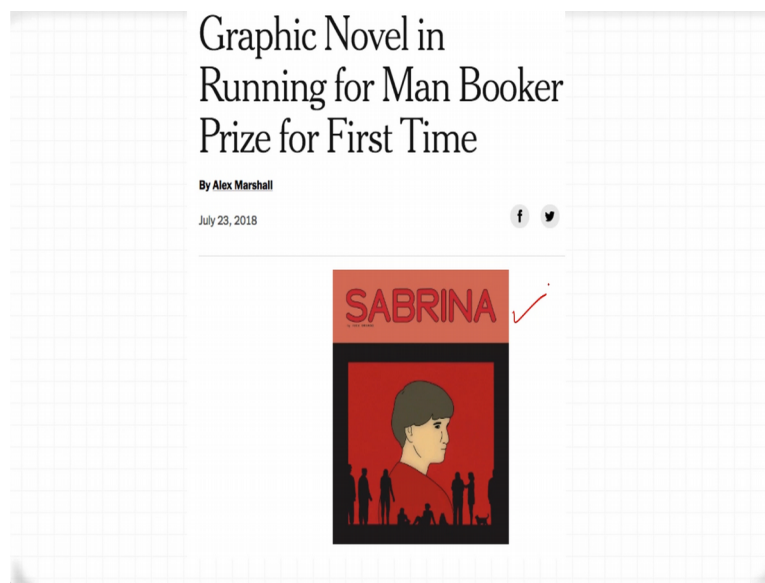


Indian Fiction in English
Dr. Merin Simi Raj
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology - Madras

Module - 11
Lecture - 40
Graphic Novel in India

Good morning and welcome to today's session. Having spoken about the newer critically look at new writings produced in English in India. Today we look at the different ways in which graphic novel can be approached from a critical point of view.

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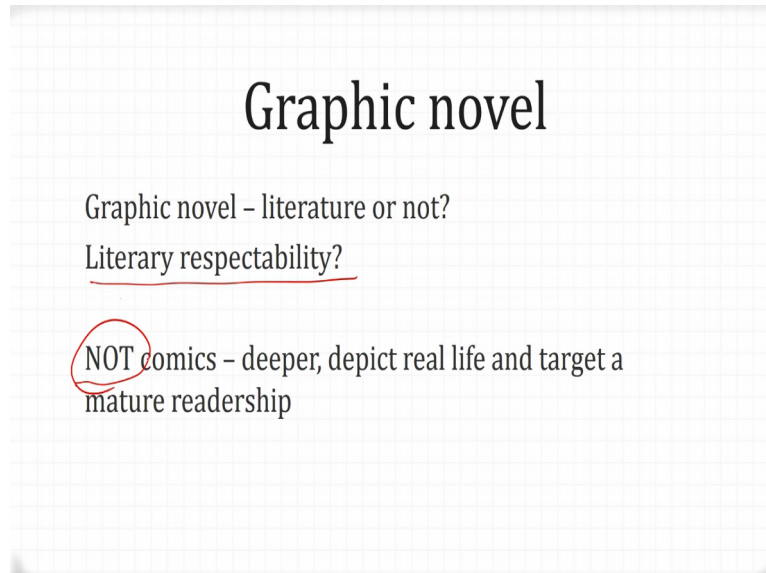


Some of you might have paid attention to this news which appeared recently, where a graphic novel was in running for Man Booker Prize for the first time. The title of the novel was Sabrina. There were mixed responses to this, to the extent that some of them were arguing that a graphic novel cannot be considered as part of this genre under this genre fiction. but nevertheless the responses were also encouraging and promising.

One of the news pieces from London read like this, A graphic novel has made the longlist of the Man Booker Prize, Britain's most prestigious literary award. The nomination marks a, major breakthrough for the format. Nick Drnaso's Sabrina, a work that Zadie Smith called, the best book in any medium, I have read about our current moment, is the surprise name among the 13 finalists announced today.

So, I would like to situate this discussion on graphic novel in India within this context about the newer formats coming in and challenging the conventions of story-telling and also the formats within which stories were being conventionally told.

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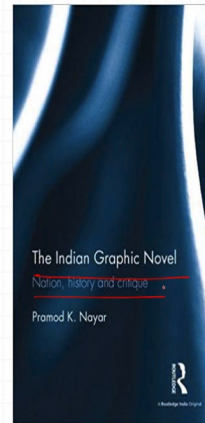


And when one talks about a graphic novel and when we try to approach it from a critical point of view, this is one of the questions that most of us face, whether this is literature or not. And what would the literary respectability and reputation of this genre or even sub- genre. Before we go on to look at the different kinds of graphic novel which is currently in circulation in India, it is important to understand that this is different from comics.

Graphic novel is not a comic book. Unlike a comic book it is deeper; it depicts real life and the targets are mature readership. Not to say that comics do not do those things at all, but this is the loose general definition that we would stick to while talking about graphic novel in today's lecture. You may not find too many books which look at graphic novel.

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o This book welcomes the graphic turn in Indian Writing in English



In a serious way. It is in that context that I place the significance of Pramod Nayar's recent work, *The Indian Graphic Novel, Nation, History and Critique*. As Nayar himself announces, this is a book that welcomes the graphic turn in Indian Writing in English. He makes an attempt to theorise graphic novel. And also, to talk about graphic novel within the tradition of Indian Writing in English. His most persistent argument being;

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Theorising graphic novel

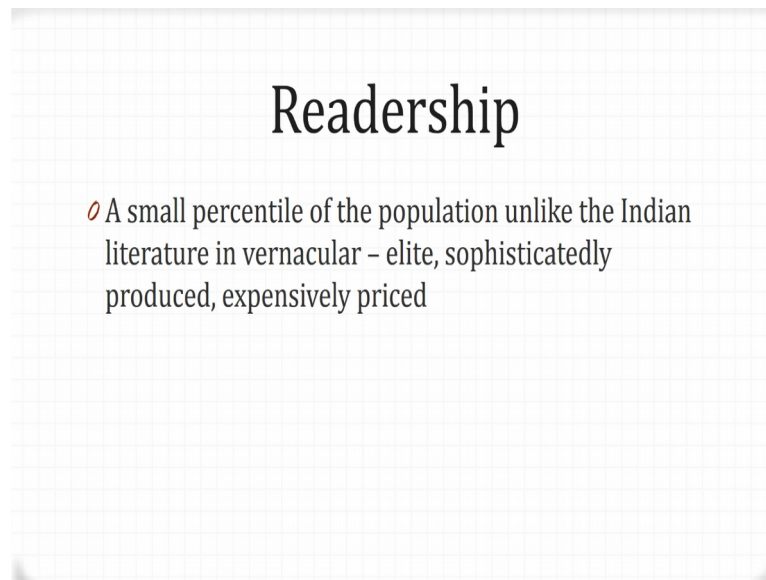
- o "this present book forwards the claim that the medium possesses enough formal and thematic complexities, not to mention political edges, to deserve the same (if not more) sustained academic attention as traditional genres in IWE" (Pramod Nayar)
- o "The Indian graphic novel possesses all the qualifications of a literary text"

This present book forwards the claim that the medium possesses in a formal and thematic complexities, not to mention the political edges, to deserve the same, if not more, sustained academic attention as traditional genres in Indian Writing in English. And he also goes on to make this argument, this statement, right at the outset of his book that the Indian graphic novel possesses all qualifications, all the qualifications of a literary text.

We do not therefore propose to engage in a debate about whether graphic novel is literary enough or not. Whether we have enough within the space of graphic fiction to engage with it thematically, formally. Is it complex enough to deserve certain kinds of things that Pramod Nayar as a bringing into this discussion such as the nation, history and critique which are part of traditional genres within the Indian Writing in English.

While we are trying to be attentive to the growing readership and in the need for a sustained critic of graphic Indian fiction, graphic fiction in India. one also needs to be aware of the limitations in this process. There is only a small percentile of the population whom we can identify as a readership of a graphic fiction. This is unlike the Indian literature vernacular or even unlike the Indian Writing in English.

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Some of those works you would also realise they are not very easily accessible. They target an elite readership. It is sophisticatedly produced and mostly expensively priced. This is something that Pramod Nayar also alerts us to, when he enters this discussion on graphic fiction. There is a term that Nayar introduces us to, when he is taking us to this discussion in graphic fiction, Critical Literacy.

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Critical literacy

- o Unlike the authoritative, definitive, pedagogic histories of textbooks or official documentation, the graphic narrative tells us that there is no History outside modes of representation
- o “literacy in the demotic register of the graphic narrative” – the average Indian’s exposure to a range of visual stimuli – Amar Chitra Katha, Chandamama, Manmohan Desai films etc

He argues that unlike the authoritative definitive pedagogic histories of text book or official documentation, the graphic narrative tells us that there is no history outside modes of representation. So, there is a serious way in which he encourages us to approach graphic fiction. And he says that this is something that an average Indian audience, an average Indian reader would find easier to do because of our literacy in the demotic register of the graphic narrative.

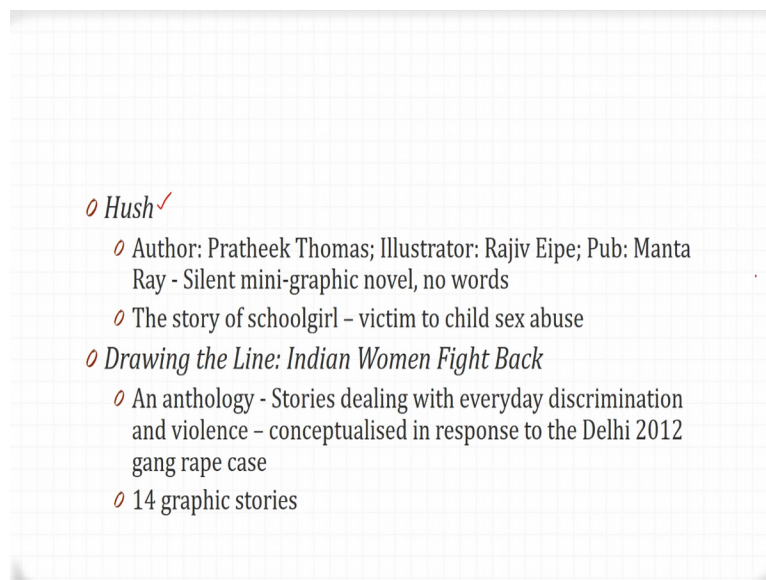
And this he says can be exemplified in the Indian's exposure to a range of visual stimuli whether it is Amar Chitra Katha or Chandamama series or the Manmohan Desai films and the kind of posters, the colourful posters that we were introduced to.

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So he, Nayar at the outset argues that, the Indian is, the average Indian is already exposed to a range of colourful visual stimuli. So, it would be an easy transition to engage with graphic fiction because the critical literacy is already there. And he makes this powerful argument that there is no history outside modes of representation. And this we would also begin to notice when we look at some of the prominent works of recent times.

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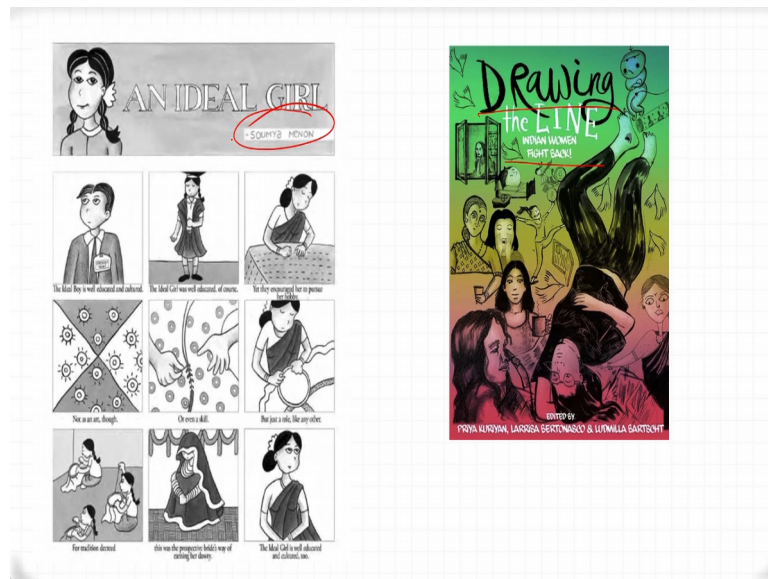


This is some of the works that Nayar initially introduces us to, *Hush*; the author is Pratheek Thomas, the illustrator is Rajiv Eipe and it is published by Manta Ray. You can notice that there are different figures, there are different kinds of author functions at work here. We have an author and also an illustrator. So, it is certainly different from a conventional work of fiction. *Hush* is presented as a silent mini graphic novel.

It is a slender volume, there are no words in it, only visuals, only pictures. It is the story of a school girl, who has been made a victim to child sex abuse. So, this is also a work which is come under the intention of awareness. *Drawing the Line: Indian Women Fight Back* is an anthology brought out by Zubaan. It has a series of stories dealing with everyday discrimination violence.

And this was, there was a lot of ground work which went on behind the production of this work. It was conceptualised in response to our Delhi 2012, a gang rape case. It has about 14 graphic stories which engage us with women's fights and women's struggles and their difficulties from different points of view.

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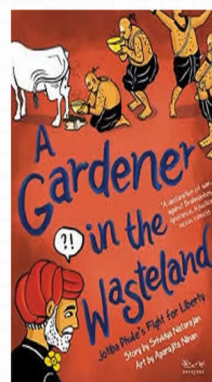
An ideal girl is one of the stories in this anthology, Drawing the Line Indian Women Fight Back. It is by Soumya Menon, as you can see here. And this is how the, each of the illustrations featured. It is in different panels. Using Nayar's proposition that that graphic fiction has enough metal, enough theme and enough complexity to merit a serious critical attention.

I take you through a series of works which have which have produced in the contemporary. Some of the important works which would later perhaps be turned this a set of works which brought about this graphic movement, which gave momentum to this graphic fiction movement within the Indian context.

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A Gardener in the Wasteland: Jotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty

- o Navayana publication, 2012
- o Story: Srividya Natarajan
- o Art: Aparajita Ninan



A Gardener in the Wasteland, Jotiba Phule's Fight for Liberty. It is a Navayana publication which came out in 2012. The story was by Srividya Natarajan and the art was by Aparajita Ninan. And it graphically represents a less known story, a less narrated story of a Jotiba Phule. It is not a one of its kind work, we can find a lot of such works engaging with real history and trying to depict it visually; which is why Nayar also perhaps feels compelled to argue that there is no history outside the representation.

Having noticed how graphic fiction actually deals with serious history, serious issues and complex political figures and ideology;

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It is important to look at the history and background of this new genre which is now in vogue. Comics if we notice they have been serious business in India since 1967 with Amar Chitra Katha series. Graphic novel was a term coined only in 1964; it was in America by Will Eisner. But soon after that we find Amar Chitra Katha series becoming a huge success in the Indian context.

Though they term graphic fiction was not used to talk about Amar Chitra Katha, it was mostly seen as a comics. This history and background can be found relevant in situating graphic fiction in the contemporary. And also, it accentuates the need to critically approach and critically frame this genre. Because we do share a history which dates back to the 1960s.

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Progressive graphic novels

- o "They rely less on the corporate conveyor-belt production system of editors, writers, pencillers, inkers, and colourists and letterers. Instead, they are often the work and vision of a single complete auteur or a close partnership working as one. Being in control of every task brings a greater personality, directness and intimacy, as one person or a collaborative duo can put their thoughts and feelings into words and pictures" (Paul Gravett 2015))

Paul Gravett introduces this term, progressive graphic novels, to talk about the kind of works that we see today in the contemporary. Attentive to define them Gravett points out, they rely less on the corporate conveyor belt production system of editors, writers pencillers, inkers and colourists and letterers. Instead they are often the work and vision of a single complete auteur or a close partnership working as one.

Being in control of every task brings the greater personality directness and intimacy as one person or as a collaborative duo can put their thoughts and feelings into words and pictures.

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'Progressive graphic novels'

- o Orijit Sen's *River of Stories*, 1994 ✓
 - o Published by Kalpavriksh - A pioneering work
 - o The impact of building the Sardar Sarovar Dam
- o *Delhi Calm*
 - o Viswajyothi Ghosh - The Emergency
 - o Part history lesson part wake-up call to those too young to remember or have experienced it

Among these progressive graphic novels there are series of titles that we can identify. Orijit Sen's *River of Stories* which came out in 1994. It was published by Kalpavriksh. It is seen as a pioneering work. It engages with the impact of building the Sardar Sarovar Dam and the

effect that it will have on the locals the aftermath of it. Delhi Calm is another one which focuses on this event of emergency. It is written by Viswajyothi Ghosh. It said about Delhi Calm that its part history lesson and part wake-up-call to those too young to remember or have experienced this event of emergency.

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This is one of the illustrations from Delhi Calm which talks about the event of emergency which happened during 1975 to 77. There are few works which thematically focus on urban India.

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Urban India

- o *Corridor*
 - o Sarnath Banerjee - exploration of the city's fragmented realities and hidden lives - through the life of a Delhi shopkeeper
 - o The ideal reader - someone who is 'post-literate'
- o *Kari*
 - o Amruta Patil - a lesbian community
- o *Hyderabad: A Graphic Novel*
 - o Jai Undurti and Harsho Mohan Chatteraj - histories and fables that coexist in the contemporary - almost 4 centuries - IT hub

Just like some of the novelists of contemporary Indian fiction also do. One of the leading works in this segment is Corridor by Sarnath Banerjee. And Sarnath Banerjee is considered one of the leading graphic fiction artists and writers in India. In Corridor he explores the

city's fragmented realities and hidden lives. And this is being done through a Delhi shop keeper. The storyline follows his life and the instance which happened to him.

In the context, I would also like to remind you that Sarnath Banerjee is the one who identified his ideal reader as someone who is post literate. I think we also need to read this in tandem, in connection with some of Nayar's observations, where he also talks about a critical literacy which the Indian already possesses, because of his or her exposure to a range of visual stimuli, and also how Nayar situates the importance of a graphic fiction as a kind of work which explicates that there is no history outside of representation.

There is another work by Amruta Patil, which was quite controversial and as part of an awareness raising campaign as well. It is titled Kari and it talks about the lesbian community. Hyderabad: A Graphic Novel is another important one which talks about the many changes that the city had gone through. It is a combined effort by Jai Undurti and Harsho Mohan Chatteraj.

It talks about the histories and favours that coexist in the contemporary and how they collectively inform the history of a city in this case a Hyderabad. And it also comes with this tagline that every city is a story. The nature of the histories and fables which are woven together, they span a period of almost 4 centuries. It also focuses on the emergence of Hyderabad as an IT hub.

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Tara Books - experiments

<ul style="list-style-type: none">o <i>Sita's Ramayana</i> ✓o Illustrated by Moyna Chitrakao Written by Samhita Arnio <i>I see the Promised Land</i> ✓o Illustrated by Manu Chitrakaro Based on a biography of Martin Luther King	<p>Patua scroll artists Cropping the hand-painted panels in the artists' vertical scrolls and rearranging them into pages of a book alongside typeset text - NOT entirely successful</p>
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2 books came out from the publishers Tara books as experiments. One is Sita's Ramayana and the other is, I see the Promised Land. Sita's Ramayana was illustrated by Moyna Chitraka and it was written by Samhita Arni. I see the promise land was illustrated by Manu Chitrakar and it was based on a biography of Martin Luther King.

And this is the experiment that they did. They used Patua scroll artist for illustration and they also tried cropping the hand painted panels in the artists vertical scrolls and then rearranging them into pages of a book alongside the other usual typeset text. So, there were these 2 different things coming together within this single book.

It was done as an experiment but it was not entirely successful, because it was quite a challenge to bring in the native artistic traditions and the native practices and fuse them with the modern printing technology. But nevertheless, these need to be documented because these are the various things that the publishers are also willing to try out on an experimental basis.

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Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability

- o Published by Navayana, 2011
- o Written by Srividya Natarajan and S. Anand
- o Drawn by Durgabal and Subhash Vyam
 - o Gond artists - folk art traditions into a graphic novel
- o The biography of Ambedkar
- o Contextualising the plight of Dalits

Though balloons - mind's eye
Speech balloons - shaped like birds
Words of cruelty - balloon's tail transforms into a scorpion's sting

Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability is a book that Navayana published even before they brought out the graphic fiction on Jotiba Phule. This was in 2011. It was written by Srividya Natrajan and S. Anand. The illustrations are particularly interesting. They were drawn by Durgabal and Subhash Vyam. They were Gond artists and they could make use of folk art traditions and convert them into illustrations for a graphic novel.

So, these are some of the different things that they tried to do. They have thought balloons which function as mind's eye. That is how it is illustrated. There are speech balloons shaped

like birds and whenever words of cruelty are uttered because this is also in the context of the experiences of untouchability. So, whenever words of cruelty are uttered the balloons tail transforms into a scorpion's sting.

So, this entire narrative it is very visual. Even the illustrations, even the things which otherwise we do not pay attention to, such as a thought balloon. They are also illustrated to convey the emotion and to convey the overall theme that this novel is talking about. Bhimayana as the title implies is the biography of Ambedkar. It also tries to contextualise the plight of the Dalits. So, there is certainly a political edge in some of these works as Pramod Nayar also tries to point out in his introduction to his seminal work.

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And this is the illustration that we can find in Bhimayana and it has received ray of reviews. John burger noted that it is an extraordinary booker conference of corporeal experience across generations full of pain and empathy. Andhati Roy has remarked that it is unusually beautiful and unforgettable. So, within the space of graphic fiction, Bhimayana is one work which makes use of the freedom that the artist has.

And if you get a chance to go through this illustrated work, it will be interesting to notice the different fonts that they use for various emotions. Due to technical reasons we cannot share more illustrations from this book. But I strongly encourage you to take a look at this graphic fiction titled Bhimayana to know about how they made use of these various possibilities that this mode of illustration, that this mode of fiction is opening up before us.

And this is also one such work which deals with the socio-political changes and also engaging with one of the powerful concepts and one of the powerful hierarchical elements in a society namely caste and untouchability which has been under represented in Indian fiction we have noticed. And graphic fiction perhaps is one such avenue which would open up discussions and modes of representations for things such as caste or gender which also suffers from a jaded kind of representation in the other spaces.

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Like the Zubaan anthology Drawing the Line, this is another anthology published by Yoda press in 2013 titled, This Side That Side: Restoring Partition. It comprises of 28 stories where they talk about the need to access the story of partition as the title implies it restoring partition. So, the stories are about partition, narrated by different individuals from various perspectives. And this is also a work which came out with the support of Goethe Institute. And we do find the immense possibilities even in terms of the alliances that publishers get into as far as this new genre is concerned.

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- o They remain a niche market
- o Require heavy investment
- o No 'bestsellers' yet - sells well though
- o The dearth of more focused study to critique the aesthetics, the visual

This lecture is not been able to cover all kinds of graphic fiction which is produced in the contemporary. But I hope I have given you some kind of a random sampling, a taste of a how serious a graphic fiction is also getting to be. But nevertheless, we need to agree and acknowledge that they continue to remain niche market in the contemporary. It is also the kind of genre which requires heavy investment.

And there are, graphic fiction is selling well but there are no best sellers yet. If we go by the statistics that is available in different online sources, there is also a dearth of more focussed study that to critique the aesthetics, the visual. I could come across only Pramod Nayar's work as a serious intervention in this in this context.

And as I wind up this lecture I would also like to draw your attention to one of the concepts that Nayar is introducing, rather Nayar is explicating in this study of graphic novels. He talks about the duality of narration and the possibility which this duality offers to us in terms of knowledge production and in terms of coming up with a newer critical practices and establishing newer critical traditions.

In Nayar's own words, it adds a new dimension to narrating, events and contexts and conditions, the visual. So that multiple ways of telling are available on the same page. The documentary and the aesthetic, the satiric caricature and the traumatic realist. So, this is perhaps the revolution which would set a different kind of ball rolling in the space of Indian Fiction in English. There is a duality which does not mystify. It rather demystifies the many complex histories which have been part of not Indian fiction but this subcontinent itself.

That is all we have for today. I Thank you for listening and I look forward to seeing you in the next session.