

INDIAN POPULAR CULTURE

Lecture13

Cartoons - Emergence and History

In today's lecture, we will discuss cartoons. When talking about the history of cartoons in India, it takes its inspiration from British cartoons and along with that, integrates it in India in all the regional vernacular languages as well. What is fascinating to know about cartoons is the development of political cartoons. Later on, we also see the coming of activism kind of cartoons happening. Finally, we will look into contemporary days cartoons, how it has moved and also discuss a little bit about the contemporary cartoonists.

Talking or starting to talk about the history of cartoons, we see that It is based on what we call as imperial endeavours bringing us back to the British era. Two very renowned people and James Moffat joining them, Thomas Rowlandson, and we have James Guillory and Moffat joined them. They were among the most famous artist cartoonists during this period.

Their turgid engravings are exposed in ways of how the ugliness of the imperial British endeavours. It is very interesting to note how these people emerged as the very renowned artists and cartoonists in the British era, calling them out as well. We see Thomas Lanson having very biting humour, and he gives us a lens to look at the culture and political landscape of Georgian England. and then we have James Guillory, who contributed to the public opinion.

Thomas has been said to be very lively, and fluid and had a very keen eye, which is reflected in his cartoons as well. and further, we see that they got their inspiration from Punch, which was founded by Henry Mayhew and Ebenezer Landels. It was also called the London Shariwari, a British weekly magazine of humour and satire which came in 1841. We will now see how Punch, the British weekly magazine, became the inspiration for most of the cartoons that were made in India later. Mr. Punch was a character from where they got the inspiration to name it in this British Weekly magazine. and it was a puppet character, Mr. Punch, who ensured

popularity along with being the staple, showing the staple British cultural life. Coming to the history of cartoons in India, we see Kamal Sarkar. Proclaiming that it was the Delhi sketchbook which was the first journal of the comic satiric genre in India. and again brings us to the importance of this journal because without this journal the establishment of the cartoons in history would not have been placed.

There were other cartoon Books or magazines that came later on. Amongst these, we have the Bombay Weekly Anglo Gujarati Hindi Panch. Coming in around 1889 to 1931. Then we have Lucknow's Weekly Urdu Language.

Awadh Panch. Because it is talking about different languages. It came from around 1877 to 1936. were the longest running amongst the successful illustrated comic satires published in India. Lots of other variants of punch magazines also started publishing like the Delhi Punch, the Gujarati Punch, the Punjabi Punch, the Urdu Punch, etc.

The most renowned was Basantaka came from Calcutta. Basantaka, copied the style of Kalighat Patrachitra and it attacked the high officials working in the British administration at that time. and the Hindi Panch had its personification called Panchuba. As in English, it was Mr. Panch. Here in Hindi, we have Panchuba.

There was Harish Chandra Talchekar, who brought in a compilation of cartoons of Viceroy Lord Curzon in 1902, which offers an early glimpse of caricatures and cartoons in colonial publications. and interestingly, we also see such as that where it came Again, we have the Hindi Panch, Bhim Sen, Gadgadat, Bharat Mitra, Nagar Chercha, Bhut and Gujarati Panch.

Then we have Gandhi coming in and Gandhi was very fond of cartoons. He also wrote political commentary on cartoons. and even after the coming of Shankar, post-independence, he had a lot of contributions to make to that as well. So Gandhi was very actively reproducing the translations of the cartoons that were published in British journals.

He asked people also to read these cartoons so that they would tell us about what was going on in the minds of the whites. So through these translations of the cartoons he was critiquing the British Empire and alongside this, he said that other people should also read and through his translations, it was made possible to see the cartoons as a peep into the minds of the white.

Another very important thing about Gandhi to note was the Satyagraha cartoon. In this cartoon, we see there is a monster-like figure who is dragging a cart. and in the cart, there is again another figure lying down and a kind of knife which is on his chest, placed on his chest. Like almost the person is dying. Maybe the wolf has killed the other figure in the cart and is dragging it.

He made a political commentary on this particular cartoon. It was published in the Indian Opinion. and was called the March of Civilization. In the English context, Gandhi's brief commentary was prefaced by observation, the picture tells its own tale. Khanduri tells us about how this became famous, this particular Satyagraha cartoon.

Belonging to the colonial period what this cartoon indicated has been very much translated by Gandhi in former times too there used to be bloody wars but they were free from the hypocrisy of modern civilization while drawing our reader's attention to this cartoon, we want to give them as the same time a glimpse of the divine light of Satyagraha. he is discussing the divine light of Satyagraha. On the one side, look at the picture of the civilization drawn above. he's talking about the picture that I just described.

And it says a civilization grown so terrible as a wolf through its hunger for wealth and its greed. greed pursuit of worldly pleasures. So this wolf that he's talking about has grown out of hunger for wealth and greed at the same time and is in pursuit of worldly pleasures. On the other, look at the figure of a satyagraha. We know the person who is lying, the figure who is lying in the cart is a satyagrahi.

Who is out of his loyalty to truth, to his nature as a spiritual being. So this Satyagrahi is a spiritual being and out of his desire to obey God's command, submits to the suffering inflicted by wicked men with fortitude in his breast. So he has submitted to this beast-like monster because he is a spiritual being and he doesn't want to defy God's command. and we further see with a smile on his face and without a single tear in his eyes the two pictures towards which the reader feels attached. So he asks the reader, whom will you get more attracted to, the beast who is dragging the cart or the person who is lying, who is a satyagrahi?

We are sure it is the vision of the Satyagrahi which will touch the heart of mankind and the effect will grow deeper as his sufferings increase. So in a way he is talking about some sort of effect that will take place. When the Satyagrahis will look at the

body of the Satyagrahi, it will hit them deeper and it will bring out their angst. for the Britishers, who is the wolf here. and this is how he pictures the cartoon and explains the meaning.

We have C. Subramanian Bharti. He is also a figure, a very popular figure, who is a Tamil poet and who has also been a cartoonist. , he is considered as South India's first cartoon creator. A very important position. The Tamil Weekly, India edited by Bharti from Pondicherry, carried in its issue of 15th July 1909, a cartoon illustrating the acquittal of Sri Aurobindo with not guilty in the Alipur bomb trial. So let's discuss this particular cartoon that Bharti made. and it was in support of Sri Aurobindo because he was being tried for Alipore bomb trial. and the title of this particular cartoon is Not Guilty and it was published on 15 July 1909.

The cartoon that he drew was of Aurobindo in the center and his face is there. It looks like what we call as sun. So his face is in the center where we see the sun and the rays are moving out. and then there is another figure who has a face like a human and the body of a serpent. So this serpent is for some time trying to eat the sun. and therefore Bharti questions whether is it possible for that creature, that snake, serpent to eat the sun. The answer is no. So after a time, it struggles to eclipse the sun for some time. It just moves out of it.

what meaning does it try to comprehend? He says that Aurobindo is the Dharm Surya, the epitome of what you call as Dharma. and the rays of the sun are the flames of wisdom. So Aurobindo again had talked a lot about wisdom, dharma and the intellect at large. He was eclipsed by the Rahu and Rahu here is and the body of the serpent that we are talking about is actually the British.

Who unjustly accused him. and the police is as it is repressive state apparatus. It is the following. It is the serpent, or you can also be called Rahu. So these are symbolisms of the dominant.

Though he thought of swallowing him initially. But of course, it is not possible and therefore it after time moves away. So what does it show? The aura of Aurobindo or because he was not guilty, they couldn't do anything about him. Another remarkable person we have is Gaganendranath Tagore. Tagore is actually a very pioneering satirical cartoonist known for his satire on the Britishers. And also the people who were very ardent fans of the Britishers always wanted some favour for

them. dressed themselves as Britishers and he also is hard-hitting on the caste and religious practices in India.

So, Gagandranath Tagore was the nephew of the renowned Rabindranath Tagore a multifaceted artist known for his innovative paintings. So he was also a painter. He also made sculptures. Along with that, he extended his realm to political commentary as well.

All in all, he's a mix of talent and one being a satirical cartoonist. From 1915 to 1921, Tagore suddenly developed a keen interest in caricature drawing. He articulated strong discontent towards bourgeois nationalists, as I mentioned, and colonial apologists and the caste system also through his caricatures. He disliked them. He had no liking towards these bourgeois Indians who in a way wanted to win favor from the colonial masters. His first volume of caricatures was called Virupa Vajra translated as Strange Thunderbolts and the second one was Adbhut Lok, Realm of the Absurd coming in 1917. And both of them are equally very important. Many fascinating comics used to come up in these two volumes, had come up in these two volumes.

So let's discuss Tagore's few caricature cartoons, in one, he named it Metamorphosis. and in this cartoon, a guy, an Indian guy is sitting and he says, don't disturb me now. I am about to become a sahib. Lithograph from the realm of the absurd, 1917.

So it was published in the realm of the absurd in 1917. and the funniest part is that this guy who is trying to put on the Western dress is on a train, is also smoking a cigar, full Boshwa nationalist. and there is a person who comes and knocks on his coupe on the train. and he says that don't disturb me. I'm about to transform.

I'm about to metamorphosis from an Indian to somewhat like an English sahib. and that is how he mocks. and the other one is again where a very fat, ugly kind of a person is sitting, standing. and we see that he is trying to... give alms to people okay and this is called the purification by muddy water of ill-earned fat make him physically elevated rather than any sacred source so it is a commentary on the religion on the widely practised religion so this man is levitating and he says that he is levitating not because of his sacred source which is the Gita, the Puran or the religious texts. But because of his ill-earned fat which is making him physically elevated. The caste signifiers, the sacred thread that he is wearing. The cartoon is

wearing the tilak prominently featured on his forehead. Reinstating the object identity of the ridicule.

So he has made a lot of comments on this as well. and this particular caricature again was from Adbhut Lok. The realm of the absurd came in 1970 as well. Another two very important cartoons of Tagore; a fat man is wearing a Western suit and he's saying that my love for my nation is as big as I am. So in a way, this is a commentary on the person who has grown so big and then he is in a way comparing himself, and his body and saying that his love for his nation is as big as he is. and this was published again Adbhut Lok, which came in 1917.

Adbhut Lok directs laughter and scorn at the hybrid identity of these anglicized Indians who adopted a colonial culture in the hope of political gain, as I mentioned earlier. One of the pieces is titled By the Sweat of My Brow, where a man is sweating. He's wearing this Western three-piece suit and is sweating like anything. He says that I tried to be mistaken as a Sahib. So he wanted people to identify him as a Sahib.

But instant people called him Babu. So this is a distinct distinction where Britishers placed Indians. So when we talk about Babu and Sahib, Sahib, only the English were called Sahib. and people who worked for these Britishers were called Babu. Even though he had put so much effort into dressing himself as a Sahib, he was still called Babu and then because of his failure to adopt the Western garb and also the embarrassment, he is sweating and therefore the title by The Sweat of my Brow. Tagore also takes a jibe at the religious foundations of the caste system. Through the caricature that he makes, his portrayal of their huge perversely shaped bellies, their ill-acquired wealth and fox superiority which he manifests into their body. Another Political cartoon that Gagendranath Tagore made was of Gandhi and Jinnah.

So there is a branch of a tree and both Gandhi and Jinnah are in opposition. So the body looks like that of a goat. But they have horns and they have those two faces there. One is of Gandhi on the right and one is of Jinnah on the left and he's also wearing a cap. Shankar came post-independence and Gandhi made a comment on Shankar and said, your ridicule should never bite. So Gandhi was not against cartoons, but he was certainly against what he thought it should not take

jibes so much that it would feel like a bite. So Jawaharlal Nehru had grown up reading The Punch.

He was very fond of The Punch and of the political cartoons in and around. and therefore, Nehru is seen to have inaugurated the Shankar Weekly. Before that, as the title suggests, we see that Shankar got a mild rebuke from Mahatma Gandhi for making a cartoon of Jinnah, which Gandhi thought was not of good taste. He had written to Shankar, your ridicule should never bite. So it was a cartoon on Jinnah.

where Gandhi made a commentary and kind of rebuked Shankar. Nehru inaugurated his Shankar Weekly, the first magazine devoted to political satire. and he said, don't spare me, Shankar. Since Nehru was such a fan of punch and he had grown up reading the punch and the penchant for political comments, and commentary that he liked about it he therefore told Shankar to include him as well in this political commentary now Shankar Pillai started Shankar's Weekly in 1948, just one year after independence and ran till the declaration of emergency, which was in the year 1975. So if you remember when we were discussing about comics before the emergency, everything was censored from comics to cartoons, everything. Further, we see what Nehru has to say to Shankar. So he established a children's book trust. in 1975 and Shankar's International Doll Museum as well so both of it was introduced and established by Shankar. Shankar's cartoons appeared in the Bombay Chronicles earlier when he was he did not launch his weekly Free Press Journal so both these places Shankar's cartoons used to appear and Nehru might have been aware of his cartoons. He was hired as a staff cartoonist by Pothan Joseph, the editor of the Hindustan Times. So he worked for Bombay Chronicle, for the Free Press Journal and also for Hindustan Times in 1932 and remained there up until 1946. Then again came back to start in 1948 the Shankar's Weekly. Nehru often called himself Chanakya.

He related himself somewhere to Machiavelli. Adopted his own ministerial persona and talked in the third person. and hence we see what he meant when he said don't spare me, Shankar. What was his idea? How Shankar should utilize his image as a leader?

So in that connection, we have two concerns. The first connection between the need to construct a public icon for a private person and to do this with a little

dramatization. So he is a public icon. and when you write or draw for newspapers, you are doing it for a private person who will be reading it, reading the text and reading the cartoon. and to do this, he wants it to be a little dramatic in nature. It shouldn't be plain, but it should have some sort of dramatization to it. That was first. and the second was the connection between the construction of the image. of the national leader and the fragility of the nation. So when you are constructing an image in and around the national leader, you are also in a way talking about the fragility of the nation, which still needs to be established because we got independence in 1947 and then he started in 1948.

When we talk about the nation, we want the nation to find its footing first. Right. The image of the leader becomes very crucial. How a state gets established just after independence, just like a delicate flower needing support to grow. The leader's image helps the nation stand tall.

It's like painting a strong picture of leadership. to give people confidence and stability as the nation grows and develops. So in a way, Gandhi wanted Shankar to portray him as a strong leader who helps people so that the population, they confide in him and think that he would bring some sort of stability to the nation and help it develop further the cartoons of Shankar, when he talked about Don't Spare Me Shankar is very important. So we'll discuss a little bit of Shankar's cartoon.

So it came in 1949 and the title is Please Yourself. , how to please yourself? There is a picture where Nehru is standing and it seems he has two heads. and on one side, there are people wearing all dress suits and sitting on benches and a few musical instruments. These musical instruments also seem to be Western musical instruments.

One person sitting in the end is kind of playing a cello. and then on the other side, there are people wearing dhoti kurtas and sitting on the ground and both of them kind of shouting. we see that it is about Vande Mataram. Nehru resolves a dispute between his cabinet and congressmen by making "Jana Gana Mana" the national anthem and Vande Mataram the national song.

So in the cabinet, a debate was going on about the opposition and the people in power and therefore they were having a discussion on which one to make the national anthem and which one to make the national song. So ultimately Nehru was the one who made the choice and decided that Vande Mataram would

become the national song and Jana Gana Mana would become the national anthem. and in the other picture of Shankar, the title is National Integrity and there is a picture of Buddha. It's not a picture. It's a sculpture of Buddha and it is placed in the ground and it is broken. and he's wearing a kind of a slash and it's written unity in India. and very interestingly, the name of the cartoon is National Integrity.

So in the way national integration. There is no unity while they are discussing national integration and there are a lot of other people from small villages to national leaders and they are standing and wondering how to glue this everyone has a glue tube that they are holding and thinking of how to put it all together and this old man says why not scotch tape we use it in the United Nations.

So in a way, it is also a mockery of the United Nations, and how they use and talk about national integration.