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**VIOLENCE NARRATIVES: A STUDY ON PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE  
PORTRAYED IN SELECTED JAPANESE ANIME**

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**Abstract:**

*The study on violence in anime has indicated a strong need of awareness and psychological acceptance among people. Violence is generally described as 'the use of physical force to harm or injure a person, group or community which results in injury, trauma or even death'. Anime which is either hand-drawn or computer generated is quite popular in Japan and overseas and contains certain elements which may be inappropriate for the younger audience. In Japanese anime, violence and gore elements reflect the dark and repressed part of the society which is often not highlighted by the studio. Japanese anime has been criticized for its depiction of violence which may not be appropriate for young adolescents and may have a negative impact on the young viewers. On the other hand, popular anime such as 'Attack on Titan', 'Demon Slayer', 'Berserk' depict substantial amounts of violence, yet they are fan favorites, acclaimed and highly rated on IMDB website. The paper reflects on the acceptance of violence in anime in a developing society and it is alarming to normalize such concepts in real life. The present study attempts to shed light on various types of violence portrayed in Japanese anime and its dramatic representation and acceptance in popular media. The paper also aims to address and question the chauvinism of anime enthusiasts. The study focuses on anime discourse to create awareness and realization through well-informed representation of violence.*

**Keywords:** *Violence, Anime, Media Fiction, Psychology, Gore, etc.*

**Introduction:**

Violence involves a behavior or intent to hurt, damage or to kill someone. It is an extreme inclination and impulse to injure another person or groups physically, mentally or emotionally. Violence has been prevalent for a long time, as far as humans and animal history is concerned. Social psychologists believe that "aggression often leads to violence" which might be true in majority of the cases where gradual accumulation of outburst, anger and ill-will has not been addressed properly or rather repressed and it eventually results in violence. In the 21st century, violence has become customary for certain individuals or members of groups or a community as a result of dissent amongst each other. Over the period of time, our society has evolved, however in



a mad-race to deliver quick and popular content on various platforms, many animation industries deliberately forget about the substance being depicted on TV and in other platforms of media. Violence has a long history in our society and in our mythology as well, however violence cannot be considered as an absolute answer to everything. The question arises, whether to glorify violence on-screen or censor it as much as possible in order to maintain peace in the society. Manga authors are more familiar with the practice of including bloodshed, carnage and violence in their artworks, with a view to engage their readers and to arouse curiosity among them; sometimes it works well with the audience eg: The fight between Gon and Pitou in *Hunter XHunter*, Titans devouring humans in *AOT*. The anime industry is growing rapidly and its active users tend to practise enthusiastically when it comes to cosplay or portraying the same traits of their favorite anime characters. Occasionally, anime consists of representation of violent characters and their determination to seek revenge. Certain types of anime may contain stimulating images or video that might end up triggering the younger audience and it must be taken into account that it may affect children's mental health drastically.

The striking images on screen might trigger neurological episodes in young children and adults even without their knowledge. Extreme optical stimulation can also cause seizures and other emergency situations. As and when visual effects become more intense, their effects also tend to be more adverse in nature. The audience usually has an enigmatic effect via television and the internet which is growing rapidly among the younger generation. Many young people take inspiration from anime characters aired on TV or through other mediums of entertainment. Hence, measures to reduce portrayal of violence in Japanese anime should be taken into consideration, and proper course of action should be followed. This paper aims to address the portrayal of violence in popular anime, which have depicted certain controversial scenes in the anime and to emphasize upon its demerits in the society. The study also intends to understand the normalization of violence in anime industry in an effort to make it appear as essential for character development.

### **Objective:**

This paper aims to study the depiction of violence in modern anime and its perception and influence on the younger audiences. The paper will also intend to make us understand why violent anime are popular among the younger generation and the measures to be taken to reduce its obstructive influence.

### **Methodology:**

The selected anime is analyzed by studying various themes and representation of violence in Japanese anime. The selected anime is highly regarded and worthy of appreciation because of their unique portrayal of storytelling and excessive graphic illustrations. The paper will also delve into the cultural aspect of the anime and its subsequent impact.

### **Violence in Japanese Anime:**

Japanese animation, also popularly known as 'anime', has had a powerful impact in the animation industry since the 1960s. Japan has produced some of the phenomenal works in the anime industry which even to this day is considered as ground-breaking and remarkable. Japanese anime has dealt with several themes in their animation such as friendship, love, romance, myths, action, and historical drama among others. However, one of the genres of animation is deemed to be controversial to some degree, namely 'gore anime' which has all types of violence and its



multifarious portrayal in animation. Few of the anime in the past twenty years have showcased many characters or stories which are not appropriate for a particular age group, gender or community and can have adverse effects on the mental health of the viewer.

Ironically, most popular anime series have violent or graphic content and they are considered as crowd-pleasers. Such immense popularity of action-based anime tends to motivate Mangaka to include violent actions or certain aspects of violence to sustain its popularity among the anime enthusiasts. Eren Jaegar of *Attack on Titan* displays excessive aggression; however, his character has garnered immense attraction among the younger generation and some even tend to justify his horrendous deeds depicted in anime and manga. Certain studies have revealed that brief exposure to watching gore or violent content may affect viewers to display aggression. However, the studies have failed to produce concrete data, the likelihood of aggressive behavior taking place cannot be ignored. Sometimes, anime requires the portrayal of violence for the sake of spectacle and drama, however up to what extent the depiction of violence must be carried out, that's a crucial question.

Following are some popular anime which have depicted gruesome or gore elements in their animation and despite having 'gore' content in their animation, the animation is popular amongst the present youth.

#### **Attack on Titan:**

*Attack on Titan* (2013) written by mangaka Hajime Isayama, was initially introduced as a survival story against the backdrop of conflict and struggle with giant Titans. The most popular protagonist and antagonist Eren Yeager, as of 2024, has divided half of the fandom on moral grounds whether his actions can liberate humanity or not. The anime has many dark themes such as oppression, classism, cannibalism, conflict, freedom, human-on-human violence etc. The anime sheds light on multiple topics wherein the protagonist has to take certain harsh decisions to save his kind, for eg: genocide, selective killing etc. The anime has been popular since it first aired in Japan and overseas. The anime has sharp and stunning visuals along with depiction of gore and scenes of brutality. The anime has received immense appreciation for its animation at the same time it is not recommended for young children. The anime created a controversy for its portrayal of excessive violence on screen however, unless and until the depiction of violence is not put in the picture, viewers may not be able to understand the perspective of the protagonist.

#### **Demon Slayer:**

*Demon Slayer* (2019) written by Koyoharu Gotouge, is a story which follows a teenage boy striving to become a demon slayer after his family is slaughtered by a primordial demon. The anime showcases themes of loss, perseverance, hope, but it also portrays corpses, blood injuries, disturbing images etc. The show gained immense popularity for its outstanding animation, music and VFX effects; however, throughout the anime there are several episodes in the series, where serious warnings have been issued for the viewers before they proceed to watch the anime series. The movie *Demon Slayer: Mugen Train* (2020) broke all the previous records and became one of the most watched anime films in the year 2020. The film had its own share of violent content which is not suitable for children and yet it ended up securing its position amongst the highest grossing films of all time in Japan.

#### **Tokyo Ghoul:**



*Tokyo Ghoul* (2011) written by Sui Ishida portrays a man-eating creature in the human body of a college student, Ken Kaneki. The anime explores the themes of grief, injustice, mental illness and physical and psychological abuse. The anime deals with the issues of co-existence of humans and *ghouls* (monsters) in a peaceful society. The series is gothic in nature and has certain strong visuals, along with super-powered humanoid characters. The anime is famous for its fighting and action scenes, even though it was censored. The anime describes the story of Ken Kaneki who is attacked by a ghoul and ends up becoming half ghoul himself. Ghouls are creatures who feed on human flesh. The anime has tragic storylines and captivating visuals and great music; however, the visuals can provoke the audience if they are not accustomed to visuals of gore and violence. The anime version is often criticized for not staying true to its *Manga* (Japanese comics) which has laboriously portrayed violent scenes in its panels.

#### **Berserk:**

The Gore anime series cannot be finished without mentioning the critically acclaimed anime *Berserk*. Kitaro Miura's *Berserk* (1989) explores human nature & morality as the characters struggle between becoming good human beings or falling into madness and evil. The anime depicts moral ambiguity, traumatic background, human killings, destiny vs force of will, etc. The manga elevated its status from 'brutality to an art form'. *Berserk* anime has some of the most traumatizing scenes, bloodshed, killings and torture. Some of the anime scenes are completely uncensored and can be accessed easily. The anime has several psychological themes embedded into it causing viewers to ponder about the fate of the characters in the series.

#### **Recurrent Themes in Violence-based Anime:**

There are several themes in violent anime such as hatred, revenge, resentment which is exercised by either the protagonist or antagonist of anime. Occasionally, violence related anime includes such strong concepts that may be essential for the growth of character and in a way that may shape them for the better or worse. Many of the anime have repetitive themes which might appear monotonous in a particular storyline, although their depiction is carried out rather differently than other violence-based anime. Most of the time, 'gore anime' is based on 'revenge theme' wherein the protagonist of the anime either turns into an antagonist or seeks revenge from his enemies throughout the anime series. The characters are usually determined to take revenge and carry out justice in their own way. They share similar characteristics such as holding grudges, loathing, seeking justice etc., certain anime deliver justice to the characters and render justification for their actions. The bottom line is not to glorify the violent scenes depicted in anime as to not normalize into mainstream television industry.

#### **Censorship and Legal Issues:**

There is a dire need of censoring or regulating anime in Japan and its extended cut or uncensored versions abroad, as it is quite easy to procure the original version and disseminate it extensively. As per the article 175 of the Penal Code of Japan, any material containing improper, obscene and offensive images are prohibited. Indecent content in anime is usually censored through the use of black dots and blur. Depictions of people being sexualized at a young age are a punishable act and are generally the cause of concern among the large group of audience in and outside Japan. Many countries have put a ban on certain animation series as they do not adhere to the common rules laid by the respective government. Battling legal concerns is an issue as well, since many favour



the depiction of violence in anime and manga, to understand the character or the storyline. The animation will come under censorship if it is considered to be immoral, inappropriate, gore or anything similar which may cause discomfort for the audience or violate the rules of the government. Extreme violence in anime is a social threat to viewers as it can lead to real world violence and aggression. It can create both short- and long-term aggression in young viewers.

### **Minimal Depiction of Violence:**

Generally, animation cannot be depicted without segments of negative content or material, which can help a particular story to be narrated in a better way. Depiction of violence or violent characters cannot be completely eliminated; however, the style of animation can be closely monitored and rectified before the animation is aired on various platforms without being censored. Certain measures can be taken to accommodate 'negative' aspects of life while portraying them on screen. Perhaps issuing a warning in the beginning of an anime or a message expressing concern towards people who are more vulnerable in society can be a good start. Depiction of violence is not always carried out for entertainment purposes; sometimes it is a tool to further show a dark and catastrophic storyline. When animated violence is comedic, it is non-threatening. Yet, when it is realistic and serious, it is uncomfortable (Kirsh, 2006).

### **Psychological Impact on Viewers:**

Animated violence is usually sanitized and well-informed when it is aired on television, i.e. there is usually no blood, scars, or death (censorship) and it is considered acceptable. However, when an anime releases uncensored versions which goes against the norms of the society, people can have adverse psychological impact; they might become less sensitive to the pain of others (Desensitization). They may also become fearful of the world around them. Individuals might end up copying the violent behavior of their favorite character (imitation, idolizing). At times, development of fear, depression, nightmares, bullying, PTSD, violent behavior, sleep disturbances or greater acceptance of aggression as a daily occurrence can be seen in various individuals who tend to watch gore anime on a regular basis. It might also become difficult for the viewers to regulate their emotions and failing to understand the suffering from others. The audience must consider their own capacity of engaging in anime which may impact their mental health.

### **Conclusion:**

The present paper aimed to discuss the various aspects of depiction of violence in Japanese anime in the current scenario. Selected anime series have been briefly discussed to comprehend the intensity and sensory stimulation of the images portrayed in the animation. The paper has highlighted certain aspects of animation pertaining to visual impacts and censorship which is often neglected or not taken into consideration. The animation industry is one of the fastest growing industries which is leading and impacting the youth at a larger scale. The present paper focuses on violent portrayal, actions and characteristics of the protagonists which directly or indirectly create a psychological impact on the viewers.

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