Place, Ideology, and Protest: Analysing Urban Politics in *Hyderabad: A Graphic Novel*

Arockia Licy Monika C.

Abstract
Literary geographies are essential in understanding the urban sector of a region or a country. The need to understand the urban sector is ever-increasing as the rise in population means that cities are becoming larger than ever. In India, this creates a need to address the spatial structures within the city, which is intricately associated with its culture. When a work of literature represents a part of the city, it represents the city's spatiality, indicating the ebb and flow of the underlying power structure. These spatialities thus give an immediate indication of the urban politics within the city. This article addresses urban politics using Kevin Lynch's method of mapping. The representation can never be so comprehensive as to every political or place-based ideology within a city space. However, selective inclusion and exclusion can aid in understanding the complete picture. This concept of urban politics will be further explored in the representation of the city of Hyderabad through the graphic novel *Hyderabad: A Graphic Novel*.
Keywords: Urban Politics, Hyderabad, Graphic Novels, Kevin Lynch.

Introduction

In antiquity, upon arriving in a new city, a person would ask for directions to reach their destination. At the time, there was a fashion of using maps made from leather skins. As the technology advanced, maps took a new form, medium, or method. Presently, maps are often digital. The medium of maps is a key indicator of not only how a city is laid out, but also what the city is *like*. James Grant's approach in depicting the streets of London in his 1839 work *Travels in Town* reflects this in his description of cities as having an "animated condition, as illustrative of the character, habits, and pursuits of the inhabitants."[1] Other novelists and theorists later embraced this practice

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Arockia Licy Monika C. is a research scholar at Christ University Bangalore.
[1] James Grant, *Travels in Town* (Sydney: Wentworth Press, 2016).

of deciphering the city, including Walter Benjamin, Edgar Allan Poe, Gustave Flaubert, and Mikhail Bakhtin. Continuation of this tradition led to the embracement of the 'imaginal' as a tool for mining close reading[2] on cities and writings concerning cities.

One of the ways to read the literature about the city is through mapping. This is a framework through which "literary works serve a cartographic function by creating a figurative or allegorical representation of social space, broadly misunderstood."[3] Here, individuals associate themselves through navigating the practices, habits, and culture around them to understand the particular geography represented in the text. This practice is referred to as literary cartography. In the realm of graphic novels, however, this practice is yet to gain momentum. This is quite a gap in the field, as the flexibility in the spatial representation of the genre aids in representing complex matters and issues needing solutions. Hence, the article aims to establish a basis for practising literary cartography in specifically India graphic novels using Kevin Lynch's mapping method.

Literary Cartography

Cartographic readings focus on a text's representation of a place and its culture forms the basis of the construction. The text will often offer a landmark by which the reader can position themself and approach the city and its social practices as described. The practice of mapping literary stories through novels has existed since at least the early twentieth century.[4] If a novel fails in establishing spatial awareness in a location familiar to the reader, the very essence of mapping the city through social practices may become blurry, and the issues the author tries to represent may get lost. This method of understanding the city has brought out various issues and discrepancies in various literary works.

Several questions can be asked about the authenticity or reliability of literary cartography practices. Sébastien Caquard explains that "mapping both vernacular knowledge and fiction is central to understanding places in

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[2] Jo Guldi, 'Spatial Turn in Literature', *Scholar's Lab*, University of Virginia. At https://spatial.scholarslab.org/spatial-turn/the-spatial-turn-in-literature/index.html. Accessed 3/03/2022.

[3] Robert T. Tally Jr., 'On Literary Cartography: Narrative as a Spatially Symbolic Act', *New American Notes Online*, vol. 1, no. 1 (January 2011).

[4] Barabara Piatti, Hans Rudolf Bär, Anne-Kathrin Reuschel, Lorenz Hurni and William Cartwright, 'Mapping Literature: Towards a Geography of Fiction', in *Cartography and Art*, eds William Cartwright, Georg Gartner and Antje Lehn (Berlin: Springer, 2009), pp. 1-6.

depth."[5] He points out that the narrative cartographies play an essential role in exposing the authentic culture of a place more than the digitised Google Maps.

The representation of cities in literature may not be at first identifiable as a key aspect of the text, and indeed in many cases, the geographic positioning is subtle. Marie-Laure Ryan, who rejects more subtle examples, emphasises the simultaneous exhibition of these literary readings along with real-world maps so that the reader can understand the association of a particular culture to a place.[6] Caquard on the other hand classifies the act of literary mapping into two streams. The first category adheres to "the maps that appear in narratives such as novels and films," where they serve as a "spatial metaphor, as aesthetic elements and narrative guidelines."[7] The second category regards the "power of maps to stimulate and support narrative processes where a real-world map inspires the author to produce a work."[8]

Comparing the arguments of Ryan and Caquard, it is safe to say that a comprehensive understanding of a place requires a real-time map along with the spatial representations of the place. However, the point of literary cartography is to understand the city on a personal level and to bring to light to its darkest alleys and deepest rivers. One underlying emphasis that the movement put forth is the need for a combination of words (as in novels) and pictures (as in various types of maps, including VR) for such practices. This brings us, quite neatly, to the graphic novel and its vast, untapped potential for literary cartography.

Literary Cartography and Indian Cities

In India, graphic novels are emerging faster than before, bringing challenging themes, ideas, and issues to the literary sphere. Due to tiheir starting position as "outside" of traditional literature, they frequently challenge mainstream constructions, including mythology, gender, geographic politics, and

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[5] Sébastien Caquard, 'Cartography I: Mapping narrative cartography', *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 37, no. 1 (2011), p. 1.

[6] Marie-Laure Ryan, 'Narrative Cartography' in *International Encyclopedia of Geography*, eds Douglas Richardson, Noel Castree, Michael F. Goodchild, Audrey Kobayashi, Weidong Liu, and Richard A. Marston (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2020), p. 2.

[7] Sébastien Caquard and William Cartwright, 'Narrative Cartography: From Mapping Stories to the Narrative of Maps and Mapping', *The Cartographic Journal*, vol. 51, no. 2 (2014).

[8] Caquard and Cartwright, 'Narrative Cartography'.

language. Through the double media of writing and images, they can explore complex topics, including those surrounding urban spaces and the nuances of the city as an environment. The graphic novel that will be explored in this article is *Hyderabad: A Graphic Novel*, scripted by Jai Undurti and illustrated by Harsho Mohan Chattoraj, and published by Syenagiri Publications in 2015. The publisher dedicates itself publishing graphic novels that centre Indian places and experiences.

A fundamental similarity between the comics, graphic novels, and cartographies is that they "both (almost always) merge visual and textual parts" and they both "engage readers to participate in back-and-forth reading."[9] Several attempts have been made streamline the production of maps to be used in graphic novels.[10] These include the ability to edit real-life maps to suit a literary world, which brings with it a number of implications for how that text represents a physical space. The very process of sifting through the whole spaces of a city and representing only a few spaces of the city aims to bring out a peculiar voice to the forefront. This voice is an essential quality of the protest literature. For, "The idea of protest runs into fixed and predetermined values-patterns, and it seeks to explore new values rooted in the realities of life."[11]

When literature reflects issues rooted in life with urgency to the solution, it inevitably becomes a voice of protest. In this sense, the graphic novel may represent an uncanny and uncommon city, encompassing a voice of protest.

Mapping *Hyderabad*
Having established the importance and need for literary cartographic studies in graphic novels from India, the method of analysis, Kevin Lynch's "mapping", as proposed in his 1960 book *The Image of the City*, is suitable in for addressing the urban issues within the text.

Lynch's idea of mapping a city is applicable to various fields. Lynch himself advanced his propositions in this area in later periods. His propositions have been effectively incorporated into urban planning, public

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[9] Giarda Peterle, 'Comics and Maps? A CartoGraphic Essay', *Living Maps Review*, vol. 7, no. 1 (2019).

[10] Antoni Moore, 'Maps as Comics, Comics as Maps', *24th International Cartographic Conference*, Santiago, 15-21 November, 2009.

[11] Narendra Mohan, 'Protest and Literature', *Indian Literature*, vol. 18, no. 1 (1975).

policy, and urban development across several cities in the last two decades.[12] He describes the "imageability: of a city, which as he describes is "that quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer."[13] Lynch conducts this research to identify potent places, navigations, and spaces that impacted its observer.

In a graphic novel, the scenes are already designed in a particular way to address a specific requirement of the plot or an issue. Hence, an impact is already created in the author's mind that reflects in the text.[14] Lynch's method aims to observe its participants, which in the case of the graphic novel are the author and illustrator(s), as well as the audience. As such, it is a cumulative representation of the city of observation. Additionally, Lynch analyses the environmental image obtained from the observers. Environmental images result from a two-way process between the observer and their environment.[15] A graphic novel is also an observation of the environment. Though the text is a collective output, it has an individual voice. This image is classified into three types for analysis: identity, structure, and meaning.[16] Lynch explains,

> A workable image requires first the identification of an object, which implies its distinction from other things and its recognition as a separable entity. This is called identity, not in the sense of equality with something else but with the meaning of individuality or oneness. Second, the image must include the spatial or pattern relation of the object to the observer and to other objects. Finally, this object must have some meaning for the observer, whether practical or emotional. Meaning is also a relation, but quite a different one from spatial or pattern relation.[17]

This classification of the image helps in identifying places that made an impact. One cannot separate each panel within the text in this fashion. Hence, depending on the storyline the images can be split into an analysis triad: place, spatial relation, and ideology.

[12] Kaven Fattahi, 'City Imaging after Kevin Lynch', *2009 WRI World Congress on Computer Science and Information Engineering*, Los Angeles, 31 March – 2 April 2009; and Rossella Salerno, 'Rethinking Kevin Lynch's Lesson in Mapping Today's City', in *Innovative Technologies in Urban Mapping*, eds Antonella Contin, Paolo Paolini and Rossella Salerno (New York: Springer, 2014), pp. 25-31.

[13] Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Boston: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1990), p. 9.

[14] Lynch, *The Image of the City*, p. 6.

[15] Lynch, *The Image of the City*, p. 6.

[16] Lynch, *The Image of the City*, p. 9.

[17] Lynch, *The Image of the City*, p. 9.

A graphic novel's 'place' consists of the *mise-en-scene* of a panel and the environment depicted by a particular scene. Spatial relation and meaning are related entities drawn from the protagonist's relationship with the place and their relation to ideology. The spatial relation between a place and a character within the panel and on the whole reflects the spatial association of the individual. Spaces, identified as the meeting point social relations and physical place, reflect the culture of the individual occupying the space – in this case, a character.[18] Ideology reflects the prominent issues and patterns of arguments in the text, reflecting the politics and history of a represented location. In Lynch's research, the observers passively reflect on the imageability of the city. In the text, the authors represent the city with an ideological stance; hence, the term ideology is used in the analysis triad. As the text represents a single city, the analysis aims to bring out the urban politics and issues within the same city.

The first measure of comparing the cities can be adopted in further research when the goal is to identify the urban politics of multiple cities of the same country or a particular region depending on the geography; for instance, cities located in mountains, plains, and in the seaside. The current study will analyse the text to bring about the discussions of urban politics represented in the city of Hyderabad, India.

Place

The "place" of the city represented in the text comprises of landmarks referenced and neighbourhoods traversed. *Hyderabad* contains four different chapters, which differ chronologically in visual and verbal representation.

The first chapter, "Late Cretaceous Incident", begins with a mention of the name 'Panjagutta'. Here, the setting does not hint at an intended location. The verbal denotation, the sentences in the speech and thought boxes alone indicates the place. There are no mentions of other places or landmarks until the end of the chapter. To escape the dinosaur, the hunter transports himself to the twenty-first century with the help of his driver. When the hunter lands, his destination is immediately identified as Hyderabad.

The second chapter begins with architecture similar to that of the Osmania University of Hyderabad. This is the first distinct landmark that denotes a precise place. In specific panels, the middle ground of the depth of field contains arches of buildings in the background.

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[18] Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (New York: Horizon Press, 1974).

Then, within a splash page, the protagonist is transported to the top of a dome supported by construction rods. A partial figure of complex and intricate architecture is depicted. The reader can conclude that it is a palace: for the verbal narrative contains a story where the protagonist goes to meet the poet in *mushaira* conducted by the princess. The following panels depict the inner architecture of the palace and an elegant room where the *mushaira* takes place. As a sudden twist, the protagonist is seen standing in the middle of a garden where the verbal narrative mentions the "in the gardens of time".

The third chapter has illustrations that differ from the other sections. This chapter is devoid of colour and is entirely in greyscale. The panels depict the protagonist overlooking a crowded market, and the buildings' walls contain many advertisements. The subsequent pages depict landmarks from around the world. There are depictions of the ruins of tombs, a well-planned city which is identified as the city of Vara. The depictions of the tetrarchs of the ancient city and the tower of Babel can be seen in the following panels. The narrative within these pages progresses the storyline toward the history of world cities, starting from the creation of the earth.

Then, the chapter jump cuts its representation to several years before India's Independence. There is a depiction of landscapes featuring people living in huts and canons, as well as the temple of Chandi, maps, ancient symbols, ancient cave drawings, cartographies, and extraterritorial suit, and lands. The following pages showcase images of the tetrarchs of the period, fighting a psychogeographic war between the cities of Islamabad and Chandigarh. The chapter ends with the depiction of the Sphinx of Gaza. In the last few pages of the chapter, the plot returns to the old city of Hyderabad, where the clash of verses takes place in the palace upon a hill.

The last chapter, titled 'Zenophelon', consists of two different narrations. The backgrounds of the panels are colourless and empty. The second part of the chapter consists of similar illustrations to the second chapter. The protagonist exits the palace and once again travels through time. What follows is a depiction of a cluster of houses and his home, which reflect the city's modern architecture. In the following panels, the protagonist works within what appears to be a corporate cabin, followed by the construction of "cyber towers". The following panels consist of a half-destroyed tomb and a busy road with hanging advertisements, followed by a cemetery with a large tomb in its centre. Yet again, the places and the tombs are not named.

Spatial Relation

Spatial relation is the dynamic between characters and their physical environment. The relation can be depicted through objects and languages that represent the real city. The text also depicts the city in non-specific locations, which give a sense of the energy and atmosphere of the place. The hunter driver speaks fluently in multiple languages, including English, Telugu and Hindi, which eases his ability to navigate the city regardless of the time period. The driver's relation to the city is identified through his language as a native of the place, while the hunter interacts with it as a coloniser.

The second chapter showcases his supervisor rejecting the hunter's thesis, "Life and Times of Poet Ashfaq". The desert and the place known as 'Nishapur', which is in Iran, is related to the protagonist through the poet. Many of these poems are informed by the hunter's ability to travel through time. From this, the reader can infer that the places without names displayed in the text are parts of the old city. The clothing fashion of the characters denotes a Mughal rule, and the language contains phrases that indicate Urdu slang. The *mushaira*, the palace, and the architecture denote also the old city.

This chapter's narrative style is twofold: both conversational and poetic. The protagonist uses the informal style amongst all characters except people in the *mushaira*. Once the *mushaira* commences, the poets in the palace start conversing through verses, and the language's style changes. The objects depicted within these panels before the *mushaira* include amulets, fez, medicine, and maps. The protagonist's mobile phone is sold for some currency after some bargain. All these social relations of the protagonist with other individuals within these places indicate the social practices of the ancient city.

The third chapter depicts distinct places and monuments; the collective aim of the chapter is to represent the beginning of the history of the world and the beginning of the cities of India. After depicting the psychogeographic effects of the journey, the chapter emphasises both the Hindu and the Muslim presence in the city.

The first part of illustrations in the final chapter consists of a number of symbols. There is a chess board, and a coin arrangement that is different to what appeared in previous chapters.. Due to the lack of details of place, it becomes difficult to pinpoint the place of action within these pages.

Upon leaving the palace, the protagonist returns to the present city. He goes straight to his house, where his parents persuade him to take up a job in the corporate field rather than continue his research on poet Ashfaq. Within

the office space, the protagonist does not interact with anybody. He is seen alone. The following panels feature current city places like the cyber tower and ruined tombs, presented without narration.

Ideology

The term 'ideology', in its broadest definition, denotes a set of practices and beliefs. Since the method is adapted to map a represented place and not delve into the politics of spatiality, ideology is used in its most general sense. In the first chapter, 'Panjagutta' situates the text within a city, though it is not specified which until the following chapter. The dynamic between the dinosaur, the hunter, and the driver all relate to the changes within the landscape from the beginning of time. The city's history during the Colonial Period, and at present as the state's bifurcation is a significant political movement, are both depicted to give atmosphere to the setting and contextualise the state of the city. The driver's inability to speak English likewise shapes his interactions with his surroundings.

The second chapter contains more social interactions than the first chapter. The interaction between the protagonist and the professor within the university depicts several issues regarding scholarship of the city's history. This connotes that in the limelight of development, the city's history is getting darker, neglected, and unpreserved.

After the protagonist enters the old city, more details in architecture and character clearly depict the time period. One of the panels illustrates a coffee shop with a woman smoking Hukkah at a tea table. This showcases the culture within the coffee shops. The only modern appliance within these depictions is the mobile phone that the protagonist carries with him.

The royal reign and rulers of the old city of Hyderabad are given attention through their social practices. The social history is portrayed through aspects such as the princess, the announcement in the streets of her arrival, the lively palace, the *mushaira*, the language used within these spaces, and the notion of the ruler encouraging arts by supporting poets and scholars. The protagonist becomes successful in his quest for the poet Ashfaq as he recognises himself as the poet who came out of nowhere to the princess's *mushaira*. The very act of self-actualisation is also done through the interaction with art is yet again a classical influence of the city. The entire chapter celebrates the old city.

The third chapter is a black and white depiction of the psychogeographic development of cities, both globally and in India

specifically. The lack of colours within these pages is contemplative. Though the protagonist narrates the entire story about how the city "speaks" to him, the text does not imply a social relation that is particular to the land of Hyderabad.

By featuring the effect of psychogeography and the absence of modern depiction of the city simultaneously, the text makes the reader ponder the present urban planning of the city Hyderabad. The text leaves the reader's imagination to ponder upon various factors of the current city in terms of urban planning and historical monuments. The very power that the text seems to advocate to be present within a city, lacks its relation to the current city. The text does not showcase Hyderabad to be possessing a power that drives its people; rather, it elaborates on the rise and fall of the great cities of the world and in India. The last few pages of this chapter enable the reader to understand the city's religious facets. The text depicts the coexistence of both the religions in harmony yet as opposing differences on the whole.

The first part of the final chapter emphasises the ancient city's residents ending in the same role at the end of the day. The second part is a continuation of this monotonous everyday life of the modern city. The lack of social interaction within the places of the present city, and the isolated depiction of the protagonist in all these places, bring out the loneliness inherent to cities, despite how full they are. The psychogeographic power of a city that once made and destroyed cities in ancient times now seems to have been lost.

Conclusion
The only place named in the entire text of *Hyderabad* is the "cyber tower". The places depicted in the old city do not have distinct details that the reader can identify. However, the old city of Hyderabad is filled with social interactions, unlike the present city. By featuring the old city rather than the current city, and by depicting the psychogeographic powers of the old city, juxtaposed with the loneliness of the modern one, the text questions everything that the current city stands for. Hence, the text becomes a representation of an urban protest through all these characteristics.