HISTORICIZING MARGINALITY IN GRAPHIC NARRATIVES: INDIA AND BEYOND

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Abstract

The term paper titled "Historicizing Marginality in Graphic Narratives: India and Beyond" explores the intricate intersection of marginality and epistemology in the context of graphic narratives, with a specific focus on the representation of Dalits in India and related narratives from other regions. The paper begins by delving into the theoretical praxis of marginality, tracing its origins and examining its relevance in both Western cultural anthropology and the Indian context. The study highlights the notion that marginality is often a product of power dynamics and discourse, rather than a naturally occurring state. It scrutinizes how marginality has been used to categorize individuals and communities, pushing them to the societal peripheries. The paper argues that questioning the very existence of a normative center is crucial in understanding and challenging marginalization. It also investigates how postcolonial studies have played a role in redefining the narratives of those in marginalized positions. Furthermore, the term paper sheds light on the various forms of marginality, the adverse effects it has on marginalized individuals and communities, and the socio-economic consequences of relegating certain groups to the margins. It examines acculturation processes, including assimilation, separation, marginalization, and integration, as they relate to marginalized communities. Overall, this term paper offers a comprehensive exploration of marginality, providing a historical and cultural context for understanding the representation of Dalits in graphic narratives, both in India and beyond. It seeks to unravel the complexities of marginality and its impact on the lives of those pushed to the margins.

Keywords: marginality, graphic narratives, representation, Dalit studies, comics studies, caste

This article aims to locate certain epistemological issues within the theoretical praxis of marginality and use them to probe representations of Dalits in select Indian graphic narratives in

6

the chapters that follow. This article intends to examine the interface of marginality in India and beyond. The present researcher will try to make a critical analysis of the discourses relating to marginality vis-á-vis Indian and foreign theorists concerning Dalit marginalization. The article will have four distinct sections: (i) theorizing marginality by Western cultural anthropologists, (ii) theorizing marginality in its Indian context, (iii) representation of marginality in comics beyond India and (iv) representation of various forms of marginality in Indian comics/graphic narratives.

I

The term marginality or marginalization is often invoked in the fields of postcolonial studies with respect to the discourse of the periphery, the margins—economic, political, social and ideological margins of a given societal space. It is invariably based on the notion that there happens to be a centre. Robert E. Park in his 1928-study, "Human Migration and the Marginal Man" introduced the concept of marginality as symbol of process by which individuals and groups are veritably pushed beyond the horizons of a society. Some people or peoples are reduced to the margins of that centre is the cornerstone of the notion of marginality. At times the project of marginality becomes uncontested and natural. Even the idea of a postcolonial subject identifying themselves on the margins of the colonial centre cannot be dispensed with. The minds of the postcolonial subjects supposedly internalize the very idea of a metropolitan centre and that of a postcolonial peripheral position. That the centres used to be the centres of normative power, the centres of European colonial needs are an assumption needs to be complicated. It is rather through politics, power and discourse that the state of being in margins is produced. Marginality is a resulting construct and the producing paradigms are far from categorical natural terms. If marginality is accepted without contestation then the normative and discursive power structure of the centre becomes rather concretized. When the question *what are we marginalized to* arises, it also indicates to a stable and material structure of power as the normative centre. But both centre and margin are always in negotiation and in a constant flux. Postcolonial studies have always taken utmost care while arguing for the people/peoples in margins because the position of marginality is rather forced and coerced, and in the process of such argument it is imperative that a postcolonial scholar questions the existence of the central space of power and politics. It is a revolutionary stance to put the margins in the centre and thus contest and question the positions of power in the centre. Moreover, the colonial knowledge puts certain people and certain places in the marginal positions ascribing to the latter non-human traits and less civilized stature. Marginality has been argued as an "undesirable state of affairs" (Zander 22). It may result in uprootedness. Marginality has adverse effect "on one's sense of belonging" (22). Marginality is often regarded as "a liability for the creation of a stable society or the establishment of a religion, but as an asset for, and even as a source of, innovation, rationality, objectivity, efficiency and individualism" (22).

The discourse on the marginal has been seen as a response to the political violence of the west in the sixties. Radical upheavals ushered in ideological destabilization, "The persistence, expansion, and rearticulation of this discourse have been connected with the ongoing performance of a cultural and political critique from feminist, African-American, third-world, gay, lesbian, and other positions self-identified as marginal, or capable of being so regarded" (Crewe 121). Marginality has been defined as the "position of people on the edges, preventing their access to resources and opportunities, freedom of choices, and the development of personal

7

capabilities" (von Braun and Gatzweiler 3). Everett V. Stonequist in his seminal study, *The Marginal Man*, defines his eponymous marginal man as

> [o]ne who is poised in psychological uncertainty between two (or more) social worlds ; reflecting in his soul the discords and harmonies, repulsions and attractions of these worlds, one of which is often "dominant" over the other ; within which membership is implicitly if not explicitly based upon birth or ancestry (race or nationality); and where exclusion removes the individual from a system of group relations. (8)

Stonequist makes it a point to underline how marginality arising from birth or ancestry is "automatically moved beyond the individual's control" as birth/ancestry as markers of marginalized identity are not based "upon personal choice" of a marginal individual (8). The people in the marginalized lived experiences fights the assumptions and experiences of ostracized living. That the centre and the margins are only produced discursively needs to be understood. To critique the centre from the marginal positions a marginalized group needs to question the naturalness of the concrete concepts such as the centre. Various forms of tenuous and precarious Othering may give rise to marginalization. Bina D'Costa means marginalization to be a social status "linked to particular identities or social groups" that involves multiple practices of exclusion and forms of discrimination (qtd. in Murshid 6). Peter Leonard defines marginality as "…being outside the mainstream of productive activity and/or social reproductive activity" (180). The tendency of human society to exclude and pigeonhole those whom the society deems undesirable or perceives to be without a useful function may be rightly called marginality. The processes of protection, inclusion and integration for the marginalized groups/communities are duly absent. Their means of survival hangs in the balance. They are placed in the margins of the socio-economic matrix. Power, privilege and security of the majoritarian community takes the centre. Marginalized groups are relegated to a demeaning and disadvantageous life of irrevocable discrimination. Neither can they fully participate in social life nor are they immune to livelihood change nor even can they struggle to gain access to socio-cultural resources.

To underline the spacial segregation that a marginalized community face Sommers, Mehretu and Pigozzi in "Concepts in Social and Spatial Marginality" defines marginality as a complex condition of disadvantage "that individuals and communities may experience because of vulnerabilities which may arise from unequal or inequitable environmental, ethnic, cultural, social, political and economic factors" (89-90). Earlier in "Towards typologies of socio-economic marginality: North/South Comparisons" the three geographers defined socio-economic marginality as a process in which "components of society and space in a territorial unit are observed to lag behind an expected level of performance in economic, political and social well-being compared with average condition in the territory as a whole" (7). Stallybrass and White have observed in their 1986-book, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* how the carnivalesque contents represented fantasies of repression and exclusion in the cultural identity of the European bourgeoise. Carnivalesque presented what was abjected from the elite social order and thus the poor, the prostitutes, the vulgar, the contaminated, the refuse and the dirt began to be sided with what is known as the transgressive carnivalesque. The feasting and drinking, the violence and the spectacles of the wakes, fairs and carnivals have risen to a marginal category since the Renaissance times, a category to be repressed, eliminated, subjected

to surveillance and control. As identity is embedded in power relations, observes Efrat Tseëlon, marginalized identities form what may be termed as identities of otherness (12).

For a segregated ethno-religious community, Canadian psychologist John Berry devised out a comprehensive framework for the acculturation process of the marginalized group. In a culturally plural society, a number of distinct ethnic groups could be ghettoized, and the marginalized communities are to retain their very own independent socio-cultural dimensions to survive. The four acculturation parameters are as follows:

> Assimilation – When an individual wishes to diminish or decrease the significance of the culture of origin and desires to identify and interact primarily with the other culture, typically with the dominant culture if one comes from an ethnic minority group.
> Separation – Whenever the individual wishes to hold on to the original culture and avoids interacting or learning about the other culture(s).
> Marginalization – Individuals show little involvement in maintaining the culture of origin or in learning about the other culture(s).
> Integration – When a person shows an interest in maintaining the original culture and in learning and participating in the other culture(s). (Ghosh 44)

Interestingly, scholars like Rudmin and Chirkav think that Berry's model and other similar approaches "entail the same two acculturation processes and the four resultant acculturation categories, for any migrant population irrespective of any factor to be somewhat problematic" (Ghosh 48). Moreover, Habermas holds that marginalization deals with political dependencies through social and political economies and thus invites collective political liberation movements. In the struggle for recognition, Habermas says, marginalization takes various avatars that are related phenomena: feminisms, multiculturalism, nationalism and even the Eurocentric heritage of colonialism: "They are related in that women, ethnic and cultural minorities, and nations and cultures defend themselves against oppression, marginalization, and disrespect and thereby struggle for the recognition of collective identities, whether in the context of a majority culture or within the community of peoples" (116).

The marginalized communities live in a relative isolation. It is perceived by critics such as Ambreoli and Leimgruber to be "a condition or state in relation to the socio-economic features of a system. As far as economic and cultural power is concerned, for instance, marginality might define the condition of an area opposite the concentration of that power. This implies that the area in question receives fewer benefits from the centre" (Nshimbi 5). Geographers have associated marginality with states of poverty and deprivation the basis of which lies in exercising a systematic hegemonic bias of political control on the basis of class, ethnicity, gender, race. As to be marginalized is to be deliberately distanced from resources enabling economic self-determination, in the spectrum of marginalization there are various facets: acquired in a social setting, social marginalization determines lived experiences of the Dalits/untouchables in India, the indigenous population in Australasia and the Americas, the African Caribbean population in Britain and so on. Socially impaired from birth, these marginal communities suffer social discrimination in the forms of dispossession of land, livelihood and sustainable support systems. Largely deprived of social opportunities, the socially marginalized are rather stigmatized and face negative public attitudes hurting their self-esteem and dignity as a human being. Next in the spectrum is economic marginality in which certain communities face discrimination on the basis

of gender, caste, class and ethnicity being segmented and excluded from economic and financial fountainhead of a society. They lack tenuous involvement in the social and political economy. Poverty has direct and long-lasting impact on the physical and mental health of such economically marginalized communities for ages to come. The third kind of marginality on the spectrum is political marginalization. Those who wield power in party leadership and elected offices minimalizes the participation of representatives based on gender and ethnicity. It becomes an acute and chronic problem in developing countries as more and more women and Dalits are further veered away from policy making and political affairs. Disables persons, migrants and ethnic minorities have been facing untold political marginalization for ages around the globe.

II

That all objects have a set of attributes necessary to their individual identities may well be traced back to Plato and Aristotle (Cartwright 615). Plato had his idealism in which essence, idea or form played a categorical feature and Aristotle corroborated it with the notion of objects having a substance of its own. Essentialism branches off from such discourses of Plato, Aristotle and even from the rationale behind the Darwinian taxonomy. It was in the 1980s that the scholarship of Ranajit Guha spearheaded the Subaltern Studies Group which projected a radical anti-essentialist approach by writing history from the global south (Atabaki). Guha and Stokes contextualized Gramsci's term and referred to the peasants deliberately marginalized by the industrialist capitalism. Subaltern, the postcolonial term of intervention, soon evolved and incorporated the marginalized groups of the post-colonial south based on race, class, gender, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation. John Rawls had argued that self-respect is perhaps the most pivotal primary good on which the theory of justice has to concentrate fairly, and Indian economist Amartya Sen refers to Rawls underlining the fact that "[s]ince the matter of self-respect is often taken by policy leaders to be of rather marginal interest (and considered to be a rather "genteel' concern)", a person to be identified as poor "would tend to have some effects on one's self-respect as well as on respect by others. This may distort the seeking of help, but also there are direct costs and losses involved in feeling-and being-stigmatized" (Sen 136). Stigmatization and various forms of marginality are undoubtedly associated with exclusionary poverty in India.

In India, certain groups such as the Dalits, Dalit Buddhists, Dalit Christians, the Adivasis and the Syrian Christians are made to feel socially unacceptable. Marginalization causes serious consequences in India ranging from name-calling, lynching to humiliation and politico-economic ostracization. Indian Constitution declares the country as a secular one and thus any form of marginalization and exclusion have been deemed prohibited by the law. But the minorities like the Adivasis of central India have long been overlooked due to the mining and building of dams. The well-beings of the North Eastern tribes too have rarely been brought to the foreground.

Before British colonization, India happened to be a patchwork of regional kingdoms called princely states that were populated by Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, Christians, Parsis, Buddhists and Jews. Each of the princely states had their caste backgrounds and their very own traditional rituals. Coastal trading settlements were to be seen starting from early 1500s as a few European countries tried their hands at colonizing India. For East India Company to emerge as the most primary colonial power in India it took three hundred years. The said provinces and princely states were ruled directly and at times indirectly. Under indirect dictatorship of the East

10

India Company the princely states made political and financial concessions to the British. By nineteenth century, the British began pigeonholing the ruled-over Indians by religious parameters of identity. In a gross simplification, the Hindus were counted as the majority of the subjects and the rest of the present religious communities were counted as minorities. The Sikhs were coerced to be categorized as the Hindus, not by the Sikhs but the British for the sake of political simplification. Muslims were deemed as the prominent minority community. The British let the Indian subjects vote for their own representatives from their own religious communities. Distrust was sown between religious communities in India thus. Panikkar holds that the colonial state had sought to establish its hegemony in both education, medicine and culture and thus it did its best to marginalize and delegitimize the indigenous systems at place in India, "In the process, the role of the colonial state went beyond its administrative functions" (148). It became easier for the colonial state to intervene in Indian administration and legislative enterprises because "the colonial state's preference for western knowledge was expressed at the time of the orientalist-anglicist controversy and institutional arrangements were made thereafter" (148).

As the twentieth century approached a series of anti-colonial movement started to take place but to the horror of the Indians the partition of 1947 by the British left India bifurcated, displaced and wounded. Muhammed Ali Jinnah's call for a two-nation division in the aftermath of World War II saw riots of 1946 and 1947 expediting the retreat of the British. As the Boundary Committee drew a border for the trifurcated India (into India, East and West Pakistan) using outdated maps and inaccurate census numbers, the majority and minority divide became all the more deep-rooted in Indian polity and governance (Roy, "Why was India Split into Two Countries?"). It is a lamentable fact that democratic success in India "has had to contend with persistent mass poverty and illiteracy, communal conflagrations and political insurgency" (qtd. in Bhattacharya et al 164).

In India, the socially disadvantageous sections such as the Adivasis or the Scheduled Castes or even the Mandal Commission's Other Backward Castes groups, not without a telling hierarchical diversity among themselves, make the corpus of the Indian minority groups along with the women and the Muslims. In the developmental arc of the Indian democracy, political secessionist mobilizing and communal clashes have been a routine and outward manifestation of a deep-rooted social exclusion in India. Ethnic riots and sexual violence have also been manifestations of social exclusion of minorities. It is unfortunate that the debate bordering on inclusion and exclusion of minorities has been ongoing and problematizing. In Indian polity, minority rights have loomed large in different forms and in different context. It has been multidimensional in nature too. In Africa, on the one hand, the majoritarian Hutus was marginalized by the minority tribes of Tutsi in Burundi (Bhattacharya et al 4).

A few aberrations notwithstanding, the historical sociology of India has been the displacement of marginalized groups based on caste, class and on the concept of purity. The issue of globalization and labour market economy also added to the discourse of deprivation and marginalization of Indian minority groups. As nation states become homogenous, it tends to be exclusionary and thus the project of unseeing and that of untouchability come to the fore instead of equity, agency and identity. More than a hundred million tribal people are marginalized or displaced in India because of dams and ore mines of central India since and before the independence. It goes without saying that the systematic and politicised exclusion of minorities since the colonial times gave rise to various forms of rifts envisaged in binaries: "majority-

minority, sons of the soil-immigrants; locals-outsiders; tribal-non-tribal; hills-plains; inter-tribal and intra-tribal" and what not (Bhattacharya et al 6). The nineteenth-century Bengali social philosopher Bhudev Mukhopadhyay stands out to be India's first social theorist underlining the notion that "an inclusive, predominantly society-centric Indian national identity was articulated in terms of the indigenous notion of jatiyabhav (a national feeling; a sense of nationhood), and with indigenous communities such as the Hindus, the Muslims, the Christians, the tribes and so on" (7). Mukhopadhyay turned radically critical of many a pitfall of state-centric Western nationhood and thus held a brief for society-centric mahajati, that of a composite nation, including the Muslim minorities politically in independent India. Rabindranath Tagore too advocated for diminishing the walls within communities in terms of majority/minority binaries and did well to pave a way for a secular public sphere for an Indian national identity (7). As for the Muslims in India, the 2006 published Sachar Committee Report from the government of India acknowledged the deep-rooted discrimination and marginalization of Muslims in India even after six decades of Indian independence. Globalization poses a serious implication on economic and social exclusion of minority groups too. The economic growth rates of the minorities experience deceleration. The LPG syndrome (liberalization, privatization and globalization) in underdeveloped and developing countries is both an offshoot of the said globalization and also contributing to the displacement of minorities on a massive scale (9). Although Indian epics such as The Mahabharata and The Ramayana foregrounds the interface between caste and tyrannical patriarchy as agents of social exclusion, later writers such as Ashapurna Devi, Mahasweta Devi, Manto, Manik bandyopadhyay, Khushwant Singh, Mulk Raj Anand, Girish Karnad and so many more have delved deeper into the agents of exclusion.

Although Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Buddhists, Jain and Zorastrians (Parsis) have been notified as minority communities under Section 2 (c) of the National Commission for Minorities Act, 1992 the question of the Adivasis has always eluded the corporation driven capitalist central governments. Dandakaranya, the Britishers' Gondwana or the land of Gonds, slices through the forests of state boundaries spanning Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Orissa, Maharashtra and Andhra. Marginality, for the tribals, have been less of a problem and more of a representation of a sub-human/non-human entity across ancient scriptures like the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, the Puranas, the Samhitas, argues Rajakishor Mahana, "'[s]acred books' refer to indigenous communities as rakshasa (demons), vanara (monkeys), jambuvan (boar men), naga (serpents), bhusundi kaka (crow) and garuda (king of eagles). In medieval India, they were derogatorily called kirata (people with lion nature), nishada (hunter), dasa (slave) and dasyu (a hostile robber)" (10). Romila Thapar opines that the image of 'tribe' draws its sustenance from the problematic arrival of the Indo-Aryan speaking nomadic pastoralists in northern India "who came into contact with the indigenous population (possibly the remnants of the urban civilization of the Indus) and regarded them as mleccha (barbarians) as against the Aryans who were distinct because of their linguistic (speaking Sanskrit) and racial supremacy" (qtd. in Mahana 10). Nirmal Sengupta notes, "In socio-cultural achievements Indians who did not accept the caste system were placed not only at the bottom of the evolutionary ladder within India but also were considered at par with others marked as "tribes" all over the world" (qtd. in Mahana 10). Thus, Rajakishor Mahana is of the view that it is more by the process of elimination, "what Gramsci calls negation,that this [tribal] category seems to have been arrived" (10).

III

Recent development in comics has focused on non-mimetic and somewhat anti-mimetic forms of narration, and comics have long been argued to be one of the most hybrid and visual-verbal medium. At the very outset, it is imperative that the present researcher establishes the rift between the terms, "comics" and "graphic narrative". Comics is a medium of storytelling. Comics derives its origin from a visual-verbal medium which is made use of for creating comic books and graphic novels. But then "comics" owes its origin from the culturally specific Anglo-American form of storytelling. The terminology is based on the Anglo-American marketability of comics, but the term graphic narrative/graphic novel tends to be an inclusive format. Graphic narratives are marketed to be a serious form of literature and the *marginality* of the term "comics" somehow encompasses the capability of different caveats of genres and storytelling.

A graphic narrative therefore is distinct in making dense use of "sequential storytelling, gutters separating framed panels, direct speech represented in balloons, with additional conventions such as motion lines, thought bubbles, and much more" (Stein, Thon 5) in telling engaging stories across tradition and cultures. The salient historical and cultural differences between the terms establishes "graphic narratives" as more central and pivotal for the present purpose of the chapter. In early 1830s when Rodolphe Topffer made his histories en estampes or even in 1900s when American dailies saw development of comic strips by Richard Felton Outcault developed, the term "comics" gained its cultural currency and sustenance. Steering away from the era of superheroes as Adventure Comics and Detective Comics of the 1930s, non-superhero comic strips had to occupy the inconsequential marginal space of newspaper strips. Robert S. Petersen points out,

> The humble beginnings of George Herriman's (1880–1944) *Krazy Kat* began along the lower margin of his comic strip the Dingbat Family (1910). There, in the seemingly inconsequential, narrow portion of the strip, Herriman began to explore the odd humorous banter between a twee cat and an unsentimental mouse as a counterpoint to the antics of the family above. (107)

The term "graphic novel" gained its usage with the 1890s influx of the British comics writer-artists in the American scene: say Brian Bolland was at the vanguard and the followers were as follows: Dave Gibbons, Brendan McCarthy, Glenn Fabry, Steve Dillon, and Philip Bond. Use of precise naturalistic dialogues and story arc of comics with mature themes, Alan Moore soon championed the said British Invasion of American comics with his *Swamp Thing* run and his celebrated graphic novel, *Watchmen*. The comic book industry was at the helm of a revolution—culminating in American cartoonist Art Spiegelman's holocaust graphic narrative, *Maus* winning the Pulitzer Prize in 1992. With comics writers like Alan Moore, Neil Gaiman and graphic designers like Dave McKean comic series like *Sandman* and *Black Orchid* appeared that did not have the actual narrative text of the comics as only subordinate to the comics art. The superhero genre of the 1940s and 1950s was being reworked, and with Scottish comics writer Grant Morrison to Peter Milligan, Mark Millar, Warren Ellis, Garth Ennis and Paul Jenkins comics and graphic novels acquired the adult market and readership within a decade. Comics readership has always been frowned upon by critics such as Jean-Paul Gabilliet or Fredric Wertham to be of noxious character. Adult comics readership is marginalized to the extent of being called juvenile intellectual delinquency:

> In the late 1940s and early 1950s, anti-comics sentiments intensified into concerted projects of censorship and marginalization. Scholarly accounts of

13

> Wertham's anti-comics crusade and of the purge in general have shown that these projects were part of a larger trend that swept comics up in its wake. Wertham's attacks on comics were in dialogue with postwar fears of mass culture and became aligned, however uneasily, with some of the values of high modernism. (Pizinno 639)

The comics have been hailed as at most middlebrow like that of the photography, video or film—middlebrow arts from the nineteenth and twentieth century still struggling to garner a substantial cultural legitimacy in readership and scholarship. As *Maus* wins the Pulitzer Prize, "The graphic novel, in this view", writes Christopher Pizzino, "shines more brightly for the benightedness of comics readership in general" (631). "The industry was an easy target for many critics from the beginning because comic books, unlike newspapers", writes Robert Petersen, "were produced on the more nefarious margins of the publishing industry" (146). Art Spiegelman's *Maus* captures a story of a cartoonist son coming to terms with his Holocaust-survivor father, Vladek Spiegelman. Most affecting narrative—graphic or written—closest to the bleak heart of the Holocaust, the graphic novel depicts Jews as harrowed and dogged mice and the Nazis as prowling cats. The tortured filial relationship and the backdrop of a survivor's guilt make Spiegelman's graphic novel both a mainstream success for the comics medium and a saga of marginalized experiences almost impossible to put to words.

> Since Spiegelman, the supposed "demotic" medium of comics has been made to carry the burden of representing traumatic events, including genocide, war, ecological disaster, chronic disease, and mental illness, in a variety of sub-genres. As Thomas Doherty noted about Maus, "the cartoon medium possesses a graphic quality well-suited to a confrontation with Nazism and the Holocaust." (Nayar 147)

Alternative comics owe their origins to the underground comix movements of the 1960s and 70s when artistic possibilities ignited the fevered sense of "comix" in the margins that "scurrilous, wild and liberating, innovative, radical, and yet in some ways narrowly circumscribed—gave rise to the idea of comics as an acutely personal means of artistic exploration and self-expression" (Hatfield ix). Self-conscious marginality made its way into alternative "comix" with the underground publication/serialization of *Raw* between 1980-91, *Weirdo* between 1981-93 and eventually in currently running 1980s *Love & Rockets*—a homage to both the mainstream and independent comics movement. Alternative comics, opines Charles Hatfield, emerges out of a marginalized subculture, and somewhat uneasily straddle two different attitudes about comic art:

> [o]ne, that the form is at its best an underground art, teasing and outraging bourgeois society from a gutter-level position of economic hopelessness and (paradoxically) unchecked artistic freedom; two, that the form needs and deserves cultural legitimatization as a means of artistic expression. (That would include academic legitimization.) Alternative comics waver between these two positions—between the punk and the curator, so to speak. (xi-xii)

Robert Crumb's comics may assume a notoriously pivotal position in the counter-culture that alternative "comix" is. Known for his satire on American way of life, Crumb is the staple of marginality in underground comics revolution of the late 19th century. His *Zap Comix* is both famous and infamous for its bold scatological and pornographic themes. He also skimmed over

autobiographical comics and his countercultural bent is written and drawn all over *Fritz the Cat, Keep on Truckin'* strip, *Uneeda, Despair, Motor City Comics, Home Grown Funnies, Hytone Comix, Jiz, Snatch* and *Mr Natural*. His *Arcade* anthology and magazine *Weirdo*, that he founded himself, is both a culmination of his crosshatched pen-and-ink style and his mature themes of psychedelic drugs, uncensored self-expression, Rabelaisian satires on oversexed African-American stereotypes and 1970s obscenity trials. By the 1970s, the comics books industry was split between a "fannish emphasis on superpowered heroes" and alternative, post-underground outlook of "heady satire" and realism—writes Charles Hatfield—

> Indeed, rejection of the corporatist "mainstream" gives the post-underground, alternative scene everything: its raison d'être, its core readership, and its problematic, marginal, and self-marginalizing identity. It is here, on the activist end of comic book culture, that autobiographical comics have flourished, overturning the corporate comics hero in favor of the particularized and unglamorous common man or woman. (111)

Soon irony, anti-heroic seediness and self-reflexivity took over alternative autobiographical comics: Joyce Brabner's *Our Cancer Year*, Colin Upton's *Big Thing*, Ed Brubaker's *Lowlife*, Dennis Eichhorn's *Real Stuff*, the latter issues of Chester Brown's *Yummy Fur*, the early issues of Seth's *Palookaville*, Joe Matt's *Peepshow*, Mary Fleener's *Slutburger*, Julie Doucet's *Dirty Plotte*, Joe Chiapetta's *Silly Daddy*, Brown's *The Playboy* (1992) and *I Never Liked You* (1994), Doucet's *My Most Secret Desire* (1995), Fleener's *Life of the Party* (1996), Brubaker's *A Complete Lowlife* (1997), and Matt's *The Poor Bastard* (1997).

Shortly before the 2015-Paris Agreement on climate change Swedish comics artist Anneli Furmark created a one-page sequential comic story called "Klimatet i rummet" [The climate in the room]. Men refusing to acknowledge the acceleration of the climate crisis was the cornerstone of the graphic narrative. This comics also made its way to "Jag vill inte göra slut. Serier för klimatet" [I don't want to break up. Comics for the climate] (2016) giving niche to a different and fresh marginal paradigm of comics: on one level, its Swedish comics from the northern margins of the inhabited globe and on the other, it's about climate change, a discourse that has been continually marginalized by the fossil fuel industry and its offshoot politico-economic policy: industrial modernist masculinity has denied climate change, challenged policy reforms, resisted social and environmental transformations, and hindered responses to threats to global sustainability such as those relating to the production of renewable energy" (Nordenstam and Wictorin 3). Malin Svedjeholm's "Hela Jorden skramlar" from the said anthology and Karolina Bång's work in comics album, "Maskulinitet, genus och klimaträttvisa" from 2021 should also be mentioned. It has been widely realized that "the comics medium has several advantages, among others those of immediacy and accessibility, in which you can identify with the characters in a story, read the text as your own words and connect with emotions conveyed via facial expressions" (Nordenstam and Wictorin 4). All these marginal and lesser known Swedish comics work towards discourse on equity, taking action for climate justice, reducing unfair consumption as well as eradicating gender norms.

Revisionist historicity is widely expressed in African-American comics. The African marginalized experiences assume the proportion of drawing on, redrawing and drawing over of "the visual archive of experiences that have come to be associated with black existence in the United States," writes Michael Chaney (176). Ho Che Anderson's critically-acclaimed multi-

15

volume biography of Martin Luther King, Jr. is titled *King* (2005); Lance Took's *Narcissa* (2002) is an arsty melodrama of race-consciousness; Aaron McGruber, Hudlin and Kyle Baker's *Birth of a Nation* (2004) is a slap-stick political spoof from the margins of black lived experience. Deliberately marginalized experiences of African-Americans found expression in graphic narratives like *King* (2005) in which documentary press photography takes the central frame in art design of the comics: "search for a voice" that is the formal tension between oral and written art central to the African American literature is replaced by the search for a face in history (Chaney 197).

Speaking of contemporary graphic narratives in the United States, Adrian Tomine's *Shortcomings* introduces Ben who "refuses to see the braided relationship between racial formations, gender constructions, and sexual fantasies. He also fails to see himself as a part of the scopic gambit that produces and reproduces such interpellated behavior" (Oh 114). Tomine is famous for his *Killing and Dying* and *Summer Blonde*. Tomine's work as a fourth-generation Japanese American comics artist encapsulates the quirks and tenderness of New Yorkers in the interface of "the process of gendering and racial formation" that is "inextricably linked to economic exploitation and political marginalization" (Oh 114). In comics like Shortcomings Ben echoes racial stereotypes of asexual and deviant Asian men and Sasha is a bisexual blonde woman. Alice and Autumn are also trapped in the gamut of Ben's relationship between his racialization and his sexual insecurities. Similarly, central to the 2006-graphic novel Gene Luen Yang's *American Born Chinese* is the assimilation issues of marginalized second-generation immigrant identity constructs. In an interview about the impact of the graphic novel, Yang cites a complex balancing act of the second-generation immigrants resisting an absolute assimilation into American culture and at the same time iterating the desire to reside in both the hyphenated Asian and American cultures:

> I'm still trying to figure out what it means to be Asian American. I think I've progressively gotten away from shame in my own culture, although it's still there....There's definitely a temptation to become fully assimilated, fully a part of America, but as Asian Americans, we have to constantly struggle against that. (qtd. in Boatright 474)

The intersection of gender and marginality in graphic narratives such as Marjane Satrapi's warrants special mention. With the publication of her *Persepolis* as a prominent autobiographical graphic novel, Iran and the Islamic Revolution in the backdrop of the patriarchal stereotypes and preconceived ideas of male chauvinism made its way into the fold of comics of marginalization. Middle Eastern comics artists such as Zeina Abirached, Lena Irmgard Merhej, Magdy El Shafee, Leila Abdelrazaq, and Riad Sattouf wrote and designed graphic novels with thematic influences from the interface of Arab Muslim world in countries like Iran, Egypt, Palestine, Lebanon, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Turkey. *Persepolis* was an excercise in the aesthetic Oriental style of artwork with the child mind-set struggling agiainst dictatorship. Promoting Middle Eastern ideologies of patriotism, pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism, graphic novels for adults such as *Metro*, a thriller, and *Cairo*, from the fantasy generation were also published with a view to blurring the boundaries of eastern and western hemisphere since 1984. The introduction of Kamala Khan as Ms Marvel is certainly an interesting trend in which the periphery is brought into the center. In the similar line, *L'Arabe du futur: une jeunesse au Moyen Orient, 1978-1984* by Franco-Syrian Riad Sattouf came out in 2014 receiving the Fauve d'Or for the best graphic

novel at the Festival d'Angoulème in August 2015 becoming one of the bestselling graphic novels championing the cause of the margins from the Arab/Muslim world. The first volume was translated in English as The Arab of the Future and was published by American publisher Metropolitan Books in 2015. Mention of Sattouf's work is due to fact that its style is significantly different from that of Satrapi's, Satrapi's work being celebrated for its enduring influence around the Middle Eastern graphic novel community. The artwork in Sattouf's are rather closer to expressive caricatures with colour yellow representing Libya, blue for France, red-pink and green for Syria. There are no adult intervention in what the child gathers from his world around him: complete lack of empathy, shackles of religious dogma, legacy of colonialism, his father's belief in the Arab of the future, corporal punishment for both children and adults, rampant sexism, Gadhafi's Libya, Hafez al-Assad's regime in Syria and what not.

IV

In the Indian context, towards the 2010s, a new sub-genre called "graphic memoir and graphic auto/biography" emerged entailing the English-language memoir boom of the late twentieth century. The role of literature in dealing with empathy, language and (re)presentation came to the foreground, and in India, graphic narratives such as Viswajyoti Ghosh's take on partition with the anthology *This Side, That Side*, trauma of violence dotting the Kashmir valley in Malik Sajad's *Munnu,* biographies of Dalit and Adivasi leaders such as Natarajan's *A Gardener in the Wasteland* on Phule, Vyam and S. Anand's *Bhimayana* on Ambedkar's *Autobiographical Notes* and S. Anand's *Finding My Way* on Raman Singh Shyam's autobiography as a Gond artist became the fountainhead for this new sub-genre of graphic narratives. These said few early graphic memoirs completes the experience in the narrative "by infusing personal experience to complete the missing visual and verbal lexicon" (Acheson 292). In his comprehensive study on Indian graphic memoirs in 2016 Pramod K. Nayar writes pertinently,

> The word "graphic" here signals, first, the potent visual dimension of the medium, and second, the more popular sense of the term that highlights the explicitness with which oppression, injustice, and inequality is mapped. "Graphic" in these narratives thus captures the impact of historically subjugating structures and events in their embodied form. (Nayar, "Radical Graphics" 147).

The visual dimension of the graphic narratives not only substantiates the comprehensive histories but also makes the reader and the critic aware of the dead ends and loopholes of the fissured history. Sarnath Banerjee's *Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers*, a graphic retelling and appropriation of Kaliprasanna Singha's 19th century Bengali classic *Hootum Pyanchar Naksha*, is a seminal instance of a successful exercise in the marginalia of history by the graphic novel medium. The outsiders and the visitors are the witnesses of the 19th c Bengal tensions. Graphic narratives, at times, assumes the dimension of spoken memoirs that struggle to represent their narratives. Staub says in 1995, in this connection, graphic memoirs "rely on the immediacy and authority of oral encounters with members of persecuted and oppressed groups" (34). The trifling tale of idiosyncrasies of the colonial Kolkata finds its graphic expression in the panels of Sarnath Banerjee as the creator draws sustenance from the presence and the glances of the marginalized characters as part of the historical narrative: in the backdrop of introducing the main theme of Philip Francis' duel with Warren Hastings, Banerjee, with his tongue in cheek, focuses on the ordinary life of 1780s Kolkata, "the horse carriage with the driver in silhouette (4), the man

17

watering the grounds (5)" writes Pramod K. Nayar, "When the panels move on to depict the English duellers prior to battle – Philip Francis dressing for the event in a single panel covering the width of the page (5) – there is the punkahwallah, the valet and the man fetching tea" (*The Indian Graphic Novel* 15). What happens with the inclusion of such peripheral characters in the narrative of the 1780s Kolkata is that the graphic narrative visualizes what is beyond the locus of the historical moments: to the ergon of the meaning-making and performativity of comics reading, the marginal characters assumes the proportion of Kantian and Derridian parergons to the main narrative (Nayar, *Indian Graphic Novel* 21). Like columns to the buildings and frames to a painting, the visualization of the peripheral and minor in the graphic narratives rather repoliticize the narrative of history. The critical litearcy generated by a graphic novel drives home liminality from the pages of sweeping macro-histories:

> The emphasis on marginal characters from history, on the merging of public and personal (hi)stories, the quest for approximation and resemblance rather than realistic representation and the modes of articulating postmemory through the visual-verbal medium render the graphic narrative a phenomenally powerful mode of not only delivering history but also calling into question how we read this history. (Nayar, *Indian Graphic Novel* 46)

Brighu from Sarnath Banerjee's *The Harappa Files'* "Single Malt, Single Woman" may be taken for an instance in this regard. Banerjee offers a direct commentary to narrate the unfolding events as AK asks Brighu not to visit her for their regular Thursday trusts as she is planning a threesome with two of her male friends. This is how the unimportant and the insignificant margin offers one the cultural commentary and enables a cultural literacy in connection to the main narrative in the unfolding central scene. Take for another instance *Kashmir Pending*. Here marginal history of the Kashmir valley is in itself witnessed from the margins as Mushtaq, the narrator of Malik Sajad's graphic novel, tells the story to his fellow inmate, Ali, both of whom are behind bars. There is a description of a protest march that Mushtaq witnessed with Aziz, his friend. There are riots, there is police action and there are sights of Kashmiri protestors in the face of Indian Army men. Mustaq here delivers cultural critique from the margins. The visuals are, to be precise, retracing of Mustaq's sight. "The witness is on the margins, a fragmented, concealed body", notes Pramod K. Nayar, "and through whose eyes alone can we see the events of the Kashmir valley" (*Indian Graphic Novel* 96).

Malik Sajad's *Munnu: A Boy from Kashmir* "speaks to the matters of childhood, belonging, displacement, political precariousness, and coming-of-age in an uncertain world", writes Amrita Dhar (66). Contra-human rights military deployment in the Kashmir valley since the 90s rendered the Kashmiri identity as a fringe and peripheral minority (Fig. 2).

18

Fig. 2: Sajad, Malik. "An 18-Month-Old Victim in a Very Old Fight." Opinion: Op-Art. *The New York Times*, 19 Jan. 2019.

Their marginalization found its political culmination in Indian government breaching the fundamental conditions of the Instrument of Accession by (which the former Princely State of Jammu and Kashmir had acceded to India in 1947) in August, 2019. States attack and atrocity even on the Kashmiri youngest citizens are deftly and poignantly depicted and represented in Malik Sajjad's lesser known opinion graphic narrative column for *The New York Times*, "An 18-Month-Old Victim in a Very Old Fight" that saw the light of the day in January of the same year of the breach of Instrument of Accession.

This Side, That Side: Restorying Partition, curated by Vishwajyoti Ghosh in 2013, emerged as a graphic narrative anthology with a cocktail of facts laced with nostalgia and esoteric engagement with the memories of the Partition. Interestingly, the ensemble of graphic narratives also encapsule explorations by those who might n ot have experienced Partition but had to negotiate the legacy of Partition growing up. Graphic monographs like "An Old Fable" deals with the political historiography of the Partition in direct terms; a tribute to Manto's "The Dog of Tetwal", graphic monograph "Tamasha-e-Tetwal" engages with the issue of Kashmir valley from a vantage point of the 2010s; Bani Abidi's "The News" juxtaposes news reports from both India and Pakistan, side by side, the frames bringing telling similarities between the two side of broken stories; "Welcome to the Geneva Camp" deals with 25000 refugees housed in a Bangladeshi camp during the Partition in an excercise in photo essay; the margal experiences of belonging and diasporic pain are foregrounded in graphic narrative monographs such as "Know Directions Home?" and/or "Karachi-Delhi Katha". Ghosh's own contribution, a take on his grandfather Amiya Sen's unforgettably horrid experiences in East Bengali refugee camp in Dandakaranya is also done with documentary veracity. Experience of marginality haunts the pages of the anthology as Vishwajyoti Ghosh himself grew up with refugee children housed in Kasturba Niketan, Lajpat Nagar, New Delhi.

The graphic novelist, Amruta Patil, known for her Parva trilogy, *Adi Parva: Churning of the Ocean* (2012) with *Sauptik: Blood and Flower* (2016) and *Aranyaka: Book of the Forest* (2019), began her distinguished career with *Kari* in 2008. The lived experience of heartbreak in a

19

lesbian relationship gives Patil's graphic narrative a peculiar and hitherto uncharted visual storytelling. The attempted double suicide by Kari and Ruth, the inversed rebirth after both of them get saved miraculously and the portrayal of the city in the decaying body of Kari:

> The graphic novel is the story of Kari after she finds herself alone in the heterosexual culture around her and the internal turmoil of her separation from Ruth set against this highly heterosexual culture-scape of the metropolitan city. [...] The naturalized and dominant nature of heterosexuality in our lives is evident in several parts of the book but one that evidently stands out for me as a reader is an exchange between Kari and the two men – boyfriends of her roommates. They urge Kari to find a suitable man for herself. [...] Patil's Kari is an important revelation of how the city which is supposed to be progressive and modern still continues to harbor a highly heterosexual understanding of society. She uses the metaphor of suffocation in the "smog city". [...] Through Kari's constant search for her identity as a woman, her rebellion against mainstream and enforced concepts of femininity, the struggle to understand oneself in this culture of dominance is beautifully portrayed and stays with the reader. (Mahurkar)

Amar Chitra Katha used to portray mythology and inculcate national identity in the children using the comics medium in India since the late 1950s. *Kari* is a deliberate detour from the visual rhetoric of heterosexual love and mythology with a hegemonic discussion of history, nation, religion and gender that the mainstream corpus of Amar Chitra Katha series spanning decades lacked. *Kari* does its part in filling up the fissure of the spectrum of gender and sexual identity in a country that witnessed the wide-spread gamut of Amar Chitra Katha series with an eye to teach the children of the nation about Indian identity. It has been argued that

> [t]he publisher [Amar Chitra Katha by Anant Pai] became a household name in the country and oriented thousands of kids to the comic-book culture, acquainting them with the tales of Hindu mythology that previously were purveyed only in religious hymns and prayers. Though that was the intention of its creator, Anant Pai; to teach children about their own folklore and culture, Amar Chitra Katha also took a dark turn because of it. For years the comics fueled the Hindu nationalist doctrine devaluing lower castes, women, tribal populations, and religious minorities feeding systemic unequality. (Bijolia)

On the other hand, mention should be made of Gautam Bhatia's *Lie* from 2010 that depicts the marginal position and lived experience of an impoverished farmer, Alibaba, walking the Gandhian path of righteousness. Characters like Rekha, a sex-worker turned prime minister, populate the graphic narrative. From duty bound demure wives to untouchables, from Buddhist monks to collective tolerance of an Islamic tomb in an old neighbourhood, from regularization of an illegal Hindu temple to the passivity of an individual citizen: deprivations of opportunity and paradox of belonging are the many spectrums of Bhatia's narrative of marginality and centrality of the national identity. A few instances from the pages and panels of select Indian graphic narratives that does well to portray the niceties of marginal lives need to be presented before we conclude.

In Samhita Arni's *Sita's Ramayana* women are the pawns in wars with kingdoms and masculinity of the ruling men at stake. The timeless epic of Ramayana finds expression in the

voice of a destitute, forsaken and marginal lived experience of a woman, Sita (Fig.3). Arni's graphic narrative is drawn by Moyna Chitrakar using the medium of *pattachitra*, scroll paintings:

> It graphically explores the intense emotional rollercoaster that Sita undergoes from the fear of never finding freedom. After Rama frees Sita, it explores loyalty and trust. Sita has to prove her purity to her husband by undergoing a fire test. This a central part of the novel because it explores chastity and troubled lovers. It lets the reader connect to a woman who is unjustly banished by a man. The feminist viewpoint in this story allows the novel to go above and beyond being just another retelling of Ramayana. It allows the narrative to look past a man's heroism, and instead it familiarizes the reader with Sita's heroic impact and acts of compassion. (Morini)
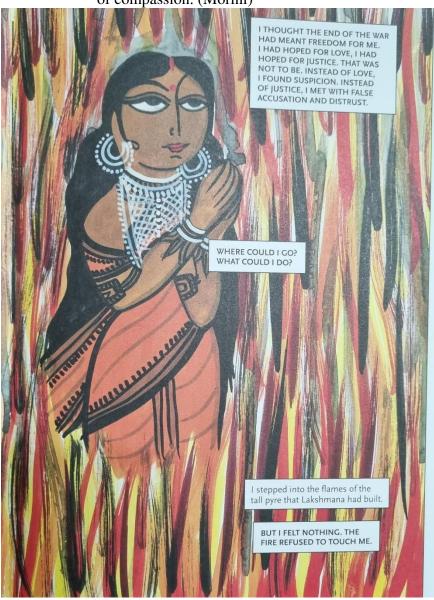
Fig. 3: Arni, Samhita and Chitrakar, Moyna. *Sita's Ramayana*. Groundwood Books, 2011, pp. 121

Samhita Arni's Sita, with her static postures and blank stares, questions the glorification of male heroism and chauvinism concerning rampant bloodshed and wartime losses.

In the last page of the fourth chapter in Sarnath Banerjee's *Doab Dil* (2019), we get to witness the story of Caroline Wyburgh, who was being marginalized for walking. Activist and writer Rebecca Solnit states that it has been implied rhat women walk not to see, but to be seen. The fourth chapter of *Doab Dil* concerns itself with all famous walkers of history. Once Caroline Wyburg was arrested in London "under the Contagious Diseases Act for walking unescorted" (Banerjee, *Doab Dil*, n.pag) and yet male walkers like the pacifist Mohandas Gandhi, Abdul Ghaffar Khan from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the Danish pioneering existential philosopher Kierkegaard, celebrated film-maker Werner Herzog, "the nightwandering man" Coleridge, Walter Benjamin, wanderers like Abel and the Wandering Jew made a name for themselves by being walkers, by finding the significance and deeper meaning in wandering and by being solemn investigator of futile things in cities and out of cities. But that is not the case for a woman wanderer as unescorted women wanderers were put in painful and humiliating medical examinations. Activist Solnit was imprisoned. Banerjee closes his fourth chapter with the marginal position of women wanderers, "Strolling, wandering, roaming, straying meant different things for men and women" (*Doab Dil*, n. pag).

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