



Visual Words: A Critical Analysis of *Chithrapusthakathile Yathrikar*

Dr Aiswarya PK

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Payyanur College, Payyanur, Kannur, Kerala, India

Abstract: This paper is an analysis of *Chithrapusthakathile Yathrikar* which is a short Malayalam novel written by an upcoming writer Sreejith Vallikkunnu. This work unfolds the life of a journalist and the happenings of his life amidst his fast-paced work-life. It is the story of Anna, a research associate at Shanti Nikethan, too. This paper analyses how *Chithrapusthakathile Yathrikar* becomes an instance of a successful attempt at providing a clear graphic representation of a human tale through words. The selected vocabulary and narrative pattern show how letters can create visuals without providing the actual pictures. This paper uses the insights from Visual and Graphic studies and points out how the idea of Visual Studies can include aspects from word narratives. For this purpose, I have adopted certain select terminology and conceptual tools from visual field, namely, the Visual, Visuality, Visibilization, Visual Subjectivation/Objectivation, and Visual Engagement.

Index Terms – Graphic Studies, Visual Studies, the Visual, Visuality, Visibilization, Visual Subjectivation/Objectivation, and Visual Engagement.

Chithrapusthakathile Yathrikar is a short Malayalam novel written by an upcoming writer Sreejith Vallikkunnu. This work unfolds the life of a journalist and the happenings of his life amidst his fast-paced work-life. It is the story of Anna, a research associate at Shanti Nikethan, too. The novels are to be read and imagined, but here the writer surpasses this to reach a further aspect, here the novel itself transforms to be a perfect example of a visual art with its vividness of narrations.

The novel's title itself is to be evaluated. The title points out the graphic nature of the work itself. The rough English translation of the title goes as: "The Travelers of a Picture Book"—a title which indicates how intricately the narration is visually mediated. The pattern adapted by the novelist also justifies this dominant tendency. From the beginning lines to the ending paragraphs one can witness the presence of narrations which appear not as narrations but as drawings and photographs. The picture-perfect observation provided at the beginning also indicates the nature of the narrator who, unsurprisingly, turns out to be a journalist, or more precisely a photographer. The text follows the aforementioned visual pattern in its context setting as well as in its character development.

Here, in this paper, I would like to analyse how *Chithrapusthakathile Yathrikar* becomes an instance of a successful attempt at providing a clear graphic representation of a human tale through words. The selected vocabulary and narrative pattern show how letters can create visuals without providing the actual pictures.

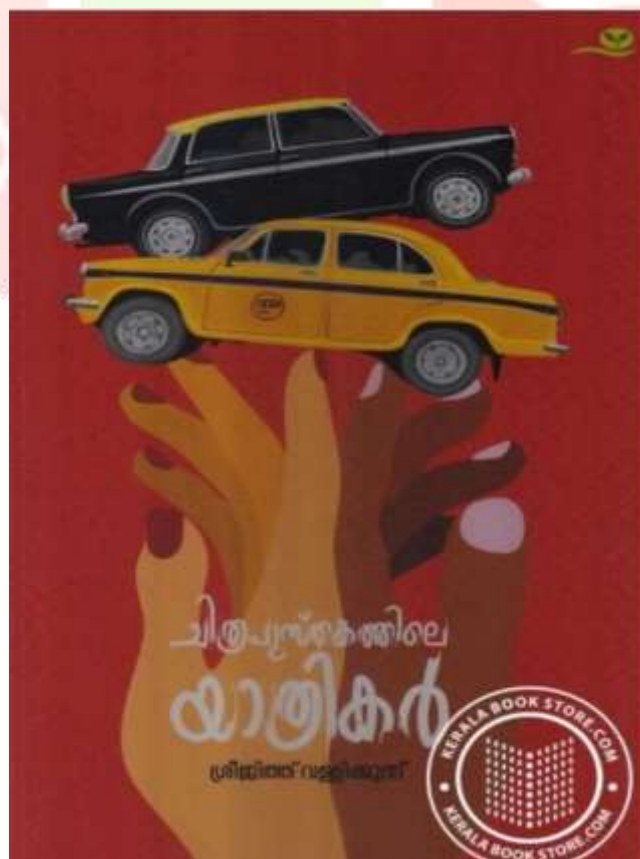


Figure 1: Cover Page of the Novel

This paper uses the insights from Visual and Graphic studies and points out how the idea of Visual Studies can include aspects from word narratives. For this purpose, I have adopted certain select terminology and conceptual tools from visual field, namely, the Visual, Visuality, Visibilization, Visual Subjectivation/Objectivation, and Visual Engagement.

“The visual...is the most generic term designating the entire multifaceted field of visual experience... ‘Visual field/s’ and visual experience are in one sense completely ordinary. If we denaturalize and historicize the concept of perception we generate the category of ‘seeing’ or, more simply, *visuality*” (Sandywell and Heywood 12)

The starting paragraph sets this tone of the work.

The long queue of people to have coffee in the stall. More are there to get the tickets. The weariness in the eyes of some people who are engrossed in the thoughts that the train might be late. Others who are sitting absolutely absorbed in their mobile phones. Very few are glancing at old magazines or newspapers. Some others are expecting to alight the approaching trains with relief tattooed onto their faces. (*my trans.*) (Vallikunnu11)

The word picture of a typical hectic railway station. The starting lines thus set the context of the narration in general. Moreover, it also hints at the narrative style adopted by the writer. The graphic narration creates a cultural context and it points at the fact that being the part of a culture is also about “belong[ing] to its orderings of visual space” (Sandywell and Heywood 12) that we cannot delete the *visuality* from our mundane things. The boredom and anxiety one faces while waiting for the train, the habitual and ordinary ambience of a typical railway station, combined with the minute understanding of human psychology and its deeper nuances are presented before the readers. The writer creates a visual through his narrations here and the act of doing this generates the importance of *visuality*. The visual is carefully placed by the selection of apt vocabulary which has more graphic inclination. Such a narration simultaneously becomes an ordinary visual, and the process of reading between the lines endows it with more deeper meanings beyond what is seen. A moment of perceiving—the *visuality*—the visual. The writer surrounds us with more and more such images.

Apart from delineating the central characters, the work follows the same graphic pathway in creating the unknown, minor characters. This narration makes these characters more alive and relevant rather than appearing as mere passers by.

See the description of a girl who is seeing off her lover: “She cannot even think of leaving his hands. Her eyes are welling up either because of love or because of her dejection” (*my trans.*) (Vallikunnu 11). There are more such instances. See the description of a woman who is there at Mahashweta Devi Nagar.

If you go straight and look through the left, you can see a green-saree-draped woman sitting and chewing pan. Sometimes she is surrounded by two or three little children. Or else she sits and chats with some elderly people. There is a strong stick kept besides her chair. Do not be scared. She uses it to walk and frighten off the pye-dogs. (*my trans.*) (30)

There is another description of a man whom the narrator casually observes during his beach visit. Even the description of capturing photos is done underscoring its visual element.

I took photos in my zoom lens. A canvas as large as a beach is an opportunity for a cameraman. The buttons of a man lying on the cement floor are misplaced. He might be a person who is exhausted after a long tiresome interview. Then I attempted to capture the smiles of children.... I created a beach canvas brimming with mirth-photographs. (*my trans.*) (37)

The visual rhetoric used by the author in unfolding this tale succeeds in creating a colourful imprint in the minds of the readers. The readers are transcended from their passive stance by these graphically vivid images. The reader imagines the scene more clearly, moreover, the reader sees the scene. The reader in fact sees the tale of Sujith and Anna as if s/he watches a movie. There is lot to imagine, and this imagination is watered by the crystalline graphic descriptions. The reader is thus not a mere reader, but an observer, who walks with the character without being seen. The reader is endowed with the boon of “invisible visibility” (Sandywell and Heywood 13).

The complex institutions of visibility come into focus when the unnoticed realms of the visual are seen as problematic or extraordinary. What is striking here, and what matters, is what we might call ‘invisible visibility’, that combination of the utterly obvious—on which our capacity to live a life is necessarily depends—and the radical elusiveness of everyday life....Once this ‘alienation effect’ is set into motion we begin to notice the remarkable unremarkableness of ordinary perception...(13-14)

While dealing with the aspects of Visual Subjectivation/Objectivation, it is seen that writer presents some moments of self-critique. Subjectivation and objectivation indicate the “processes and practices that construct ‘subjectivities’ and ‘objectivities’ in different historical regimes and social orders....The visual turn is thus also a turn towards a renewed interest in the self and conceptions of selfhood and ‘modes of spectatorship’” (30).

Here the narrator himself is a photographer. The way Sujith utilizes the weapon of power, the camera, is also mentioned in one of the initial parts of the novel. He captures the picture of Anna when she is the most vulnerable, even without her permission. The moment of camera capture immediately objectifies Anna, and Sujith turns out to be in the other side of the spectrum. The narrator, but, acknowledges this dominant as well as intrusive behaviour in another part of the narrative as a part of his profession. This acknowledgement in fact is a moment of self-criticism too.

The dominance of the visual aspect in this text becomes more evident when one realizes the fact that both the main characters are professionally and passionately inclined to the visual field. Sujith is a photographer, one who captures a moment with camera and Anna is a painter, one who captures a moment with colours. This creates the link between them and their thoughts. Both are visually oriented and for them images speak better than words. To narrate their story, the words should match the graphics. The language of their tale is the language of visible spaces.

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