
UNIT 2 GRAPHIC NARRATIVES: ANALYSING VYAM'S *BHIMAYANA*

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2.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit aims to introduce the learners to the engaging and exciting world of Graphic and Visual Narratives. It begins by tracing the beginnings of the graphic narrative form of the *avante-garde* comics written during the 1980s. Later, it critically engages with Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam's illustrative book *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability* which depicts the life-story of Babasaheb Bhimrao Ambedkar in a graphic manner by making use of the tribal *Pardhan Gond* Art form. Let us begin by tracing the history of graphic narratives next.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

It was not very long ago that *Diamond Comics*, *Raj Comics*, *Amar Chitra Katha*, *Nandan*, *Champak*, were a rage amongst teenagers growing up in India. *Chacha Chaudhary*, *Doga*, *Nagraj* and several others still continue to excite the imagination of young adults. The same is true of the fascinating world of superheroes brought alive by *Marvel Comics*. Despite the fascination here in India and across the globe, comic books were largely seen with contempt citing their corrupting influence over young minds; a source of cheap entertainment; a distraction away from the 'serious business' of education; not having that artistic finesse, etc. There have been lengthy debates on the literary canon comprising 'high art' and comics being unworthy of that tag. The subject matter of comics

was believed to be inapt for serious issues demanding academic attention. It was largely restricted to generate humor as it catered to only a specific age group.

There came a paradigmatic shift in these debates around comics as a creative art form with the publication of **Art Spiegelman's** *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* in 1986. Here, the American cartoonist chose the graphic novel form to narrate the traumatic experiences of his parents who were Polish Jews that survived the concentration camp at Auschwitz. As a disturbing and extremely moving piece of art, the text allegorically depicts Jews as Mice and Nazis as menacing cats to represent the brutal lived realities of the Holocaust. The novel went on to receive the prestigious Pulitzer Prize in 1992. This was the first time that a graphic text, written in a comic way, was considered for a literary award. The critical acclaim that followed heralded the transition of comics from a 'low art' medium to 'high art' graphic narrative. Along with Spiegelman, **Gary Panter** and **Jerry Moriarty** contributed towards *avant-garde* comic/graphic/visual writings during the 1980s where they explored complex subjects in experimental 'form'. Let us look at the graphic narrative in some detail next.

2.2 DEFINING THE CATEGORY

In this section we will look at how the graphic narrative came into being, evolving from the humble and low brow comic to its present stature. The literary category of 'Popular Fiction' today has witnessed a considerable rise in the popularity of graphic and visual modes of narrativisation. The comics, sequential art, motion picture, pictorial narrative, illustration, animation – all of these would, fall under its ambit. Given the wide variety of these creative categories and their overlapping nature, it is difficult to arrive at a specific definition of graphic and visual narratives. Loosely, these can be defined as the ones that combine the text, graphics, visuals, pictures, illustrations etc. to convey the story. A special issue on Graphic Narratives by *Modern Fiction Studies* writes: "...graphic narrative offers an intricately layered narrative language – the language of comics – that comprises the verbal, the visual and the way these two representational modes interact on a page."

One point of criticism that has bothered graphic novelists for a long time is that they rely heavily upon the visual elements to convey their 'stories'. **K Strong Hansen** undercuts this negative criticism by focusing upon the range and complexity of graphic narratives. She further argues: "Imagery and drawings are not inherently less valuable than the verbal, literary art. In fact, images often convey a richness and depth of ideas that require interpretation and high level critical thinking, analysis and evaluation skills." Having said that by way of defining the graphic novel let us begin with the text *Bhimayana*. Of course, we have looked at it in some detail in Unit I.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Enlist any three comic books you read while growing up? What was the motive behind reading those books?

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2.3 INTRODUCTION TO THE *BHIMAYANA*

Published in 2011, *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability* is based on the lived experiences of Dr Bhimrao Ambedkar. The text uses a hybrid medium wherein it uses both the text as well as images in order to convey the life story of Ambedkar. The illustrations are done in the folk idiom of Gond art by Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam. The storyline, written by Srividya Natrajan and S Anand, is loosely modeled upon the *Autobiographical Notes* of Ambedkar. The same is available in Vasant Moon's *Babasaheb Ambedkar: Writings and Speeches* under the heading 'Waiting for a Visa'. *Bhimayana* creates a counter-narrative against Brahminism by focusing upon the actions/attitudes of upper castes towards the subjugated castes. Images are given equal space and importance which helps the book to subvert the hegemony of the written word. The text is divided into three parts: water, shelter, travel. Through these three sections, the book tries to present a historiography of the life and times of Ambedkar as well as the struggles of the Dalit community through these times. In doing so, it borrows heavily from the novelistic form of narration. Nandini Chandra notes: "while the publishers shy away from calling it a graphic novel and stick to the more universal category *graphic book*, the overarching frame in which it is slotted, marketed and reviewed are that of *Graphic Novel*."

Bhimayana is a new age graphic book that defies the conventional codes of graphic narratives. The book is radical both in its content as well as the form. One of the major aims of the book is to raise awareness about the continuity of Dalit struggle in contemporary times by creating a visual literacy around the issue. In a radical departure from western models of sequential art, *Bhimayana* uses an ancient tribal folk art form to narrate an ages' old narrative of oppression. The telling symbolism of the images, the structure and placement of the text, the colours, and beautiful demarcation through *digna* patterns – all come together to create this radical experiment in the graphic narrative form which challenges hegemony in terms of form, content, literary models and purpose. The next section will deal with the hero of the *Bhimayana*.

2.4 KNOWING THE 'HERO' OF THE *BHIMAYANA*

In popular imagination and conventional history books, Dr Ambedkar is largely known as the Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee. As you may already be aware, having read it in the previous unit, Ambedkar was a prolific student and a politician of repute. He was born on April 14, 1891 in a Mahar family of Mhow (part of Central Provinces) in western India. After graduating from University of Mumbai, he went for higher studies to Columbia University and London School of Economics. He also served as the first Minister of Law and Justice of Independent India from August 1945 to September 1951. Most of the statues of Ambedkar represent him as the wearing a suit and tie, big glasses and holding a book. This image while emphasising one aspect of his personality, fails to depict his attachment and engagement with the Dalit community; for many of whom wearing such an attire or having access to higher education remains a distant dream even today.

While testifying to the public imagination of him being urban/educated/elite, who, played a crucial role in laying the foundation of modern, democratic and a

'just' India, one must also remember that he played an equally important role in Dalit awakening against centuries' old caste based oppression. He remained a lifelong crusader of affirmative action for the socially marginalised communities. This definitely brought him at loggerheads with the government many a times. In 1924, he founded the *Bahishkrit Hitkarini Sabha* with an aim to 'Educate, Agitate, Organise' the depressed classes.

India has come a long way in granting constitutional rights to all the citizens irrespective of their caste and creed. The *Dalit Pathers* movement of the 1970s further emboldened the Dalits to fight for their right to dignified life. Despite rigorous efforts, the atrocities against Dalits have not stopped. Constitutional rights have not really changed the attitude of the upper castes towards the people of the "lower castes". It is important to underscore that caste is not a thing of the past. Repeated hate crimes like rape, murder, parading naked, etc against the oppressed classes which floods the newspapers on a daily basis, are a testimony to the fact that caste is a living force in Indian culture and politics. Given the manner in which caste polarisation occurs during elections, one can conclude that caste is also a form of power and privilege to some and also a reason for large scale socio-economic marginalisation for several others.

It is in this context that *Bhimayana* appears to be radical in its approach. Dr Ambedkar as the protagonist of *Bhimayana* does not borrow the features of superheroes to launch a crusade against caste based discrimination. Rather, he uses his position to depict the struggles of the Dalit community. Even though the structure of *Bhimayana* is largely modeled on Ambedkar's *Autobiographical Notes*, it is as much a memoir of the community whose struggles have only changed shape over a period of time. Pramod K Nayar writes that the life story of Ambedkar "was constantly yoked to contemporary India by carefully noting the continuities of caste based oppression and anti Dalit violence".

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Write a short note on the contribution of Dr Ambedkar towards the uplift of the depressed classes?

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- 2) Do you think that the issue of caste has contemporary relevance? Why/ Why not?

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2.5 A NOTE ON THE STRUCTURE OF *BHIMAYANA*

In this section, we shall examine the manner in which the graphic narrative *Bhimayana* is structured. The text opens by showcasing any ‘one day in recent past’ where two people are sitting at a bus stop and discussing the relevance of caste based reservation in education and employment opportunities. The contemporary relevance of the text comes from this image which depicts the varying attitudes of the modern generation towards affirmative action for subjugated communities. The page (11) which is brought alive by merely three dialogues but many images depicting ‘modern times’ serves as the framing device of the text. There is a constant back and forth movement in time as the knowledge production around the complex dialectics of anti-caste ideology takes place through questions and answers between these two individuals. The two individuals finally arrive at an understanding on the caste struggle towards the end, which is, as much an understanding meant for the readers as for the individuals in question. In doing so, the text aims to represent a prejudice-free depiction of the caste based struggle from the past to the present times. The cut-outs from the newspapers that talk of modern day dehumanisation of Dalit life also serve the same purpose which is to underscore the contemporary relevance of *Bhimayana*.

The first part is titled *Water* and narrates the story of young Bhim’s first experiences of caste based discrimination. The segregation from the classmates, the restrictions on accessing potable water, lack of access to the barber – all depict the attitude of the larger community towards the untouchables. The narrative also focuses upon the sub-human existence of Dalit life where animals have better rights than them. Despite being one of the ‘lucky few’ as his father was a *subedar* in the British Army, Bhim is fairly agitated to notice the discrimination he suffers at school and in society. On his visit to Satara, not even a single cart-man agrees to give a ride to a *mahar* even if the *mahar* was willing to pay double the fare. The full reality of caste discrimination becomes evident to Bhim when he undertakes that journey to Satara and learns it the hard way by undergoing hardships. The text also makes it a point to note that these hardships are not a thing of the past. It depicts the newspaper cuttings from 2008 in Satara where a dalit man was killed for planning to dig a personal well in his compound. The present day conversation around the *Mahad Satyagraha* of 1923 further emphasises the fact that, a community had to historically challenge the established structures of society for access to something as elemental and basic as water.

Section Two of the book titled *Shelter* opens with an image of an adult Ambedkar wearing a suit and glasses symbolising his encounter with western education and cultural values. While away at Columbia, he had almost forgotten the experience of untouchability. When he boards a train to Baroda in 1917 to join a government job, he is immediately reminded of his position in the social structure, in a conversation with a fellow brahmin passenger. Apparently, he goes to Baroda to join as a Probationer in the Accountant General’s Office but cannot find a place to stay in Baroda. He cannot find shelter anywhere in Baroda despite repeated efforts. He is forcibly evicted from his temporary stay at a Parsi Inn by an armed mob of Parsis. None of his friends allow him to stay at his place citing his lower caste status. Helplessly, he decides to return to Bombay on the next train. With no place to go, he decides to spend the remaining duration of five

hours in the Kamathi Baug public garden. This series of events comes with a realisation that an untouchable remains untouchable not just for an upper caste Hindu but also for Parsis, Christians and Muslims. The framed narrative also refutes a mainstream claim that caste exists only in remote parts of the country. Ambedkar was refused a shelter in the city of Baroda in spite of his academic credentials. The situation in contemporary Indian cities is hardly any different where one can still find similar incidents of forcible eviction, caste based slurs, public beating, etc. on almost an everyday basis.

The third book *Travel* is located in Aurangabad, in 1934. This was the time when Ambedkar was already recognised as an influential leader of the depressed classes. He was closely attached to the cause of Dalit communities and worked rigorously for the socio-political awakening of this section of society. Here, the text talks about the rigid structure of *chaturvarnashrama* within the Hindu fold where a dalit is looked down upon even by the one doing menial jobs like driving a tonga. Even the doctors refuse to touch/treat the body of a dalit patient fearing that the touch might pollute their sense of purity. The framed narrative then comes back to the major debates around the contribution of Gandhi and Ambedkar towards establishing the principles of equality in society. The text foregrounds that Ambedkar remained a lifelong advocate of equality for all sections, to make them independent and be able to fight for their own rights. Gandhi on the other hand was more concerned with the freedom struggle. While the former hoped for complete annihilation of the caste system so as to bring all the citizens at par, the latter promoted only cosmetic changes to the caste system so that untouchables could also be accommodated within the fourfold structure of Hindu caste system. Tired of the regressive caste system within Hinduism, he eventually embraced Buddhism in 1956.

The fourth section of the book decodes and simplifies the *Art of Bhimayana* for the readers. It narrates the story of the gradual development of *Pardhan Gond* art from being a decorative art used during festivities to the one making to a mainstream graphic book in 2011. The next section will look at some of the major themes in *Bhimayana*. If you recall we mentioned in an earlier course that a novel/ a play/ any text for that matter has a main idea/ theme and several other ideas/ themes that hold the novel together and add to the richness of the text along with fitting into the overall structure of the text.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) What is *Chaturvarnashrama* in Hinduism?

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2) Explain the significance of the framed narrative in the *Bhimayana*?

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3) What purpose do the excerpts from newspapers serve in the text?

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2.6 MAJOR THEMES: READING BETWEEN THE LINES

Bhimayana is considered to be one of the most important graphic texts of contemporary popular fiction. While the tools of analysing the text are largely borrowed from the conventions of graphic writing, *Bhimayana* undercuts the very same conventions despite falling under the broad category of the Graphic Narrative. This section is further divided into three subsections, with each subsection dealing with a specific theme in the graphic narrative – the *Bhimayana*. The *Bhimayana* also lends very well to the idea of subverting the codes of graphic narratives. Let us look at that first.

2.6.1 Subversion of the Conventional Codes of Graphic Narratives

Comic book writing involves the usage of rectangular framing to separate one line of thought from another. The illustrators of *Bhimayana* found this frame to be stifling for the characters. They wanted to create ‘*khulla*’/‘open’ art where all the characters could breathe easily. Instead, they chose *digna* patterns to create boundaries. The narrative is not unilinear in approach. It goes back and forth in time constantly. Further, the same characters may not appear identical at all times. At times it is difficult to even distinguish one character from the other. The text is referential in nature which functions in both a connotative as well as a denotative manner. The meaning does not really emerge only through the characters but takes shape in accordance to the placement of humans, birds, trains, buses, sky, *lathi*, and even pointed fingers or staring eyes. All these elements come together to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of Dalit existence, their challenges and their resolve to fight back. The next subsection will look at what is now called alternate historiography.

2.6.2 Alternate Historiography

Through references to certain political events of modern Indian history, the text aims to focus upon alternate histories which seem to fill in the gaps between mainstream historical narratives about the caste struggle and the narratives of and by the lower castes. What gets published and what is deliberately left out in history books is a matter of power politics. The 'authenticity' of this History is also mediated by vested interests of successive ruling regimes. While the *Dandi March* against the salt rule is emphasised in modern political history, the *Mahad Satyagraha* is left out of the larger discourses around the freedom struggle. The protest in which 3000 dalits were led by Ambedkar to drink from the Chadavar Tank came to be known as the "Declaration of Independence" in the Dalit Movement. However, the event which aimed to bring dalits on equal footing with their upper caste counterparts is conspicuously missing from mainstream history. Similarly, when Dalits were promised separate electorates by the then British Prime Minister **Ramsay McDonald**, Gandhi strongly opposed the idea citing that this measure would further disintegrate Hindu society. While mainstream history tends to either skip this piece of information or dilutes its impact upon the lower classes, *Bhimayana* foregrounds that the *Poona Pact* of 1932 was actually a betrayal of Dalits' struggle for an autonomous and independent voice of their own. Gandhi went on a fast unto death, to prevent the granting of a separate electorate to the Dalits. Due to this arm-twisting, Ambedkar was forced to sign the *Poona Pact* which settled for electorates for Dalits within the seats meant for the Hindus. Let us quickly look at the third subsection that deals with how the word *Bhimayana* is a pun on the word *Ramayana*, once again a subversion of sorts.

2.6.3 *Bhimayana* – A Pun on 'Ramayana'

The title *Bhimayana* is a pun on the epic narrative '*Ramayana*'. The way the *Ramayana* talks of the journey of Rama through various stages of his life overcoming hardships on the way, *Bhimayana* also narrates the life story of a young boy - Bhim who transcends his social-historical reality and goes on to acquire the status of the quintessential 'hero' of Dalits for ages to come. The text uses the overarching frame of the journey motif used in epics but it does not allow the narrative to fall into an epic-like structure in the conventional sense. Rather, it showcases an alternative story of heroism via subversive techniques of storytelling. While the *Ramayana* speaks of the coming of age story of Rama and depicts the struggles of an upper class Prince to establish his kingdom after fighting the enemies, the *Bhimayana* appears to present a completely contrasting image. The lofty style of epic proportions is abandoned and an informal conversational tone becomes the narrative strategy in *Bhimayana*. The traditional hero is replaced by a young boy of the Mahar community and the text chooses to depict the 'heroic' journey of Dr Ambedkar and his struggles in fighting for basic amenities. *Bhimayana*, in that sense, is not merely a story about *Bhim/Ambedkar* but also symbolises the journey of an entire community and their struggle through the ages against caste based atrocities.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Write a short note on the Poona Pact of 1932.

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- 2) Enlist any five characteristics of an Epic.

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- 3) Discuss the dissimilarities between the Ramayana and the Bhimayana with relevant examples.

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2.6.4 *Pardhan Gonds and their Folk Art*

In this section we shall take a quick look at *Gond* art and see how it has been utilised in the *Bhimayana*. Questions that arise are is *Gond* art just used to give a different effect to the graphic narrative or does it serve another purpose? The *Gonds* are a tribal community largely found in central India. They form the largest *adivasi* community in India with widespread presence in Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. *Pardhan Gonds* are a sub-part of the larger *Gond* community and have traditionally served as the ‘keepers of the cultural heritage’ of their clan. The origins of their traditional folk art are rooted in oral narratives transmitted through songs and storytelling. This conventional way of living suffered a major setback when the patronage of these artists declined over a period of time. As a survival strategy, they turned to a visual mode of storytelling. They began by painting *digna* patterns on the mud walls of their houses for decorative purposes. Coloured mud of different kinds was used to convey the story through ample use of motifs. Gradually, around the early 1980s their talent came to the limelight with the active support of artist **Jagdish Swaminathan** who promoted the traditional artists as professional ones. With this, canvas and acrylic/fabric colors were also brought to use in order to depict the aesthetics of tribal *gond* art.

Pardhan Gond art is pregnant with rich symbolism where meanings are not static. Often, the art is referential in nature where the collective meaning of a given panel comes from the minute details which might go unnoticed in the first reading. The paintings showcase beautifully the peaceful co-existence of living and non-living forms. Humans do not necessarily form the larger than life characters in their scheme of things.

In *Bhimayana*, the illustrators have avoided the staple boxed narratives of comic writing. They have allowed for a breathing space for all the characters. There are no gutters to demarcate one line of thought from another. Rather, one image seamlessly merges into another. *Digna* patterns are used effectively to demarcate certain sections if needed. Often a story begins in the present, refers to the past and comes back to the present on the same page; just like the framed narrative. There is an associated meaning with every single image. Even the strategy of representing characters keeps on shifting throughout the course of the text. For example, to depict thirsty Bhim, the image of a fish is attached to his persona (pg 19). As his thirst increases, the image of fish becomes bigger (pg 21). While waiting for his train in Kamathi Baug, Ambedkar himself turns into a park. In fact, there is no effort to make the hero stand out in the crowded panel. He looks almost similar to other members of his community. This 'de-iconising' of the hero is a step forward than the didactic approach used in the *Amar Chitra Katha* series that showcased a chronological depiction of Ambedkar's struggles right from his younger days to his eventual rise as the father of the Indian Constitution. *Bhimayana*, on the other hand, narrates the collective struggle of the community in which one's caste identity overshadows his personal achievements. There are repeated references to Ambedkar's realisation of his own insignificance in front of the diabolic caste structure. As a child, he is pained to see that animals have better rights than dalits.

In one particular panel, the entire page is filled with the large colourful images of animals having access to water and being groomed by human. Ambedkar's minor presence in the corner of this panel in black and white speaks volume about the sub-human existence meted out to untouchables (pg 23). The opening page of Book two depicts a similar story where a learned Ambedkar returns to India carrying the 'heavy weight' of his western education. The panel is divided between two major images – water at the top and shelter like image at the bottom. Ambedkar is actually stuck between the two. Despite his education, he remains caught between the struggle for water and shelter (pg 59). His numerous degrees have helped little in changing the attitudes of upper caste people towards him. He tries hard but fails to find a shelter for himself in Baroda. Thereby, begins a long struggle for equality that culminates with the drafting of the constitution where provisions for equality were inserted for all citizens of the nation and untouchability was abolished by law. The text goes on to depict these struggles and achievements through various panels but a lot needs to be done even today because the constitutional provisions have not been able to change the mindset. In 2006, a village near Nagpur witnessed a gruesome incident in which a mother and a daughter were raped, paraded naked and subsequently killed by an upper caste mob. Incidents like Khairlanji (Nagpur) are a living reminder that little has changed in modern India when it comes to caste based atrocities. S Anand rightly argues in *Bhimayana*: "Each time you view a page in this book, you will discover new ways of seeing, new meanings, new pleasures, fresh insights. (102)"

The text also presents a brilliant example of metonymic representation. Different viewpoints are suggested by multiple hands pointing in the same direction (pg 20); an angry mob is shown by attaching heads and shoes to axes and *lathis*. The existence of different animals, birds, and insects is not merely for the sake of filling gaps. They are also active participants in the storytelling. Even non-living entities have been given a humane dimension by making serpentine structures, railway tracks, showcasing a tear-shedding earthmover, pained to see the mob lynching a Dalit. There is no linear sense of time. The past and the present exist in a continuum both in terms of the narration as well as the narrative strategy. Talking about this ‘mytho-epic universe’ of *Bhimayana*, Nandini Chandra writes: “This kind of animistic excess and fluidity of morphing forms tells us something about the nature of imagination in Gondi artwork, in contrast to the void fixated imagination defying Vedic cosmos. (22)” Let us look at the significance of the bubble motif that is to be found in the narrative in the section.

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) Write a short note on the Gond Tribes.

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- 2) What do you understand by Motif? Comment on water as a motif in *Bhimayana*.

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2.6.5 Significance of the Bubble Motif

Here, we shall examine the significance of the bubble motif and see how or what it does in the graphic narrative- *Bhimayana*. There are repeated occurrences of speech bubbles throughout the text. The bird speech bubble signifies the voice of the weak and the oppressed. These people are generally the victims of caste based discrimination and often fail to raise their voice against the victimisers. Contrary to these, are the scorpion shaped bubbles venomous both in appearance as well as content. These scorpion shaped bubbles represent the harsh, slur-filled, abusive attitude of the upper caste/upper class people towards the untouchables. The thought bubbles merely reflect the musings of the mind without giving details to the active listeners. Given the limited agency of Dalits in expressing their viewpoints, the thought bubbles allow the reader to see the state of mind of the affected party. Thus, we see how the bubbles are used to substantiate a point of view or to get a message across in the graphic narrative. Colours used by the

Gond artists too have a cultural significance. We shall look at this aspect briefly in the next section.

2.6.6 The Symbolism of Colours

Colors have a major significance in *Gondi* folk art. Traditionally, *Pardhan Gonds* made use of seasonally coloured soil to decorate the walls through beautiful *digna* patterns. *Bhimayana* also makes creative use of colours in the illustrations. Every single image carries multiple layers of meaning where colours also help to further emphasise the impact of the image. They serve different purposes at different times. In a text like *Bhimayana*, the background carries as much significance as the foreground itself. At times, colour codes are used to separate these two. They also act as segregating device between two distinct ideas/events/incidents. For instance, page 23 depicts animals and the background is in bold colours while human are painted in a dull black and white. This signifies the degradation of dalit life, and the depiction indicates that dalits are treated even worse than animals/ beasts.

The text makes use of vibrant colours like orange, green, yellow, and blue in different parts. The text boxes painted in yellow depict the speeches/views of Ambedkar while those in dark orange depict the views of Gandhi. The one in the mint green shade contain the excerpts from the Indian constitution (Pg 90-91). The vibrant blue colour is majorly used to depict water but it symbolises freshness, positivity and energy. Do you think the colours could suggest/ stand for other issues as well?

2.7 LET US SUM UP

The roots of caste based discrimination are deep seated in India and it exists as a continuum from the ancient past to the present, and contemporary times. The framed narrative of *Bhimayana* serves as a brilliant reminder for the audience to, visualise that even though they are witnessing incidents from the past (incidents of oppression faced by the Dalit community in general and Dr Ambedkar in particular), the present - day experiences of Dalits are strikingly similar. A counter narrative against upper caste hegemony, *Bhimayana* not only delineates the trajectory of historical trauma but also develops an efficient vocabulary of counter – abuse. The double standards and hypocrisy of the upper castes is laid bare by repeated references to incidents of the rape of dalit women.

There is a complete disregard of their own heightened notions of ‘purity and pollution’ when it comes to raping these women belonging to the lower castes. While the hand pump and the earth mower are shown to be humane, there is ‘de-humanisation’ of the angry upper caste mob whose bodies are replaced by the sticks. The choice of graphic medium allows for a wider reach given a sense of excitement associated with graphic narratives. Moreover, it is a powerful medium as it triggers associations. It allows the reader to see multiple histories of oppression and understand their contemporary relevance.

The unit focused upon the rise of the Graphic Narratives as a serious category of literature. It critically engaged with Srividya Natarajan's *Bhimayana* while paying attention to major themes. It further talked about the creative brilliance of the text in using an ancient art form - *gondi* to depict a centuries' old history of

oppression. While the tools are traditional, the technique of narrativisation is brand new which renders the story into a graphic format to raise awareness about India's hidden apartheid at a local as well as a global level via visual literacy.

2.8 QUESTIONS

- 1) What makes Bhimayana an instance of Popular Literature? Explain with the help of relevant examples?
- 2) What is an allegory? Give any two examples from the text Bhimayana.
- 3) Explain the significance of the Mahad Satyagraha.

2.9 HINTS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Any three comics and why you read them will be your answer.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Read section 2.4 carefully and answer in your own words.
- 2) Read section 2.4 carefully and answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Read section 2.5 carefully and answer in your own words.
- 2) Read section 2.5 carefully and answer in your own words.
- 3) Read section 2.5 carefully and answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Read section 2.6.2 carefully and answer in your own words.
- 2) Read section 2.6.3 carefully as well as revisit BEGC-101 {102. and answer in your own words.
- 3) Read section 2.6.3 carefully and answer in your own words.

Check Your Progress 5

- 1) Read section 2.6.4 carefully and answer in your own words.
- 2) Refer to the Glossary, section 2.5, and section 2.7 and answer in your own words.

2.10 GLOSSARY

Alternate Historiography : Refers to fiction that is based largely on history and that which explores what might have happened if certain historical events, figures, etc., had been different; a history that is told from an unusual or unorthodox perspective. Historiography can very simply be defined as the history of history; or as the study of how history was written, by whom, and why it was recorded as such. Moreover, it is a look at the:

ifs, and hows, of how historical events have been reinterpreted by historians over time and why. Historiography is important for a wide range of reasons. It helps us understand why historical events have been interpreted so differently over time. In other words, historiography helps us examine not only history itself, but also the broader, overlying characteristics that shape the recording of history itself. For instance, did a new power come to being and did its historians alter the loser's history for generations? Or maybe economic issues caused historians to look at a historical event through a different lens. Just as critically, historiography lets us study history with a critical eye. It helps us understand what biases may have shaped the historical record. It ensures we don't blindly trust what we read from historians 10, 100, and 1,000 years ago. Simultaneously, it also ensures that we do not fall victim to the same mistakes made by some previous historians. By extension historiography lets us dig for, and get to, the factual history behind the historical myth, so to speak. It gives us a way to re-interpret the biases of a historian's perspective in a more equitable manner. So long as we remain unbiased in the process, of course. Ultimately, historiography gives us an appreciation of how factors that shape and alter the recording of history shape and alter our interpretation of it as a result.

Allegory : An allegory is a representation of an abstract or a spiritual meaning conveyed through a comparison of a concrete or material form; it may also be described as the figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another.

Auschwitz : Auschwitz, is also known as Auschwitz-Birkenau, and was the largest Nazi concentration and death camp that was opened in 1940. Auschwitz began as a detention center for political prisoners and is located in southern Poland. It was to quickly evolve into a network of camps where Jewish people and other perceived enemies of the Nazi state were killed, often in gas chambers, or used as slave labour. Josef Mengele (1911-79) also conducted some of the most barbaric medical experiments on the prisoners there. During World War II (1939-45), more than 1 million people, lost their lives at Auschwitz. In January 1945, when it was obvious that the Soviet army was going to

overrun Auschwitz, the Nazi officials abandoned the camp and sent around 60,000 prisoners on a forced march to other locations. Eventually when the Soviets entered Auschwitz, they found thousands of emaciated detainees and piles of corpses left behind.

- Avante Garde** : Avante Garde is a concept that may be explained with a movement / phase that occurred in the sphere of the arts. The painters, writers, musicians, and other artists whose ideas, styles, and methods were very original or modern in comparison to the period in which they live, or the work of these artists is referred to as avantgarde.
- Brahmanism** : Brahmanism is an ancient Indian religious tradition that emerged from the Vedic religion. Brahmanism emphasised the rites performed by, and the status of, the Brahman, or the priestly class.
- Concentration camp** : A Concentration camp is described by Britannica.com as an internment centre for political prisoners and members of national or minority groups who are confined for reasons of state security, exploitation, or punishment, usually by executive decree or military order. People are grouped in camps such as this based more on ethnic or political affiliation sans benefit either of indictment or fair trial.
- Hegemony** : Hegemony is the dominance of one group over another, often supported by legitimating norms and ideas. The term is also used to describe the relatively dominant position of a particular set of ideas and their associated tendency to become commonsensical and intuitive, thereby inhibiting the dissemination or even the articulation of alternative ideas.
- High art** : High art was a term used to describe the most aesthetically pleasing and challenging (in terms of production) arts, while low art was used to describe what was not challenging, aesthetically pleasing.
- Holocaust** : The word "Holocaust," from the Greek words "holos" (whole) and "kaustos" (burned), was historically used to describe a sacrificial offering burned on an altar. Since 1945, the word has taken on a new and horrible meaning: the ideological and systematic state-sponsored

prosecution and mass murder of millions of European Jews (as well as millions of others, including Gypsies, the intellectually disabled, dissidents and homosexuals) by the German Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945. To the anti-Semitic Nazi leader Adolf Hitler, Jews were an inferior race, an alien threat to German racial purity and community. After years of Nazi rule in Germany, during which Jews were consistently persecuted, Hitler's "final solution"—now known as the Holocaust—came to fruition under the cover of World War II, with mass killing centers constructed in the concentration camps of occupied Poland. Approximately six million Jews and some 5 million others, were targeted for racial, political, ideological and behavioral reasons, and died in the Holocaust. More than one million of those who perished were children.

Marvel comics : Marvel Comics is the brand name and primary imprint of Marvel Worldwide Inc., formerly Marvel Publishing, Inc. and Marvel Comics Group, a publisher of American comic books and related media. In 2009, The Walt Disney Company acquired Marvel Entertainment, Marvel Worldwide's parent company. The first modern comic books under the Marvel Comics brand were the science-fiction anthology *Journey into Mystery* #69 and the teen-humor title *Patsy Walker* #95. Then, in the wake of DC Comics' success in reviving superheroes in the late 1950s and early 1960s, particularly with the Flash, Green Lantern, Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Green Arrow and other members of the team the Justice League of America, Marvel followed suit.

Motif : In a literary work, a motif can be seen as an image, sound, action, or other figure that has a symbolic significance, and contributes toward the development of a theme. A motif is a recurrent image, idea, or symbol that develops or explains a theme. Sometimes examples of motif are mistakenly identified as examples of symbols. Symbols are images, ideas, sounds, or words that represent something else, and help to understand an idea or a thing. Motifs, on the other hand, are images, ideas, sounds, or words that help to explain the central idea of a literary work – the theme. Moreover, a symbol may appear once or twice in a literary work, whereas a motif is a recurring element.

- Paradigmatic** : Paradigmatic means relating to the way different words or language items can be chosen to play a particular part in a language structure.
- Symbolism** : Symbolism is the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities, by giving them symbolic meanings that are different from their literal sense. Symbolism can take different forms. Generally, it is an object representing another, to give an entirely different meaning that is much deeper and more significant. Sometimes, however, an action, an event or a word spoken by someone may have a symbolic value. For instance, “smile” is a symbol of friendship. Similarly, the action of someone smiling at you may stand as a symbol of the feeling of affection which that person has for you. Symbols do shift their meanings depending on the context they are used in. “A chain,” for example, may stand for “union” as well as “imprisonment”. Thus, symbolic meaning of an object or an action is understood by when, where, and how it is used. It also depends on who reads the work.

2.11 SUGGESTED READINGS & REFERENCES

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