

**Pratheek Thomas. Illustrations: Rajiv Eipe. *HUSH*. Bangalore: Manta Ray Comics, 2010. pp. 35, ISBN: 978-81-920239-0-8**

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A spider web which gradually gets bigger and bigger, and finally we see blood stains on the surface of the blackboard. The next frame shows the faces of shocked school children; both boys and girls. In the midst of them all, we see Maya, a young tall girl with a scowl on her face and a gun in her hand. Back to the spider web, and we see a bullet mark on the blackboard with blood stains on it, and the legs of man who lies still on the podium of a classroom. She walks out of the classroom with the gun in her hand, stops and stares in front of the Vice Principal's room and then walks into the Boys Toilet.

These are the striking first few frames of the debut graphic novel of Manta Ray comics, *HUSH* written by Pratheek Thomas and illustrated by Rajiv Eipe. The story of silence, frustration, violence and child sexual abuse that unfolds in this graphic novel is narrated through illustrations in 17 pages. The book also includes forward, interviews, sketch book and samples of working of the script.

The story of *HUSH* revolves around Maya, a victim of child sexual abuse, who is abused by her own father. *HUSH*, is based on realities and shows the sad state of affairs where lust dominates all other relationships and values. The story recalls Maya's plight, a victim of suppression, fear, and silence. Like Maya her mother is also a victim of fear and suppression

who finds himself in a most awkward quandary and is unable to stop her husband from climbing the steeps to Maya's room every night. Maya's mother and her younger sister, Anju, are helpless silent spectators, who are unable to thwart their father of his desires. Maya decides to strike back when her father eyes on her younger sister. Maya answers by murdering the culprit and killing herself. The brilliant illustrations brings out even the minute details of the last few frames that show Maya shoots herself before the police try to conquered her. Here, we see Maya recall her entire life, and we do not find even a single frame where Maya is happy.

The black and white illustration offers photographic accuracy and a sense of realism to each frame. Each illustration is different from the other and the graphic novel has succeeded in communicating the plot to the readers. The illustrations bring out infinitesimal details, for instance in one of the frames on the second page where we find the legs of man lying still on the podium of a classroom the illustrator details minute details like date, pen, pencils and chalks amongst other things. The illustrations weave a web of chaos in each frame and the plot of this silent graphic novel echoes the same. The illustrator's choice of the dark background to depict incident of the past and to depict the traumas Maya endured makes the reading easier. The graphic novel genre is new to India and their popularity has been ever increasing. Newer experiments with themes and subjects in the graphic tradition would help in the booming of the graphic novel industry in India.

HUSH, will interest, entertain, and educates a mature audience of different age groups. The graphic novel offers an easier reading as the book is devoid of any written script. HUSH, aims to inform people of the harsh realities of child sexual abuse. Most of victims of are exploited by their own immediate family member and figures indicate that nearly 70% of such cases go unreported. India is home to almost 19% of the world's children, more than one-third of the country's population, and the question of child abuse is increasing at an alarming rate. The graphic novel HUSH, with its brilliant illustration will undoubtedly entertain and inform the ordinary reader, who would appreciate it for the new attempt, however, HUSH has not been able to exploit the possibilities of the medium to fullest.



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