in the ancient civilizations of Greece and Italy. Illustrations featured many parts of their lives. As the world progressed, this form of art gained popularity and became advanced in its form. Towards the end of the 19th century, we see the development of comics in the western world, which eventually led towards the international success of DC and Marvel comics in the second half of the 20th century.

The decision to select comic fiction for this research study stems from its profound significance and impact. This medium of highlighting moral, social, and cultural issues of the world emerged firstly in the western world, then it made its way in the subcontinent too, where many artists and writers took initiative to present the local problems through comic books. Exploring the tapestry of comic graphic literature in South Asia, “*Baalak*” and “*Honhar*” are classic Hindi and Urdu comic magazines which lasted from 1926-1986. With the development in the world, the comic graphic literature also progressed. Where only Gods and Goddesses surrounded comic graphic literature in the subcontinent, like popular *Amar Chitra Katha*, which features Hindu legends and epics, contemporary comics took a turn and revolutionary ideas became a part of discussion. Both Pakistani and Indian comic fiction writers have made a contribution towards the voicing of unheard issues.

Exploring the landscape of comic book publications in Pakistan and India can lead to exciting opportunities for creativity and cultural expression. Kachee Goliyan, CFX comics, HS Comics, and Azcorp Entertainment have made their contribution by producing many comic books in Pakistan for many years. Likewise, Indrajal Comics, Diamond Comics and Raj Comics are Indian companies that have produced multiple graphic novels and comic books. They have tried their best to communicate revolutionary ideas by presenting social issues of the Pakistani and Indian society. Raj comic company has brought an immense change in the comic literature of India by introducing local superheroes like *Nagraj* (2009), who fought bravely against the criminals of the Mumbai attack that took place in 2008. *Doga*, another comic features the superhero who uncovers corrupt politicians. All these comic fictions reflect social issues. “Kachee Goliyan” is among the pioneers in comic book development in Pakistan as it was launched in 2011 as Pakistan’s very first comic book company. One of the English language newspapers, “The Baltic Review” stated Kachee Goliyan as Pakistan’s first mass-produced comic book (Abruzzini). Most of the comic books produced by these companies addressed social issues and brought local heroes to the

forefront. Comic fictions like *Team Muhafiz* (2015), *Paak Legion* (2019) and *Basila and the Street Crew* (2020) brought minorities in Pakistan into the spotlight. Other comic fictions like *Pakistanigirl* (2017), and *Raat* (2017) addressed women's agency by presenting women as superheroes.

Azcorp Entertainment has made its contribution by producing many comic books in Pakistan for many years. It is among the Pioneers in comic books development in Pakistan. The present study includes one of their comic series named *Basila and the Street Crew* (2020). It revolves around the story of an orphaned girl, Basila. However, what makes this comic book inspiring is the incorporation of transgender community in it. Moreover, their presence in the comic fiction challenges their typical portrayal in mainstream Pakistani media and other fictional works. In Pakistani society, where transgender community is still not fully accepted by people, such comic fiction helps to pave the way towards their acceptance. This way they also get positive representation which is against their highly stigmatized identity.

Comic books in India are also significant in representing transgenders in positive light. Talking about Web comic series named *Transgender persons in science mini-series* is a part of the blog “The life of Science.com” that has made an effective step towards the representation of transgenders in the field of science and technology. The series has released many comic fictions based on the stories of transgenders excelling in the field of science and technology. They have been shown heroic in the sense of their professional success.

Such initiatives towards the positive representation of transgender community in comics challenge the general perception about their social identity in South Asia. Such works are the source of eradicating all misconceptions towards transgenders which are causing transphobia. Their transition from victimized bodies to positive characters is novel.

Moreover, the targeted audience of comics is children, specifically teenagers who will be the future of Pakistan and India. Compared to adults, children have less exposure to the realities of life and hence have limited life experience. It's through reading literature that they get to know of new possibilities and difficulties of life. Children's literature serves the purpose of entertaining as well as educating children. By inculcating the social issue like Transphobia in a very delicate manner, comic fiction writers like Anain Sheikh, Noman Ansari and Sanyatan Datta have done a good job to challenge the so called static identity of transgenders in South Asia. The

current study focuses on this very aspect that how transgenders are portrayed positively instead of shown as caricature of the community through the reconstruction of their new identity and impression in selected comic fiction.

1.4 Situatedness of Researcher

The western comic industry has immense popularity compared to the South Asian comic industry in the world. However, the progressive contemporary South Asian comic fictions are bringing change by taking account of various social issues. Being a Pakistani researcher and a student of literature, I am keen to investigate how our local Pakistani comic fictional works have the potential of presenting counter narrative on stereotypical social identity of transgenders. Being a part of heteronormative Pakistani society, I have first-hand knowledge of their marginalization and stigmatization. In the face of such discrimination, these positive narratives offer a way towards their impression management. Moreover, I also believe that this critical examination of comic fictions would encourage local readership to approach Pakistani comics critically beyond the purpose of pleasure reading. It will also motivate the literature students to look into the possible potential of Pakistani comic fiction to alter false ideologies.

1.5 Delimitation

The current research study is delimited to selected Pakistani and Indian comic fiction specifically based on transgenders. Pakistani comic fiction series named, *Basila and the Street Crew* (2020) by Sheikh and Ansari will be studied along with Indian comic fiction series titled *Transgender persons in science mini-series* from the blog “The Life of Science.com” (2016). The context of the study is delimited to representation of Transgenders in the selected comic fictions. Their new social identity in terms of their professional roles, socioeconomic status and their gender identity is examined with their new impression through in depth analysis of characters’ representation, their dialogues, illustration, and description of the comic fictional works.

1.6 Thesis Statement

The contemporary selected South Asian comic fiction negotiates the marginalized social identity of transgender characters by representing them in new performative roles, thereby (re)constructing a new impression and social identity for them. In the face of unidimensional roles, these comic fictions offer the complex and nuanced representations, which eventually bring the newness and diversity in their social identity.

1.7 Research Questions

The present research study endeavors to investigate the role of representation of transgender characters in selected south Asian comic fiction in the reconstruction of their new impression and social identity. On the basis of Stryker's theory of transgender Performativity and Goffman's theory of Impression Management, two research questions have been formed which are attempted to be answered by carrying out the analysis of the selected primary texts. The questions are as follows:

1. In what ways do visual and representational techniques build the new image and new impression of transgenders in the selected texts?
2. How do the transgender characters construct a new social identity for themselves by performing new and active roles in the selected texts?

1.8 Plan of Research

I have organized my research study coherently. There are five chapters comprising this thesis. The first chapter provides the background of the topic under study and its rationale along with research questions. I have also located selected texts in the larger context of SA comic fiction. Literature Review is the second chapter of the study. This part of the thesis contextualizes my research. It highlights the gap within a wide-ranging existing knowledge. In the third chapter of this thesis, I have discussed the Theoretical framework and Methodology based on the concept of Multimodal discourse analysis. In the fourth Chapter, I have included the Analysis of the study. I have incorporated the understanding and interpretation of the selected primary texts in the light of a theoretical lens. This section explored the research questions in detail. Lastly, chapter five concludes the discussion and analysis. Some suggestions and recommendations will also be a part of this chapter.

1.9 Significance of the Study

The present study is significant because of two reasons. Firstly, it is significant because it is centered on comic fictions, which are generally sidelined whenever literature is being talked about. In literary studies, Comic fictions are mostly ignored because they exist in the periphery of literature and because they are taken as the medium of literature, which is usually read by a young audience like children and teenagers. Moreover, the South Asian graphic comic industry has not made as much progress as the western graphic comic industry has made. Thus, a little number of researchers went into this direction for literary research. The present study focuses on comic fiction based on South Asian culture by South Asian writers. For this reason, this research is unique and significant.

Secondly, this research study explores the honest and encouraging portrayal of transgender community in the South Asian comic Fiction. Previous researches on transgenders focused on their victimized position in South Asian society and highlighted their struggles and efforts. The representation of social identity of transgenders in the form of reconstruction of new identity in selected texts is observed and noticed that how it alters their typical portrayal in South Asian culture. Looking back at the representation of transgenders in electronic and print media of Pakistan and India, it can be said that the mere intent was to drive humor out of their presence. Many comedy TV dramas portrayed them in their stereotypical manner, i.e. with feminine dresses and gaudy make up. However, with the passage of time, electronic media took initiative to present the other side of this community through their different roles in society, other than begging and dancing. Talking about print media, less attention has been paid to transgender community. Little or no literature has been dedicated to them. Typical portrayal has never been challenged in any South Asian comics ever before. This is the first time that any Pakistani or Indian comic talked about the less acceptable community by portraying them as saviors and in a positive light. This way it questions typical position of transgenders and their static identity in South Asian society. Their portrayal as positive figures in comic fiction is the negotiation of their old marginalized identity and the reconstruction of their new identity.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter of my thesis comprises the literature review. It reviews the available literature on the relevant subject. The purpose is to trace the historical development of the subject and to identify the gap in existing researches while situating my research study in the available scholarship.

As my study revolves around South Asian comic fictions specifically based on transgenders and the idea of the reconstruction of their impression and identity, both primary and secondary sources are reviewed. This chapter majorly focuses on their representation in literary and media works concerning their social identity and impression construction.

This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part discusses the area of my research by introducing the topic under study and the objectives of the literature review. The second part constitutes the main body of this chapter. It includes the detailed review of the available literature. This part is further divided into two parts, which organize the main body systematically. In this part, both primary and secondary relevant sources of study are reviewed. In this part, I have structured my material by discussing the subject on a broader level and then narrowing it down to a specific genre under study. This helped me in building up my stance. As there is plenty of material available on the subject of my thesis, I tried to restrict myself to only the most relevant sources. The third and the last part concludes the reviews and situates my study in the available gap.

This chapter has proved useful as it provided the relevant background to my study and helped me to identify the gap where I could situate my research study.

2.1 Review of Literature

I have divided my literature review into two parts to carry out my review systematically. I will go from a broader perspective and narrow it down to the specific area of my research. The review of primary and secondary sources is done under the following two themes:

I- South Asian literary and media Representation of Transgenders

II- Aesthetics and politics of Comic fiction and impression Management of Transgenders

(I)

Literature transcends mere entertainment; it serves as a powerful vehicle for either reinforcing or challenging prevailing social beliefs. In words of literary critic Terry Eagleton, "Literature is not simply a mirror of social reality but a significant structure which shapes social ideology" (Eagleton 64). Representation, hence, plays its part in the form of inclusivity and perception. Considering the above mentioned relationship, the major part of this thesis explores the link between transgender representation and their social identity reconstruction and their eventual impression management in the selected comic fictional works. The selected texts for this study consist of 4 issues of Pakistani comic fiction *Basila and the Street Crew* (2020) which are authored and illustrated by Anain Sheikh and Noman Ansari along with the 4 Indian comic fiction series titled *Transgender persons in science mini-series* (2016) authored and illustrated by Sanyatan Datta and his team. Both fictional works skillfully represent transgender characters with nuanced and progressive appearances, negating the traditional image of their social identity. As far as literary scholarship is concerned, these selected texts have not gone through any academic inquiry till now. This notable gap in the scholarly research marks the significance of the undertaken research study.

Representation of transgenders has been explored immensely by many research scholars. The literary landscape boasts a rich array of texts that profoundly explore the experiences of transgender individuals in South Asia. However, the exploration from this perspective has predominantly unfolded within the realm of SA literary fiction. This scholarly gap is highlighted by Kavita Daiya, who asserts that postcolonial and South Asian literary study is largely focused on literary fiction, poetry, and drama, leaving the graphic and comics at the periphery (Daiya 3). She adds that graphic narratives hold aesthetic and political significance as they constitute a "rich archive, forcing an examination of history, culture, identity, place, pleasure, and community in South Asia" (Daiya 5). In her editorial, "*South Asia in Graphic narratives*" (2018), she points towards this important gap which marks any graphic and comic-based work as significant.

Amidst the SA literary fiction, several literary works and dramas poignantly center on the transgender community, illuminating their struggles, suffering, and the discrimination they face within the prevailing heteronormative society. This part of

the literature review adds the scholarly critique on these transgender based works, considering their relevance to the current study regarding the perspective of representation. There are some Indian literary works that have compellingly explored the lives and experiences of transgender individuals, such as *No Outlaws in the Gender Galaxy* (2015), *Friends under the summer sun* (2019), and *Guthli has wings* (2019). These fictional works document their experiences at social, emotional, and economic levels. Likewise, many non-fictional works also represented them. Autobiographical narratives like Vidya's memoir *I am Vidya: A Transgender's Journey* (2007) and *The truth about me: A Hijra life story* (2010) by an activist and writer Revathi discuss their lives as *Hijra* in India. Moreover, Laxmi Narayan Tripathi's autobiography *Me Hijra, Me Laxmi* (2015) also sheds light on the struggles of transgenders in India. Another notable work *we are not the others: Reflections of a transgender activist* (2021) is also based on the daily struggle of a trans-woman. Many of these literary works powerfully encapsulate the struggle for survival in the face of a transphobic and heteronormative society of India. Similarly, there is a considerable amount of narratives based on transgender experiences in Pakistan. *Teesri Jins* (2015) is an Urdu work by Pakistani writer Akhtar Hussain Balouch based on the stories of transgender community in Pakistan. It consists of different interviews to present aspects of their lives being transgenders in a large population of Pakistan. Similarly, an Indian book, *Hijras: India's third gender between discrimination and recognition* (2019) by Renate Syed also sheds light on the discrimination and marginalization of transgenders. Both of these non-fictional works consist of interviews with transgender community living in India and Pakistan.

All these above discussed literary and non-literary works pose transgenders as victims who are facing discrimination and marginalization. These narratives often portray transgender individuals as victims who are surviving amidst a harsh and unyielding environment. Their representation in literature often falls woefully short, predominantly focusing on their victimized bodies. The texts under examination stand apart from those previously discussed, particularly in their depiction of the trans community. The challenges and survival struggles depicted in the selected texts reveal a deeper narrative, showcasing that the identity of the transgender community transcends mere victimization. Their stories are filled with resilience and strength, highlighting the richness of their experiences beyond the hardships they face.

Moreover, in the selected comic fictional works, the resilience is manifested directly and subtly through powerful dialogues and visuals simultaneously.

Scholarly critique of various SA transgender based literary texts is offered by a range of researchers, each examining these fictional works through distinct perspectives. Pakistani fiction *This House of Clay and Water* (2017) by Faiqa Mansab represents transgender protagonist named Bhanggi who leads the life of miseries, struggle and discrimination in heteronormative Pakistani society. Two Pakistani literary researchers scrutinized the novel with above mentioned perspective in their article “Faiqa Mansab’s *This House of Clay and Water*: The Representations of Transgenders in Heteronormative Pakistani Society”. Through the detailed scrutiny of Bhanggi’s character, the authors analyzed the inhumane treatment towards transgender community on the basis of gender in the substructures of orthodox Pakistani society (Nadeem and Javed 74). Similar approach has been made towards Arundhati’s novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) by another researcher in her article “Highlighting the Subaltern Identity in the Novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* By Arundhati Roy” (2022). Her research study highlights the transgenders as subaltern identities in post-Independence Indian society through the character of transgender protagonist, Anjum. Anjum is a hermaphrodite who faces marginalization in every aspect of her life at the hands of her family, society, and even by her group of transgenders (Khan, 152). Both research studies focus on the discriminated and marginalized status of transgenders in the subcontinent.

Both of the above-mentioned studies are conducted with the same perspective, however, on different texts with different settings. Through transgender character analysis, researchers have provided insight into their marginalized identity in the contemporary SA context. Their struggles as belonging to a non-binary gender category have been highlighted in both articles. However, their struggles are only a way to resist the dehumanized behavior of social structures towards them. Their resistance is their survival strategy and isn’t shown to alter their status. They are resisting in their capacity. My research study, however, fills this gap by focusing on their altered status in selected SA comic fictional works. The characters emerge not only as saviors of their own lives, but they also become beacons of hope for their entire community, selflessly rescuing others.

Besides victimized representation of transgender characters in SA literary works, we find other research articles which highlight their agency in heteronormative society. South Asian researcher Subhra Roy's research study also looks into similar dimension. Her research is based on *Delhi* (1990) novel by Khushwant Singh. In her research article, "Romancing the Third Gender: Analysis of the Representation of the Transgender in Delhi: A Novel, with Special Reference to the Character of Bhagmati", she explores how transgender character's portrayal has gone beyond utopian representation. In her view, the character of Bhagmati is given agency because she is shown as a savior who has saved a sikh journalist's life during the communal riot of 1984 (Roy 237). Other research study by Sarah E. Newport also examines the literary representation of the character of Bhagmati. Her findings conclude that not only the emancipated figure of Bhagmati negates the conventional image of transgender in India but the "hijra troupe" also deconstructs the conventional social belief about them. Sarah E. Newport's research study delves into an in-depth study of the novel and sees no evidence of "kidnapping of young children" in the novel. Bhagmati's father himself "decides to hand Bhagmati over" to the troupe (Newport 55).

Despite the inclusion of Bhagmati's character as an emancipated figure, there are some ridiculous portrayals in the narrative, which show that their representation isn't "overly deviant" but somewhat traditional (Newport 57). This is where my research study fills the gap. The characterization in the selected texts doesn't follow the stereotypical impression of their identities. The current research study delves into this nuanced perspective of defiance from the traditional image. There aren't many texts in SA which actually portray the altered representation of transgenders. The effort of showing their true identity is not completely fulfilled.

Kavita Daiya also pinpoints drama as another dominating SA literary genre, surpassing graphic narratives. Mainstream media has actively engaged in representational politics surrounding the identity of the transgender community. The electronic media, which wields significant power in shaping narratives, has mostly contributed to their misrepresentation. Mainstream media of South Asian countries generally conform to their stereotypical image in their act of representation. They are often depicted with heavy makeup and a distinctive style of speaking that has turned them into humorous figures. They have been referred with derogatory terms like *Hijra*, *Khusra*, and Shemale etc. It is a very common practice in both India and Pakistan to call them with such offensive terms. In the media, they have been portrayed for the

sake of dramatic effect. The influence of media is undeniably profound, as it shapes and reinforces specific perceptions and ideologies that permeate our society.

Pakistani electronic media also plays significant role in highlighting transgenders identities through their dramas. I am using selected contemporary Pakistani dramas as my secondary source for my thesis. Dramas, which can be regarded as the most significant and effective instrument of mass media, their impact on the audience can't be ignored. Many Pakistani researchers critically approached this medium while limiting their studies to selected dramas. Their research studies are relevant secondary sources for my thesis.

Pakistani researcher Aroosa Kanwal has also penned down two research articles in 2020 based on transgender characters and their subjectivities in selected Pakistani Urdu Plays. In her first research article, "Transphobia to transrespect: undoing Hijraism through rehumanization of Khwaja Siras in Pakistani TV dramas", she traces the reconstruction of *Khwaja Siras* subjectivities. Kanwal sees narratives in such plays as a way towards the agency and inclusion of transgender individuals in social setups. However, her second research article, "Cartographies of Khawaja Siras: Psychological Perspectives in Building Trans inclusive Workspaces" unveils the struggles and sacrifices of transgender individuals for better work opportunities. She argues that though the transgender characters in the selected Pakistani plays are shown as independently working individuals who are doing better jobs, but still this doesn't confirm their agency in the social mainstream. This is because transgender characters are shown as working respectable jobs only after their "sartorial transition" from females to males (Kanwal). It reveals the fact that only masculine performativity can strengthen their career opportunities.

The present research study aligns with Kanwal's first research article, which traces the agency given to transgender characters, however, in comic fiction. Moreover, Kanwal's articles are centered on selected Pakistani plays where she looks into the agency of transgender characters only through their dialogues and the professional roles given to them, while my research study looks into the visual representation of transgender characters.

Same dramas are analyzed by many other researchers, however, from different perspectives. Saima Waheed and her co-authors' research article "Storyline Depiction of Transgender Issues in Pakistani Dramas", is another useful secondary source which is relevant to our study. They trace transgender issues on ethical, social, and

economical level through content analysis of these Pakistani dramas and coming to the conclusion that "more media portrayal of transgender individuals" enhances positive attitude of people towards their existence. (Waheed et al. 326). Depiction of disrespectful social behavior towards this minority group of society may evoke empathy and sympathy among the audience.

The stereotypical portrayal of transgenders isn't only restricted to Pakistani media but their traditional image is also visible in Bollywood movies which is Hindi based cinema industry in India. A group of Pakistani researchers analyzed the intricate interplay between discourse and media, uncovering their roles in perpetuating narratives surrounding transgender individuals in Pakistani society. Their findings shed light on the profound impact of communication channels in shaping societal perceptions and attitudes. They concluded that the representation of transgender people in media has been overwhelmingly negative, often perpetuating stereotypes and misconceptions (Faheem et al. 444). Likewise, Indian Hindi cinema, Bollywood has long history of reinforcing negative stereotypes by portraying transgenders as humorous characters, caricatures, and as an entertainer in comedy, thriller, and horror movies by using "fixed visual codes like loud make-up, freak applause and vulgar body movements" (Yasin et al. 97). This lack of empathy shows the negative impression of their social identity. While the visibility of transgender individuals has been significantly enhanced, the precision in representing their identities still falls short.

Yasin and his co-authors have depicted this through their research study, "Exploring Transgender's Representation, Perception and Experiences: An Analytical Study of Portrayal of Transgender in Bollywood movies and its Effects on Transgender Community of Lahore, Pakistan". This analytical study brought them to the conclusion that through the stereotypical characterization of transgender community, Bollywood movies insist upon their portrayal as "sex workers, beggars, criminals and dancers" (Yasin et al. 95). The label of 'stereotypical' is always attributed with this minority group of society and Indian movies further confirm this label by portraying them as "loud, harsh, shameless, as well as one-dimensional character who have no distinction at all" (Yasin et al. 96). Yasin and his co-authors have approached to this conclusion by content analysis of the selected Indian movies and through extensive interviews and surveys.

The constant image of transgender characters as villain or victim in South Asian electronic media and print media deprives them of their real and accurate representation. The need to look at their identity beyond societal labels is always there. My research study fills two significant gaps from the above reviewed literature. Firstly, it revolves around the SA comic fictional works, which have not been explored before, focusing on the complexity of their aesthetic and political potential in representing transgender community. Secondly, the nuanced representation highlights the diversity while negating the monotonous stereotypical social identity of transgenders which provides them margin to come ahead as normal beings rather than caricature of society.

(II)

Comic literature is far more than entertainment and societal reflection; it serves as a powerful tool for challenging conventional ideas and provoking thought. In 2009, the research study “Comic Books and the Addressing of Social Issues” was conducted to discover the relationship between comic books and social issues. The study explores how comics are a source of addressing social issues. Sometimes explicitly and sometimes relying on metaphors to address their point (Juniewicz 8). In “Graphic Novels and Visual Cultures in South Asia” (2024), Varughese and Rajinder Dudrah engage in a compelling exploration of the region's vibrant visual storytelling and the meaning these visuals hold. They have curated a set of essays in their book addressing the South Asian graphic novel and its relation with viewers who impute meanings to familiar images. Kavita Daiya in her research article, “South Asia in Graphic Narratives” (2019) applauds these contributors about opening up new conversations about aesthetic hybridity and experimentation in the graphic representation of ecological violence, social justice, nationalism, gender-based violence, and displacement (Daiya 5). This points towards the political nature of graphic and visual narratives and how they transcend aesthetics and hold a political dimension. SA Graphic narratives, being a multimedum, allow an examination of history, culture, identity, place, pleasure, and community in South Asia (Daiya 5). This describes the richness of graphic narratives. In light of this, South Asian comic and graphic fiction writers skillfully weave a tapestry of hybrid local issues, enveloping them in the allure of the aestheticism of storytelling. The current research study delves deep, peeling

back the layers to reveal the profound truths about non-binary gender's impression, which is hidden within aestheticism. The subtle approach towards uncovering indirect impression management techniques employed by SA comic fiction writers brings novelty to this research project.

Likewise, Binita Mehta and Pia Mukherji's edited volume, *Postcolonial Comics: Texts, Events, Identities* (2015), significantly contributes to exploring the intersection of comics, gender, and postcolonial studies. Their work consists of scholarly conversation on the potential of comics as a medium to challenge stereotypes and provide nuanced representations of marginalized identities. They argue that postcolonial comics can serve as meaningful postcolonial texts, which become an appropriate venue to offer new vocabularies and reimagined images which serve as "progressive alternatives to the notion of obsolete authenticities" (Mehta and Mukherji 3). In the introductory essay, the writers claimed that their work is based on graphic writings, which can be read as "postcolonial textuality" that foregrounds colonial legacies and "(re)scripting missing or misrepresented identities in their precise contexts" (2).

Harleen Singh authored the chapter titled "Graphics of Freedom: Colonial Terrorists and Postcolonial Revolutionaries in Indian Comics" within this publication. This chapter thoroughly examines the representation of colonial and postcolonial figures in Indian comics, offering valuable insights into how these narratives both reflect and challenge prevailing historical and cultural stereotypes. Additionally, her documentary, "Drawn Together: Comics, Diversity, and Stereotypes," investigates themes of race, gender, and identity through the medium of comics and cartoons. The documentary features three talented artists—a Sikh, a woman, and an African American—who are challenging the racist stereotyping currently endemic in America through their work and advocate for enhanced representation within the media landscape.

Additionally, Steve Tanner, editor and publisher of British comic book company, "Time Bomb" has published his comic book *Flintlock* (2016) to feature a first regular South Asian character, Shanti, without a stereotypical image. He has featured his South Asian character as Pirate Queen rather than a nerd or stereotypical taxi driver, which is their usual representation in western media. The revolution is ultimately questioning the old stereotypical portrayal of South Asian culture, people, and minorities. The impression of South Asians is managed through images as

narrative tools. Similar insights are developed in the selected comic works where transgender stereotypes are handled through visuals and verbal details.

The writers of selected comic series have visualized them differently and by constructed a positive impression of their social identity.

In the realm of South Asian graphics and comics, the representation of queer characters has garnered surprisingly little attention. This oversight highlights a significant gap in academic research, revealing the urgent need to explore this vital area. In 2018, an Indian researcher, Poushali Bhadury has conducted research study on queer female representation in South Asian graphic comics. Her research study focuses on the positive and diverse representation of queer female characters of Indian and Bangladeshi contexts. However, the gender debate remained confined to only female impression management. The representation of transgender individuals has largely gone unnoticed, as has the academic inquiry surrounding this vital topic. This research study aims to fill that significant gap, shedding light on an overlooked aspect of the comic narrative by focusing on the non-binary gender debate.

Impression management of gender identity in Pakistani graphic literature also remained confined to binaries by celebrating the diversity in characterization of men and women. Many researchers focused on female uprising beyond their traditional image in the Pakistani social setting. Numerous scholarly researches are based on women's agency and their nuanced representations. In 2021, Wajeehah Aayeshah conducted research on selected Pakistani comic books, which feature strong women characters in them. She claims that she has analyzed interpreted images of comics as 'cultural artefacts' (Aayeshah 3). She considers such comic fictions a way to counter gender inequality in Pakistani society by diverse representation of women (Aayeshah 23). Her research concludes that socio-political hierarchy existing in contemporary Pakistani culture is being challenged through the women's agency given to female characters in comic fictions. *Entertainment Education and Social Change* (2003) is another academic book with one chapter "*Cartoons and Comic Books for Changing Social Norms: Meena, the South Asian Girl*" focusing on the character of Meena and how that character is influential in bringing change in society. Similar approach can be taken towards the diverse representation of transgenders in comic books which ultimately will lead towards their acceptance. The present research will focus on the agency given to transgender characters through their positive image.

Indian comic fiction also plays an important role in discussion of social issues and management of gender-based stereotypes. Comic book series *Dabung Girl and the Space Journey* (2019) addresses social issues like child protection and also challenges the gender stereotypes existing in Indian society. In a striking parallel, *Tiranga* introduces us to a patriotic hero named Shakti, who emerges as a powerful feminist icon. This remarkable female superhero embodies women's agency, illustrating strength and resilience in an inspiring manner. All these comic fictions focus on the local heroes, mainly focusing on people who conform to a gender binary. Thus very less number of comic fictions have centered on queer or transgender characters. *Kari* (2008), India's first graphic novel based on queer protagonist, explores gender non-conformity and societal expectations, but it doesn't focus on trans character as such. Likewise, *Apsara Engine* (2020) by Bishakh Som, and the publishing company, "Holy Cow Entertainment's Comics", introduced LGBTQ characters in their comics, but the gap still exists regarding transgenders' appearance and their ultimate identity (re)construction.

This study will look into the diverse representation of this minority group in selected comic fictions and will offer a new perspective about their social identity. So far no research study has been conducted on the selected primary texts.

The impact of transgender and gender non-conforming groups' representation is studied in Foresman's research study. He studied the impact of children's literature, specifically focused on stigmatized groups of society, on young children. Under the topic of "The Power of Children's Literature," Foreman emphasizes that the lack of available literature specifically addressing transgender and gender non-conforming themes significantly affects children's motivation to engage with these texts. It reduces the level of familiarity and hence Children cannot "relate to and identify with the characters within the text" (Foreman 12). Foreman concluded the earlier result after studying the impact of selected elementary children's literature on children aged five to eleven. This secondary source holds considerable significance for my research study, as it provides a rationale for the ongoing debate surrounding non-binary gender and its representation in graphic literature. Foreman asserts that stories about stigmatized groups of society promote empathy among the readers. Transgenders are categorized as "outgroup" of the society. Their inclusion in the texts adds a level of familiarity between the portrayed outgroup individual and the reader. This familiarity

is the source of creating empathy. This also resolves the issue of representation and impression.

The primary texts for this study consist of selected South Asian comic fictions that have not previously been analyzed from any perspective. As a result, there is currently no existing research inquiry on this topic. However, these texts have garnered significant appreciation from various magazines. Pakistan's two leading English Newspaper magazines have shown appreciation towards the Pakistani comic book series *Basila and the Street Crew* (2020). Sonia Ashraf, a reporter for Dawn newspaper magazine, appreciates the new step by Azcorp Entertainment group towards the representation of transgender people in their comic book series *Basila and the Street Crew* (2020). Ashraf considers this step as a hope to bring Pakistan's transgender community into mainstream (Ashraf). She views the series as a project which highlights the transgender community's issues that they face in Pakistan. Similarly, the Express Tribune sees this Pakistani comic series as a step further to portray transgender community and their survival struggles in everyday life. Reporter Fatima Muneer thinks of this series as a way to normalize transgender by portraying them in everyday societal roles (Muneer). Another leading online social media platform "Pakistan Chowk Community Centre" views this Pakistani comic book series as a step towards normalizing transgenders' existence in Pakistani society in the face of transphobia. However, there is much more to explore in these series besides this. Their positive image through different representation inside this comic fiction series is more like a celebration and glorification of transgender characters, which ultimately challenges their typical identity. The present research study endeavors to cater to this very aspect.

The other primary texts of the present study is Indian comic fiction series which again put transgenders in mainstream. Indian science journalist and a writer, Sayantan Datta has contributed towards the positive representation of transgenders in comics named *Transgender persons in science mini-series* in a blog "The Life of Science.com" (2016). His recently published article "(Trans)forming Science: Towards a Transgender-Inclusive Science Higher Education in India"(2022) is on the same topic about contribution of transgenders in the field of science and technology. Datta, with his co-writers, shed light on the transgender inclusive educational space in India with specific reference to science. Their research project shows discrimination against queer-trans bodies in the Indian science ecosystem and how caste structures

and patriarchy are behind discrimination. Datta's recent research study explains their concern with the transgenders inclusion in science and technology and also explains their motive behind the creation of comic fiction based on transgenders unusual contribution towards science and technology. The present research study will also focus on the uprising of transgenders in the scientific field, however, in comic fiction.

SA Literary studies provide plenty of material on transgender debate. This area of study is explored immensely by many research scholars. However, the exploration from this perspective has predominantly unfolded within the realm of SA literary fiction. This scholarly gap is highlighted by Kavita Daiya, who asserts that postcolonial and South Asian literary study is largely focused on literary fiction, poetry, and drama (Daiya 3). This leaves the graphic and comics at the periphery. This chapter provides the critical scholarship of both literary fiction, drama, and comics based on the representation of transgenders in SA. It is viewed that no research study has been conducted on the chosen texts.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Literature review of the secondary sources helped me in the selection of the relevant theoretical framework for my research study. This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the selected theories and related concepts, which are helpful in the analysis of the selected texts. My research study uses a qualitative approach as it is exploratory. This chapter of the thesis comprises two parts. First part discusses the theoretical framework, while the second part describes the selected research methodology and the rationale behind opting for this method.

3.1 Theoretical Framework

This thesis discusses the (re)construction of new identity of transgenders with the help of Judith Butler's theory of Gender Performativity in relation with Erving Goffman's theory of Impression Management. Butler's concept of "Gender Performativity", which is taken from her seminal academic work *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) provides the lens for understanding the performative and socially constructed nature of gender identity. This theory is supplemented with Susan Stryker's influential concept of "Transgender performativity", given in her work, *Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution* (2017). Goffman's "Impression Management" is helpful in further negotiation of social identity while discussing the self-constructed nature of "Self Presentation". Butler's concept of "Performativity" provides the lens for understanding the hegemonic performance of gender identity, which involves the formation of socially or culturally accepted gender roles, and how the status quo of gender norms can be challenged through performance. Stryker explores this potential of subversion through performance in transgender individuals that how they perform and negotiate their gender identities. Likewise, Goffman's theatrical metaphor "dramaturgy" is examined with its concepts of "front stage", "back stage" and "sign vehicles". All these concepts are looked into concerning the (re)construction of social identity. These concepts by Goffman are taken from his seminal academic work, *The*

Presentation of Self in Everyday Life (1959). This framework gives the researcher an insight into the process, involving the reconstruction of social identity of transgender people. With the help of Butler's theoretical concept about non-essentialist view of gender identity, the status quo of transgender people is challenged. It is argued that since gender can be maintained, created, or perpetuated through stylized performance in a certain social setting, transgenders with subversive performance of their gender can challenge their fixed marginal social status. They can negotiate their social identity by managing their impression. This management of impression is directly linked with the idea of self-presentation in a society, which is possible through different techniques as stated in Goffman's idea of Impression Management. The present study focuses on the multimodality of selected South Asian comic fictions which are (re)constructing new identities of transgender people by portraying them in different and positive personalities. In this thesis, social identity of transgender people is negotiated while focusing on their representation in selected texts.

3.1.1 Theory of Performativity & Transgender Performativity

The concept of "Performativity" has its roots in various fields such as gender studies, anthropology, management studies, performance studies, economics, social and cultural geography and linguistics. Judith Butler's theory of "Gender Performativity" is also initiated from the idea that gender is not fixed, rather a performance. It suggests that gender identity is all act and it is formed with gendered acts, which ultimately suggests that there are certain acts, which are forming the identity. According to Butler's theory of Gender Performativity, gender and gender roles are not fixed categories, rather socially constructed through repetitive social performances. As Butler states gender as "culturally constructed" identity (Butler 9). There are some behavioral traits which are associated with specific gender and society expects people to behave accordingly. Likewise, gender roles are formed through social interventions because society tells certain genders to behave in a certain way for acceptance. She takes support from other theorists' ideas about gender as "a relation" rather than "a set of relations, and not an individual attribute" (13). This means that context is significant in formation of one's gender and a person's gender "is always relative to the constructed relations in which it is determined" (15). This depicts the social acceptance of hegemonic performance of gender that compels

people of certain gender to act certain ways. In simple words, it is based on social conditioning.

According to Butler's theory, "gender proves to be performative" which also means "gender is always a doing" (Butler 33). This challenges the fixity of identity or roles. The different day-to-day acts, such as nonverbal communication and speech acts, are performative because these are significant in forming or maintaining one's identity. Thus a person's actions, his speech acts, and his nonverbal communicating acts like gestures and behaviors contribute towards his/her identity formation which is continuously being redefined through these same sources. Hence, gender performativity marks gender as fluid, socially constructed, and potentially subversive.

Butler took the initiative to define gender identity of transgenders in the light of Simon de Beavoir's contribution towards defining gender identity. Both feminists talked about the socially constructed nature of identity. According to Butler "Gender reality is performative which asserts that gender identity is formed through acts and performances. It is real only to the extent that it is performed" (Butler 278). With subversive acts and performance, one's gender identity is negotiated. Stryker expands this idea and highlights that transgender individuals not just simply negotiate their identity but rather assert it and perform it against social discriminated conditions. This project sheds light on the subversive performance of transgender characters that eventually leads towards their impression management.

Butler's theory of Performativity has been expanded upon by many scholars considering its significant influence on transgender theory. Susan Stryker's work "*Transgender History: The Roots of Today's Revolution*" (2017) reflects this influence. Her work delves into the profound implications of performativity within the realm of gender transition, asserting that transgender individuals not only perform but intricately negotiate their gender identities. However, this journey carries distinct socio-political ramifications that set it apart from that of cisgender individuals.

Stryker talks about the potential of resistance and agency in transgender individuals who are involved in the act of creating and asserting their identities through performance and material embodiment. They are not simply disrupting gender norms but actively subverting. She also uses the monstrous metaphor of Frankenstein's monster to describe the people's general perception of transgenders as unnatural beings. She explores this aspect in her essay, "My Words to Victor

Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage" (1994). In the monologue of her essay, she develops a connection between herself and the monster by stating that, like the monster, she is excluded from the human community because she is "often perceived as less fully human" (Stryker 238). Instead of rejecting this prejudiced perception of their gender identity, Stryker seems to embrace it, arguing that trans identity challenges the boundaries of what is considered "natural". This gives her the potential to resist against the conditions in which she must struggle to exist. She highlights rage and emotion as central to transgender performativity, positioning trans identity as an assertion of existence against societal rejection. She considers transgender performativity as an act of political resistance. She explains that trans people challenge normative ideas of gender through their visibility and existence, writing that "the term transgender signals a refusal to comply with societal expectations about gender" (Stryker 19). This suggests that performing a trans identity is not just about self-expression but about disrupting rigid gender binaries imposed by society.

Stryker's "Transgender Performativity" involves both social performance and material embodiment. In her view, transgender identities are enacted not as mere performance but as a real physical transformation, also enact their gender identity. Appearance, voice, body modifications, and social interactions, all of these play crucial role in the assertion of transgenders' social identity.

With the help of the theoretical concept about non-essentialized view of gender identity along with its imitative structure, monotonous social identity of transgender people as street singers, dancers, beggars, and sex workers is questioned and the study argues that their gender roles are socially constructed hence should not be considered as their final identity. Highly essentialist approach towards transgenders representation in South Asian media and fictional works is merely based on biased perception of their social identity at the hands of representers. The unbalanced and stereotypical portrayal only distorts their image in the eyes of the public and eventually becomes one of the leading reasons behind transphobia. The current research study delves into the representational mechanism regarding transgender social identity in selected comic fictional works, and how their positive and balanced portrayal combat their typical negative image.

3.1.2 Theory of Impression Management

Theoretical concept of Impression management was first theorized in sociologist Erving Goffman's seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. In 1959, Goffman coined this term "Impression management" in his book while describing the mechanism of controlling and manipulating the public image of a person, object or an event. Impression management is also termed as "self presentation" as it involves the process of desired self image before the audience. While explaining the purpose of his book, Goffman stated in the preface that the focus would be on the individual that how he presents himself and his activity before others and the ways "in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them" (Goffman xi). This management of impression is directly linked with the actions an individual may or may not perform. Goffman states:

A correctly staged and performed scene leads the audience to impute a self to a performed character, but this imputation – this self – is a product of a scene that comes off, and is not a cause of it. The self, then, as a performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or discredited (Goffman 253).

Goffman delivered his concept of impression management by using the theatrical metaphor called "Dramaturgy", that provides the lens for looking at human behaviors as performances on the stage of real life. According to him everyone is performing their roles in social settings before different audiences. Both performers and audience are significant in the process of social interaction as both cooperate in the negotiation of the situation. Both enact their roles in relation with each other. He further explains the two stages where people perform their roles. "Front stage" means a "well decorated, well repaired, and tidy" performance or representation of real life performer before an audience while "Back stage" refers to the times which are "relatively unprepossessing" where people are their real selves without their masks on (Goffman 75). Both of these stages are significant in the process of social establishments. Back stage is the region where "performance of a routine is prepared"

and the front stage is the region where the "performance is presented" (Goffman 152). This way people are continually processing and managing their impressions in the context of social interaction. Goffman describes this organized system of activity as social establishments, which pave the way for the "achievement of predefined objectives" (Goffman 153). This point also provides another rationale for choosing this theory in my research study as it helps in looking into writers' deliberate attempt to manage the impression of transgenders resulting into reconstruction of their social identity.

According to Goffman, there are certain attributes which are required for "successfully staging a character" and these attributes are expressed with the help of some of the "techniques of impression management" (Goffman 132).

There are various mechanisms and techniques which are helpful in influencing the thoughts of others about self. He termed these mechanisms as "Sign Vehicles". There are a number of sign vehicles which are responsible for desired image including social setting, appearance, and manner of interacting. Other signs at personal front that affect presentation of self are like "rank; clothing; sex, age, and racial characteristics; size and looks; posture; speech patterns; facial expressions; bodily gestures" (Goffman 14). These all signs can be controlled by the presenters for the desired public image. All these signs deliver a special kind of message on behalf of the presenter like "Appearance" of the performer or presenter tells an audience about "performer's social statuses" (Goffman 15). Similarly, "Manner" refers to "those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction role the performer will expect to play in the on-coming situation" (15). All these signs vehicles act as tools while presenting one's self before others in a social setting.

In chapter six, "The Arts of Impression Management", Goffman further explains the complexity of the process of self presentation by explaining "expressive responsibility" at the part of the performer who must act upon certain rules to manage their expression. Along with this, the performers must also avoid "unmeant gestures", which are referred to as "minor and inadvertent acts" by Goffman (Goffman 132). These actions convey impressions which are inappropriate at that time, hence should be avoided to form and maintain the desired image.

This theoretical concept has its roots in social psychology while focusing on individuals' behavior. However, later this concept has been used by various researchers in different fields for desired outcomes. There are two stated motives

behind the process of impression management. One is the instrumental motive which involves the strategies to influence others to gain desired rewards. The other referred to as expressive motive which involves the process of forming one's identity or to reinvent themselves. Goffman's ideas about stigma and management of impression have also proved fruitful in the field of queer theory. The present research study looks into the expressive motive behind the mechanisms of impression management used by graphic comic writers to reconstruct new social identity of transgender people through their managed impression.

This idea of Goffman has similar grounds with Butler's theory of Performativity. Both theories of Performativity and Impression Management have non essentialist approach and are more focused on the act of self construction resulting into (re)construction of identity. It highlights the fact that identities are not only under the process of continuous negotiation but can also be manipulated by different mechanisms. Humans are called performers in Goffman's views because they are managing the ways others see them.

Goffman's idea of impression management is useful in this research study in terms of understanding the comic fiction writers' attempt to negotiate the transgenders' identity that how they tried to build new and positive impression of transgenders in the minds of readers. As Goffman states that performers have control because they are "aware of the impression they foster" over the minds of the audience who are bound to "know what they have been allowed to perceive" (Goffman 90). Based on this concept this theory helps in the investigation of the process of positive representation of transgenders through managed impression which in result reconstructs their new identity.

The common trait of both selected theories, which motivated me as a researcher to opt for them for my thesis, is the core concept about identity as a social construct rather than an innate thing. For both theorists, negotiation of identity involves the performance. Impression management theory sees performance as strategic and conscious while the Performativity theory sees it as subconscious and socially constructed. The main focus remains on the "performance" of characters that leads towards the (re)construction of their identity. Both theories acknowledge that social norms dictate how people behave. Since gender norms, behaviors, and gender expectations are socially constructed, they can be challenged through performativity and material embodiment as pointed out by Stryker which involves the process of

active enactment and assertion of identity. The process results in the emergence or construction of their new social identity. This aligns with Goffman's idea of impression management that these new asserted identities reject previous misunderstood stereotypical identities related to that specific gender and hence build new impression of their identity. This new desired image is managed through different techniques which Goffman refers as "Sign Vehicles".

3.2 Research Methodology

The following study is qualitative research as the selected primary texts are visual narratives and aren't mono modal discourses, hence require multifaceted approach for analysis. For this reason, Visual Grammar of Multimodal discourse analysis by Kress and Van Leeuwen proves useful as a research method to carry out this study. This research method allows to look at the three meta-functions of the images; Representational, Interpersonal and Compositional. Multiple modes of communication in the form of texts, illustrations, symbols and colors are analyzed. The analysis of these different semiotic modes and lexical choices in the texts are helpful in analyzing the representation of social identity of transgenders. Specific focus has been put on the characters of the comic fictions. Thus analysis is carried out by doing the social semiotic analysis of undertaken comics with the help of Multimodal discourse analysis. The texts are selected comic fictions of South Asia. 4 issues of Pakistani comic fiction *Basila and the Street Crew* (2020) which are authored and illustrated by Anain Sheikh and Noman Ansari are studied along with the 4 Indian comic fiction series titled *Transgender persons in science mini-series* from the blog "Life of Science.com" (2016). The analysis of the undertaken comic fictions is carried out under the light of key tenets of Performativity theory given by Judith Butler in her book "*Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*" (1990) along with Erving Goffman's theory of Impression Management from his book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). The theoretical framework of Butler's and Goffman's idea of Performativity and Impression Management provide the lens for carrying out research study on the dialogues, description, and illustrations of these comic fictions. According to which, gender is a kind of improvised performance and presentation of self in the form of impression can be controlled through various mechanisms. With the help of socially constructed nature of gender identity and impression management, social identity of transgender people is debated

that how their gender identity is always associated with lower social category and how by controlling mechanism their impression can be improved.

3.3 Research Method

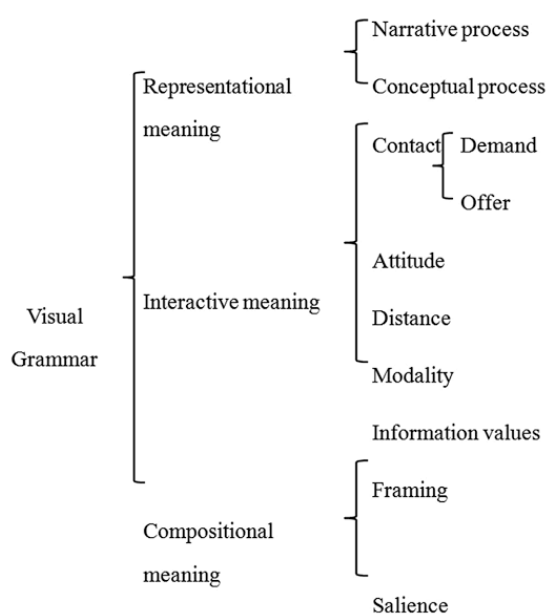
I have chosen Gunther Kress and Van Leeuwen's Visual Grammar method of Multimodal discourse analysis (MDA) for my thesis. The method is presented in their seminal work *"Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design"* (1996), which analyzes the multimodality of picture books. My research study explores the multimodality of selected comic fictions by exploring the visual and verbal details to make connections with the meanings they propose. Kress and Leeuwen's method of 'Visual Grammar' is based on and grew out of Halliday's 'Systematic Functional Linguistics' taken from his book, *"Language as Social Semiotic"*. Visual Grammar suggests that images like language can deliver multilayered interpretation as they are also rich in the meaning making process. Considering their potential in the process of semiotic interpretation, Kress and Van Leeuwen proposed that just like language, images also have grammatical structures which convey meanings upon analysis. They proposed that to function as a full system of communication, visuals have to serve several representational and communicational requirements (Kress and Leeuwen 41). They have adapted the theoretical notion of 'metafunction' from Halliday's work. The three metafunctions which he posits are the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual. The other names for these metafunctions are Representational, Interpersonal, and Compositional. Chapter 1 of their book discusses these levels in detail. This thesis explores the representational metafunction of Visual grammar in detail while leaving the other two, as the main focus of the study remains on the representation of transgender characters in the selected comics.

Visual grammar proves to be a systematic and comprehensive method to analyze the multimodality of my selected comic fictions. Multimodal discourse means the interaction or interrelated system of multiple semiotic modes. Therefore, this method allows the in-depth analysis of different semiotic systems present in multimodal discourse of selected visual narratives. The method also investigates the desired meaning communicated to the targeted audience through both visual and verbal communication in the form of multimodal discourse. Both visual and verbal modes are analyzed in the process of analysis. Though the method is popular in linguistics and communication studies, it also applies to literary research that involves

multimodal texts like graphic novels, illustrated fiction, or digital narratives. This approach seems particularly relevant to literary forms like comics, which inherently blend visual and textual elements. In comics, the visual mode often plays a primary role, with the verbal mode complementing it; these modes interact to convey meaning. This way MDA can offer rich insights into how multiple modes contribute to meaning-making. Michal Borodo used this visual grammar method of MDA in the investigation of Franco-Belgian comic book series, *Thorgal*, and the Polish translations of it in his research article, “Multimodality, translation and comics” (2014).

This method is more like an approach or a model of social semiotics involving the sociological interpretation of the verbal and non-verbal semiotic systems present in the form of visual text. Not only does the understanding of visual grammar structures help us to get the most appropriate interpretation, but it also helps us to look into the psychological manipulation at the part of viewers or audience practiced by writers and illustrators. Visual grammar method allows us to examine the combined effect of verbal and visual modes of semiotic systems on the desired meaning of Multimodal discourse.

Following is the framework of Visual Grammar:



According to this framework, image is interpreted at three levels. The first level, namely 'Representational', talks about what the image is actually about? It

focuses mainly on the representation of the objects, people, or places in the image. This metafunction observes the represented participants, their depicted actions concerning the circumstances in which they are taking those actions. In other words, it is said that different “semiotic modes offer an array of choices, of different ways in which objects, and their relations to other objects and to processes, can be represented” (Kress and Leeuwen 42). Intersemiotic analysis of both verbal and non-verbal semiotic modes is required to identify the above-mentioned aspects of representational meaning. The physical appearance of characters is explored through this metafunction, which further helps in the exploration of the age, role, class, and ethnicity of the represented characters. This level is further divided into two processes, namely Narrative and Conceptual. The narrative process examines the relation between the represented things and their actions. The conceptual process, however, investigates the classification of the participants in the represented image.

The second level of Interpersonal Metafunction is about the particular social relationship between the creator or the producer of the represented image and the participants and viewers of the object represented (Kress and Leeuwen 42). It focuses on the question of how the represented image engages the viewer. It simply shows the relationship between the producer of the semiotic sign and the interpreter of the semiotic sign. This level is achieved through 4 elements: Gaze, size of frame and social distance, perspective, and modality. Painter, Martin and Unsworth (2013) refer to these elements as ‘social distance’, ‘attitude’, ‘contact’ and ‘modality’. These elements affect the audience perception of the image and the linguistic message.

The third level is Compositional metafunction which examines the unified effect of aforementioned two levels on the perception of the image. It investigates the role of “semiotic mode to form texts, complexes of signs which cohere both internally with each other and externally with the context in and for which they were produced” (Kress and Leeuwen 42). It shows how the two levels contribute towards the production of a meaningful whole. This level is also dependent on three elements, i.e, Information value, salience, and Framing. The information value is about the placement of elements in a semiotic system. The object's position in the image delivers specific information about the object. Salience is about the prominence of the presented object in comparison to others. Lastly, Framing determines the relationship between different elements based on its presence and absence.

The selected method of Visual Grammar of MDA enables me as a researcher to look at the deeper and foregrounded meaning of the selected comic fictional works, how linguistic and non-linguistic semiotic systems work together to convey the desired meaning through the Representational semiotic system. In this research study, the desired meaning hints towards the writers' attempt to construct transgenders' social identity through their positive portrayal in SA comic fictions. The in-depth analysis of visual and linguistic information of the selected texts at representational metafunction level investigates the negotiation of social identity of transgenders in SA context and its effect on their impression with the theoretical support of Butler's and Stryker's theoretical concepts about Performativity and Goffman's Impression management.

CHAPTER 4

REIMAGINING TRANSGENDER PERFORMATIVITY IN PAKISTANI COMIC FICTION: *BASILA AND THE STREET CREW*

In this chapter, I critically analyze my first primary text, "*Basila and the Street Crew*" (2020), a Pakistani comic fiction illustrated by Anain Sheikh and written by Noman Ansari. This text consists of 4 issues based on the life of an orphaned girl, Basila, who was raised by transgender characters living in Karachi, the metropolitan city of Pakistan. Three transgender characters, namely Riffat Apa, Anji and Nargis, play an important role in developing the storyline and their characterization forms the crux of my thesis. The illustrations with verbal details are examined critically with the help of the selected research method of Multimodal discourse analysis. The analyzed content further helped in the development of my argument about the reconstruction of the social identity of transgenders through their performativity in the face of societal expectation of their gender in the light of Butler and Stryker's concept of "Performativity". The analysis also involved successfully examining their improved impression in the light of Goffman's theory of impression management. I propose that the selected comic fiction isn't merely representing transgenders and their existence in Pakistani society, but rather reconstructing their former neglected, marginalized and submissive identities by portraying them in new and active roles and performances.

Anain Sheikh is the illustrator of this comic series whose portrayal of transgender characters through illustrated pictures is significant in the narrative building regarding their reconstructed identities. Instead of portraying this marginalized community as the caricature of Pakistani society, Sheikh developed their characters through their new looks, appearances, and their unique performativity. The story is developed by the writer, Noman Ansari, which discusses the social issues such as child trafficking, animal rights, and also presents the significant impact of social media in the 4 issues of this comic book.

The setting of each issue of this comic fiction is Karachi, which is the metropolitan city of Pakistan. As the title of the comic fiction suggests, the story

revolves around the eponymous character, Basila, a teenage girl, and her group of friends, who are referred to as "the street crew". They work for the resolution of different social issues concerning the lives of the citizens of Karachi. However, my research study looks critically into the characterization of transgender characters in the comic fiction and the semiotic systems involved in the process of their representation.

For the critical examination of the represented transgender characters in "*Basila and the Street Crew*", I have focused only on the first level of MDA method of visual grammar, which is "Representational metafunction". The first level of MDA is relatable to my research study as it involves the examination of represented transgender characters while focusing on the multimodality of the comic fiction. The opted method helps read and analyze the semiotic systems of verbal and non-verbal modes of communication present in the primary texts.

4.1 (Re)constructing social identity of Transgenders through the power of representation

Representational metafunction of the Visual Grammar method of Multimodal discourse analysis critically examines the represented participants in the form of characters, objects or places and the processes which are taking place in given circumstances. The exploration of these details is helpful in decoding the meaning of different semiotic modes.

The illustrations in "*Basila and the Street Crew*" are also a great source of more than one social semiotic mode. Different semiotic sources like appearance, colors, symbols and lexical modes are helpful in the critical development of the main argument of my study about the reconstruction of social identity of transgenders.

4.1.1 Strong Characterization and Narrative Building

Three transgender characters have been introduced in "*Basila and the Street Crew*", namely Riffat Apa, Anji and Nargis. Their carefully developed characters are reflected through many unique traits attributed to them unconventionally. All of these transgender characters are portrayed economically independent personalities with strong emotional and psychological attitudes. The intention was to develop the desired public persona of their personalities and to reveal their private struggles that eventually led towards their impression management. This makes characters more layered and intriguing for the readers. Moreover, their individuality adds uniqueness

to their personalities, which also shapes their performativity in the face of societal expectations. This image negates their typical social image in South Asian societies.

The first and most significant transgender character to be discussed is of 'Riffat Apa', who is more like a mentor and a mother to the household. Her character is associated with the pious figure of a mother which stands opposite to the traditional image of transgender person as cursed being. This impression management is quite subtle during the whole process of her image representation. Riffat Apa's calm and compose attitude towards others make her a leader and a trustworthy guide for everyone else. Her motherly care and love for Basila, komal and Saad, who are non transgender characters, is significant in her character development.



(pp. 57,11 issue 1) (p. 22 issue 2)

All of above three illustrations represent Riffat Apa as a loving and a kind elder to others in the house. Her motherly figure contrasts with the typical representation of transgenders as harsh, loud and non Sympathetic. These negative behavioral traits which are usually associated with their gender identity cause transphobic sentiments among the people especially children. The typical association of their gender identity with such negativity is because of the society, which associates such low behavioral traits with this third gender category. Butler confirms the societal role in the formation of one's gender identity and states gender as "culturally constructed" identity (Butler 9). The prejudice against transgender community and their ultimate stigmatization in South Asia is basically a cultural construct. With improved impression through the change in their behavior and performance, the perception of their identities can be improved and their social status can be upgraded. This is what Goffman called "self presentation". In the selected illustrations, the impression of transgender characters is being managed with their active performativity.

Above illustrations reject the typical notion of transphobia by showing Riffat Apa's loving relationship with the children. The illustrations also reflect enactment and assertion of transgender identity through 'performativity'. The writer and

illustrator have achieved this goal with subtle management of the character's impression with the use of different sign vehicles. Riffat Apa's character boldly challenges societal norms that marginalized trans individuals by wholeheartedly embracing the role of motherhood and contesting cisnormative concepts of family and relationships. She actively confronts mainstream narratives surrounding trans femininity by asserting her right to be a mother—a role frequently denied to trans women. In doing so, she disrupts the conventional expectations of motherhood, which often assume that only cisgender women can fulfill this role. This perspective resonates with Stryker's assertion that trans individuals challenge gender norms not merely through identity performance, but through lived, embodied experiences that redefine the meanings of gendered roles (Stryker 19).

Both verbal and visual details in the illustrations are representative of her kind personality. In the first illustration she is holding child Basila. Her kind and affectionate gesture is visible through her tight and secure hold of Basila who is just a baby here. She has wrapped her both arms around her and has pulled her near to her chest. Her closed eyes while hugging Basila shows the intensity of her emotions. She is determined to save her. Her emotional state of mind is also visible through the verbal details given in speech balloon. Her determined attitude regarding Basila's safety is visible through her assertive tone. She makes a silent promise to Basila to keep her safe forever. Her verbal assertion with a statement that "No one will ever hurt you again" shows the protective side of her personality which is another motherly trait. (Sheikh and Ansari 11). She is adoptive mother to Basila after Samina's death. Her status as a transgender mother is basically a change in her gender role. This change is significant in the upgradation of her social identity. Her gender roles are being negotiated here.

The second and third illustrations also show her character as a mother to Komal and Saad. Her emotional attachment with them is evident through her gestures. She gives Saad cooking lessons and provides him with shelter. She also seems to appreciate Komal's efforts in journalism. Along with this, she is like an elder sister to Nargis and Anji who are also transgender like her. That's why she is called "Apa" by everyone in the house. They all share the same space while living in the same house. The peaceful household setting in the form of shared space along with the respectful and loving image of Riffat Apa is the rejection or ultimate challenge to the idea of

transphobia. This change in the gender role shows a challenge to the status quo of transgenders in SA social setups.

Besides being kind and sympathetic, Riffat Apa is also shown as a self made person owning her own office and actively working as a social worker for the betterment of the society. The loads of papers on her office desk and multiple books in the background of the picture shows that she is an educated person with an intellect to resolve issues.



(p.1 issue 2)

She has made her workplace in her home, a double-storey building with a nice and decent outlook. She also owns a vehicle which further confirms her status as an independent and financially strong person. This economical stability directly hints towards her status as an independent and educated person who is rejecting the conventional mindset about transgender people through her professional role. What is generally associated with the people of this community is being rejected through her improved impression.

Riffat Apa's first appearance in the 1st issue of the comic fiction narrates a lot about her character. She stands against "two-legged wolves" who are trying to kill a helpless child (Sheikh and Ansari 1).



(p. 6 issue 1)

In this illustration she is shown as confronting the murderers barehanded. Her raised hand isn't merely a signal to the murderers to stop but it also hints towards her fearless and empowered character. One standing against the two without any availability of weapon adds to her subversive outlook. The speech balloon with the word "STOP" in capital letters shows the intensity of her opposition and the assertive side of her personality.



(p. 40 issue 4)

Similar portrayal is depicted in the issue 4, where Riffat Apa fights bravely with the criminals who come to take her with them forcefully. Not only did she resist her kidnapping verbally but physically too. She lands a lamp on the head of one of the kidnappers. Again, in this picture she has been shown fighting against the two. We see no sign of fear on her face. This contrast with the earlier illustration where her face shows signs of worry. The transition from the previous somewhat scared person to a fearless person shows her groomed personality over the years. Her body language communicates a lot about her strong emotional demeanor. This depicts the change in her performativity.



(p.8 issue 1)

This picture communicates her character as a saviour at two levels. She protects not only Basila from being murdered but she also saves the other child from becoming a murderer. She successfully invokes the goodness in the other child who was being forced to kill them both. This image contrasts with the typical notion about transgenders that they are most likely to invoke evilness and promote crimes.



(p. 65 issue 4)

Riffat Apa's figure as a saviour is also visible in the 4th issue. In this illustrated picture, despite being wounded herself she stands Infront of Sami. Her fierce facial expressions set the assertive tone for her personality. Along with this, the clenched fist gives her strong outlook. She seems determined to save Sami.

The above discussed four illustrations portray Riffat Apa fighting against evil doers and criminals. This unusual depiction of transgender person combating evils is a

direct critique to the narrative of criminalization of transgenders which was first initiated by British government of subcontinent. Their criminal social identity has been reinforced in many narratives with their portrayal as criminals. This comic fiction is reconstructing their social identity by showing them as saviours instead of criminals.



(pp.25, 26 issue 1)

Besides Riffat Apa other two transgender characters also come forward as saviours. The above illustrations put light on the subversive character of Nargis. Both verbal and visual details seem to subvert power dynamics and challenge the idea of masculinity in heteronormative society. She is shown as a strong character who confronts Saad's father and saves him from the thrashing. Nargis stops Saad's father from hurting Saad by holding his wrist with her right hand. Her strong grip on his wrist, and as a result his loose separated fingers of his hand show his submission and her dominance over him. Her fierce facial expressions add to her assertive character. In the picture, we see four other characters apart from Nargis and Saad's father. They are shown as furious but they aren't shown in action. Nargis is centralized in the illustration as she is standing in the center and blocking the attack physically. This shows that she is strong enough to handle the situation. The subversive side of her personality is also visible through her assertive tone of speech when she says "How dare you hit a child? Your own son!" (Sheikh and Ansari 25). In the second picture she jerks his hand with an abrupt and forceful release. This again shows her dominance over him and also gives a warning sign. She clearly challenges his masculinity by not only blocking his attack physically, but also verbally. She says, "If you're such a man, then why not take on someone your own size" (Sheikh and Ansari

26). Her character is subverting the whole idea of power dynamics between a male figure and a transgender person. Her physical and verbal dominance sets her on powerful position while Saad's father becomes powerless. Eventually, he leaves the scene without uttering any word.

Nargis' resilience and her dominance over Saad's father depicts her powerful assertion of her identity as a strong transgender person which defy her socially expected identity of victimized person. It also depicts the "Self- presentation" tactic of Goffman. The strong public persona is developed for the readers and for the other characters inside the comic. Saad's father, leaving the scene, shows his acknowledgment of her power. This means Nargis' character is controlling the readers' perception as well as the other characters' perception of her identity.



(p. 44 issue 1)

This illustration also challenges the idea of masculinity and power dynamics. Nargis' use of physical strength to fight against the evil shows the fearless side of her personality. The above illustrated figure challenges the same typical notion of criminalization associated with transgenders in South Asian societies. Postcolonial Indian and Pakistani heteronormative societies think of transgenders as criminals responsible for illegal acts. Above illustration shows them as combating evils. This managed impression rejects their typical criminalized figure.

Anji's character also rejects the stereotypical representation of transgenders. Nargis and Anji stand in contrast to each other in their personalities but the commonality that unite them together is their strong and subversive character with good and kind heart. Both Anji and Nargis are shown with some educational backgrounds.



(p.52 issue 2)

In the 2nd issue it is mentioned that Nargis studies theatre on the weekend which enabled her to act effortlessly good. In 1st issue, she distracts the kidnappers with her acting skills in order to save Komal while in the 2nd issue she gets into another role of a rich lady to manipulate dognappers. Her skilled performance with her skillful transformation through her makeup, she helped her crew to fight against illegal dogfighting operation. This image is again opposite to the victimized representation of transgender community of Pakistan. Instead of portraying them as victims of social exclusion and discrimination, a very common narrative about their existence, comic fiction writers have represented differently. Characterization proved as the useful mechanism for managing their impression. For readers transgenders are not victims rather saviours. Saviours of their lives and other's too. This self presentation is being practiced at the hands of the writers and the illustrators who at the back stage are responsible for the front stage representation of transgender characters. This whole process of representation is using different sign vehicles. Represented characters are one of them.



(p. 21 issue 1) (p.28 issue 2)

The above illustrations are taken from 1st and the 2nd issue of this comic series. Both pictures clearly demonstrate the kind hearted nature of Nargis' character and her being the animal lover. Her kind gaze towards her pet cat Jalebi shows affectionate side of her personality. Similarly, in the second illustration she is adoring puppies. In both illustrations she is shown as clamping her hands together and bringing them to her face. This shows her intense love for animals. Her loving and affectionate gesture is also visible through her gaze. Her eyes are shining which means she completely adores the animals. Her smile adds to the description of her emotional state of mind.

Nargis character's individuality lies in her self-loving nature. Her self-love stands opposite to what we generally think of transgender community that they hate themselves. She always remains in a presentable looks with decent and minimal makeup which adds beauty to her natural look. Her personality is shown in two contrasting attitudes. At one hand she is shown kind, loving and caring person while on the other hand she is shown strong, fearless and subversive character to combat evil. Either way she is subverting the common stereotypical image of transgender in South Asian societies where they are generally perceived as ugly, harsh and hateful people associated with criminal acts.

Another significant transgender character is of Anji who is represented as an educated, intelligent and a decisive person. She usually leads the crew with her unique and cunning ideas. She also knows how to drive which is very unusual depiction of

transgenders in Pakistani community where they are considered uneducated, uncivilized and dishonest.



(p.29 issue 1)

In this illustration she is guiding the crew with her plan. Her image of leading the crew to combat evil isn't only the critique of bad image of transgenders who are typically perceived as evil themselves involved in illegal activities but her intelligence and sharp mind also reject the idea that pose transgenders as not capable of high intellect. Anji's intellectual personality constantly negates this notion.



(p.24 issue 2) (p.47 issue 2)

In the above illustrations Anji is shown as driving a vehicle with a determined look on her face. The crew is out on a hunt of criminals responsible for animal abuse and their illegal trafficking. In the second illustration we see how Basila appreciates her skills and instincts by saying that her instincts are "usually right" (Sheikh and

Ansari 47). This means that this isn't the first time she is proposing something or helping the crew with her intellect.



(pp.83, 84 issue 2)

These illustrations about Nargis and Anji show that both of them are passionate and determined in their futures. The way they are supporting each other hint towards their career oriented selves. This is again very rare to see in the society where transgenders are deprived of their entrance in almost every social sphere. Pakistani transgender community is usually depicted as living dull and mundane life merely focusing on meeting basic necessities let alone making their career.

The writer and illustrator of this comic fiction tried to improve the impression of transgender characters through the application of different impression management techniques. All transgender characters are shown educated, passionate, emotionally strong and professionally active member of society. This image contrasts with their typical social identity in Pakistani society. The improved portrayal of their personalities is a way to reconstruct their social identity in the heteronormative society of Pakistan where their typical social identity is associated with begging, prostitution, street singing and dancing. This comic fiction is representing them doing honorable job of social activism which itself is the struggle in the face of social exclusion because of which transgender community is denied of honorable professions.

4.1.2 Physical Appearance as Sign Vehicle

Physical appearance of characters is significant in determining the portrayal mechanism practiced by the creators. As Goffman states the 'appearance' as one of the

"Sign vehicles" for managing impression. It communicates a lot about the characters. Goffman states appearance as one of the most significant sign vehicles that affects self presentation. Similar approach can be observed in the representation of transgender characters in the comic fiction. All of the transgender characters have been portrayed without any stereotypical perceptions. Their impression upon the readers or the audience has been managed with the careful usage of multiple semiotic systems i.e verbal and visual both. These modes' critical examination directs our attention towards the mechanism of representation and ultimate reconstruction of transgenders' social identity.

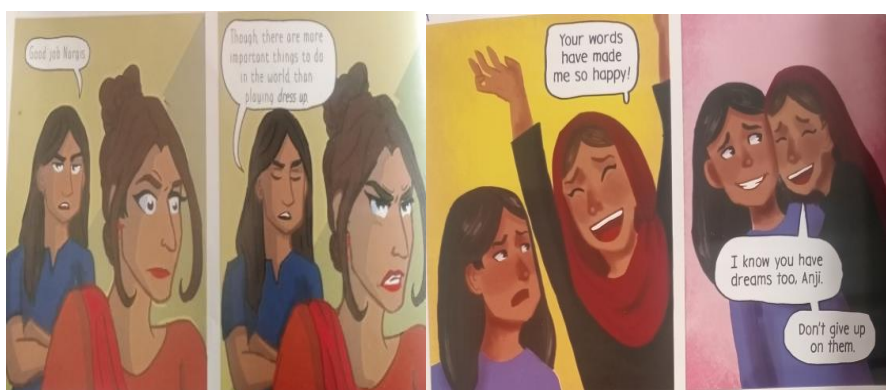
Firstly, talking about the facial features and body representation of transgender characters, we see no sign of exaggerated typical looks that are usually assigned to them. Transgender community is typically shown as masculine figures in female attires with loud gaudy makeup which overall give them exotic look. This stereotypical image is rejected in this comic series *"Basila and the Street Crew"* by representing transgender characters more realistically in simple attires and features.

The appearance of Riffat Apa in this comic fiction narrates a lot about her character being realistic rather than stereotypical. Both of the below illustrations show her character with 19 years of gap. The first illustration is her first appearance in issue 1. She is shown as wearing simple green dress with modest veil wrapped around her with almost no makeup look. The second illustration shows her character after 19 years. She is wearing a yellow colored doppatta with turquoise colored kameez shalwar. She isn't wearing any makeup or jewelry now which point towards her matured character over the years. Despite two decades apart, her character appearance hasn't changed much. The modesty and the simplicity is constant. This decent image of a transgender character stands opposite to their exaggerated typical image portrayed by electronic and print media.



(p. 11 issue 1) (p.1 issue 2)

In this illustration, 5 images of Riffat Apa are arranged in a single page in such a way that convey not only her emotional state of mind but her physical features and appearance communicate a lot about her portrayal. Besides her expressions and body language, other semiotic modes like her dressing, skin color, and jewelry speak volume about her portrayal. The only accessory she is shown as wearing is the minimal design earrings. Her dopatta draped figure is adding to her modest appearance. She is wearing a red lipstick with almost no makeup. Her skin color matches with Basila's skin color which means she surely isn't applying any makeup. All these modes hint towards her simplicity and originality. This portrayal is the direct negation of stereotypical image of transgenders that we usually observe in almost every Pakistani drama. Their image is usually restricted to gaudy and loud makeup with fancy dresses which overall represent them in exaggerated personalities. Besides Riffat Apa, other two transgender characters are also defying the typical image of their community with their simple outlooks.



(p. 21 issue 1) (p. 84 issue 2)

The above illustrations show Nargis and Anji talking to each other. Like Riffat Apa they are also portrayed as simple and in modest look. Talking about their dresses, all of three characters are wearing very simple *shalwar kameez* which is the national dress for an average Pakistani woman. The dresses are kept as simple as they can be with no print or prominent design. There is no imprint of embroidery on the dresses. Their simplicity in dresses depicts that they are leading simple lives.

4.1.3 Challenging the Status Quo through Manners

Goffman's theory of Impression management categorizes "Manners" as another significant sign vehicle, which are useful in the production of a desired image. The actions and Performative roles that transgender characters are given in this comic book are also crucial to my study as they are also responsible for the social identity reconstruction.

All three transgender characters in "*Basila and the Street Crew*" are assigned respectable roles, more precisely professional roles which are contrary to their stereotypical image in South Asian society. Riffat Apa works as an active social worker. She hasn't only empowered the people of her community but also provided her services to the society.



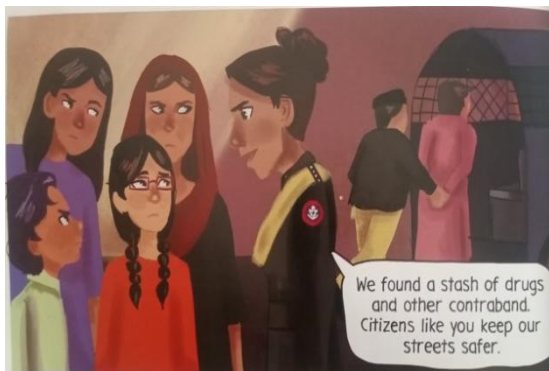
(p. 57 issue 1)

She is shown as a successful social activist who has reunited many missing kids with their parents. Now the whole crew has joined her in this mission and has made her work easier. This points towards her character as a source of motivation for the rest of the crew to set foot on the path of social work. Nargis and Anji have also joined her in this cause. Their joint struggle against the social evils makes them respectable citizens of the society. This positive image construction of transgender

characters through positive roles rejects the whole narrative of typical roles associated with them like begging, street singing, dancing, and prostitution. According to Butler's Performativity theory, identity is constructed through repeated behaviors. In case of SA transgenders, they are repeatedly shown doing odd jobs. Their repeated performance has made them a caricature of society. This impression is managed through the new performance assigned to them.

Apart from the given roles, their manner of interaction also communicates a lot about their image construction. They aren't shown as clapping their hands while talking. The typical image of transgender in South Asian society is associated with the "hollow clap" which usually acts as their identity marker. It is again a culturally constructed identity marker for their gender in South Asia. This image is altered in this comic fiction through their normal representation. They are acting just like any other normal person. This dismissal of typical identity marker of transgenders shows the change in their behavioral trait. This change is conveyed through the way they interact with each other and with others.

Similarly, their speech doesn't include a single abusive word or derogatory term. They aren't shown as cursing people or practicing any stereotypical activity. Instead, they come ahead as responsible citizens. The illustration shows that they are being appreciated by the lady police officer for their social services.



(p.78 Issue 2)

All these positive personality traits are helpful in the achievement of the desired image of their gender identity, which leads towards the reconstruction of their social identity and the eventual challenge to their existing status quo in SA.

4.1.4 Names Politics and Identity Reconstruction

Naming transgender characters in this comic fiction is another form of reconstructing their social identity. Names carry meanings and are regarded as the

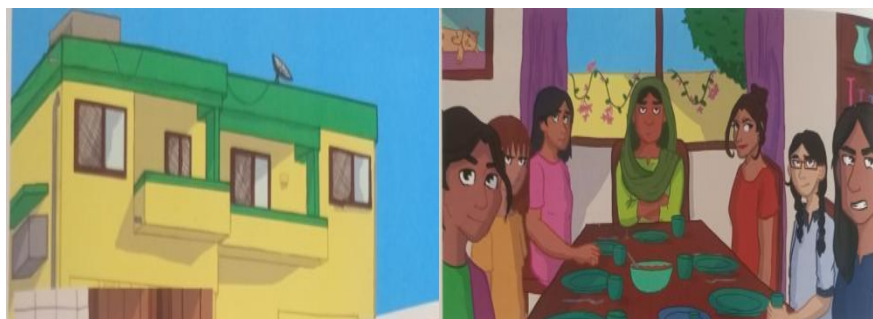
foremost identity marker. In this selected comic fiction, all transgender characters are given normal and respectable names. Writer hasn't given them any nick name or any humorous name. Instead he calls them Riffat Apa , Anji and Nargis. All these names are just like other respectable names common in Pakistani society. This naming technique allows the creator of the comic fiction to reconstruct their social identity in the Pakistani heteronormative society where transgenders are generally perceived as humorous bodies. They are generally called with funny names like Jalebi, shammo, Tara, bijli etc. All these names are just another way to mock their existence.

Humorous names steal their identity by dehumanizing them and objectifying them. In *"Basila and the Street Crew"*, "Jalebi" name is given to a kitten and "Shaweeto" to a pet dog. The creator is setting a bar between humanization and dehumanization through the naming process. He is producing a narrative that such funny nicknames are only suitable for pets and animals and shouldn't be used for transgenders.

4.1.5 Social Settings and its Impact on the Identity Reconstruction

Social Settings is another technique used widely by creators and writers to manage the impression according to their desires. This sign vehicle provides the context for the communicated impression. It is highly effective in the production of desired image in the eyes of viewers, readers or audience.

In the comic fiction *"Basila and the Street Crew"*, Riffat Apa's household setting is significant as it rejects the typical household settings of transgender community in Pakistan. Their house is situated in a nice place amid the city of Karachi. The props used in the presentation of their house in the comic fiction are significant in understanding the process of reconstruction of their social identity.



(pp.20, 23 issue 1)

In the above illustration, we see a nice colored double storey building with several windows and two balconies. It is colored in two decent colors, green and

yellow, which are giving it a good outlook. The building seems to be in the best condition as we see no marks of a rugged surface or paint peeling off the walls. We can also spot a TV dish antenna on the roof and an AC inverter on the side wall of the house. These material possessions and the outlook of the building confirm the financial stability of the residents. It also hints towards the comfortable, easy life that the residents of the house are living. This proposed image of transgenders in comic fiction stands opposite to their usual representation as beggars on streets. This impression management is carried out through different semiotic systems in the illustrations.

In the second illustration, we see a household setting. All of the characters are sitting at a dining table having lunch like a family. Behind the table we see a showcase on the right side decorated with a vase and other colorful utensils. On the left side of the wall there is a painting of a cat. In the middle there is a window which is opened in a backyard or a balcony. Window is half covered with purple curtains. On the backside wall, which is visible through the window, there is a flowering Vine covered wall, which gives a very beautiful look. All these things point towards the managed house. We see no randomness in the environment, rather there is a hint of harmony in the environment. The coexistence of different things in a managed way can be symbolic of harmony between transgender and non transgender characters in the picture.

The above argument directs our attention towards their shared living space in the house. We see Riffat Apa's house accommodates total six people. Three members belong to transgender community while other three are non transgender. All six of them share the same space by living in the house together like a family. It is very unusual considering the fact that transgender people are forced to live secluded lives as a result of expulsion from the society. This harmonious relationship between transgender and non transgender characters alters the narrative of transphobia and it also hints towards the agency of the transgender community. Transgender characters are shown as exercising free mobility.

Secondly, this household setting questions the typical kinship system of transgender community in South Asia, which typically revolves around the "*Guru*"-the master and the apprentice "*Chella*". In this hierarchical relationship, *Guru* holds the power and exercises it on the *chella* without questioning. This system is challenged through Riffat Apa's relationship with Nargis and Anji. Their loving

relationship is based on mutual respect. Their community representation in this comic fiction also rejects the old tradition of "*Toli and Vadhai*". The "*Toli*" means a group of transgender people who go to different celebratory events and congratulate people through their singing and dancing. Their action is known as "*Vadhai*". Transgenders in the comic fiction reject these typical kinship traditions associated with their social identity and form new bond among themselves. Their familial bond communicates about their new identity. Here, mannerism acts as the symbolic interaction of their new social identity. This argument stands parallel with Butler's idea of performativity. According to this, *Guru-chella* tradition can be regarded as performance dictated by the society



(p. 24 issue 1)

In the above illustration we see that Riffat Apa has initiated a discussion on the important social issue of kidnapping. Their discussion at the dining table shows their active participation in combating the evils of the society. The picture communicates the idea of their reconstructed social identity. Throughout the comic fiction, we see the transgender characters doing social work. They aren't shown as a part of celebratory events like weddings and childbirth ceremonies. Their involvement in such events is a very commonly reinforced typical image of their community in South Asian countries. By not representing them in such traditional roles, the writer and illustrator of "*Basila and the Street Crew*" improve their impression, which eventually reconstructs their social identity.

The analysis in this chapter is based on the first primary text of my study that is Pakistani comic fiction *Basila and the Street Crew*. Throughout the analysis, the main focus remained on the representational mechanism regarding transgender characters' social identity. The careful examination of the visual and linguistic details in the text highlighted the mechanism of self presentation. With Butler's idea of

society's influence on one's gender identity construction, the analysis focused on the socially constructed stereotypes associated with Pakistani transgender community and the possible rejection of their stereotypical image in the form of this comic fiction. According to Goffman's theoretical concept of impression management presenters have control over their image construction. It depends on the presenters what they are showing on the front stage. For the desired image construction one can use different techniques which Goffman state as 'Sign vehicles'. The above analysis looked in to different techniques regarding the representation of transgender characters and how these helped in their positive portrayal which in result helped in the process of reconstruction of their social identity. The analysis is carried out in three steps of Multimodal discourse analysis which allowed to look at both visual and verbal details.

CHAPTER 5

NARRATIVES OF RECONSTRUCTED SOCIAL IDENTITY OF TRANSGENDERS IN INDIAN COMIC FICTION: *TRANSGENDER PERSON IN SCIENCE MINI SERIES*

In this chapter, I critically analyze my second primary text, "*Transgender Persons in Science Mini Series*" (2016) which is an Indian comic fictional series illustrated and written by Sanyantan Datta and other teammates. This series consists of 4 comic fictions based on the lives and successful uprising of transgender persons in advanced disciplines of the scientific field. Talented transgender people living in India are appreciated through the inculcation of their success stories in science and technology in the form of comic fiction. With four different stories of transgender characters in different scientific fields, writers and illustrators communicate about their potential abilities and outstanding skills in the heteronormative society of India. These comic fictions are combating transphobia through transgenders' inclusion in different professional roles. Their representation not only challenges their invisibility in the scientific field but also dismantles the popular narrative about them. The typically perceived notion regarding transgenders that they are unable to do anything extraordinary is challenged here. Through the critical exploration of characterization in the selected comic fictions, with the particular focus on the transgenders' performativity in their professional workspace, reconstructed social identity of transgenders in Indian society is examined. Both visual and verbal modes are analyzed with the help of Kress and Van Leeuwen's Multimodal discourse analysis. With the theoretical support, I state that the selected comic fictions are narratives which are successfully reconstructing social identities of transgenders with the help of their improved impression.

The selected Indian comic fiction series consists of 4 comic fictions namely;
III- Salamanders, Crickets and Zebrafish: Bittu's Journey in Science(and gender)

IV- Grace Banu: A Dalit-Trans technologist fights for a better world

V- I have only brought them pride: A trans doctor's journey in Medicine

VI- Fire Burning Bright: Aparna's and Amrita's work in Public Health

These comic fictions are published in different years 2020-22. The setting of each of the comic fiction is India, which is the neighboring country of Pakistan. As the title of each comic fiction suggests, the story revolves around the success stories of transgender people doing extraordinary things in science and technology. My main focus is on the careful examination of transgender characters, their represented identities and their positive portrayal through different sign vehicles. Their unique and positive portrayal is achieved with the help of different semiotic systems. MDA as a research method allows the examination of these semiotic modes to successfully develop my argument of the study. Visual and non-visual semiotic modes are studied through the representational metafunction.

5.1 Reconstructed Social Identity vis-à-vis Social activism and Professional Advancement:

The carefully developed transgender characters in the selected comic fictions mirror their triumph against the narrative of gender based discrimination in advanced fields of study like science, medicine, engineering, and technology. Despite belonging to marginalized community in India, their significant contribution towards the advanced disciplines of study is a proof of their strong and subversive characterization in the heteronormative society where they are usually sidelined. Their inclusion and performativity in professional careers questions gender norms in various ways. Their presence in such fields redefines professionalism by challenging societal expectations of what a doctor, scientist, or engineer looks like. The writers and illustrators of these texts purposely portray strong characters through different semiotic modes. Their new image has been constructed by representing them beyond social expectations. Representational metafunction allows us to look into the represented images and to access their reconstructed social identity.

5.1.1 Subversive Characterization and a Challenge to Gender Norms

Subversion often brings revolutionary changes. It has capacity to challenge old beliefs by going against them. People with subversive attitudes are most likely to bring change in their lives and can also have great impact on their community. Transgender characters with subversive attitudes challenge the typical narrative about their social identity. They come forward with their new image. With characterization

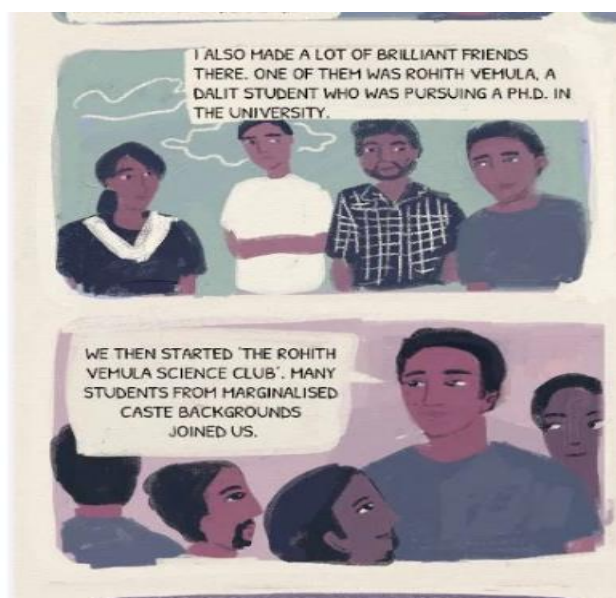
technique, writers are able to build new image of transgenders and with the same narrative technique they can manage the impression of their identities.

In the second primary text of the study which consists of 4 comic fiction series, there are a total 5 transgender characters namely Bittu Rajaraman, Grace Banu, Aqsa, Aparna, and Amrita. All these characters are shown positively with their strong and subversive personalities. Their subversive attitude is visible through their strong educational struggle in the society where they are barely able to receive basic necessities of life. Along with this, their social activism for their community and for other marginalized communities of the society reflects their subversion against social discrimination. They navigate gendered expectations while also challenging them by existing in spaces where they are traditionally underrepresented.

Bittu Rajaraman is the protagonist of the first comic fiction *"Salamanders, Crickets and Zebrafish: Bittu's Journey in Science (and gender)"*, is portrayed as highly educated transman. He served as an associate professor in two universities of India. Firstly, at the University of Hyderabad, and then started his work as an associate professor of biology and psychology at Ashoka University of Haryana. He is shown as a successful figure with his gender identity as a transman. This highly qualified image of Bittu Rajaraman contrasts with the typical image of transgenders in India where they aren't accepted by the society and hardly get an opportunity to complete their education in heteronormative institutes. It is really hard for them to stand their ground and reach the heights of success. Bittu's strong educational background with his professional status in society speaks a lot about his struggle. Despite his controversial gender identity, he has achieved a successful career. His character's strength lies in his academic achievements. Bittu's performativity as a scientist is a rejection of typical gender norms. His social identity as a transgender scientist and his presence in the field itself challenges the stereotype that gender and scientific ability are linked. By existing as experts, they rewrite gendered scripts of who "belongs" in science. Bittu himself rejects the discrimination in the scientific field by claiming that, "there is no such thing as a person who cannot do science!" (Agarwal and Datta 3). He is portrayed as navigating his social identity in professional space. His success as a scientist proves that gender identity isn't a limitation.

Bittu is exercising his agency at two levels. With his extraordinary academic background, he has achieved a social status of an evolutionary neuroscientist, and

with this he is also actively working as a social activist. His distinguished social status grants him the power to not only free himself from the shackles of the society but it also enables him to strengthen the other people of his community and other marginalized communities. All these details are added in the comic fiction with the prominence of Bittu's character. His strong and subversive character distinguishes him from the traditional image of transgender community of India.



(Datta and Agarwal 3)

In the first illustration, we see a group of people gathered around Bittu who is given a salient position in the picture to show his prominence among others. He is speaking to the students from marginalized caste background in the University of Hyderabad. Everybody has set their eyes on him, which centralizes him even more. The illustration with his character as a central figure makes him the leader of the group. He is combating casteism in his capacity. He has started a club with his dalit friend's name, "The Rohith Vemula Science Club" to fight against the caste based discrimination in science discourse. The verbal details in the picture inform that he has also formed a committee for transgender persons to make them strong against gender based discrimination in educational institutions. In short, Bittu is shown as actively subverting the marginalization of minorities at multiple axes with his active participation in social works. His act of forming clubs and societies to encourage others to join him in this cause is another reference for his subversion. His subversive and strong character rejects the typical image of submissive transgender community of India. Bittu's transgender identity isn't placing him in a victim position, rather his

unique self grants him the power to fight against injustice committed to minorities. He isn't shown as only speaking for himself or his community, but rather he takes stand for the other marginalized community, which in this comic fiction is the dalit community.

The first illustration shows Bittu's active subversion against casteism while the second illustration depicts his subversive attitude towards the notion of transphobia. These illustrations show his struggle for the people of marginalized communities to navigate and actively assert their professional identity through their performativity. Bittu's active performativity as a scientist and as a social worker is the form of strong assertion of his professional identity in such highly segregated spaces. His image defies societal expectations of his gender. Transgenders are traditionally believed to be suppressed and victims. Bittu's character emerges as a person who challenges gender norms.



(Datta and Agarwal 4)

The linguistic message in the form of slogans shown in the second illustration delivers the powerful message regarding the subversion against discrimination. The phrases, "TRANS LIVES MATTER" and "END TRANSPHOBIA NOW!" aren't simply slogans but rather a strong declaration of their objection upon transgenders discrimination. The tone of the phrases and the capitalized letters is stressing the significance of this subversion. There is no ambiguity in the message. The tone gives the clear-cut message of objection that now they will not tolerate subjugation or injustice.

Talking about the strong and subversive characterization as a way to reconstruct transgenders' social identity, we see all of the transgender characters in the selected comic fiction as representation of newly constructed impression. They all are portrayed as educated people who are performing professional roles in different areas of science and technology. The field of study itself defines transgender characters with extraordinary minds, and their social activism reflects their kind and powerful heart with the potential of resistance to any kind of injustice. This positive image of transgender persons stands in contrast with their traditional image in Indian culture. With representational technique, the image has been improved. Transgender people are no longer shown as silent victims of social oppression but rather portrayed as active protesters who are more than willing to combat any kind of discrimination and oppression. This subversion is the result of their assertion of their identity through active performativity. Meanwhile, their impression is being managed at different levels.

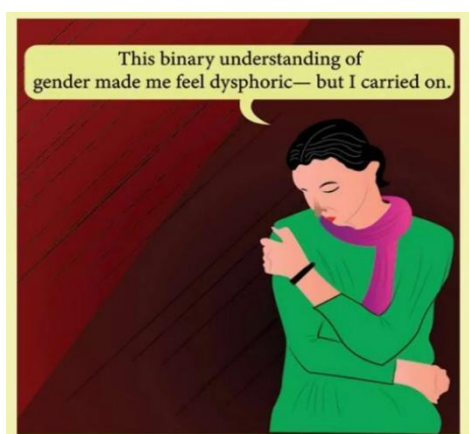


(Gautam and Datta 3)

The above illustrations are taken from the comic fiction second in Series. It features Grace Banu, a dalit trans woman as a social activist. Like Bittu, her subversive character isn't only visible through her academic journey but also through her social activism for the people of her community. Her support and subsequent upstanding for her community is reflective of her undefeated personality. In the first illustration, Grace Banu is shown as leading the protest. Her active participation in the protest is visible through her slogans and holding of banners in front of the directorate of Higher Education. The second picture also illustrates her subversive attitude towards the conventional educational System which is representative of heteronormative society. She struck off the above-mentioned gender categories and herself entered the third category on the form. This action is a clear-cut demonstration of her firm and subversive attitude. This also reflects her attempt of asserting her enacted identity.

Just like Bittu Rajaraman, Grace Banu is also subverting the traditional educational System's injustice towards marginalized communities of India. Both of these transgender characters fight against caste and gender based discrimination. Their subversion is at two levels. This shows that they're not only practicing defense mechanism for themselves but also working for others.

The other two comic fictions also portray such empowered transgender characters which are working for the betterment of the society.



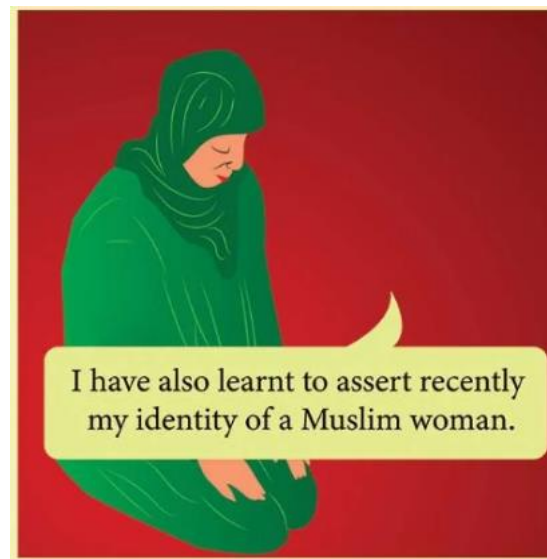
(Datta and Rox 2)

The above illustration is the pictorial description of the gender dysphoria that a presented character is facing and the character's attitude towards it. The picture shows the transgender character named Aqsa who is struggling and yet fighting at two levels. Her subversive attitude is visible through the illustration. Firstly talking about the

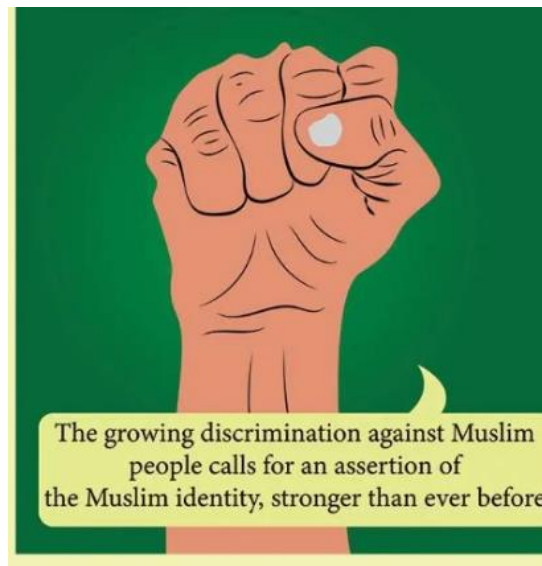
verbal detail given on the top of the illustration where she says "but I carried on". The phrase shows her subversion against her dysphoria. Secondly the body language of the represented character also speaks of her subversive attitude. Aqsa is hugging herself with her both arms. Her closed eyes and lowered head shows her submission to her newly identified gender identity. She is feeling separated yet she is accepting her identity. She is shown as embracing herself as a transgender which is a direct hint towards her character's subversive nature. She is going against society and embracing her new gender identity. Internally she is fighting with her gender dysphoria and externally she is fighting against society.

Aqsa's transgender identity resonates well with Stryker's idea of "transgender performativity" that involves both active performativity and material embodiment. Her emotion of dysphoria is significant in forming her transgender identity.

In the following illustration, she claims about the assertion of her muslim woman identity. This again shows her performativity in the form of bodily transformation and her intentional act of identity enactment and assertion. She seems to acknowledge her new identity as a transgender person. This image contrasts with the typical portrayal of transgender characters who remain passive in the process of assertion of their identity.

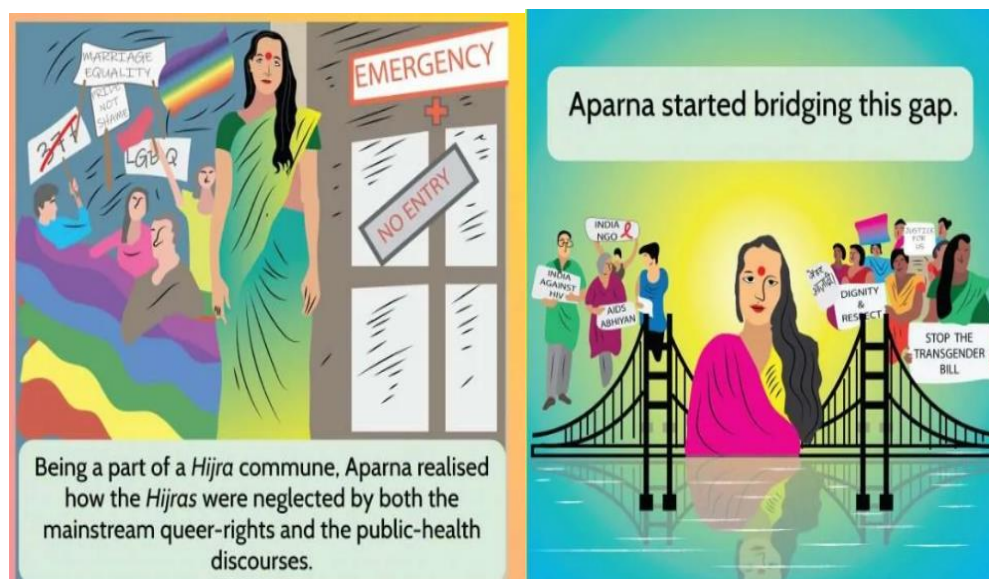


(Datta and Rox 4)



(Datta and Rox 5)

Aqsa's religious identity as a muslim also shows the potential of subversion in her character. Her character is categorized as a minority in Indian society at two levels. She is a transgender woman and a muslim too. Both identities are considered minorities in India, where they are more prone to victimization and marginalization. The above illustrations show Aqsa's strong assertion of her muslim identity just like she has accepted her transgender identity before. She is combating the double marginalized social status of her. She is practically asserting her muslim transgender identity by offering prayer in her newly found self, wearing a green colored dress. This color is significant here as it is representative of muslims' identity. A strong fist with a green colored background shown in the second illustration is symbolic of her strong and determined attitude towards her muslim transgender identity. This use of color is intentional here. The illustrator has used the green color as a sign vehicle to communicate his message. Aqsa's strong demeanor regarding the assertion of her muslim transgender identity and her active performativity in her professional field improves her impression.



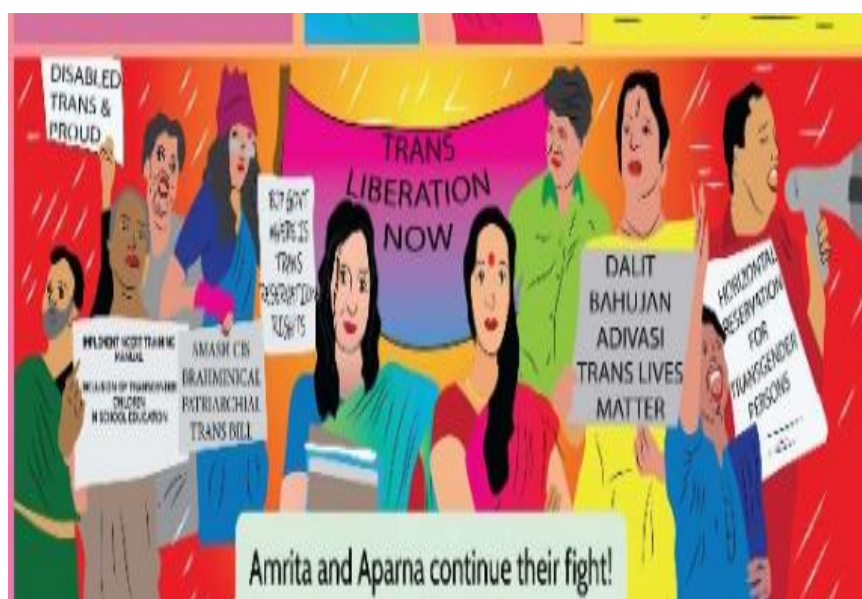
(Datta and Rox 2)

Fourth in series, "*Fire Burning Bright: Aparna's and Amrita's work in Public Health*" also demonstrates the subversion. The above illustration features Aparna and her struggle at two forums. In both of above illustrations, Aparna's character is centralized. She is positioned in the middle of the picture which confirms her role as a coordinator. She is featured as someone bridging the gap between queer rights and their public health rights. At one side of Aparna, minority in India has been shown protesting while on her other side their public health concerns are elaborated. Her in-between position grants her power to link these two discourses. Her presence shows that she is capable of making public health facilities accessible to the marginalized transgender community of India. This represents her powerful image.



((Datta and Rox 4)

The above illustration shows Amrita and Aparna talking about their self discovery. They haven't only discovered their true selves with each other's help but are also determined to motivate others. They have surpassed the level of self discovery and aren't shown as victims rather they are paving way for the people of their community towards the achievement of their rights. Their potential for continuing fight for others make them more than victimized transgender identities. Focusing on the visual details in the picture, both characters are shown happily talking about their achievement. They seem determined to build "powerful solidarities" among the socially excluded queer community. This hints towards their potential of subversion. They are determined to encourage others for subversion too.



(Datta and Rox 4)

This illustration shows the successful achievement of the powerful solidarities that Aparna and Amrita promised to build. They have gathered Dalit, disabled, and transgenders in their venture. All marginalized groups of society are protesting for their rights while standing with Aparna and Amrita. They are leading the protest as they are in the center and are surrounded by others holding banners. They are centralized because they have encouraged others in this fight for rights.

Each transgender character in this comic is battling at multiple levels not only for themselves but also for the other people of their community. Thus, subversion is visible not only in their characters but it is also present in their act of supporting their community. In SA, where transgender community is perceived and portrayed as

victims who are unable to stand for themselves, let alone raising their voice for others, such impression management improves the perception of their identity resulting into the construction of their new social identity. With their journey of navigation through their professional spaces, each transgender character seems to assert their gender and professional identity actively. This assertion brought subversion in their characters, which they practiced against the stereotypical societal expectations of their gender identity.

5.1.2 Sartorial choices and negotiation of Social Identity of Transgenders

Physical appearance has a significant role in the field of social psychology. It has an immense impact on the perception of people. Considering its role in the matter of representation, Goffman considers appearance as one of the sign vehicles responsible for impression management. The appearance of presented people, objects, or ideas directly affects the perceptions of the audience about them. The selected Indian comic fiction portrays transgender characters in such a way that it effectively improves their impression in the society where they are typically perceived as objects of humiliation.

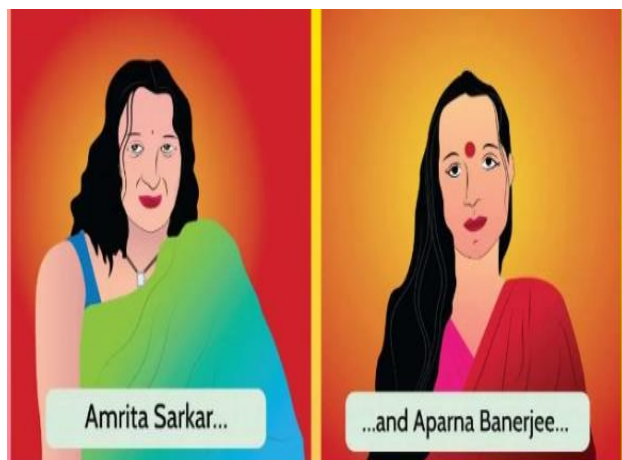
The represented transgender characters in all four comic books are rejecting the stereotypical impression of transgenders in India. They aren't shown as exaggerated figures with humorous outlooks.



(Datta and Agarwal 1)

The above illustration shows Bittu Rajaraman. By looking at the illustrated picture, one can see a person with a simple attire working with full dedication. He is wearing spectacles and a lab coat of white color. His eyes are fixed on the object of observation while holding a dropper in his gloved hand. All the costume details speak of his professional identity. There is not a single hint of stereotypical image. The

simplicity of his appearance in the illustration convinces the audience to view him under new light.



(Datta and Rox 1)

The second illustration is portraying two transgender characters namely Amrita Sarkar and Aparna Banerjee. Both of them are trans women. Talking about their physical appearance in the comic fiction, we see they are shown as wearing two bright colored sarees which are national dress of Indian women. Their attires are simple with no exaggerated style. They aren't wearing loud makeup but rather a simple bindi on forehead. Their woman like appearance is their deliberate adherence to this gender category. This reflects their bodily embodiment of their perceived identity. The illustrations are fulfilling the purpose by showing them more like an average Indian woman.



(Datta and Rox 1)



(Datta and Siddhesh 3)

The above two illustrations are representing two other trans women characters of comic fiction series. The left side illustration shows the picture of doctor Aqsa Sheikh, while the right side illustration shows the image of Grace Banu. Both

transgender characters are portrayed wearing simple *shalwar kameez* with a *dupatta*. They aren't shown as wearing any accessory except the minimal design earrings and a simple wristwatch.

Sartorial choices of the represented transgender characters actually act as visual language of resistance by them. Wearing simple traditional attires and defying stereotypical dressing codes, transgender characters renegotiate their place within the social order, thereby reconstructing not only personal identity but also collective understandings of gender and belonging. Illustrators of these comic fictions have tried to portray transgender characters more realistically by not portraying them as humorous bodies. Their welcoming physical appearances make a good impression of their gender identity.

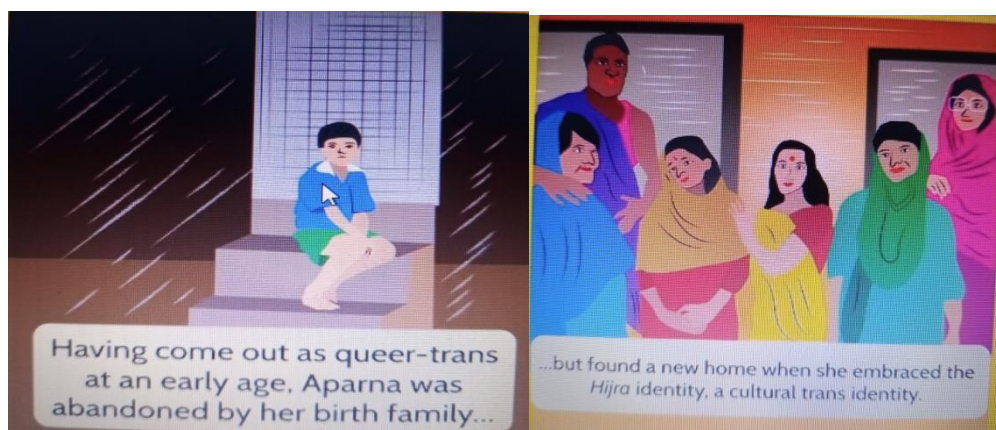
5.1.3 Kinship System against the narrative of Guru- Chella

Social Settings are communicative of ideologies. The represented household settings of transgender community in the comic fiction speak a lot about their unconventional kinship systems. The typical kinship system of transgenders in South Asian societies is restricted to master and servant relationship. Transgender community regulates its activities according to this hierarchical setup to maintain the power structure between the one who commands and the one who obeys. The *Guru* commands and the servants who are typically called *Chellas* have no option other than fulfilling their Guru's orders. Under Guru's supervision, *Chellas* are given the odd jobs of begging, street singing, and dancing. They don't have any personal objectives or individual identities but rather live their lives in a group, typically called "*Toli*" in South Asia. The chosen comic fictions boldly confront these misconceptions and challenge the conventional expectations surrounding transgender behavior and norms. They vividly convey a positive self-image of gender identity through the nuanced portrayal of their kinship systems, celebrating authenticity and individuality.



(Gautam and Datta 2)

The above illustration is taken from the second comic, “*Grace Banu: A Dalit-Trans technologist fights for a better world*”. The pictorial description rejects the typical ideology of master and servant narrative. The picture demonstrates six transgender characters from varying age groups. From their attire and actions, everybody seems equal in status to each other. They are seeming more like a family. They are shown as sharing a familial bond while showing love and care to each other. What is typically thought of as a Guru is rejected here. We see no hierarchy in the household. Secondly, Grace Banu calls her elder transgender as a trans- mother. This again shows the familial bond between them.



((Datta and Rox 2)

The above illustrated pictures are from the fourth comic in series. These pictorial descriptions also show the familial bond between transgender community. After being rejected and abandoned by her birth family, Aparna had no one other than the people like her. She found solace in living among her community. Aparna has found a new home among them. She got acceptance, security, and above all love from them. The first illustration shows the intense loneliness and rejection as Aparna is

shown sitting helplessly on the doorsteps of the home. Contrary to the previous one, second illustration portrays transgenders showing sympathetic gestures towards Aparna. Everyone is gathered around her and seems to console her. There is no typical discipleship-kinship system operating in the household, which manages the impression of their identity and also negates the narrative of oppressive power structures existing in the transgender community.

5.1.4 Representation against stereotypical image of weakened minority

The relationship between gender, caste, and representation has always been complex, especially in the caste ridden Indian society. Gender and caste based discrimination is prevalent in the social structures of India. The selected comic fiction with the positive representation of dalit characters subverts the narrative of casteism, while positive portrayal of transgender identity of a dalit character means the impression is being managed at two levels. In case of Grace Banu, the writer Sanyantan Datta and illustrator Siddesh Gautam have represented her dalit trans woman identity under a positive light.

The second in the comic series, "*Grace Banu: A Dalit-Trans technologist fights for a better world*", deals with the struggle story of the protagonist who is a doubly marginalized character because of her gender and caste. Grace Banu's character rejects all the stereotypes. Her strong dedication towards her education and her professional status as a freelance technologist with extensive experience of software engineering oppose the traditional image of her trans-dalit identity. Her academic success stands in opposition to the stereotypical image of the dalit community, which is taken as ugly, polluted, immoral and weak. Historically, dalits were known as 'untouchables' in Indian culture. Even today's situation is no good considering the fact that they are socially bound to work as sanitary workers. Despite belonging to the subaltern group of society, Grace Banu stands in the face of social oppression. She is actively suppressing and opposing typical racial and gender conventions through her performativity.

Grace Banu isn't shown as relying on anybody to improve her living condition. Despite belonging to doubly marginalized community, she struggles at her own and rejects the narrative of dalits and transgenders as weak and passive victims of society. There is no denying the fact that these marginalized groups of Indian society are

victims of social discrimination, but Grace Banu's character isn't the typical representation of a passive victim but rather a survivor and a fighter who fights for a better world. As the title of the comic fiction suggests. This positive impression of her dalit-trans identity is the (re)construction of her social identity, which is the topic under discussion.

Similar complexity can be seen in the life of Aqsa Sheikh, who is a muslim transgender character in the comic series. Her gender identity and religious identity both make her a minority. India, despite being a secular republic, offers no equality to the Indian Muslim minority. Aqsa is a doubly marginalized character as she fights gender discrimination and also faces growing discrimination against muslims in India. Her professional success as an associate professor of community medicines in a renowned university of India shows her triumph over the so-called societal hierarchies prevalent in Indian societies.

This positive representation of minorities directly affects the impression of their identities in the minds of the readers. The represented transgender characters aren't associated with their typical occupational roles, nor are they given any behavioral traits conforming to their stereotypical impression. This brings our attention towards Butler's idea of identity as a social construct. Behavioral traits associated with the people are society-based concepts, hence aren't rigid and can be changed. Stryker highlights that the change comes with the active enactment and assertion of their identity, which again depends on performativity and material embodiment. In case of the selected comic fictional series, the transgender characters are successfully staged with the help of certain impression management techniques like appearance, social settings, and mannerism. Their impression has been improved and their social identity has been reconstructed with the help of these representational techniques.

The above carried critical discussion is based on the analysis of my second primary text, that is an Indian comic fiction series, *"Transgender Persons in Science Mini Series"*. The analysis majorly focused on the representation of transgender characters in the text and how their representation affects their impression and image in Indian society. It has been explored that one of the reasons that the Indian transgender community is highly marginalized and oppressed is because of their stereotypical image. Public's perception of this third gender category is not welcoming based on their tarnished reputation. The comic fiction series under study

allows the readers to look at them differently. The series features transgender characters as exceptionally good in academics and their professional life. The strong and subversive represented transgender characters negate many false narratives about their identity. The positive constructed image of their personalities is helpful in their social identity reconstruction. Verbal and non-verbal details in the selected texts are examined carefully with the help of MDA method by Kress and Leeuwen.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter consists of a concluding discussion of my research study. Central to this research study are two thought-provoking questions that guide the exploration of how transgenders' social identity is (re)constructed through the art of impression management. The first question examines the visual and representational effect of transgenders' portrayal in selected comics that how their physical appearance, social settings, and mannerism in a work of fiction, depict the technique of impression management that is being handled by the hands of writers and illustrators. Second research question delves deep into the exploration of "performance" of transgenders in the selected comic fictions with specific reference to their professional roles given to them and how their nuanced performances negotiate their social identity. These inquiries are addressed throughout the research while focusing on transgender characters in the selected comic works.

The primary texts of this research study consist of selected comic fictions from Pakistan and India. "*Basila and the Street Crew*" is set in Pakistan and portrays the Pakistani transgender community, while the other text, "*Transgender Persons in science mini-series*" is set in India and features the Indian transgender community. Through a critical analysis of these texts, the study elucidates the nuanced performances of transgender characters in their fight against social discrimination and exclusion. Through their unique and progressive performative roles and material embodiment, they are actively enacting and asserting their transgender identities in heteronormative society of India and Pakistan. Moreover, Transgender characters are not represented as vulnerable passive victims of social exclusion. Their unique portrayal in selected comic fictions is different from their former victimized and marginalized representation. They emerge as dynamic figures, challenging and overturning preconceived notions and stereotypes associated with their social identity in South Asian culture. The roles and performances given to them, empower them to actively resist, within an oppressive environment, asserting their agency with remarkable strength and resilience.

Stryker talks about the potential of resistance and agency in transgender individuals, who are involved in an act of creating and asserting their identities

through performance. They are not simply disrupting gender norms but actively subverting. This research study explored the mechanism involved behind this active subversion and the ultimate reconstruction of social identity of transgenders in the context of SA. It has been accessed that the technique of ‘self-presentation’ has been employed by the writers and illustrators in the description and portrayal of trans characters. Butler’s theoretical lens of “Performativity” with Stryker’s idea of “Transgender performativity” and Goffman’s “Impression management”, provided support for my argument. Butler's idea of gender as a social construct opens ways for self-determination. She is of the view that people form themselves in the vocabularies that other people choose for them, and sometimes for self-determination they have to reject those vocabularies. Butler's idea supports my thesis statement which talks about the rejection of stereotypical image and ultimate reconstruction of social identity of transgenders. This reconstruction is carried out with the positive self presentation at the hands of the writer and illustrator of the comic books. Goffman’s idea of Impression management allows us to look at the representational mechanism carried out by the writers.

Their managed impression and positive image is constructed in selected works with representational techniques. In order to explore the science behind the representation, I have taken support from Goffman’s theoretical concept of “Sign Vehicles”. Transgender characters’ physical appearance, manners, their professional status, and their social activism against social injustice towards their community, everything builds their new image by negating stereotypical notions about their community. This also highlights their active assertion of their social identity. It has been explored that transgender community shouldn’t be associated with rigid roles. With Butler’s view of gender identity and gender roles as not static but rather social construct, and with Stryker’s view of performance as a way to enact gender identity, it is argued that transgenders are not always bound to go for low jobs like begging, street singing and dancing. They can be seen and perceived in new social roles, which can ultimately build their new impression. Positive impression of their personalities is helpful in the reconstruction of their social identity.

The analysis of my selected primary texts has been conducted with the help of Multimodal discourse analysis of Visual Grammar by Kress and Leeuwen. The visual and verbal details present in the illustrations of selected comic fiction are examined critically. The main focus remained on the “Representational metafunction” of MDA

model. In visuals, I have looked at the salient message behind the presented objects. Moreover, characters' actions and their gestures were also examined critically. Textual evidences in the form of linguistic messages in the illustrations are also examined carefully.

In the analysis of my first primary text, *Basila and the Street Crew*, transgender characters are shown as self-made and educated social workers who are challenging the narrative that transgenders are criminals and actively working for the betterment of the society. Likewise, my second primary text, *Transgender persons in Science miniseries*, portray transgender characters as highly educated and professionally exceptional people who are supporting their community and are involved in social activism at different platforms. Their successful professional status as scientists, doctors, technologists, and public health workers challenges the invisibility of transgender community in the fields of science and technology. With their positive and unique portrayal, comic fiction writers and illustrators are improving their impression and rejecting the notion of their stereotypical social identity and the false narratives associated with their gender identity.

Concluding the discussion, it is observed that in all selected comic fictions, visuals and verbal details indicate that transgenders are negotiating their social positioning through their sartorial choices, performativite roles and manners. All transgender characters are shown as exercising their powers and agency through social activism and asserting their identity. They are not powerless anymore. They are shown as having control over their lives. They are not submissive to society's unjust behaviour towards them but rather challenging it through different means. The findings of this study also reflect the social realities in Pakistani and Indian contexts as we witness many transgender people emerging in various disciplines and wakes of life and proving their abilities through their professional roles and other performative roles.

Future scholars may find it worthwhile to delve into the intricate dynamics of impression management among other subaltern communities of South Asia like ethnic and religious minority groups, within the realm of South Asian comic fiction. Research in this area holds great significance, as SA comic fictions have remained largely unexplored, ripe for exploration and discovery. Furthermore, they could explore the various performances as strategies of resistance employed by the subaltern community portrayed in the realm of comic fiction. This analysis could reveal

profound insights into the resilience and creativity of marginalized voices. They can also delve into the way, SA comics either perpetuate stereotypes or enrich our understanding by offering diverse and intersectional narratives, as done in this research study. Scholars can also analyse the digital performativity exercised by online communities through the use of social media platforms in the process of identity assertion.

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