



God Reimagined In A Post-Apocalyptic World: A Multimodal Reading Of Ramayan 3392ad

¹Meenu Sharma, ²Dr.Ramakant Sharma

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, Ismail National Mahila PG College, Meerut, Uttar Pradesh, India.

² Associate Professor, Department of English, S.S.V. PG College, Hapur, Uttar Pradesh, India.

Abstract: The theoretical and empirical interconnections between mythology and multimodal structures have been abundantly apparent in recent decades. Reimagined in a post-apocalyptic scenario, Ramayan 3392 AD is a graphic novel based on a great South Asian epic originally written by Maharishi Valmiki millennia ago. This article endeavoured to unveil the multimodal structures of graphic novels to emphasize their powerful potential in epic narratives while also exploring the anguish of a future society devastated by nuclear Armageddon. Since the graphic novel depicts time and space in multimodal ways utilizing comic, graphic, and textual semiotic modes, it has become an increasingly popular means to depict serious issues across the world and particularly in South Asia. Driving on the multimodal reading of the retelling of the popular south Asian epic Ramayan, the article strives to present that while advancing endless desires, self-centric culture drives, it evinces climate change and environmental deterioration as well. Moreover, it attempts to demonstrate that through the use of graphic novel format, the current captivating story not only envisions God in a post-apocalyptic setting engraved with an appealing color palette and visual strategy but also verbalizes ecocritical catastrophe and other social issues constructively. In addition, the relevance of multimodal reading in raising social consciousness and interpreting classic stories with metaphorical parallels that provide critical insights is argued in this article.

Index Terms: Multimodal, Post-apocalyptic, Ramayana, Mythology, South Asian epic. Visual narratives

Introduction:

Graphic novels have evolved into a forum for a varied spectrum of individual and societal voices, encompassing many techniques of expression. Kress coined the word "multimodality" to stress that "language is no longer the only or even the central semiotic mode." (153) Multimodality, according to Kress, is defined as "all the modes available and utilized in making meaning, in representation, and in communication" (91). Since comics and graphic novels combine both graphic and text manifestation in their storytelling, interaction with these texts is referred to as "multimodal literacy", Kress, and Jewitt defined in their book of the same name. However, superheroes, women, and Jewish trauma narratives in graphic novels are the first choices of researchers but the last two-decade saw an upsurge in visual interpretations of myth and research related to its interpretations. As claimed by Joseph Campbell in an interview, myths "put you in touch with a plane of reference that goes past your mind and into your very being, into your very gut," also stating later that there are four purposes of myth: mystical, cosmological, sociological, and pedagogical (Campbell). The graphic novel creates a new medium for literacy because it fuses art and text, the visual and the verbal (Bucher and Manning). This combination of the verbal and visual, what Kress refers to as a "multimodal ensemble," requires readers to approach a comic or graphic novel differently than they would a printed word-only text. The present study projects the multimodal analysis of the visual representations of the classical epic Ramayana. The paper will begin with a historical overview of graphic novels and mythology and their interactions with each other in contemporary times. Then, the study will apply the parameters of multimodal study to drawing on both textual discourse and social theories in the given text and the dynamics of textual, discourse, and social practices emerging from the graphic novels. As Yang confirms, "By combining image and text, graphic novels bridge the gap between media we watch and media we read" (p. 187).

Comics and graphic novels:

Comics (kom'iks) n. plural in form, used with a singular verb. Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer. (p. 9) is how McCloud defines comics. Will Eisner, on the other hand, employs the term sequential art' to describe motion graphics comics that metaphorically illustrate motions. In this view, Eisner's understanding of comics emphasizes the graphic instead of the textual aspects of the art. In addition, Spiegelman used the term commix to emphasise the co-mingle appeal of words and pictures. Will Eisner considers the graphic novel as a genre and its mode of expression—the comics format of sequentialization—as a medium. For him, there is no real hierarchy between comics and graphic novels. He clubs all the genres and subgenres of the comics format under the term graphic narratives or visual narratives which he believes “deal(s) with the mission and process of storytelling with graphics” (Eisner). Furthermore, I would like to quote Lila Christensen to describe graphic novels as “in contrast to superhero comic books,” the former being “more serious, often nonfiction, full-length, sequential art novels that explore the issues of race, social justice, global conflict, and war with intelligence and humor”. (227) The inability to reach an agreement on determining the nature of comics, according to Roth (2010), is the pivotal element in theorizing it. This article will not attempt to conceptualize comics or graphic novels, instead emphasizing multimodal reading and the societal and moral connotations that a particular graphic book may have.

Mythological Stories and Indian graphic novels:

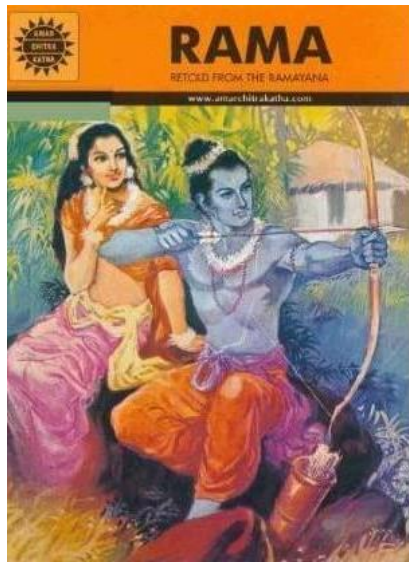
Humans have assigned meanings to their environs and interacted through etched images in cave art or rock carvings since the Palaeolithic Era, a primordial epoch in human chronology. Amar Chitra Katha, a comic series begun in 1967 by Anant Pai, was the very inaugural stride in the path of Indian graphic novels. Because of the impact of western graphic novels as a result of internationalization and rising consumer culture, India now has its own publishing houses that produce spectacular phenomenal graphic novels. Post-millennial graphic books recreated Mythology and served as a platform for a slew of previously silenced voices. They mutated into unnoticed copies of the well-known. They morphed into modified versions of the unheralded figures in popular mythology. Anusha Parthasarthy states, “Graphic novels have always been around. But their resurgence in the last five years has seen major players improvise on the country’s rich mythology, and dig out those little-known details.”(The Hindu) *Ravanayan (1-7)* by Vijendra Mohanti, *Ramayana 3392 AD* by Shamik Dasgupta, *Shiva: The Legends of the Immortal* by Kshitish Padhy, *Sita: Daughter of the Earth and Draupadi: The Fire- Born Princess* by Saraswati Nagpal, *Sita's Ramayana* by Samhita Arni, *Adi Parva and Saptik* by Amruta Patil stand as witnesses to the huge explosion of expressions. The huge explosion of phrases is documented in Samhita Arni's *Sita's Ramayana*, *Adi Parva's Adi Parva*, and *Amruta Patil's Saptik*. The incorporation of diverse interpretations of individual and relational voices into visualizations evolved the genre into a highly politicized conversation forum. By integrating regional art forms notably Gond Art and Patua (Scroll) pattern, these novels' illustrations were nativized. They unveiled and formed indigenous aspects of being an "Indian," but the fascinating building of such statements did not refute the modernized and globalized India in them.

Mashup of History and Theory: Analysis of Ramayana 3392 Ad as a Multimodal artifact

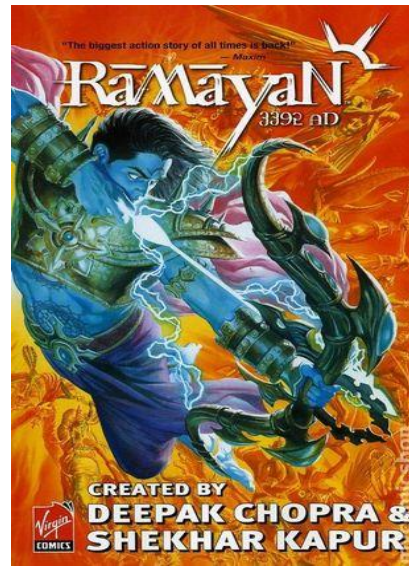
Ramayan 3392 AD is a graphic novel, an important part of the venture started by Liquid comics to reimagine Indian mythology for the whole world. Just as myth epics belong to many genres and forms, the medium of the graphic book belongs in the many categories of para-literature, children’s literature, popular culture, etc. in the Indian context. However, and especially in the graphic book of myth epics, this distinction is necessary, since rendering mythical material for comics usually entails either following the ACK pedagogic model or ‘adapting’ the epic matter to fit the western model of the ‘superhero’ comics genre. The scope for ‘retelling’ or ‘re-visiting’ the myth epics then is realized by alternative comics or graphic novels which hold the promise of liberating themselves from the weight of tradition. Ramanujan says, “In India and South East Asia, no one ever reads the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* for the first time” (158).

Characterization – Appearance

Since the story set in a post-apocalyptic world, all the characters carry the appearance that complements the setting. Rama and his brothers are cast as superhumans with highly build bodies in an attempt to align their representation with that of American comic book characters. Their appearance is entirely different from the other versions of *Ramayana*. Not only Four brothers but Sage Vishwa Mitra, one of the great seers do not present a serene and calm look but angst and arrogance. The story shows not only environmental degradation but moral degradation, especially Rama. His facial expression is angst, rebelliousness makes his persona very distinct from the Rama of the versions by Valmiki, Tulsidas, or Ramanand Sagar. Anuradha Kapur traces a marked iconographic shift in popular imagery of Rama. She observes that in the older images, Rama is “compassionate, benign, and graceful; he is ever-serene and ever-forgiving; he is ever-youthful, boyish almost, with a conspicuous lack of masculine power; and yet, he is the lord of the universe” (77). Discussing Rama’s visual representation in medieval miniature paintings, she makes the crucial point that even in paintings that depict battle scenes, “forms of heroism do not get locked with aggressive masculinity and prowess” (91). All through the battle sequences, Rama is kept under restraint. “Ram the warrior, fighting for his rights in a battle that signifies apocalyptic upheaval, and Ram the king, embodiment of a golden age of Hindu culture, source of stability and reassurance” (Basu, et al. 62). (See fig.1&2) In this rendition, Rama has a blue physique that symbolizes a calm and rational hero, yet his expressions are rather contradictory. The impact of American graphic novels is likely most conspicuous in Rama's depiction as a superhuman as he frequently alludes to a "super warrior" in the comics. Rama's appearance indicates the break from the Amar Chitra Katha comics as Amar Chitra Katha artwork depicts Rama striking an arrow in a serene manner.



(Figure.1) Rama in ACK by Anant Pai



(Figure-2) Rama in Ramayan 3392 AD

The Ramayan 3392 AD cover page depicts Rama as the protagonist of a humongous action narrative. Rama in the present artwork reveals an aggressive, carved face as well as a slender, robust build reminiscent of American superheroes. Rama's and his brothers' weapons, which retain their Sanskrit names, store solar energy and contain telescopic parts signify renewable energy as hope for sustainable development. Seeta, is presented as an embodiment of pure nature daughter of mother earth" or the spirit of our planet" (Dasgupta et al.) She came up in a full panel among flowers and innocent children. Moreover, her entry scene changed the entire color palette of the book with blue and green background. She is truly termed by Lakshmana the key of salvation to the wretched land". Wadley rightly states that although set in a futuristic setting, "Ramayan 3392 AD comics represents the duality of Seeta's character that is inherent in the concept of the female in the Hindu tradition—"on the one hand, she is fertile, benevolent—the bestower; on the other hand, she is aggressive, malevolent—the destroyer" (113) On the contrary, Ravan projected as a machine "ultimate weapon meant to end the world war" according to the scientific research of the seven seers, Ravan is actually a vast accumulation of microscopic artificial organism called yantra" (Dasgupta et al.) He changes his shapes and sizes and reconstructs himself as humanoid because of his desire to have the perfection of the human being. He is projected with silver grey and black shades with a horn kind of crown over his head and the lightening of his weapon presents him as incredibly powerful.

The language and text:

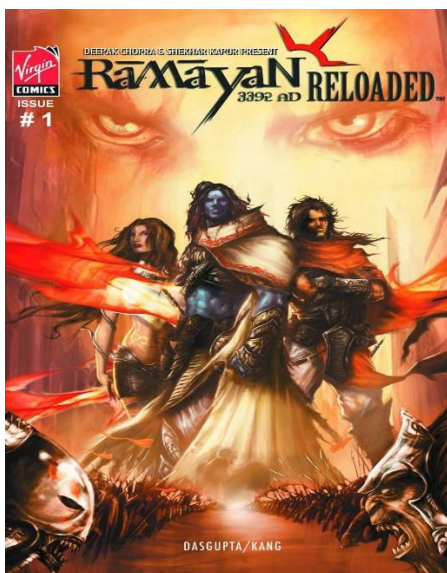
"The visual treatment of words as graphic art forms a part of the vocabulary" (Eisner,10). In almost the same fashion that articulation and sound level affect the meaning of spoken sounds, words written in a particular manner contribute to their meaning. Comic lettering designs embody a comprehensive set of acoustic standards. A comic page contains three forms of text, according to Sobin: narration or caption, dialogue, and sound effects (1993). Dialogue, narration, and captions are all rendered in uppercase in Ramayan 3392 AD. The fact that the narration or caption is projected as a page of ancient scriptures denotes it as a rendition of a legendary epic. Except for negative characters like Ravan and Kalanemi, who are painted on black speech balloons with white letters, the dialogues are written in much the same manner.

In term of language, the Ramayan 3392 AD series acknowledges to the pervasiveness of the breakdown between Vedic science and the paradigm of Indian civilization, as the language has a substantial percentage of Hindi and Sanskrit vocabulary. The nuclear apocalypse is referred to as 'Mahavinaash' (literally transcribed as 'the great devastation'); the airfield of Armagarh is referred to as 'vimantal' (the term for the airport in Hindi); airships are referred to as 'Vayu yaans' (literally transcribed as aircraft); an Armagarhian bomb is termed to as a 'visfotak (the term for explosives in Hindi) Despite being set in a post-apocalyptic environment, it sees modern technology as an intrinsic part of the Indian knowledge framework. Numerous Hindi expressions such as 'pitashree' 'Maharaj', 'bhai' 'Mandir', 'sura', 'Kshatriyas', 'Mahavriksh' etc. are also adopted in this context. Sound images such as 'gurrhhh', 'patt', 'klik', 'whrr', 'spakk', occupy almost every alternate page. Leshinski described the sound effects in one comic as a "symphony of onomatopoeia" (6) The over-abundance of such acoustic images is not redundant though. These artistic half-words (or noises) typed in a multitude of styles and dimensions convey actual action and intensity. They have the ability to function as both motion and emotion components. Roger Sabin sees a potentially self-sustaining language in this interaction between words and visuals, "they are a language, with their grammar, syntax, and punctuation. They are not some hybrid forms halfway between 'literature' and 'art' (whatever those words might mean) but a medium in their own right" (9)

Color Symbolism:

Color in the graphic book medium is used figuratively to color the reader's perceptions. According to Kress and Van Leeuwen, color can serve textual, cultural and social functions, as it is a "semiotic mode" in making meaning although the meaning can be paradoxically universal or different from culture to culture. (344), When analyzing the colors used in both graphic novels, it is assumed that the colors semiotically link to the environment its degradation. According to McCloud colors are both "expressionistic" and "iconic", (188), for instance, the costume colors of some American comic heroes can make readers associate the colors with the heroes. Ramayan 3392 AD makes interesting use of colors to signify different atmospheres, such as using a red background for the wilderness outside of Armagarh which has been permeated with noxious fumes, or using a blue and green background when the setting changes to Mithila, the land of abundance and vegetation. The color changed into blue and bright like glass palace as soon we entered in Lanka. Alex Ross, universally known for his cover art for Marvel and DC comics, painted the cover for Ramayan 3392 AD. Ross displays a dynamic Rama poised in mid-air, ready to fire a futuristic bow and arrow at his foe. Many mythological creatures are depicted in fighting stances against a blazing orange background. (See fig. 3) Ravan's usage of black in his discourse signified the nasty side of technology that culminated in Armageddon.

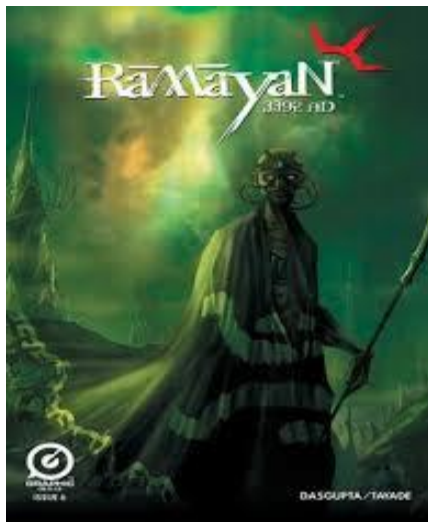
The tonality and palette of the panels in which Seeta first emerges change significantly. While dark hues have characterized the comic up to this point, the transition to Mithila is distinguished by blue and green landscapes, including the abundance of flora that has been omitted. Seeta appears as the personification of prosperity, holding a unique flower and accompanied by birds, plants, and children who adore her. As part of the army to defend the earth from deterioration in the second book, she is delineated in an orange and golden robe. In the selected graphic tale, colour schemes have been chosen to depict conflict, brutality, and sci-fi uncanniness. All of the panels are projected against black backdrops, and at times the panels blend into the background's hues, leaving the reader/viewer perplexed by the struggle to discern the line where one panel integrates into another. This effect also generates an amorphous impression of the virtual world, with alien-like objects, machinery, and characters emerging and fading. As Kalanemi projected over a green splash page, the green color was used to symbolize vegetation on one side and evil and deception on the other. (see fig.-5) In the chapter about secrets from the subterranean, the story has been portrayed in asymmetrical panels and gutters with words painted in light color against the dark background of red and black alternatively. 'Baddies' and 'antagonists' are coloured in literally 'dark' shades spanning from brown to crimson in practically every myth epic comic book. Colors and skin tones are utilized to exemplify wickedness. Even the women characters like Kaikeyi with high eyebrows, Mandodari sporting a horn on her head, Shivani with blonde short hair, and Soornaka with a tattooed face and leather apparel are all depicted in various hues of brown.



(Figure-3) Cover page of Ramayan 3392 A.D.



(Figure-4) Seeta's entry on full-page panel



(Figure-5) Kaalmechi with green background



(Figure-6) Seeta restoring Pampa's junkyard into a paradise

The Use of Gutters and Panels

As stated previously, time is communicated visually in graphic narratives, and closure is attained by the reader's cognitive attempt to integrate panels between gutters. McCloud affirms, that the panel layout or arrangement of panels on the page is quite complex and forms the narrative machinery that moves the plot (1993). Bennett furthermore defines multiple kinds of panels, such as an inset, a small panel, a bleed panel (a panel without a border on one or more sides with artwork extending off the page to indicate time and action continuing), a splash, a large or full-page panel, and irregular-shaped panels that can communicate a multitude of interpretations based on context. In *Ramayan 3392 AD*, the panel structure is uneven and experimental, with special care paid to depict motion both within and outside the frames. Chute states that because comics panels fracture the flow of the narrative into the sequenced segments which alternate with the blank spaces of the gutters, “comics as a form requires a substantial degree of reader participation for narrative interpretation” (460). A double-page spread in *Ramayan 3392 AD* illustrates Seeta restoring Pampa's junkyard into a paradise full of foliage and fruits, with a massive splash panel filling two facing pages. (See Fig.-6) Splash pages abound in the work, depicting all of the major characters' features and facial expressions. McCloud alleges the gutter is “the only element of comics that is not duplicated in any other medium” (13). Moreover, Bennett also confirms, that Gutters play a crucial role in connecting panels into a sequential, coherent story as much of the action, though unseen, happens in the gutters. To accentuate the elements in the chosen visual narrative, a range of gutters with clear or jiggered lines have been incorporated against white and dark surfaces. The implications of American Comics, on the other hand, maybe recognized in the architecture of panels and gutters.

Conclusion:

To sum up, it can be stated that multimodal reading provides multiple meanings to the present graphic tale. Chute states, “Comics is a structurally layered and doubled medium” (p. 459). Along with its architectural pluralism, the parallel, non-synthesized narratives of words and images, the words may mean one thing in one frame and the images may indicate another, resulting in a twofold narrative. In this way, comics are characterized by a plurality of messages (Hatfield). *Ramayan 3392 AD* not only revolutionizes a traditional epic in a futuristic context, but it also convincingly depicts environmental degradation, the influence of American comic books, the collapse of Vedic knowledge, and current technological advancement effectively. It is a graphic novel according to Rothschild's (1995) definition of graphic novels in which both the texts and pictures are complementary, but not supplementary to each other”.

Work cited:

- Basu, Tapan et al. *Khaki Shorts, and Saffron Flags: a Critique of the Hindu Right*. Tracts for the Times 1. Hyderabad: Orient Longman, 1993. Print.
- Bucher, Katherine T., and M. Lee Manning. “Bringing Graphic Novels into a School's Curriculum.” *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, vol. 78, no. 2, 2004, pp. 67–72., doi:10.3200/tchs.78.2.67-72.
- Campbell, Joseph “Mythic Reflections” Thoughts on myth, spirit, and our times Interviewed by Tom Collins “The New story”, Winter 1985/86 page 52.
- Christensen, Lila. L. “Graphic Global Conflict: Graphic Novels in the High School Social Studies Classroom”. *The Social Studies*, vol.97, no.6, 2006, pp. 227 – 230.
- Chute, H. Comics as literature? *Reading graphic narrative*. PMLA, Vol.123 No.2, pp.452-465 2008.

- Dasgupta, Shamik, et.al. *Ramayan 3392 AD*. Maduravoyal, Chennai: Westland, 2013.
- . (Vol. 2). *Ramayan 3392 AD*. Maduravoyal, Chennai: Westland.2013.
- . (Vol. 3). *Ramayan 3392 AD*. Maduravoyal, Chennai: Westland.2014.
- Eisner, Will. *Comics and sequential art*. Paramus, NJ: Poorhouse Press. 1985.
- Hatfield, Charles, Williams. Graphic interventions: Form and argument in contemporary comics. *Dissertation Abstracts* 2000. 1386. (UMI No. 9969075). <https://www.proquest.com/docview/304595248> Accessed on February 13, 2022.
- Kapur, Anuradha. "Deity to Crusader: the Changing Iconography of Ram." *Hindus and Others: the Question of Identity in India today*. Ed. Gyanendra Pandey. New Delhi: Viking Press, 1993. 74-109. Print.
- Kress, Gunther & Jewitt, Carey. *Multimodal literacy*. New York: Peter Lang. 2003.Print.
- Kress, Gunther & Van Leeuwen, Theo. (2002). Colour as a semiotic mode: Notes for a grammar of color. *Visual Communication*, Vol.1 no.3, p.no.343-368,2002.
- Kress, Gunther. "Literacy" in a multimodal environment of communication. In J. Flood, S. B. Heath, & D. Lapp (Eds.), *Handbook on teaching literacy through the communicative and visual arts*, Vol. II pp. 91-100. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. 2017.
- Leshiniski, G. The semantics of sound. *The Cultural Gutter*. February 10, 2005.
http://theculturalgutter.com/comics/the_semantics_of_sound.html. Accessed on December 16, 2021.
- McCloud, Scott. *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. New York: Harper Perennial. 1993.Print.
- Parthasarthy, Anusha. (2011). Myths-work-a-new-magic. *The Hindu*. Retrieved 22 November 2021, from Myths, work a new magic -<https://www.thehindu.com/features/metroplus/myths-work-a-new-magic/article1712302.ece>.
- Ramanujan, A.K. "Three Hundred Ramayanas: Five Examples and Three Thoughts on Translation." *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*. Ed. Paula Richman. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991. 1-21. Print.
- Roth, Laurence. Contemporary American Jewish comic books. In Baskind, Samantha & Omer-Sherman, Ranen (Eds.), *The Jewish graphic novel: Critical approaches*, pp. 3-21, 2010 New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press.
- Rothschild, D. Aviva. *Graphic novels: A bibliographic guide to book-length comics*. Englewood: Libraries Unlimited.1995.
- Sabin, Roger. *Comics, comix, and graphic novels*. London: Phaidon Press Limited. 1996.
- Spiegelman, Art. *Commix: An idiosyncratic historical and aesthetic overview*. Print, Vol.42, no.7,1988.
- Wadley, Susan. Women and the Hindu Tradition. *Signs* Vol.3 no.1,1977, pp, 113-125. Web. 25 Aug. 2021.
- Yang, Gene. Graphic novels in the classroom. *Language Arts*, Vol.85, no.3, 2008, pp. 185-192.