

INDIAN POPULAR CULTURE

Lecture12

Regional Comic Space and Web Comics

In the last lecture, we saw the pre-independence, pre-history of comics, where we looked into the four aspects which we could draw the history of comics from. and then the famous children's magazine, Chanda Mama, moving on to Amar Chitra Katha and then the golden age of mini-comics in India and discussing the Hindi superhero comics from Dhruv to Doga and Nagraj we are going to talk about gendering Hindi adventure comics and the symbiotic masculinity. This is the continuation of what we discussed in the last lecture.

In the portrayal of love and marriage, as these superheroes are situated, we see that these comics reflect broader societal attitudes toward relationships and duty. all these superheroes, Nagraj, Dhruv and Doga, have a sense of responsibility that is what is depicted in the comics even though they are very heteronormative, and very masculine, their flings and relationships do not come in the way of their duty. While superheroes like Dhruv and Nagraj navigate multiple love interests, Dhruv and Nagraj have been shown to have multiple love interests, their commitment to serving the nation remains paramount.

It is shown again as re-established how their masculinity equates with national security and that is of utmost importance. This tension between personal relationships and national duty mirrors the complexities of modern contemporary Indian society. how the modern contemporary Indian society is, is reflected through these characters. Our society is in ways very modern and a complex mix of several other things where at many times we think about our duty towards the nation and in the second moment we think about our familial love and relationships.

Overall, the evolution of Hindi superhero comics reflects a dynamic interplay between cultural narratives and socio-political context. If we situate it in cultural narratives, how they are very normative in ways and again, how if we situate it

amongst symbiotic masculinity, how they are a symbol of what a masculine figure looks like or serves as amongst the socio-political context and in the popular imagination. Through these characters, we see that the comics engage with themes of nationalism, Gender Dynamics and societal Changes offering both entertainment and commentary on contemporary Indian society.

They are in a way also the embodiment of the contemporary Indian society where everyone in the society is generally dealing with nationalism or everyday nationalism. The gender dynamics are always up for questioning and discussion and societal changes. How women are coming into play with these characters, though secondary, but they have superpowers and help in fighting against national security issues, etc. we discuss the superheroes and the idea of masculinity.

Chandika again is situated in the socio-cultural and cultural religious context where this name comes from the goddess Kali and Kali's other name is al Chandika where she is known to be someone bringing destruction equated with Shiva, the tendencies of Shiva. a mysterious masked person with long blonde hair wearing a figure-hugging purple blue catsuit in the fourth superhero comic of Dhruv series called Swark Ki Tabahi, Destruction of Heaven. Again, destruction is related to Chandika, and this is the first episode where she is introduced.

We further see that how she looks has been discussed in detail. She has blonde hair and she al wears a very Western kind of outfit, which is a figure-hugging purple and blue catsuit. Further, in her non-superheroine avatar, she reverts back to being an ordinary human called Sachveta, a decile sister of Dhruva. But whenever required, she metamorphosizes and changes into Chandika.

Owing largely to her blonde hair, Chandika appears Western. at first, we might get confused by the color of her hair because she looks like maybe she's not Indian or maybe she's Indian but does not stay in India. All these kinds of narratives erupt from the colour of her hair, which is blonde. And then the readers, know that she's Indian. The dichotomy is usually indicative of three purposes.

What are the dichotomies that are being discussed here about Chandika's look? The divided dynamics representing Chandika with Western characteristics, while we know that she's Indian, gradually introduce Indian superheroines to readers accustomed to Western heroines, facilitating their acceptance in genres like adventure and science fiction this is also common in other aspects when you try

to introduce a new concept. being a superheroine and for the Indian audience, it is new. In India, they had not seen superheroines and if suddenly you just introduced them from someone being very Indian and then transforming, people would not be able to comprehend that.

Just for example, we see when discussing queer cinema, We have films like "Shubh Mangal Jyada Saavdhan" where the queer idea is introduced through semi-urban discourses. Because if you want to reach to a larger audience, it is in a way better to reach them through semi-urban people. Because urban people, already have the idea. But how are you going to introduce it? in a roundabout manner, giving them clues from here and there, making them understand things in a certain way, which is not required to be done with the urban population. Here also we see when you first time introduce a superheroine, they're doing it in a way that they can understand, making her look like a Western female superhero. Chandika's appearance as Western yet Indian adds an exotic allure. The second purpose is to add exotic allure to the comic laying the foundation for her position, of extraordinary abilities.

She has these extraordinary abilities. they are trying to introduce these extraordinary, abilities by laying a foundation that she is exotic looking. And finally enhancing her mystique and appeal, the thing that they are trying to discuss about Chandika is in ways brought in which feminist critiques would question why they are portraying her as Western. Why can't they?

portray her to be Indian and then bring her and associate her with power. Why does it have to be more westernized or in Western feminism, rely on that? and the third approach is to portray Chandika as proficient in science and technology. Women again, when we talk about STEM, we see less women in science and technology. Therefore, bringing in Chandika and portraying her as proficient in science and technology is referring that India has changed and India has changed to a level where we see that these roles can be validated and Chandika is doing that for many women of this contemporary time. the comic validates women's dynamic roles in nuclear vocation. in skill-based science and technology kind of fields. were traditionally dominated by men, reflecting societal shifts since 1990s neoliberal India after liberalization, we see and observe the change happening through Chandika.

Coming to regional comics and while coming to regional comics, Bengal, again, as we discussed in print and iconography books, we go back again and again to Bengal. They have been the pioneer in bringing art and comics. when we talk about regional comics, we see that the first instance of any image and text accompanying each other goes back to 1816, and then

A rare edition of Anand Mangal published by Ganga Kishore Bhattacharya seems to be the first-ever evidence where a picture and text come along with it. How did that happen and from where? Calcutta School Book Society started issuing a series titled Animal Biography. in 1822. And it was a woodcut painting.

What they used to do that woodcut painting, they'll put color on that and they'll imprint it on the book or paper or whatever it is. and then that is how people got introduced and how readers got introduced to this animal biography. These woodcuts were done by John Lawn or rather call it Reverend John Lawn. he was arrested al by the East India Company and Abhijit Gupta, who has talked a lot about and worked al in-print culture gives us an introduction to where regional comics came in Bengal. Abhijit Gupta introduces comics in the Bengal circle. and this talk was organized by the Kolkata Center for Creativity. and he's a professor of English department, at Jadavpur University. Further, what it says about the introduction of comics in Bengal.

It was the mid-20th century and considered the golden age of Bengal comics. Use of comics in advertisement, public awareness campaigns and mentioning examples of comics like promoting Uco Bank. Then there is Borolin, Poppins and Horlicks al. It is interesting to note that comics were being used to advertise Uco Bank or public sector organizations. These caricatures and sketches of comics were reported on social issues like the Bengal famine of the 1940s.

He also mentions Shuktara, a magazine published shortly after India's independence, mentioned a major platform for comics during this period. Shukhtara is the one that gives kind of a platform for the artists, for the cartoonists and the comics, comic artists. Artists like Narayan Debnath, who is known for his unique onomatopoeia, created popular characters like Handa Bonda, Bantul the Great and Nonte Fonte.

We can give it to Devnath for creating such refreshing characters and al giving a new form of enjoyment to its readers. Bantul was seen to be participating in the

India-Pakistan war in one or more two instances. bringing in again the politics that was going around at that time in India and situating Bantul in that. During the 1960s and 70s were predominantly science fiction and biopics. Molyneux Chaudhary was one of the most prominent faces of this period.

His work Agantuk is a cult classic. especially with his artwork depicting animals and human beings in action, had a huge fan base. and he drew up until before Emergency and we see other upcoming cartoonists that we'll discuss getting censored during Emergency. Then a particular children's magazine started publishing translated works of Western comics in Bengali a children's magazine started publishing during that time and this publishing was translated works of western comics we see now-western comics al entering Bengal in translation and one significant work that we will discuss will be Tintin How Tintin became Bengali? Sarnath Banerjee, one of the graphic novelists, says that he grew up reading Tintin and in a Hindustan Times interview, he mentioned, the influence of the Belgian comic series Tintin in his upbringing years of the 70s and the 80s. Tintin is widely translated, but Bengali is the first language in India in which Tintin got its first translation. Since its introduction in Ananda Mela magazine in 1975.

We can locate in the year 1975 when Tintin was first published in Bengali. One of the primary reasons behind this popularity is the extraordinary vernacularization by renowned Bengali poet Nirendranath Chakraborty. he was the man who made it pleasing and appealing to his readers because of the vernacularization that he did. Bengali was the first Indian language, as I told you, but significantly important that it was translated from French and not from English. We see that Tintin was translated from the original French at the time when Herege was still alive.

Herege is the real creator of Tintin, and he was still alive when Bengali was translated from French. One episode of Tintin, which is very important to note, talks about the popularity of Bengal. There is one strong connection that comes in the episode Flight 714. There is Tintin along with Professor Calculus and Captain Haddock. They are travelling to Sydney to attend an exploration space conference and amidst that journey, they stop in Jakarta to refuel. The name of that airport is Jakarta's Kemayoran Airport. Dr. Calculus, who has a hearing problem, is being explained where they are. Because of his hard hearing, he later hears Rangoon in the English version of the title instead of Kemaroyang. In the English version, it is Rangoon but in the French original, he heard him as Chandernagar.

Chandernagar is a place in Bengal and it is important for Tintin and Bengal as well as Heregey. Again Heregey himself was aware of the enormous popularity of his work in Bengal and we see that he used to get a lot of fan mail from Bengal in the 1970s and 1980s and made up of letters from his young Bengali readers. the connection between Tintin and Bengal is quite extraordinary. Comics in the new millennial are more like activist kind of comics that came and published. Little that we would like to discuss and not leaving behind the legacy of Amar Chitra Katha, we see many other comics coming in. One activist comic called Vivaka Lok comes in and focuses on subaltern plots, basically talking about the marginalized class and their stories, very local stories, very critical in nature.

But the overarching theme is the Hindu paradigm. Next, we have new-generation comics such as those brought by Shekhar Kapoor and Deepak Chopra. They used to own Gotham Comics and later it came to be known as Liquid Comics. They came up with a comic called Vimanika, which is focused on Hindu mythology. and this is like the new millennial comics where you see the digital interface with cool stylistics and catering to the young readers of India and abroad.

Another alternative that came during this new millennial era was Sufi comics of Islamic history, which were brought by two brothers from Bangalore. That is Muhammad Ali and Muhammad Arif. An app-based webcomics made an entry because of digitalization, the coming of the Internet. Igor Baranko was one of the renditions of Mahabharata, which came as a webcomic. The rise of webcomics could be seen, by Rachita Taneja, which is sanitary panels.

Next, we have Green Humors. Then we have Royal Existentialist and many more followed. These are two very famous of this category. Another one we have, which is Priya Shakti combating rape culture in India. It is after the 2012 Delhi rape, a group of people came along and especially it was Ram Devineni's project after two years of the incident, which resulted in a workshop. That workshop ultimately gave momentum to the creation of what we now know as Priya Shakti, combating rape culture in India. and all the copies of Priya Shakti are available free to read and download on the website. and this superhero, let's say it's referred to it as a superhero and not a heroine, has risen in India in the wake of the brutal gang rape. and along with that, she is riding on a tiger. The picture shown in this webcomic is her riding on a tiger and fighting back against sexual violence with the help of the goddess Parvati and the tiger.

Priya was named gender equality champion by the UN woman. comes green humour. Combating climate crisis with humor. We know that it was a day-to-day discussion and we had environmental studies classes, but not limited to that discussion. Rohan Chakraborty by bringing in this green humor bridges this gap between the integration of world life tales. Into our daily conversation through his amusing depiction moreover, he sheds light on the human how human conflicts impact the natural and the animal realm it is because most problem starts with humans but those who suffer are the animals and the birds in one of the combating this climate crisis cartoon there is a century a bird century and it is two flamingos are flying and it's written like in a comment, Maharashtra seems a lot less magnetic to me nowadays. this is the comment made by the flamingos that are flying and going. and it was indeed a flamingo sanctuary.

There is a lot of deforestation that has happened. There are no trees left. and therefore, these birds are moving out. They're migrating. and there is a street where some workers are mending the roads, and it is written road work, that signboard is there. It invokes a kind of thought that humans for their greed have killed many species and not trying to battle climate change or other environmental-related issues. We have webcomics by Krutika Susarla. She got an Instagram. She started an Instagram series with this 36-day type project to spotlight significant organization and individuals where each day she used to put up a cartoon with an alphabet starting from A to Z.

And each day she talking about one issue related to Indian feminism or gender. Starts with androgyny and Z ends with zeal. we have female other features, topics like the Pink Chadi campaign and Satya Rani Chadda's anti-dowry movement. Sarla's inclusive representation and meticulous research. aims to address these complexities around feminism in India, including its intersectionality with religion and caste.

She has presented it very well in her comics or webcomics rather. We have G for gender. And in the background, the alphabet G and a man dressed up like a woman wearing makeup, lipstick and ornaments and the discourse could raise again what Butler talked about gender performance, how gender is performance and not biological. it brings in those discourses again by her 36 days of this type of project.

Rachita Taneja, sanitary panels that she talked about an attempt to sanitize the mindset of society at large. The Sanitary Panel employs line drawings that through thought bubbles discuss a very variety or varied array of discourses in and around sanitary. How people are not having discourse over it, finding it to be a taboo. she is trying to break these barriers, these taboos and have discussions, more and more discussions over 'period'.

As important as the political and the activism comics the adult comics, transgressive private fantasies that the name has talked about. It has elements of what Sanjay Srivastav calls as in Hindi detective fiction where the line of ft porn kind of emerges and in what places they are situated and to be found.

Comics bring these discourses to the forefront and the two very famous adult comics are "Savita Bhabhi" and the other is "Velamma". They have been situated in adult comics and we see that they kind of send in something called censorship. and what is the lines between this moral morality, sending it into a tizzy, particularly because they proliferate through the unruly mediums of the Internet? they are moving into people's houses in unruly ways, which people often think to be amoral.

Comic book characters such as Savita Bhabhi and Velamma, what Sara Ahmed calls sticky objects, objects that are saturated with effect, as sites of personal and social tension. it is very personal. At the same time, it is taken to be like a social tension. Everyone thinks about it. Maybe people watch and read this. But when it comes to discourse and discussions, it is seen to be very immoral, outside of the discourse of society. We see representations of carnal fantasies coming out through these comics. They are marked by non-material erotics, that is erotic charge of two-dimensional, non-fleshy bodies, as well as immaterial domesticity within the internet. these are characters who are akin to everyday domesticity.

They are regular people through which they are bringing in the fantasies of mostly middle-class people. In the context of what Sanjay Srivastav, for example, talks of footpath pornography. They are like very cheap yellow kind of Hindi print materials that are left in transient spaces and offer the urban poor fantasies of transgressive desires, and security. who are these people on the footpaths? They are migrants who have come to these urban spaces to find a living or make a living and while they live this life of urban poor, we see that they are feeding themselves from what they call as footpath pornography, these books where they find these transgressive

desires, seductive western women and extramarital affairs. Srivastava points Savitabhabi is a part of that middle-class sexual culture and is opposed to footpath pornography. footpath pornography on the one hand is about Western women. But when it is situated in adult comics, we see it is about the fantasies of the middle class where their desires in a way are fulfilled through these two characters.

What we see in comics and books such as Savita Bhabhi and Velamma then is an appropriation of the footpath aesthetics that is transferred into the mobile space of the Internet. What if we compare it to footpath pornography? This is an appropriate version, which is Savita Bhabhi and Velamma. and now it has moved on to our mobile spaces through the Internet and digital media. With these adult comics comes censorship as well.

The 10th episode of Savita Bhabhi, which was titled Banungi Main Miss India, features a famous yesteryear film star named Jeet Kumar and this Jeet Kumar resembles the very great superstar Amitabh Bachchan from From Kabhi Alvida Na Kehna, which was a film directed by Karan Johar in 2006. and it ruffled many feathers, such as Karan Johar, the director, alleged that the makers of Savita Bhabhi exploited the actor's look. over which the production house has complete claims.

Again, the issue of copyright or censorship comes into play when it is about adult comics. Savita Bhabhi ran into trouble with the Indian government as well when their website got blocked by the Department of Telecommunication, Ministry of Communication and Technology in July 2009. The creators of Savita Bhabhi based in Europe were shocked because they did not even get a letter stating that from tomorrow it will be banned. It was just a spur-of-the-moment thing when they came to know that it had been banned.

This again stirred a talk amongst people who used to read adult comics and Deshmukh, one of the founders of the site, floated the Save Savita project, calling it an attempt to give a voice to Savita Bhabhi fans and a resistance against selective internet censorship. It raises questions on censorship, what the censorship thinks should be banned or the not giving the autonomy to the people to decide what they want to read.