Abstract: What is happiness? Is there a definition for happiness or does it connect with gender? Many philosophers give different interpretations to these queries. For one happiness is being at peace with oneself. This may include the society one inhabits, one’s abilities, one’s past, one’s workspace, one’s limitations, literatures and art etc. Using pictures to tell stories have been a crucial medium in the history of mankind has evolved from drawing on stone and papyrus and onto paper, and digital formats, but the impact of images remains the same. One such diverse coming of age novels has come into the field of graphic novels. In the turn of the century the medium has explored a wide range of themes and motifs to express creatively this newly found genre. Especially the shattering of gender stereotypes through the female characters is stemming out the need to make their voices strongly heard in the contemporary world. This article aims to look at graphic novels and the level of happiness achieved by the female characters under the light of gender theory. The novels selected to the study are Kari by Amruta Patil, Sita’s Ramayana by Samhita Arni, Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi and Drawing the Line: Indian Women Fight Back a graphic anthology.

Keywords: empowerment, gender, graphic novels, happiness, stereotypes, subversion.

I. INTRODUCTION

Is it possible to define the word ‘happiness’ or does it have any influence in ones’ life. This question is a heated debate between the thinkers for a few years. According to the Oxford English Dictionary happiness refers to the ‘state of being happy’. However, this definition is not quite satisfactory. It is an essential component in human life. Various emotions may be associated with the word happiness especially joy, pleasure, amusement, satisfactions etc. However, these emotions that are often connected with happiness have got a fleeting experience; happiness on the other hand lasts for a long time. This assumption may vary to many because everybody has their own way of perceiving happiness. For instance, it may be sharing experiences together, travelling together, or having good foods permeates happiness among people. Scholars have given many interpretations for happiness, among them two are selected to analyse the present study. One is Martin Seligman’s three dimensions on the state of happiness which includes 1) The regular experience of pleasant life 2) the frequent engagement in satisfying activity and 3) the experience of a sense of connectedness to a greater whole (410). On elaborating this view by Martin Seligman, a fourth dimension is included by Sirgy and Wu stating the balanced life dimension. Within a single domain happiness is not satisfying, one needs to be involved in multiple domains. These definitions fall into two categories 1) Hedonic happiness and 2) Eudaimonic happiness. Hedonic happiness is experiencing more pleasure than pain and Eudaimonic happiness is the one which results in the satisfaction by attaining life’s purpose (183–196). The further elaboration by Sirgy and Wu states the need for a balanced dimension after achieving these above factors and also adds to the point that amidst all these struggles the need for standing together or doing satisfactory things help people to achieve a kind of balance in their lives.

II. HAPPINESS AND GENDER

Many studies have been done in the field and each of them comes with various interpretations. For some there lies a relation but for others there is no such connection. However, each of these studies points to the fact that it all lies in ones’ expectations. If one expects too much then maybe we get worried or expect less we may be satisfied. Too much expectations may lead to worry, whereas lesser expectations may give satisfaction. And the term gender refers to a construct in which an individual – irrespective of being a male or female– is expected to
behave in a predefined manner in a society. This notion actually makes happiness feasible for a man or a woman. The various researches on happiness among the genders suggest that at the initial stage of study women seem to be happier than men, but as time passes, they experience lesser happiness. The social roles and social responsibilities for an individual varies. For women it has got an added point- along with their basic responsibilities, they have to play multi- dimensional roles. While comparing their responsibilities much of the studies prove that men enjoy more privileges and happiness than women. However, these studies may vary according to the individual satisfaction.

III. HAPPINESS AND MENTAL STATE

The relation between the terms of happiness and mental state is like a wheel, quite centrifugally, radiating the happiness that one feels to ones’ surroundings. the happiness that we have been transmitted to our surroundings. To improve ones’ mental wellbeing happiness serves a stance. Happiness is vital in improving ones’ mental wellbeing, thus facilitating a happy mind to be creative in nature and thereby promoting universal happiness. The happy mind is also creative in nature and thereby it promotes to universal happiness. The happiness can be defined as a state of mind achieved by an individual through his or her experiences.

Literature, often, represents the theme of happiness in various forms. The modern man, though materially prosperous, feels an inner void owing to the lack of satisfaction or happiness obtained from the regular run of life. At this juncture literature serves as a special vent, opening up a new world with characters and situations, thus helping them empathetically achieve happiness or satisfaction. This is where graphic medium serves at its fullest, adding visual embodiments to the textual feelings. In this stage one can make use of the real benefit of graphic medium which has an added visual element too. Perspectives of writers differ in accord with liberation, harmony with nature, beneficial relationships and the like. writers define life on the axes of their personal experiences.

Recently graphic narratives have started branch along with different intentions. For instance, graphic medicine serves therapeutic needs. Gender wise creators too are emerging in this domain, experimenting with various themes of life stories and memoirs in different genres like novels and anthologies. With different themes, especially within the medium itself there is a branch called graphic medicine, which itself is therapeutic in nature. *Persepolis (2003-04)*by Marjane Satrapi and *Drawing the Line: Indian Women Fight Back*(2015) are among the outstanding sources. Narrating their own stories and experiences passport their liberation, consequently leading them to happiness.

Though graphic stories have been researched too a great extent happiness and gender remain unexplored. Therefore, the research in these domains, with focus on the unexplored areas and taboos will uphold the rise of the female gender and their existentialism. Autobiographically creative ideas enhance the same. This new ways of experimenting with their own stories makes them feel happy and creative, perhaps these creative ideas are the substrata in culturing the resistance against the patriarchal ideologies. These ideologies have been predefined in gender biased societies, where women are placed at the receiving ends. As readers, these women will have an insight into the resistance against patriarchal ideologies only through gender theories, which are unquestioningly multidimensional in the present era.

And the use of gender theory also makes it easy for the readers, as the theory is multidimensional in nature the study also leads to other disciplines as well. The study may also include certain limitations as it is focusing on only four such graphic narratives that too written by female writers, there may be few other graphic novels too with the same themes.

The term graphic novel was first coined in English in 1964 and popularised by the American legend Will Eisner in his work A Contract with God (1978). In the recent period this medium has explored a wide range of themes, to address the most pertinent and relevant issues that plague the society. This budding genre depicts new female characters who are on the run to get their voices heard in the contemporary society. These characters through their act of rebellion attempt to subvert the established authority and thereby attaining the possibility of constructing a counter space.

Though the female writers where a minority in the early stages of writing, the development of the graphic medium witnesses the emergence of a band of new female writers. Women writers have worked in every genre and their mode of expression and subjects of discussion have transiated from the stereotypical representation of women to the real role of a women in a society. This study attempts to look at graphic novels featuring women from various social backgrounds, cultural setting and outlook. The normalisation of rules through dominance and subjugation ingrained in the psyche of men and women is subverted by the novels taken for the study. The purpose of this study is to analyse the life of the women protagonists, who have identified their gender constructs and attempt to
make a change through their acts of reconciliation. Apart from traditional concepts, these women writers deal with
day-to-day struggles and customary themes. A kind of collective consciousness is created among them, which
opens up the possibilities of creating a new space. And for the present study four such narratives have been chosen.
One is Kari (2008) by Amruta Patil, the second one is Persepolis (2003-04) by Marjane Satrapi and the third one
is Drawing the Line: Indian Women Fight Back (2015), a graphic anthology by fourteen women and the fourth
one is Sita’s Ramayana (2018) by Samhita Arni. The female protagonists in these four works achieve happiness
through their acts of liberation, rebellion, collective consciousness and empathy for their fellow women,
respectively.
‘Kari (2008) by Amruta Patil discusses the life of a homosexual queer in a heterosexual society. The story begins
with Kari’s attempt of double suicide along with her lover Ruth, instilling Ruth to leave the city and the beginning
of Kari’s journey of self-exploration. People often resort to many ways to achieve happiness; here the protagonist
Kari achieves it through her acts of reframing and rediscovering herself. Kari, through her own attempts opens up
new possibilities to homosexuals by making them believe that they are different and not deviant from the society.
The story of Kari can be divided into two phases the one before and the one after the suicide. The first part depicts
her relation with Ruth that leads to her suicidal attempt and the second one showcases her job as a creative designer
in the ad agency. In both the lives Kari faces difficulties; however, during the second phase she tries to regain her
true self by introspecting and identifying her true nature. She states that “I give my days to the ad agency, work
like a fury and sleep like the dead” (Patil,41).
It is through Kari’s role as a creative writer in the ad agency she tries to redefine herself. According to Judith
Butler, gender is not inherited by birth but is rather attained through one’s repeated actions. In her dual life, Kari
performs some repeated actions; for instance, she is always found in shabby clothes and short hair, that are
unconventional for women. In the second part of the novel Lazarus is grieving for the loss of hair, whereas Kari
is celebrating her short hair. The mentioning of Kari as a boatman in the story adds to her celebration of nonbinary
identity. Working in the ad agency allows her immense freedom to showcase her fluid identity. The writer also
makes use of Kari’s relationship with other characters to showcase her non binary identity; for instance, her
relationship with Lazarus, Ruth and Angel emphasises her feminine and masculine sides as well. Kari’s own
creative space within the ad agency opens the scope of her third space. In her words it is the fairy world without
princes. Kari’s own nonbinary identity helps her to outgrow the smog city by challenging the status-quo genders
and helps her to explore various spheres in her journey. Through her act of reconciliation, she creates her queer
space.

The second novel of this study is Persepolis (2003-04) by Marjane Satrapi which discusses the life of an Iranian
girl amidst the Islamic Revolution of 1789. The story is presented in two volumes—the first one The Story of
Childhood (2003) deals with the protagonist Marji’s childhood life in Iran and the second one The Story of
Adulthood (2004) focuses on her return to her homeland from Europe. Being set in a war tormented society most
parts of the novel contain a bleak setting, but the writer is able to present the characters with happiness either
through their act of self-discovery. The writer portrays accurately the revelation of the female characters.
The central protagonist of the novel is Marji’, who is able to live among a few liberals and is fortunate enough
to get a good education, helping her to react with her surroundings in the right manner. There are instances in
which Marji skips wearing veil, rebelling with the school authority and at times with her parents. the narrative
intricates the acts of Marji with other female characters (96-97). All conventional rules Marji is bold enough to
divorce her husband Reza, to plan her own ways of escape from the torturers, her cordial relationship with her
maid, Mehri are pronounced examples of her subversion, consequently, leading to her happiness. Her own
decision to leave Europe showcases her ability to regain her roots. Moreover, the characters in the narrative seek
happiness by throwing parties in their households, quite unconventional for the time, through which they seek
pleasure they want.

The third novel of this study is Drawing the Line Indian Women Fight Back (2015) is a graphic anthology contains
fourteen stories by fourteen women. Each of these narratives depicts different stories by amateur women hailing
from different places. The book is in the form of a social activism. The book serves an important stance in the
field of graphic literature, as it deals with the day-to-day experiences of these fourteen women crying out to get
their voices heard in the contemporary world.
The stories in this collection deals with various themes including rape reportage and the unimportance of being
fair and finding solidarity among women. These narratives help the readers to identify themselves away from the
societal conditioning and inculcate in them the need for unity. The collection also seeks the readers’ attention to
issues which have been ignored for centuries. These women feel free through their group activities, and thereby,
bringing in a kind of solidarity that helps them to identify and fix their inner fears. In the narrative, the rebellious or subversive nature of women helps them to redefine their identity and, thereby, seeking happiness, binding women from various walks of life under a roof.

The fourth novel of the study is the graphic novel *Sita’s Ramayana (2018)* by Samhita Arni. The story is a feminist retelling of The Ramayana, from the perspective of Sita, overseeing the themes of male valour and heroism. Revisiting the Epic, The Ramayana from the viewpoint of Sita, the writer celebrates femininity, sisterhood, justice, patience and solidarity. Along with creating a heroic Sita, Arni, focuses on the compassionate empathy of Sita towards her enemy.

Though the story focuses on the life struggles of Sita, it is a meditation on the fate of women in general. Incidents like Sita’s separation from her husband, raising her children alone, trials of agni-pareeksha all signify the conditions of women in general. Even today there are instances like separation, single parenthood, captivity and much more are faced by women in the current scenario too. Arni cleverly eliminates the epic ideals from Rama and gives more prominence to Sita’s version by placing her at the axis and providing her with the ability to criticise the patriarchal men. Sita’s empathy towards her enemies eliminates the distinction between friend and foe, good and bad. Thus, by revisiting the text from a new dimension Arni is able to create a sense of happiness to herself and her female characters.

Throughout these novels one witnesses the interplay of both words and images. Every woman artist’s construct a space for her female characters in a unique way. The usage of panel space authenticate the attention to the characters and, their thoughts have been highlighted with the use of speech balloons. Judith Butler in her critical work “Gender Trouble”, asks “to what extent do regulatory practices of gender formation and division constitute identity, the internal coherence of the subject, indeed, the self- identical status of the person?” (Gender Trouble 16). And she asserts that Identity is constructed through repeated acts, for her this new category is labelled as performativity, The performance presumes a subject, but performativity contests this very notion of subject. According to her performativity is the discursive mode by which ontological effects are installed. (Gender Trouble111-112). The female characters in the works discussed in the study establish their identity through such repeated acts, either through subversion or rebellion. In their act of redefinition these women start identifying themselves and enjoy happiness which they have never experienced before.

### IV. METHODS

The methods used in this study is through direct observation. In order to analyse the level of happiness on each of the primary protagonists within the narratives, the article makes use of a close reading of the texts along with the help of literary theories. For the purpose of research four graphic narratives with strong female characters, written and illustrated by different women writers have been chosen. Along with literary theory the article makes use of sociological theory as a tool for analysing the varying degree of happiness within the characters.

### V. METHODOLOGY

The methodology adapted for the study is qualitative in nature. Using a close reading technique, the study disseminated the primary texts and interpret it using the secondary sources. The study is justified on the basis of secondary sources and also by the application literary theories. As the study focuses on the level of happiness in genders, it resorts to the use of gender theory as well.

### V. RESULTS

As the study focuses on the level of happiness achieved by the female characters within the graphic narratives, each of these female characters achieved a level of satisfaction or happiness through their gendered actions. An analysis of these novels with respect to Martin Seligman’s theory makes it worth mentioning. The characters in the novels under the study are frequently engaged in various activities which satisfies their inner needs and it also helps them in identifying with the need for solidarity. These factors together give them a hope to achieve a balanced state of life.

For instance, in the case of Kari, Marji, Sita and the other female protagonist in anthology they repeatedly perform certain activities, helping them to derive a kind of satisfaction. Subsequently, the repeated satisfactory acts help them in subverting the existing hegemonical ideologies leading them to a state of happiness. Every female character is a representative of women in general. Every character, achieves a sense of belonging, in union with the other identified female characters. The writers of these graphic narrative, too, experience a kind of satisfaction and happiness, propelling more female roles forward.
DISCUSSION
As people in the cusp of adulthood struggle for existence the writings of these female creators will help in the overall development of women in general. The search for happiness has been considered a universal theme in literature. There is no single human being on earth who would like to be sad. For all the avid human beings out there, this graphic medium proves to be a source for achieving happiness.

DECLARATION
I Parvathy J, Research Scholar, Kalasalingam Academy of Research and Education, Tamil Nadu, India, declare that this research article entitled, “An Analysis of Happiness Among the Female Genders in Select Graphic Novels”, was done by me along with my coauthors. This research work is personal and based on my true knowledge and has neither been presented nor submitted to any other reason.

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REFERENCES