ANALYSING COMIC STRIPS AS A MODE OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION AND CULTURAL DISSEMINATION

(ABSTRACT)

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS

By
Ms. ARCHITA GUPTA

Under the Supervision of
Dr. Ashes Gupta, Associate Professor

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
FACULTY OF ARTS AND COMMERCE
TRIPURA UNIVERSITY (A CENTRAL UNIVERSITY)
SURYAMANINAGAR-799022, TRIPURAWEST

F. TU/REG/Ph.D/10 (9-1) 08, 2008, w.e.f 8th April, 2008

YEAR OF SUBMISSION : 2012
Culture is an important determiner in any cultural production in general and comic strips in particular. Comic strip offers itself as a potent field of research as it is a combination of two types of cultural codes—language and the illustration. But unfortunately, preliminary reading for this research led to the conclusion that there is an acute paucity of material as well as scholarship in this area. Therefore, it was felt that a research work on the analysis of cultural codification in the form of text-image combine in comic strip and the corresponding responses thus evoked in the reader from the semiotic point of view would be beneficial not only in opening new vistas in literary appreciation and interpretation but would also relocate significance to a hitherto neglected realm.

The thesis is based on the hypothesis that comic strip is a mode of cultural production and cultural dissemination. The hypothesis also includes the idea that such a text perpetuates a tacit hierarchy and propagates a politics of marginalisation and cultural domination through image-text combine more effectively. The research focuses on two vernacular Bengali comic strip Nante Fante and Handa Bhonda as praxis areas of case study and a comic strip from Tripura and about Tripura Senapati Ray Kachag and analyses how the dissemination of cultural biases gets reflected in the illustration and language text combine of comic strips during the presentation of a subordinate or marginalised character. The thesis therefore attempts to read the image text combination of comic strip as a tool of disseminating not only the cultural context in which it is produced but also as a means of hegemonisation through its apparent innocent mould and aims at arriving at the formulation of a working theoretical model to analyse the same. The subsequent chapters read themselves as the various stages of this research undertaken and formulating a theoretical model and then application on comic strips, especially Nante Fante and Handa Bhonda.

Structurally this thesis has been divided into five chapters and the main objectives as well the inferences recorded in each of these chapters present themselves as follow:

**Chapter I: Introduction: origin, evolution and history of comic strip:** It provides a brief outline of the main objectives and aims of each of the subsequent chapters in a succinct manner. It also provides an insight into the mainstays of each of these chapters and the way in which the research is expected to be undertaken there in.

This chapter also details the background of this thesis from the point of view of the research design, methodology, expected problematic of the research, major objectives of this study as well as the necessary introduction to the genre comic strip and its evolutionary pattern through various historical
and socio-cultural stages. In addition, this chapter attempts to analyse how culture gets reflected in the popular art form detailing the style and pattern of illustration in *Nante Fante*, *Handa Bhonda* and other comic strips. The chapter adapts Roland Barthes’ concept of ‘anchorage’ and ‘relay’ text with suitable modification in the form of conceptualising the illustration as the ‘anchorage’ text that effectively ‘anchors’ the meaning of the relay (verbal dialogue in the speech bubble) and fixes the intended meaning. It investigates how these two texts disseminate cultural and gender bias in negative stereotyping of the cook/“Thakur” and portrayal of female characters in these two purely vernacular Bengali strips.

Chapter II: Formulation and application of theoretical framework for comic strip analysis: This chapter incorporates the various linguistic and semiotic and cultural theories propagated by Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jacobson, Claude Levi Strauss, Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, Michel Foucault, Hayden White, Charles Sanders Pierce as well as the theories of Reader-Response and Reception propogated by Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, Hans Robert Jauss through extension, suitable modification and adaptation, in the working theoretical model for the analysis of the usage of image-text as signs/codes in a comic strip genre. It has been inferred that the usage of image-text as sign/code and decoding/interpreting the same is constructed by dominant ideological doctrine and it also constructs the circulation pattern i.e ‘reader space’ of such cultural products. The investigation through paradigmatic and syntagmatic relation in this chapter attempts to bring out the dominant cultural forces at play behind the ‘choices’ or ‘preferences’ of a particular image over a workable alternative.

Chapter III: Comic strip as cultural product facilitating/ resisting translation in intercultural communication while disseminating culture: This chapter places comic strip in the broader context of translation as intercultural communication. It incorporates concepts propogated by translation theorists such as Lawrence Venuti, Andrew Lefevere, Susan Bassnett and concepts on comic strip translation theory postulated by Federico Zanettin. It attempts to analyse how the problem of translation can be countered in and through comic strip genre. The chapter examines through the analysis and comparison of *Nante Fante* Bengali version and *Nante Fante* English translation how illustration in comic strip facilitates translation process and at the same time resists a source text and corresponding culture to be translated in the target text and target culture. The chapter focuses on the creation of a local comic strip of Tripura Senapati Ray Kachag as a move from oral history to a written popular genre as translation. In addition it also locates how this strip resists/defies the canonical history writing both in form and content. The analysis on inter-semiotic translation such as comic strip to animation form has been attempted to examine the complex process of translation, the attribution of a genre specificity in such translation and the resultant dissemination of culture.
Chapter IV: Comic Strip Medium and its Application: Circumscribing Bengal as a Local Cultural Space, Pedagogical usage, Interview and the Revelation of the writer-Illustrator’s Psyche: This chapter theorises the concepts generated from the interview of the writer-illustrator of *Nante Fante* and *Handa Bhonda*, Narayan Debnath and attempts to validate the hypothesis of this research. It focuses on his conscious or unconscious perpetuation of Bengali cultural supremacy at the cost of negative stereotyping of 'others' viz residents of Bihar or Orissa in his comic strip as well as his acceptance of the patriarchal bias at work in the Bengali publishing industry which he perpetuates by making his comics 'male centred'. The chapter also attempts to contextualise an intra-cultural prejudice in the case of East-Bengal versus West-Bengal (of which the writer-illustrator himself is a sufferer) in the space of this research and the resultant representation of East-Bengal people (‘Bangal’) in the cultural ‘texts’ (films, novels, comic strips, etc) of West-Bengal socio-cultural space.

Chapter V: Conclusion: It sums up the research findings in the foregoing chapters of this thesis and also hints at how this working theoretical model for the analysis of the use of image-text as sign/code resists closure and, therefore, presents itself for application to cross cultural contexts. It also examines the comic strip genre as a space where serious and non-serious, high and popular merge thereby emphasising necessity to include it in the literary canon as well as academic study and research. It also indicates the relevance of such an approach in the interdisciplinary and multidimensional perspectives.