A Case Study On Sequential Art (Comics): Its Journey And It's Potential In Contemporary Indian Scenario

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Abstract: Comics are the Those thin books like Phantom, Archie or Spider-Man or Amar Chitra Katha volumes that one would read tucked inside textbooks in the back benches in class during some boring period. But the time has changed, now the is not for the entertainment only it also stablishes himself as Art-form and displayed in gallery. The recent development in comics is in grass wood level in social community/ non-fiction, guidebooks, journalistic work, academic research, poetry, and drama comics are doing them all, and inventing some new, undefined genres along the way too. The present study is to examine transformation and changing trends of comics which is relevant to the contemporary society, this study will also explore the potential of the medium, as an alternative medium in education and awareness of the common people who are marginalized by the mainstream media.

Keywords: Comics, Art-form, Gallery Art, Friction, Non-Friction, Alternative medium.

1. INTRODUCTION

The term "Sequential art" (Eisner, 1985)[i] features a series of panels that convey a single story. These panels can continue for a single page or for multiple pages and may or may not be framed. Eisner also coined the term visual narratives (Eisner, 1996) to refer to texts that convey stories through images and words. Single panel cartoons, frequently with captions instead of thought-balloons, may tell a self-contained story but are not sequential art. Today's comics can teach us about Bertrand Russell's madness and method, explore the inside stories of epileptics and Emergencies, Fiction, non-fiction, guidebooks, journalistic work, academic research, poetry, drama - comics are doing them all, and inventing some new, undefined genres along the way too.

An International Comics Culture Western comics culture shaped Indian comics from the earliest comics stories clearly recognizable as such. These can be traced to the Avadh (or Oudh) Punch, a late 19th-century satirical magazine based on the British Punch. Like the original, the Avadh Punch included comic strips and cartoons, as well as poetry, essays and comics, throughout its run from 1877 to 1936 (Hasan 2009, Historian)[ii]. From there, one can follow the rise of various regional comics publishers, with strongholds in West Bengal and Bombay (Mumbai) in particular.

A wider appreciation of comics dates from when the publishers of The Times of India began producing Indrajal Comics in 1964. Although some argue that Narayan Debnath's Batul the Great represents India's earliest superhero, West Bengal's comics culture had only regional impact (Deb 2007)[iii]. Indrajal published mainly stories from King Features, most famously including Lee

Falk's Mandrake and Phantom (Friese 1999)[iv]. Yet, it also developed local content. The masterful Aabid Surti, together will Indrajal Comics' manager A.C. Shukla, created the adventurous detective Bahadur one of India's earliest indigenous comics characters and one who was more dearly grounded in contemporary life in India (Rao 2001)[v]. Around 1960, Diamond Comics began publishing imported series, photo novellas, commercial tie-in series like Shaktimaan, and Pran Kumar Sharma's Pran's Features (Mathur 2010)[vi]. Children's magazines that featured some comics provide an even earlier precedent, including Chandamama, which started in 1947, and Ajit Ninan's popular Detective *"Mooch Wala"* series in Target magazine ("*Chandamama"* 2012; Rao 2001).

However, it was Anant Pai's Amar Chitra Katha (ACK) series, with its stories from Hindu mythology, and later other mythologies and history, that truly established comics as a national medium (McLain 2009)[vii]. Pai's influence cannot be overstate as he reframed comics in terms of cultural heritage, likely drawing on international discourse and UNESCO's 1967 endorsement of comics as a cultural communication medium (Chandra 2008)[viii]. In so doing, Uncle Pai (as he was popularly known) and AG provided an internationally-based justification of the comics medium, one that could be welcomed into schools and other educational settings. By the time of the end of ACK's regular comics publication around 1990, regional comics publishers and cultures were again coming to the fore, mainly in northern India and Delhi (Rao 2001)

Raj Comics led the way, starting in 1986, as comics creator and scholar Amitabh Kumar points out in his collaborative work with the company, Raj Come for the Hard-Headed. The Raj brothers' superheroes were inspired by Western ones but unique to Indian culture; as Kumar notes, classic superhero Nagraj was in part inspired by Spider-Man, but made anew through a unique power set, history and grounding in a mythological world (Kumar 2008)[ix]. Yet, the Raj brothers, in moving be yond the established precedent of internationally distributed comics from the West were building on the works of other publishers and creators.

Despite a historical entanglement with international comics culture, it is the personate visual narrators like Surti who make comics in India unique. Just as Surti created a comics hero - and heroine – grounded in readers' daily lives, it took writer-artists like Mario Miranda and Manjula Padmanabhan to adapt the advances made by publishers and editors into relatable and socially-engaged visual storytelling Miranda, in particular, is an important figure in Indian comics, due to his combined work as a social cartoonist and comics artist, and renown as the country's best visual chronicler. Through his detailed observations of society, Miranda adapted the influence of international comics culture into illustrations of everyday life and commentary on social problems (Ramakrishnan 2009[x]; Da Cunha and Collaco 2009)[xi]. On the other hand, Padmanabhan is an important figure because she built upon the work of other indigenous satirists to create the strip Suki, about a young, free-spirited woman dealing with an often-unfriendly urban world. The strip quickly ran into trouble with a hostile readership, and ended after shifting from Bombay's Sunday Observer to Delhi's Pioneer. However, comics creator and scholar Gokul Gopalakrishnan (2013) points out Padmanabhan importance as a female author and artist who engaged with contemporary social issues and playfully experimented with the comics form.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Methodology of approaching the topic is always a very important part of research because it identifies the nature of problem and solution accordingly. Adoption of proper tool to address the problem is very important to get the proper result/conclusion. The present research is largely historical that involves historical sources like documents, evidences from remains to study

the happenings and ideas of the past that involves individual and collective principle, opinion, ethic and behavior at any remote point of time and space. The outcome therefore is conclusion –oriented and decision oriented. Researcher adopted the case study method for this particular topic and taken those dimensions of comic-art which is relevant to the current society and which is not glossy because comics is depicted as fantasy art.

Building as a Community

While many in book publishers still publishing traditional type of content, Companies like Liquid Comics (formerly Virgin Comics) and Vimanika Comics share a focus on reinterpreting epic narratives and developing profitable film, much like alternative comics approaches in the United States and other cultures, this artisanal shift affirms the creative process as a collaborative, contextual, and even communal experience rather than a corporate one (Rogers 2011)xii. Similarly, Manta Ray Comics of Bangalore attempts to engage with readers across media platforms and through various events. While their first comic, Hush, was published in print in 2010, later comics, including Twelve: Preludes and Mixtape, were published digitally first, alongside gallery shows and other events to engage with people and build community. Through collaborations across regional and even international boundaries, Manta Ray revealed the potential for an international-type Indian comics culture with a grounding in local communities and art spaces. Additionally, their regular comic strip, The Small Picture, in Mint, contributes to comics culture with stories that experiment with the formal and narrative possibilities of the comic strip. the way in how contemporary comics makers have approached this as a global medium to telling stories grounded in everyday life in India. They demonstrate an articulate and deep commitment to comics as an international culture, a global story-telling medium, and as their own creative practice and community. There is not just an awareness of comics as a medium, or a kind of "art world" of production, distribution and reception, but as a livelihood and a tradition of telling stories that help make life more livable and more clearly meaningful.

Comics as an Art form in India

If we see in the Indian comics, Amruta Patil has made very good use of this technique to supplement a very significant narrative turn in her maiden graphic novel Kari. While there are oblique references to works of Gustav Klimt and Frida Kahlo strewn throughout the novel, the most remarkable use of visual association occurs when Kari, the protagonist, is shown as having survived a suicide attempt and washed up on the shore of the "fog city". There is despair and hope, darkness and light - Patil brilliantly uses Andrew Wyeth's painting "Christina's World" to sum up the complex mental state of her lead character in a single panel.
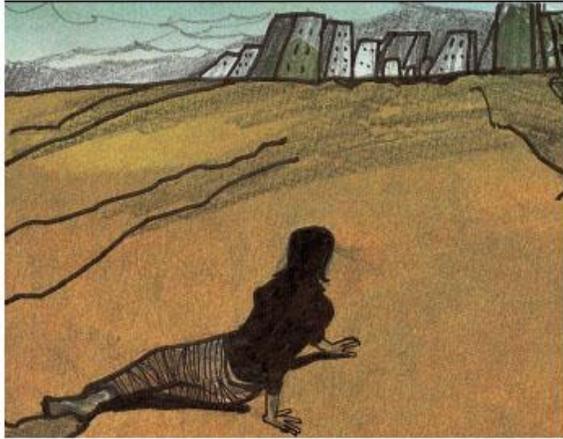
Figure 1,Illustration by Amrutha Patil in KARI, based on Andrew Wyeth's painting "Christina's World"

Comics as Installation Art

This holds true for Indian comics creators seeking to take their creations to the walls of an art gallery too, since the basic nature of the medium is tied up with narrative sequentially. The biggest challenge for a comics art curator would be how to transfer the page turning experience of a comic book onto the gallery space which is not exactly conducive for sequential storytelling. *"The Flaneur in the City"* at Galleryske Bangalore (2012) and *"The Flaneur"* in Kochi at David Hall, Kochi (2014). They had conceived the whole show as an installation with many congruent elements – murals, graffiti, walkways - to provide the viewer with a seamless experience. An issue we encountered was the scale of comic pages on the white gallery walls designed to hold large canvases. They overcame this barrier by drawing murals onto the walls to provide some kind of a background image, painting parts of the text onto the walls and introducing a character (the Flaneur) in the case of the Kochi exhibition, who curiously looked upon the proceedings around the room from the gallery walls. Another solution, especially in Unny's collection of 45 pen-and-ink drawings of Fort Kochi, was the use of video projection, in which text and ambient sounds were interlaced with images to render them in a narrative without having to succumb to the limitations of scale.
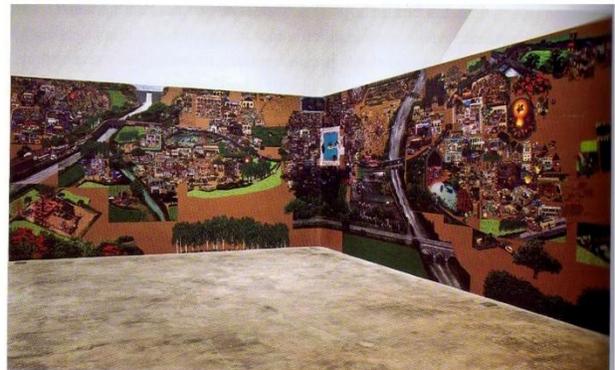
Figure 2 and 3, The Prey, Appupen, 2012. Courtesy Galleryske   A Place in Punjab, Orijit Sen,
2012. Courtesy Galleryske, Bangalore   Bangalore

Comics as Tool for Education and Social Progress

In our school days we used to hide comics inside our textbooks and never dared to share our fascination for the fantasies of the world of superheroes with our elders. But a powerful medium like comics shouldn't be used only to share superhero or mythological stories; it has huge potential to be used in education.

The majority of WCI workshop participants confess one thing very honestly - how their drawing teachers used to humiliate them in the classroom because the only picture they succeeded in drawing was perhaps an imperfect apple. Students could only satisfy the teacher by creating the "national drawing" – simply showing three triangles as mountains with a river emerging from them and the sun above, along with four other essential elements of bird, boat, hut and tree. Full marks would be given to such creators, including this writer. But why should only those who "draw well" be allowed to use the medium? During a workshop with school students and drawing teachers in Chhattisgarh, over 100 comics were generated in just two days' time, each student making a four-frame comic depicting a local issue. The drawing teachers were taken aback by the fact that trainers didn't focus too much on the drawing part, yet all the children managed to produce quite professional-looking work. Realizing the potential of comics, the drawing teachers in Chhattisgarh decided to use it to go beyond teaching "perfect art".

Recently 60 government school teachers in 30 districts of Uttar Pradesh have shown us how comics can be used in education. These teachers have been using grassroots comics as a teaching-learning tool in their classrooms, thereby very innovatively breaking the stereotypes attached to up and Bihar states. One of the teachers Sonia Chauhan converted many of the complicated textbook chapters into comics, while Meena Kumari and Neetu Sharma made over 20 comics on local issues to connect the villagers to the school, in an effort to close the gap between classroom teaching and the outside environment where children spent most of their time. The duo realized that programs like tree plantation or clean toilets wouldn't be successful until the 'Gram-Sabha' (village council) was taken on board, and they achieved this through comics - one on each issue. While one teacher used comics to enroll more students in his single-room school, another one even used comics to teach mid-day meal cooks.

Figure 3, Comic poster at grassroot label, used for social awareness and education

CONCLUSION

Another major issue that compounds the problem is that there is no ready market for comics art in India. Also, narratives that spill onto many frames are difficult to sell as buyers traditionally are on the lookout for single, self-contained places. where we can at sea at the grassroot level

comics as a medium doing tremendous job for the people whose issues are marginalized by the main stream media. As a tool of awareness grassroot comics which are created by local common people and social workers are the emerged as first voice to the local issue in the community. People easily get connected grassroot comics because it's related to their own local issue. The best thing in these comics is they are cheap and very powerful medium for the people in rural India. Time to time comics have change its flavor and is application but as a medium it always travelled with the civilization of the society So, we can see that the Comics is dynamic medium from Dream world to the real world, and Galleries to the grassroot level.

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