Comics as Propaganda: India and Abroad

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Abstract: *Comics books have been used by various government throughout the world as propaganda. Comic books are popular not only among children, but also among young adults. It appeals directly to their hopes and dreams. During the Second World War the comic books played a major part in shaping the mind of common readers. The comics fostered a sense of patriotism and encouraged the readers to contribute to the war effort. In India, the comics superhero Bantul the Great was created during the Bangladesh War of Liberation. Recent Bal Narendra comics portrayed Prime Minister Narendra Modi as a perfect superhero in whose hands the future of India is safe and secure.*

Key Words: *popular culture, power, benefits, emotion, dream, invest, war bonds, patriotism, diversions, sentiments.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Comics books have been used by various government throughout the world as propaganda for their own political benefits. As a form of popular culture, this type of propaganda comics disorients and destabilizes people, destroying their capacity to make judgments and turns them into playthings of power. Comic books are popular not only among children, but also among young adults. Comics simplifies information and activates strong emotions of the readers. It appeals to the hopes and dreams of the targeted readers.

2. SUPERHEROES DURING WWII:

Comics books were also popular in the 1930s. It was the time of Great Depression. Since the depression was of great concern for the Americans, the readers were greatly influenced by the comic book superheroes. The superheroes fought against all the evils of society. The characters like Green Lantern, Superman, and Batman often fought against corrupt businessmen who mistreated poor and desperate workers in the late 1930s. During World War II the comic books played a major part in shaping the mind of common public. The comics fostered a sense of patriotism and encouraged the readers to contribute to the war effort. The main target of comic books was to sell war bonds. Covers of popular comics during WWII had graphics urging customers to invest in war bonds. Sometimes the superheroes were transformed to fit the ideal patriotic character. In 1940 and 1941, the storylines of many famous comic books were about the events of the wars. Superman, a symbol of American patriotism in his blue-and-red uniform, fought tyrants and dictators. He even apprehended the dictators Adolf Hitler and Josef Stalin in a special comic prepared in 1940 for *Look* magazine. Captain Marvel and other superheroes also clobbered Nazi and Japanese soldiers, even before the December 1941 bombing of Pearl Harbour which brought the United States into conflict. Early editions of Batman comics focused on the fact that Batman never used guns or killed. But in these 1943 comic books, Batman was seen as supplying guns to American soldiers and supporting the seventh war loan. DC Comics also portrays Batman to persuade Americans to purchase war bonds. One cover of a Batman comic number 18 shows Batman and his sidekick Robin blowing up a firecracker in the face of the Axis leaders.

3. COMICS AS DIVERSIONS:

When WWII started, 1 million comics were published in a year. It is surprising that two and a half years later, 25 million copies were sold a month. The maximum craze was for Superman and Batman. Superman and Captain each sold over 1 million editions a month. And the largest single customer in the period was the United States Army. Originally, the Army was buying comic books as diversions as diversion is one of the important characteristics of post-truth, but soon many of the soldiers became hooked on the storylines, character development, and the virtuous fight

against evil and oppression. After the War, sales dropped dramatically and then continued to slide down throughout the 1950s.

4. BANTUL THE GREAT AND BANGLADESH WAR OF LIBERATION:

In India Bantul the Great was an immortal creation of Bengali cartoonist Narayan Debnath. Initially, he did not give any superpowers to Bantul. During the Bangladesh War of Liberation, also known as the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, as the newspapers ran full of the news of revolution and support of Bangladeshi martyrs, the editors requested Narayan Debnath to give some special power to Batul so that he sounds unbeatable. Debnath was reluctant thinking about legal implications. He was assured and also requested to draw inspiration from Western superheroes to create Eastern motivation. After much thought, he borrowed Superman's bullet-bouncing powers for Batul. He formulated some more extraordinary powers in Batul in the course of time, which promoted him from hero to superhero. Bantul single-handedly stopped the tanks of Pakistani Khan soldiers and diffused bombs. Bullets bounced off his chest and he was sought out by army generals who required his help to stop an attack. Bantul reflected the people's sentiments and immediately became popular.

5. CHILDHOOD STORIES OF NARENDRA MODI:

Bal Narendra, childhood stories of Narendra Modi, was published in 2019 by Rannade Prakashan and Blue Animation. The illustrations emphasize a modest background with pictures of exposed bricks in the walls of a one-roomed household of six members. The epilogue says: "These 17 real-life stories give you a glimpse of the formative years of Narendra Modi- a leader the entire nation is looking up with great hope". The comic book depicts Modi as rescuing a drowning boy, swimming in crocodile-infested waters and serving tea and food to soldiers going to war in 1962. We also see him in helping his father sell tea, acting in theatre, etc. Here, Narendra Modi was projected as a perfect young saint. He was portrayed as a perfect superhero in whose hands the future of India is safe and secure. In this case, facts are exaggerated and falsified to reinforce the mindsets of targeted readers who believe as the propagandists wish.

6. CONCLUSION:

A type of promotional culture which aims in self-promoting and self-branding has emerged in today's world. Government and political parties have been using communication technologies and social medias as Facebook and Twitter for their own political gain by spreading fake news, misinformation and distorting history. Though the word 'propaganda' came into focus during WWII, the truth is that the concept existed long ago. In ancient times, the Greeks used their games, theatre, assembly and religious festivals for propagandizing ideas and beliefs. They also used their oratory as means of controlling public mind. Hand written books were also circulated to shape and control the opinions of men. However, the term "propaganda" first came into common use as a result of the missionary activities of the Catholic church in Europe. Pope Gregory XV formed in Rome the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith in 1622. This was a commission of cardinals charged with spreading the faith and regulating church affairs in heathen lands. A college of Propaganda was created under the guidance of Pope Urban VIII to train priests for the missions.

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