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The Critical Visual Analysis of Graffiti on Public Transportation in Punjabi, Pakistani Culture

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Abstract: *Graffiti is a very strong way of expressing, resisting, promoting, criticising, and catharsis. As a tool of expression, this can be used to raise socio-economic issues existing around us. This study reveals the importance of graffiti as a tool for expressing the significant issues of our society, specifically those in Pakistani Punjab. This paper collected a total of 16 images, further divided into two parts; the first part contains all images to reveal the very nature of graffiti as a tool to protest, criticise, and complain against social inequalities and social issues. On the other hand, the second sphere of collected images contains those images which are an expressive form of promoting gender stereotypes, racism, class conflict, and so on. Hence one can see how beautifully graffiti is working on both types as a tool of resistance and also as a medium of promotion.*

Key Words: Graffiti, Punjabi, Pakistani, Culture, Public Transportation

Introduction

Graffiti is a very strong and aesthetic tool to highlight social issues like income inequality, power abuse, racism, and many others. In Pakistani society, the concept of graffiti is not a new emerging form of expression; rather, the concept of graffiti has been seen for many years in Pakistan. From 2014 onwards, graffiti in Pakistan primarily focused on the essence of nationalism, Music, advertisement, and political favouritism. Despite all the conflicting points of critics and artists, graffiti is at its peak, thriving around us in the form of wall chalking, transportation, painting, and so on. In Pakistan, public transportation is one of the strong tools of artistic expression, especially truck art. There are a lot of public transportation conveying several social messages of racism, inequality, nationalism, regionalism, representative of culture, and so on. There are many influential works done on graffiti-related topics

concerning urban and international bases, but there isn't any work specifically related to Pakistani Punjabi culture so we find a gap to be filled by considering it. This research paper is planned to figure out the mechanism of public transportation to put forward or register protests on unjust ways of the government regarding social issues. Our society is facing so many issues of different social problems. Still, as far as it is concerned with the mode of expression this promotion of public views on transportation contains a mode of emphasis as well as a mode of resistance in itself. Most of the public transportation around us in Pakistani Punjabi culture is used to emphasise as well as resist social inequalities around us. This research is in keen interest to select some important or repetitive graffiti expressions and to analyse them with the perspective of critical evaluation and the current state of matter existing as social problems around those feminism, poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment. This study tends to explore the very phenomenon

and its importance in Pakistani culture. It also tends to analyse the frequency of various social problems exhibited through such art and their associative relationship with socio-cultural and political rifts of contemporary issues.

As concluded by [Marche \(2012\)](#) highlighted the function of graffiti in two modes of expression; the first is "Expressivism" which is not the case that graffiti always carries surface structure meanings in itself but it also incorporates some hidden meanings indicated by some symbols. He further expresses the mode of "Resistance" by using graffiti as there are some gangs who use it as a form of threat and also to claim any territory. In Pakistani society, many social problems are having proper recognition of resistance over time like racism, poverty, corruption, and unemployment. Therefore, the mediocre class of Pakistan uses their public vehicles as a mode of promotion and resistance against those forms of injustice. This research is going to explore firstly how public transportation in Punjabi Pakistani culture is a strong and appealing mood of expression and secondly how it works as a mode of promotion as well as a mode of resistance around us.

There are many influential works done on graffiti-related topics concerning urban and international bases but there isn't any work specifically related to Pakistani Punjabi culture so we find a gap to be filled by considering it.

Relevant Studies

In Pakistani society, the concept of graffiti is not a new emerging form of expression rather, the concept of graffiti has been seen for many years in Pakistan, and the emergence of modern graffiti dates back to the era of General Pervez Musharraf when he was ruling the country with iron hands, so the mass of country rapidly opt the mood of wall chalking to protest the need of democracy. There are many famous graffiti artists for their prominent work, like Ahsan Butt, an exceptional artist from Karachi. His work wheels around the matters of politics and cultural anarchism. He is famous for the "EJECT" symbol, which he used to denote the elimination of Musharraf from the government. Soon, the symbol of "Ejection" was considered the symbol of protest against the rule of the military, and it was that very

initial point of the recognition graffiti as a tool of resistance again so-called status quo.

[Khokhar \(2020\)](#) inquired about some problems like what is the impression of buyers towards the divider chalking as a marketing strategy? How does shopper discernment change on the off chance that they have a place with various backgrounds? How do phenomenological hermeneutics help to comprehend the recognition of consumers? And she concluded that in the hermeneutic understanding, we had featured an individual history perspective that underlies customers' recognition and has demonstrated how their own set of experiences outline their opinions. The impact of individual history was clear. Customer's discernments are shaped by recorded conditions and these foundation variables ought to be concentrated all together to understand the viewpoint of a person. Positively, these elements feature important aspects of the individual being deciphered. Every one of the three individuals who were met had different personal history and their perspective on chalking was extraordinary, however, they had the same perspective that brands ought not to utilise divider chalking as an advertising procedure.

Another study was conducted on 'Graffiti on university Walls' in Jordan by [Bani-Khair and Al-Khawaldeh \(2017\)](#). It was a corpus-based study. Discourses were being drawn from messages written on the university's walls, particularly in classrooms, corridors, and toilets walls by the students to express their issues. The researchers adopted [Fairclough \(2001\)](#) for critical discourse analysis. The researchers have found that students have used graffiti as a tool to express and voice their love or hatred for rules and regulations, for their friends and enemies on the washroom walls, corridors, and classroom walls.

[Onchiri and Mogambi \(2015\)](#) describe in their study on graffiti that 'Hotshot' in some of the 'PSVs' could be abused while in others could be a form of praise, but it depends on whether it is lexically broadened or narrowed. Examples of data have been taken from different PSVs. The data analysis has shown that although graffiti used fragmented words, phrases, or sentences, the audience involved in the communication had interpreted the expected meaning successfully.

Graffiti or spray painting is found in numerous social orders with various social settings and has become an observer and an ethnographic wellspring of data on metropolitan workmanship improvement. [Ross \(2016\)](#) identified that contemporary spray painting is additionally depicted by its questionable issues between social, style, and stylish structures alongside defacement angles. Confronting an overall plethoric creation, the supposition that graffiti is a positive metropolitan artistic expression brings up some incomprehensible issues concerning ephemerality and "visual contamination" with a developing workmanship market interest. Nonetheless, it is frequently observed as illegal creation and defacing of resources. For example, eliminating spray painting or confining the act of spray painting from the public space has been a disputable issue for specialists and specialists. An inquiry subsequently emerges: in what capacity can the stylish and pictorial parts of these demonstrations of creation be considered destructive incidents.

The Method of Inquiry

Visual Art

Visual art is a broad term in the essence of the art form ranging from wall painting to writing. Graffiti is an extension of the visual art form. Graffiti has a long history of marking, initially found in Ancient Roman ruins, Mayan City of Tikal, Central America, and Rock of Spain, specifically in the 16th century and English monasteries. 20th Century graffiti was recognised just in the term of association related to gangs who used it for different purposes e.g. to boast the control of territory, to highlight the feathers of mischievous acts, and to disgrace someone by

projecting his/her character and the targeting places where including subways, billboards, street walls. Graffiti is a powerful and aesthetic tool highlighting social issues like income inequality, power abuse, racism, and many others. During the civil rights movement in America, it was also a favoured tool of expression, and there was a time when it was considered a vandalistic act in civil society. This research is conducted by implementing the qualitative mode of visual art methodology as visual art methodology is a strong way of conveying the social institutions of our society under the heading of Discourse II.

This research is conducted using a qualitative approach with a visual method to analyse the collected data for results. Does graffiti art on vehicles (Punjabi) have any importance in helping us tackle contemporary issues, e.g. racism, poverty, illiteracy? What sort of linguistic branch does graffiti deal with most, e.g. Semantics, Pragmatics. Is our Punjabi language also being used as a resisting tool for modern issues? So to study the above-mentioned questions, we have collected 16 images taken from public transport, including motorcycles, rickshaws, cars, trucks, and vans. All selected pictures contain the very element of racism, feminism, poverty, corruption, energy crises, and materialistic aspects of society. This study explores how mini-communication tools can promote and resist in their expressive ways. All the selected material analysed by research participants analyses of this research is categorised at some points as racist images, social problem images, protesting images, and criticising images concerning graffiti as a tool of resistance and a tool of stereotypes promotion.

Collected Data in Two Spheres





Figure 1: Sub-categories of Data under Head Categories

A

Graffiti art A Tool of Resistance in the form of Discourse

- Graffiti as a tool of protest: Energy crises figure 1.1 & 1.2
- Graffiti as a form of criticism: passive youth figure 1.3
- Graffiti as a channel to criticise Government figure 1.4
- Criticism of materialistic society: figure 1.5 & 1.6
- Graffiti a representative of poverty and inflation: figure 1.7,8,9,10

B

Graffiti Art as a Mood of Promoting Social Stereotypes

- Graffiti as a mode to criticise female materialism: a tool to promote female stereotypes figure 1.11
- Other social types; Figure 1.12,13,14,15,16

All selected data now will be analysed according to the sub-categories under head categories firstly, how graffiti art is a strong artistic medium to register ongoing social issues in Pakistani Punjab; secondly, how this art is also a strong medium to spread social and conventional stereotypes.

Graffiti/Visual Art as a Tool for Resisting Social Issues

Graffiti as a Tool of Protest: Energy Crises



Figure 1: Happy Independence to all except Wapda

Pakistan is facing the issue of an energy crisis of at least a deficit of 7000 megawatts during extreme periods due to the gap in demand and generating capacity. This worsening issue has become a major social as well as political issue which reflects the hardships of every individual and business sector person. This shortage of power crisis is not a new issue; rather, it is the result of poor policies of the past, which results in the current poor state of affairs. People face a lot of hurdles and hardships to sustain their everyday routines due to energy crises. A single rain in one day causes the load shedding for a long period, so it enrages the common mass, and they express their grudges by using some tools. Graffiti is one of the strong tools to express their feelings and also adds some amusement to see.



Figure 2: one Sorrow is my Lover's Second of Light

People in undeveloped countries are facing so many other issues apart from power shortages which are some personal issues that cause further mental turmoil around them.

Graffiti as a form of Criticism: Passive Youth



Figure 3: Blow Horn Slowly, the Nation is Sleeping

"Khuda Ne Aj Tak Us Qouam Ki Halat Nahi Badli Na Ho Khayal Khud Jisay Apni Halat Ke Badalne Ka" (God Never changed the situation and destiny of a nation who never bothered about its own). In Pakistan, there are so many social issues which are the result of poor government policies as well the laziness of our youth and least interest in development. Most people are interested in money-making ideas by using their children as a tool for earning, but they are not interested in their education. On the other hand, the young ones of our society are wasting their time by investing in the wrong places for those clubs, cricket, gaming, wandering, and wasting their parents' money bitterly. All these factors lead to the further worsening situation of our society. On the contrary, we must take some reformative steps to resist such ways, but alas, we are not doing. So these things obstruct the development of our country. Graffiti here is working as a shaking conscience tool to let people realise our drawbacks.

Graffiti as a Channel to Criticise Government



Figure 4: Count the Perks of Revolution

The newly established government of Pakistan is struggling with many things and going through a

difficult time. There are many claims of the government that how they helped the country in a difficult time and cope with so many issues, but despite their claims of progress, some parties are criticising like PMLN and PPP that the new government is at its failures regarding so many things therefore there exist some parties on an ambivalent term with the new government. So in many TV shows and seminars, they propagated that the government is a failure in itself and how they are making the thinking common. People, in the same way, people, also support their ways of judging collectively. It is very unfair to judge a government just on the mandate of two-year performance. Here graffiti is being used as a tool of protest, criticism, and dissatisfaction emblem.

Criticism of Materialistic Society



Figure 5: Money Finished Loved ones Angry

As a part of a developing Asian country, Pakistan has not enjoyed the economic growth, a stable economy, or good policies, including those of budget making, education, or foreign since these things cause to generate a materialistic society in the current state of matters. So the nation is abruptly absorbing the luxuries lifestyles buying western goods to show off, spending a lot to astonish people, specifically young ones. All these factors lead to a salient war to claim more public fame than those existing around us. All these things are increasing day by day lust for power, money, and exaggeration of one's assets, so resultantly, these things cause the dependency of relation on the term materialism. People choose those having enough wealth to show off and quiet those not capable of being enamoured. Graffiti here



is working as a tool to criticise those materialistic people exiting around us.

Figure 6: Everything is Sold here; beware, even People Sell air in Balloons

Social issues generate a materialistic society around us based on personal gain and interest. They don't have any feelings about other people. They just love themselves. They don't care about other people's feelings, desires, or emotions. People in this world sell anything for their benefit. Instead, it is a living thing or nonliving. Poverty has created people who are compelled to sell their children as bonded labour. It is the rule of this world that the rich have fame and the one who has no money has nothing. Even this man is treated as if he has no right to live as a human being. It means this world is so selfish that it doesn't care about anything, and it is enough for the murder of its soul. If every person does his work with proper honesty and done with the deepness of his heart, then this is the day when we will be successful. Graffiti here highlights the inner reality of people. Everyone just wants to become richer and more prosperous, and everything in this world has its price.

Graffiti is a Representative of Poverty and Inflation



Figure 7: Respected Chief Minister of Punjab, if you Spare my Life, I want to say something, the Cost of Bread is 2 RS and Gas 100 PRs O, Servant of Punjab Answer this?

Poverty and inflation are both very drastic issues in Pakistan, and both are the result of past socio-economic poor policies of past governments resulting in different social issues which further lead to social crime in our country. Dearness runs to 14.6% in January 2020, which is recorded as the highest among previous records. The short-run analysis of this image highlights the so-called issue of our country. Most of the people are fighting to earn their living, and they can hardly survive with their earnings but the high costs of things further lead to a miserable life for poor people. Most rickshaw drivers face such issues because of their dependency on a day to day earnings, so the representative image shows how beautifully he is protesting against both social and economic issues.

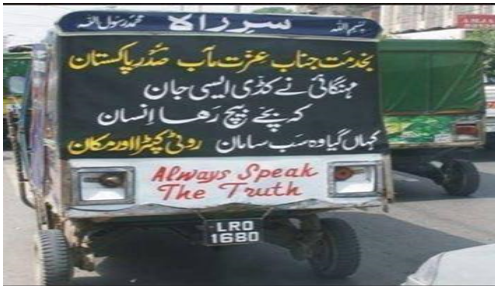


Figure 8: Respected President of Pakistan Inflation is Taking our Life in the way that man Started Selling Children, where is that Material named as "Bread, Cloth, and House"

Roti, kapra, and Makan have always been leaders' priority but limited only to their sayings, not practically. It was the slogan of Asif Ali Zardari. He tried to live up to that. But in the present scenario, one can see that every leader makes big promises to the people to get the rule. But when they get the rule, they do not take into account the preferences of the people. Our Pakistani people fall prey to such deceivers to bring comfort in their lives. As we all know, Imran Khan made many promises to the people before he came to power. That he will lift people out of poverty and provide them with a comfortable life. And as we all know that Imran Khan is two years away from coming to power, but in those two years, he has led the country to decline. Instead of developing, the country is going downhill. In such a situation, it has become very difficult for the poor people of the country to survive. There is no money for one-time bread for the people. Inflation is

rampant everywhere. Every person we meet outside cries about inflation, and the only ones responsible for this situation are our rulers who first make big promises to us and then refuse to fulfil them. And we see that the children who have to go to madrassas to study are working in factories to support their parents. In this age of poverty, parents also make their children do such things by placing stones in their hearts. The situation is such that some people leave their children in the camp due to poverty so that they do not have to take care of them. The result of all this can be deduced as our country is under the control of foreign powers. And external powers will never allow Pakistan to develop beyond them. Therefore, we must take steps for the development of the country. People say what will happen just by thinking of one human being. Graffiti is a perfect mood of catharsis for common people.



Figure 9: Sometimes there were Hurdles, sometimes Peace; the days of my Youth Passed in Saudia

Youth is the product of a nation. Whatever the country's circumstances depend upon youth, it's a very harsh reality that our youth is unemployed due to which they move to other countries. They are serving in foreign countries, so our economy is also low. If they are in our country with their families happily, the economic growth will increase as well as people spend their lives happily, instead of going outside and facing different issues. Graffiti here expresses the past as well as the current situation of those who worked in other countries and yet are working in their own country as a driver and in many other labouring fields but not having adequate education or a charming job to survive in Pakistan.

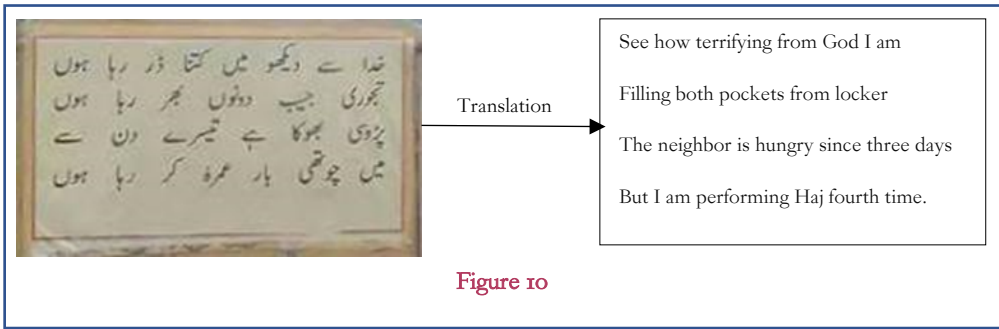


Figure 10

Our society has lost the instinct of kindness. We only become kind and generous to show off in society. We don't care about the poor and needy who are hungry for days. We are only filling our safe pockets. Suppose we help people that are only for showoff. We help others because we want respect from high-class people that we help the people who need it. On the other hand, some people think only prayers get Jannah, and they also do prayers to show off to people that we are very kind-hearted. Nowadays, we help only those people who are helpful to us in the future. People are fed up with the status quo and hungry for popularity and money. Now we need to rediscover the humanity in our society. We help those who need it and also those people who are hungry and don't have any money to eat. If we want happiness for a lifetime, we help somebody. Happiness is found in helping others, but this is not happening now. The expressive use of graffiti here is protesting the unjust and inequality of society.

Here in this verse, one can observe how Females are being projected in a patriarchal society where it is always considered that women are artificial and beauty conscious, to whom their beauty has made pride. So, they use the thing which makes them prominent in others, as here through graffiti is said that the basic thing which is essential for their belief, they even do not know because it will not grasp the attention of others but by speaking English, everybody will be attracted by the beauty of their words, so they don't bother to learn 'Kalma'. In this way, one can examine how males try to humiliate females by making fun of their education to hide their illiteracy.

Graffiti as a Mood for Promoting Social Stereotypes

Graffiti as a Mode to Criticise Female Materialism: a Tool to Promote Female Stereotypes



Figure 12: Fair Color, Exempt from Fare

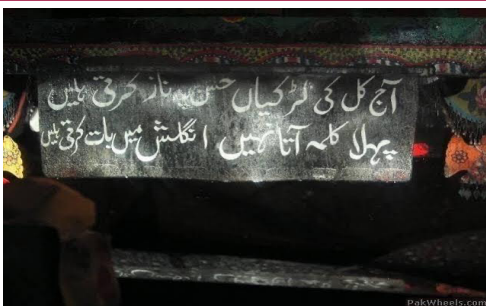


Figure 11: Nowadays, girls fancy their beauty, unaware of basic scriptures of the religion, yet talk in the English language

Here one can observe that through such kinds of slogans racism is being promoted by lower-minded people who give preference to the color of the skin and consider it a sign of superiority. The concept of racism has been rooted in the Sub Continent since the arrival of the British Raj, who gave this concept to the people that the people with white skin are far better than the black people, so anyone with white skin deserves protocol. Now, one can see that the concept of beauty is the only fair complexion, and people with dark complexion are not even considered human beings as black and white complexions represent superiority and inferiority, respectively. In this regard, the history of imperialism

in the sub-continent plays a major role. We are physically free now, but our minds are still imperialised. Imperialism has chained us as inferior in respect of colour.



Figure 13: I can Love, but my Pay is not Enough

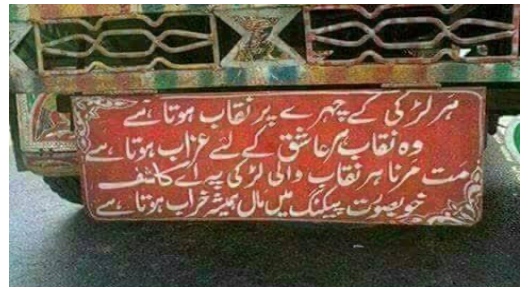
Here one can examine that males have settled their mind that where there is money, there is love because they consider that true love can only be achieved by excessive investment of money in a girl. In this way, they are raising a finger at the loyalty of a girl and considering them as a greedy creature, who gets involved in love with the people having a good salary. They believe that girls only do love because of gifts and precious things. In the world of social media, it is also a phenomenon that some leisure creatures invest their time on social media by changing their gender and presenting themselves as female characters who only demand to recharge their balance, some shopping and sometimes for money. In this way, an image of the female gender is getting worse day by day where so many males think that they are being exploited by the girls in the name of love by investing there toward or they have faced rejection just because of their poor income.



Figure 14: Respected General Pervez Musharraf congratulations on passing the bill on Women's rights, kindly propose a bill on male rights because

there is a problem with drinking, and always speak the truth.

Pakistani society is strongly patriarchal in the way men consider themselves superior and more powerful than women. There is no doubt that women are working in all fields of life, but their representation in the public sector is low. The voice of equal rights is a curse and a subject of disdain in our society. Most men laugh at the concept of equality. Economically, our women face difficulties as they work equally with men but don't receive wages equally. Men think that they are only facing problems in every field of life and feel jealousy for officially giving women rights. Men think it is their weakness to respect women, and one who loves his wife is considered a "Ren Marked" person, owing to these men snubbing women's rights. Now, it has become our culture not to give respect and love by heart. Men only use women for desires, and when they get any right officially, men start to raise their voices for their rights. In a male-dominated society, the concept of dominance is always promoted to deprive women of their rights. So, they always go against the concept of equality between men and women. Women are delicate creatures of society, so some people think



that they are not even human beings, so why should they be given rights.

Figure 15: There is a veil on every girl's face, and that veil is very painful for every lover, don't get mad at a veiled girl because packed material always contains a low-quality product

The veil is a part of respect for women, providing protection, but what type of protection? Women are not considered even human beings. People want to treat them as a thing, and they've treated and still do so. If a woman is not respected and does not have an identity as a human being, what is the veil's importance? There is a strong need to wash away the

disrespectful behaviour of people toward women. There is a strong need to enlighten people's minds in this regard. What a barbaric level of men thinking about women's loyalty. Men say that women are disloyal and insincere whether she lives in a dance club or her house and forbids other their fellows to be as far away from women as they can. Men can destroy their lives by trusting a woman. Men should not trust women by impressing on their appearance because there is no difference between women in their nature and deeds, but they have different appearances and nothing else. Here one can find that even a lover longs to watch his beloved face to decide whether he will continue his relationship with her or not. They are taken as a product that is judged by their packet, like a book by its cover and not by its quality or content.



Figure 16: No Wife, No Worry

Nowadays, marital relationships have become a subject of amusement. There is no real attachment between spouses because relationships are established based on disagreements between parents and children, economic conditions, and many other factors that affect relationships. The result is that in a short time, they disgusted each other. The concept of divorce exists in our religion, but our society conceives it as a bad thing. A divorcee has no respect in our society. So, in this scenario, our marital life is not satisfied. Another reason is the slothfulness of females who do not help their males to earn a livelihood. Here one can easily find that in a patriarchal society, females are taken as tense, and their presence is considered as anxiety, although they are a source of relief for them even if they are mothers, sisters, wives, or daughters. Despite this fact, males do not appreciate their efforts for their pleasure or relief, but they will only mention the expanses of their females. If they are causing distress

for them, so there is in one way or another male is responsible, but they will not discuss it because they do believe that women are always responsible for every misdeed and being men, they cannot commit mistakes.

Conclusion

Graffiti is a very strong way of expressing, resisting, promoting, criticising, and catharsis. Since as a tool of expression, this can be used to raise or register socio-economic issues existing around us. This is the very essence of this research paper which sought to reveal the importance of graffiti as a tool for expressing the significant issues of our society, specifically those associated with Pakistani Punjab. Figures 1.1 to figure 1.10 incorporate the images highlighting issues such as energy crisis, passive youth, poverty, and poor government policies. Figure 1.1 to 1.2 highlight the issue of electricity as well as the failure of Wapda to resolve those issues. Figure 1.3 criticises passive youth as an obstruction to the development of our country. Figure 1.4 criticises the very slogan of revolution, Figures 1.5 to 1.6 highlight the so-called materialistic society around us, and figures 1.7 and 1.8 criticise the problems caused by inflation. Figure 1.9 expresses the sufferings of young ones working in other countries. Figure 1.10 criticises those people having Hippocratic faces and their ways of showing off their wealth. Figure 1.11 criticises the very nature of females on the grounds of their materialistic ways of preference for spoken English more than learning about their religion. Figure 1.13 promotes the very stereotype that females always choose those with enough money, so for other human passions, they also choose those who are rich. Figure 1.14 is somewhat old but highlights how just a single bill in favour of women's rights pinched and caused the conflict between the government and the male-female. Figure 1.15 incorporates the very essence of beauty, and the one who covers her up is considered a deceiver. Figure 1.16 shows that a real tension is just because of the female presence, a very poor image of females projected through this misconception that females are the real bone of contention. This is how in many moods of expression, graffiti is working as a very attractive tool to express so many things indirectly in the form of criticism, but after all, it also amuses those who are around.

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