

# INDIAN POPULAR CULTURE

## Lecture15

### Emergence of Graphic Narratives

In this lecture, we will be talking about graphic narratives and we will focus on graphic novels. P.K. Nair says that it is better to refer to these graphic novels as graphic narratives because these novels are not that popular and if we just call them graphic novels, it will include the fictional works only. But if we call it graphic narratives, it will include both nonfiction and fiction as well.

Considering that, we will be calling it graphic narratives. But when we will be discussing about the novel, we will see that it interchanges. Graphic novel as margin and graphic novel as cultural margin. we can just take graphics.

We can say graphic margin or graphic novel. we will discuss on the graphic and cultural margins. Better to refer to, as I mentioned, as graphic narratives. Graphic novels as margins have long been perceived as children's medium. Accessibility issues have been there in and around and therefore we say that novels are expensive, limiting their reach to the audience, to the broader audience and therefore we intend to call them graphic narratives.

Graphic novels on the margin. However, graphic novels have emerged as a potent means to convey marginalized narratives that often evade mainstream attention. even though they are trying to bring it into the mainstream, the marginalization and all, they have failed. By embracing diverse voices and perspectives, it has become a powerful tool for illuminating and validating. It still needs to get integrated into the mainstream reader culture.

Most of them still adhere to popular literature such as novels or non-fiction, but they are still to read what they call as graphic novels. and the marginalized experiences through graphic narratives. The River of Stories by Orijit Sen. we'll discuss one at a time. Who are these novelists, graphic novelists?

Orijit Sen wrote *The River of Stories*, earlier it was contested that is it Sarnath Banerjee's "Corridor" or is it "The River Stories", it is evident that it was published in 1994 and Corridor got published in 2004.

There is a stark difference in the years and this becomes the pioneering graphic novel. It was written in 1994, predating the commonly held belief that we just talked about. This is a social commentary that Orijit Sen makes, on the predicament of the Narmada River Valley Project. As the name suggests, the *River of Stories*, is about a serious issue which needs much of addressing.

He has portrayed it in a very light-hearted way. and he has al included its political controversies. This storytelling and social message which come together in these novels of Orijit Sen, we see it incorporates traditional elements like *gayan*. , the singer is one character who has been often brought again and again by Orijit Sen called *Malgu*. He serves both as the storyteller and a normal voice.

The farcical climax between *Malgu* and the politician highlights the novel's ability to blend social commentary with engaging storytellers. He himself, the character is a storyteller or better a singer who through singing kind of brings in the dialogue or social commentary. There is another very important character. One of these episodes is *Kujum Chantu*. *Kujum Chantu* is a female.

One day she gets up and she makes a ball out of mud and she is making herself an earth. That is what she says. and after she completes that ball, she thinks what should I do further to add life to this earth? She says, how shall I give it life?

and while contemplating, she again takes mud from that particular ball and makes animals out of it, animals and birds. and that is how she makes the world, completes it. This is again a commentary on the making of the world as a gendered concept. We know that the world has been created by God and God is male.

Here we get a different kind of narrative about the creator being a female called *Kujum Chantu* with this, we come to the next novel by Orijit called *The Adventures of P.M. Mazumdar*, number 19, *Emerald Apsara*, which came in 2012, it can be looked into from a post-colonial discourse as well, where he is bringing in P.R. Mazumdar, who is an explorer, earlier the explorers were Europeans an Indian being a European explorer, is very interesting to note, who

arrives at an old fort called Heartbreak Haveli. It subverts the European colonizers' trope.

The artwork that is filled in the walls of Apsara al takes us through the journey, the beauty of this particular Haveli, that is the heartbreak Haveli. and again, we see the subversion happening through Orijit's work. Next, we have Sarnath Banerjee and another book called "Kashmir Pending" by Ahmed Nasir and Saurabh Singh. Sarnath Banerjee has earlier debated that his work Corridor was initially said to be, the pioneer work, but indeed it was not. he invokes the famous Bengali work,

"Hutom Pyachar Naksha" in his work and he restores the grotesque as a mode of decolonializing Bengali culture and in this particular work called The Barn Owls Wondrous Caprice which came in 2007 As a post-colonial work, comments on important aspects of the colonizer and colonized power dynamics as well. he al, like Orijit Sen, talks about post-colonial Bengal. His work Corridor is interesting and more known and renowned because there is a character called Brighu who thinks of himself as an Ibn Battuta and he is a wanderer who is moving around here and there. It interconnects the past with the present. and what is interesting about Birgu is, that while he is wandering, he goes to a place and his discussions are very sexual discussions that he does with people that he meets or in general, discussions that he has and at one point, he goes to a hotel, asks for a room and on the back seat of the receptionist, a board sign is written and it is written Experiments with Truth.

There was a book by Jawaharlal Nehru called Experiments with Truth. and then it is being brought back by Sarnath Banerjee, which has a political as well as very social commentary on the discussions going in and around. He also wrote the Harappan Files. It is a very fragmentary tale in the guise of a secret mission. It brings out satire, metafiction, speculative fiction, and deep political commentary.

Next, we have Kashmir Pending, which came in 2007, written by Ahmed Naseer and Saurabh Singh. It is a commentary on the turmoil, and traumas of the Kashmir Valley, the everyday people, and what they have to undergo. and it uses black and large monochromatic panels. which stripes away life but also successfully portrays the living hell that Kashmiri people live through. In one of the episodes of this particular graphic novel, there is a scene where through grids

that these two are most famous for, two friends are there and it seems they are in print and one of the friends says, any good dreams, Ali? The other one responds, yes, I dreamt I was drowning in yakhni and rice. It will be impossible to digest jail food after that. He says, and it is very evident that they both are in jail. Another friend, says, trust me, it could have been a lot worse.

Then again, the friend who was dreaming of Yakhni and Rice says, I don't believe it. this is one of the conversations that the two are having inside the jail. It again brings us back to the period when there was an insurgency and turmoil in Kashmir Valley. We have another very interesting novelist, a graphic novelist called Appupen. In Malayalam, it means granddad or it could simply mean a poo's pen.

His original name is Mathan, George Mathan, and he's a creator of the world of Halala. moonward stories from Halala and Legends of Halala. He uses dark humor and non-linear structure, criticizes violence and irrationality, organized religion and societal structures. One of his famous works from Legends of Halala is called Stupid's Arrow. In this Stupid's Arrow, he draws two realms of kings, and it seems as if it is India which is like a valley in the lower part of India on the left we have one territory of one king and on the right, we have the other king's territory and it is shown that The prince and the princess of these two territories are in love with each other. and the prince from the left territory shoots an arrow. He was sending a message to the princess, but it struck the queen, and the queen died. and then a war begins between these two nations.

The structures of the palaces also symbolize two different religions. the left symbolizes more of Mughal architecture and the right looks more like the Hindu king's palaces. we can distinctly identify that they both belong to two different religions. and the one with Mughal architecture, they are shown as wearing green. and the ones on the right are shown wearing orange.

There is a fight that starts between them. and it is in a way a rift off of Romeo and Juliet. They fight and the common people are the ones who are suffering. The soldiers die in vain since it is a valley, that valley is full of dead bodies.

In the end, both the kings die because of the war. and these two, the prince and the princess meet, and they are happy, as shown. These two landscapes in green and orange symbolize two very prominent religions. They fight where the

common man dies and the social and political commentary on war and violence is very evident as well. for two people to satisfy the ego, the common people, the soldiers or the state has to suffer.

The style of Appupen or the Legends of Halala about which he has drawn, the art style blends fantastical elements with the grotesque creating a strange, unsettling atmosphere. and it critiques the religion, as I mentioned, satirizes organized religion. he's up against the organized religion as people just blindly follow without questioning. There is no reason, no logic.

But even then, they do not have a problem with it. They are OK, which al often at times leads to conflict and violence, just in the case of Stupid Arrow. It focuses on randomness, random events shape the development of faith in this story, undermining ideas of religion as a stable and preordained system. The loss of reason, as I said, loss of reason and logic ultimately fuels the religious conflict. In the end, in this story, we see that there is a flag.

The flag is in green color and inside, in the middle of the flag, there is a heart which is orange color again, in a way, we can assume that Appupen wants both religions to come together in terms. That also could be one of the significance of the flag. Next, we have Vishwajyoti Ghosh. He wrote Delhi Calm, which was released in 2010.

Delhi Calm is set in 1975 India. Again, this is the time of political turmoil in India. and we see the suspension of civil liberties. Not only it tell the story of an oppressive regime, but also the story of Indra (Indra Gandhi), whom he calls Moon in the book. from a powerful figure of a vulnerable child, how the transformation of Indra has taken place.

It is about the childhood of Moon, which is Indra Gandhi. Her childhood used to be very lonely. The father was never present it is indicated to Nehru and she was brought up by Mahatma Gandhi. It is humanizing that details of her childhood are also present.

Details like playing piano, and a family portrait with her sons, make her seem more relatable and less like a cold political figure. But then he kind of removes the impact of humanization from the novel. However, this humanization has unintended effects. It weakens Moon's political image and blurs the lines

between personal experience and historical narratives. The impact of humanization in a way he intends to remove, but it still is very much present.

It weakens the image, the political image of Moon. That is what he says. and it kind of blurs the line between the personal experience and historical narratives. We have next Amruta Patil, a female novelist, a female graphic novelist. Her first work was Kari, which was situated in the discourse of LGBTQ or queer.

The character Kari is a very what you call an intimate urban kind of lady and it is based on the life of an eponymous lesbian protagonist. Curry resulted from Patil's desire to see more LGBTQ characters in Indian literature. The next one was Atlantis, a very fascinating name. But she has talked about Atlantis in a way that it is talking about the vulnerable spaces of domesticity. Atlantis was a town which is subdued underwater. It used to be one of the best-known realms of those times. It has all sorts of folk and myth around it. she brings it in a different light.

She shows Atlantis in a very domestic, giving it a very domestic vibe. The Parva trilogy is very famous for Amruta Patil, where we see Adi Parva churning the ocean, which is the first one in that trilogy. The second one is Saptik Blood and Flowers and the third is Aranyaka, The Book of Forests. She has based all these on mythologies.

The Adiparva is about the river Ganga being the protagonist and it talks about the story of mythology up until the birth of the Kauravas and the Pandavas. and then we have Saptik where we see the retelling of the Puranas and Mahabharata. and the protagonist is a very well-known person called Ashwatthama. Ashwatthama is a character in Mahabharata, though he has been shown as to who is always longing for the father's love. and al he is not in power with any of the great fighters.

Through Ashwatthama, she brings in that narrative that even though he has nothing heroic attached to him, he is not as other characters who were divine, and mighty and that is what puts it in a very different kind of narrative altogether. Talking about caste and caste documentation in these novels, Bhimayana is one of them. It is about the life of Bhimrao Ambedkar. came out in 2011 and it is complimented for the use of Pradhan Gond art to signify the experience of social discrimination faced by Ambedkar.

Ambedkar also belonged to the community and therefore bringing out that art form in order to tell about the life of Ambedkar is very interesting. It uses Digna imagery originally painted on the walls and floors of Pradhan Gond's. The patterns and the nature of the imagery are interesting. This Digna art is all in a way very close to sohrai art which is done by Sandhal. They also bring images of nature and draw them on the walls, especially during the sohrai festival.

The patterns are again very similar to sohrai, the nature imagery. These paintings have been done traditionally by Gond people only. and then we see the artist who brought this forward was Janghar Singh Shyam. We also have Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam. Wonderful artwork innovatively uses this space.

They use rice grains to fill in the colors. Fences of feel inspired the borders. It is most remarkable for dominating, demonstrating the strength of Indian comic culture and providing a strong example of where folk and popular culture overlap. This is again very interesting since we are discussing Indian popular culture and popular culture where folk is never equated with the popular. But here we see that amalgamation happening of the folk and the popular

Another example of documenting the caste resistance is Aparajita Ninan. and Aparajita Ninan wrote a book called *The Gardener in the Wasteland*. and it is in the book. that Jyotiba Phule wrote which was called *Gulamgiri*. The book highlights Phule's 1873 book called *Gulamgiri* which challenged the caste system.

This again this caste resistance that she is trying to bring in very beautifully and there is a comparison as to how she has brought in the bold black and white thick outline drawings reminiscent of Satrapi's *Persepolis* it seems as if she has taken inspiration from Satrapi's *Persepolis* to bring in these bold black and white, almost looking a little bit greyish in color. and it perfectly fits with Sri Vidya Natarajan's intelligent and moving narrations. We also have what we call as partition traumas. Visiting Vishwajyoti Ghosh's, *This Side That Side*, a graphic novel anthology that offers a fresh look at partition because it is unlike other partition novels. It is about the second generation and the third-generation people who underwent partition and how their lives have come from that point where

they have heard stories of partition from their parents, from their maybe grandparents. this is about the third generation of people of partition.

It revolves around moves beyond the political history to explore the ongoing impacts on families and communities. Basically, we can situate it in what we call as memory studies. and memory studies in ways go back to the Holocaust, the effects, and the impact of the Holocaust. it is very interesting to note how trauma is again being situated in memory studies, especially through the partition. and that too, not the first generation, but the third generation.

The book features a variety of styles from comic book formats to photo essays. Reflecting the experiences of people from Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, how they have explored the themes of migration, belonging, and artificiality of border identity, like the shadow lines when it talks about the identity of Thamma, of Ila, where they are confused. All three countries have undergone the traumas of partition and how the people are dealing with the aftereffects of it. Next in this trauma, partition trauma, we have Chhotu, a tale of partition and love by Varudh Gupta and Ayushi Rastogi. If you look at the graphic, it reminds us of mice who they bring in the anthropomorphic characters in Mouse we have the mouse who talks like a human behaving like a human here again we have various characters and Chotu is a monkey-like man human the face and then the other animals have been introduced in this tale of partition we see it's a love story Chotu falls in love with Heer who is the classmate. And we see it's happening during the partition of India. It also somehow reminds us of Veer Zara. where they are all talking about people coming from two distant nationalities and partition all led to two countries becoming two different nationalities.

It portrays the impact of historical events on individual lives and the loss of innocence amidst violence. This graphic novel, as I've already mentioned, is an anthropomorphic character who show through them the history, the turmoil, the trauma and everything. and through Chotu's journey, the story explores themes of growing awareness of human motivation. The tension between idealism and consequences. and destructive nature of violence. it is a commentary on violence as well. When individuals indulge in violence because of the larger paradigm of how it has been situated in society.



Because of the politics because of the influence of politics, the social becomes the target. Chotu's character and through this tale story of partition has brought in. Next, we have social and political injustice and very interesting.

I should begin it with Che Guevara's quote where he says " Silence is argument carried out by other means" and hush in ways situate itself directly where Che Guevara left this book has no words, no expressions at all. It is a wordless expression of unspeakable abuse. there is an incident of physical violence and child abuse rather, and no one speaks.

The victim did not get any agency to speak out loud, to share the anger, to share the plight, the pain. this hush revolves around that. Denial of voice and identity is what they are trying to unfold. The story focuses on the concept of rhetoric sovereignty this idea of rhetoric sovereignty, means the power of speaking given to a victim after their plight and who is going to bring out that part? No one can tell except the victim. That is being denied the ability to defend themselves beyond the experience of abuse. They have the experience of abuse, but how are they trying to bring it out?

Or are they trying to bring it out? Or are they allowed to bring it out? That is what hush means. In general terminologies, hush means to shut up, to just keep your mouth shut. The power of silence and images.

The graphic novel uses silence strategically. It's a way of revolting as a resistance. It could be seen as. highlighting the social and cultural pressures to keep abuse invisible wherever there is talk about physical abuse or child abuse, the family members or the close neighbourhood people often tell them that just do not speak about it, let it be.

But that is what is making the Abuse invisible. But the abuse has happened. It's not something that you can just remove from someone's life. The visual medium allows the story to be addressed unspeakable through powerful imagery.

Hush in a way by Manta Roy is all about imagery. She has spoken about imagery. The turmoil, the unspeakable through powerful imagery. and the last one under social and political injustice is drawn the line or drawing the line. Indian women fight back.

Priya Kuriyan, Larisa Bertolasco and Ludmilla. These three have edited a book that was published in 2015 and it is an anthology of 14 short stories created primarily by amateur women writers and artists. and this book was a result of a workshop which was held after the Delhi gang rape. after the event, they transformed it into a book which was about the brutal gang rape. and they have brought out through these 14 short stories.

The interesting part is the cover of the book. the cover of the book entails a small fetus to a grandmother; all women, professional women who are labourers women who are professionals this particular cover page of the book covers all these from a fetus to an old woman and that is very interesting how they are trying to bring in what they call as drawing the line where women are fighting back. and with that, we conclude the novelist, the graphic novelist under graphic narratives.