CHAPTER II

FORMULATION AND APPLICATION OF THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR COMIC STRIP ANALYSIS

This chapter deals with the formulation of a theoretical framework with reference to theories to be employed for analysing comic strips. This research involves theoretical postulations of Culture studies as primary for investigation, analysis and substantiation of the hypothesis. Since this research is based on various facets of culture such as cultural production, dissemination and assimilation, the same have been discussed in the light of various theoretical frameworks such as semiotics, feminism, gender studies, post colonialism, sociology and new-historicism. For this purpose the first theory to be analysed and utilised for structuring the proposed theoretical framework is semiotics. Semiotics is the study of sign processes or signification and communication, signs and symbols, both individually and grouped into sign systems. It includes the study of how meaning is constructed and understood. It is a field of study involving many different theoretical stances and methodological tools. One of the broadest definitions of this subject is that semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign. Semiotics involves the study of not only what we refer to as signs in everyday speech, but of anything which stands for something else. In semiotic sense, signs take the form of words, images, sounds, gesture and objects. Linguist Saussure considered semiology as a science that studies the life of signs as a part of social life. Charles Sanders Pierce's definition is something different and he paid attention to the formal doctrine of sign. For him a sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. (Chandler 28). Contemporary semioticians study sign not in isolation but as part of semiotic sign system (such as medium or genre). They study how meanings are made: as such, being concerned not only with communication but also with the construction and maintenance of reality. So adopting this theoretical stance this part of the present chapter focuses on the comic strips as a particular genre by treating it as a 'sign system' in general and image/ illustration of comic strips as 'text' in particular. The functionality of these signs as codes and their role in communication, construction and maintenance of 'reality' has also been attempted in this chapter.

'Text' in semiotic analysis includes a large area. A 'text' can exist in any medium and may be verbal or nonverbal. The term 'text' usually refers to a message which has been recorded in some way (e.g. writing, audio and video recording so that it is physically independent of its sender or receiver). It is an assemblage of signs (such as words, images, sounds and/or gestures) constructed and interpreted.
with reference to the conventions associated with genre and in a particular medium of communication. Thus *Nante Fante* or *Handa Bhonda* comic strips is constructed as a part of a particular genre with archetypal comic strip iconography such as stars for pain, speech bubbles and thought balloons, etc. It is a 'text' that is communicated through a particular 'language' or 'medium' shared by both the sender and receiver. In this case comic strips as genre enjoys more privilege, since comic strips iconography remains valid across all cultures. It has a larger space of communication than a traditional typographical text. The pictorial codes in comics can independently construct and communicate a meaning in other cultures even when the language is unknown to the readers. It is a powerful genre in construction and maintenance of 'reality' opted for by the writer/illustrator.

Ferdinand de Saussure focused on the linguistic sign (such as word). For Saussure both the signifier and the signified are purely 'psychological':

A linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name, but between a concept and a sound pattern. The sound pattern is not actually a sound; for a sound is something physical. A sound pattern is the hearer's psychological impression of a sound, as given to him by the evidence of his senses. This sound pattern may be called a 'material' element only in that it is the representation of our sensory impressions. The sound pattern may thus be distinguished by other element is generally of a more abstract kind (Saussure 66).

In case of comic strips the visual image is a sign. It works as the signifier and the meaning it conveys is the signified i.e. the concept. Comic strip involves two types of sign system-verbal and visual. Both of them function to convey meaning. The verbal sometimes functions as the meaning of visual sign as it is understood. A panel from *Handa Bhonda* illustrates Handa slipping on the road and the visual sign (Handa's physical condition seen changing during the incident) is accompanied by the sound of pain "ah". This is the verbal sign that conveys the meaning.

Saussure emphasised in particular negative, oppositional differences between signs and the key relationships in structuralist analysis are binary oppositions (such as nature/culture, life/death). Saussure argued that concepts are defined not positively in terms of their content, but negatively by contrast with other items in the same system (78). What characterises each most exactly is being whatever others are not. Whereas Saussure emphasised the arbitrary nature of the linguistic sign, most semioticians stress that signs differ in how arbitrary/conventional (or by contrast 'transparent') they are.
In some sign systems, for example, in drawings, photographs and television images the relation between the signifier and signified is less arbitrary. Charles Sanders Pierce calls such signs iconic in which the signifier resemble its signified in some way (Taylor and Willis 21). Yet iconic signs are not less conventionalised than words in language. Just as the meaning of words become prevalent through recurrent, learned and collective use, the resemblance that pictures have to their referents comes from learned recognition. (ibid). The above statement points out both the effectiveness of communication of illustrations and their cultural and social constructions that depend on cultural and social conventions and codes to be deciphered.

Saussure has also distinguished between langue and parole and this distinction has helped a lot in the semiotic analysis of any kind of 'text'. According to Saussure, langue is that aspect of language which is supposed to be the common denominator of a given society, the parole parlee, the given, the language already spoken, a part of the collective heritage, with its grammatical and logical structures. Parole on the other hand is parole parlante, the language in praxis, the language in dialectical interaction in the existential space of inter-human relations, with its enunciative and conceptual structures (qtd. in Gupta 26) If we extend it further and correlate it with the proposed thesis, it can be said that the comic strip creator has a langue of codes/signs in the form of image-text combination that is a socio-cultural construct and is the common denominator of a given society. This langue of codes/sign is accepted and established as an index of codes/signs corresponding to a determinable set of responses. The existential relation between the writer of a 'text', the image and text/verbal and non-verbal means of communication that he uses in case of comic strips from the langue of such communication system in a conformist or non-conformist way to create parole of image-text unique to his or her style is a complicated one and intensifies the discourse. The use of a particular image with a particular style of illustration as code cannot be decontextualised as it is based on the necessary condition of the writer/illustrator's interaction with the socio-cultural context. Thus the use of characters and content in the form image-text combination as sign/code in a particular strip by a particular creator is not only the use of the langue of image and text (pictorial and linguistic code) as a collective system, but also a very personal and existential perception of the field of signification at the level of the parole of comic strip communication system. While Saussure did not offer a typology of signs, Pierce was a compulsive taxonomist and he offered several logical typologies - symbol, icon, and index. For Pierce, a symbol is a sign which refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the symbol to be interpreted as referring to that object. Turning to icons, Pierce declared that an iconic sign represents its object mainly by its similarity. A sign is an icon in so far as it is like that thing and used as a sign of it. He added that every picture (however conventional its method) is an icon. Icons have qualities which 'resemble' those of the objects they represent, and they excite analogous sensation in the mind. An index depends on some existential relation into which the instance enters, as smoke is an
index of fire (qtd in Chandler, 33). Unlike the index, the icon has no dynamic connection with the object it represents. Semioticians generally maintain that there are no pure icons—there is always an element of cultural conventions involved. Pierce stated that although 'any material image' (such as painting) may be perceived as looking like what it represents, it is largely conventional in its mode of representation. Iconic signifiers can be highly evocative. Kent Grayson observes that because we can see the object in the sign, we are often left with a sense that the icon has brought us closer to the truth than if we had instead seen an index or a symbol (36). He adds that instead of drawing our attention to the gaps that always exist in representation, iconic experience encourage us subconsciously to fill these gaps and then to believe that there were no gaps in the first place—'this is the paradox of representation: it may deceive most when we think it works best.' (ibid)

The concept of the code is fundamental in semiotics. While Saussure dealt only with overall code of language, he did of course stress that signs are not meaningful in isolation, but only when they are interpreted in relation to each other. It was another linguist Roman Jakobson, who emphasised that the production and interpretation of texts depends upon the existence of codes or conventions for communication(573). Since the meaning of a sign depends on the code within which it is situated, codes provide a framework within which the signs make a sense. Indeed we cannot grant something the status of a sign if it does not function within a code. Furthermore, if the relationship between a signifier and signified is relatively arbitrary, then it is clear that interpreting the conventional meaning of signs require familiarity with appropriate sets of conventions. Reading a text involves relating it to relevant 'codes'.

Comic strip as a visual text involves two different types of sign systems—language and illustration. As a culture specific text it needs certain codes to understand the apparent visual image/text relation or the hidden cultural significance that such image/text entails. Nante Fante comic strip is written/illustrated keeping in mind the target audience of a particular age group of Bengali-Hindu majority culture. In reading such strips the knowledge of a particular set of conventions i.e. the dress, the language spoken by majority Bengali population, the background are the cultural codes shared by the readers. A panel of Nante Fante Collection -8 presents a picture of Nante and Fante with a 'sadhu maharaj' (Figure 2.1, meaning 'ascetic'). The knowledge of their dress functions as codes and renders identity to them. The images/illustrations of Nante and Fante are signs and refer to the signified i.e. the identity of 'boys' of twelve or thirteen years. Similarly the image/illustration of long bearded sadhubaba is a sign psychologically associated with the conventional set of knowledge (codes) of the readers/interpreters acquired through many such representations in cultural 'texts'. The stylised and almost archaic language he speaks is unusual to boys of the age of Nante and Fante. This is also a code as readers have the knowledge that such a person with such an image would speak such language. Thus in comic strips the image/text combined code disseminates meaning.
Codes are interpretative frameworks which are used by both producers and interpreters of texts. In creating texts signs are selected and combined in relation to the codes with which both are familiar. Such selections limit the range of possible meanings they are likely to generate when read by others. Semioticians argue that although exposure over time leads to visual language appearing natural, we need to learn how to read even visual and audio visual texts. This aspect relates to the culture specificity of codes. The conventions of codes represent a social dimension in semiotics: a code is a set of practices familiar to users of the medium operating within a broad cultural framework. Indeed as Stuart Hall puts it, "there is no intelligible discourse without the operation of codes" (31).

Society itself depends on the existence of such signifying systems. An interesting fact about code is that the medium employed clearly influences the choice of codes. Pierre Guirard notes that “the frame of painting or the cover of a book highlights the nature of the codes; the title of a work of art refers to the code adopted much more often than to the content of the message” (qtd in Chandler, 54). In this sense we routinely judge a book by its cover. Codes here operate as a means of hegemonic bias. The employment or non-employment of dominant codes determine the position of great/high/scholarly literature and popular/low/pulp literature. It is the functionality of codes that excludes comic strips from the grand literary canon. The use of scholarly conventions (such as introduction, acknowledgements, section headings, tables, notes, references, bibliographies, appendices and indexes) is what makes academic texts immediately identifiable as such to the readers. Such cuing is a part of metalingual function of signs. With familiar codes we are rarely conscious of our act of interpretation. Comic strips have no less culture specificity than any other literary text. It employs two types of sign system-language and illustration and with the help of this combined code system reveals the hegemonic or cultural bias at play in creating centre-marginal hierarchy. The dominant literary text does not include the illustrative framework of comic strips. The encoding or decoding of a text requires the cultural or social set up in which a text operates. Three key kinds of knowledge are required by interpreters of a 'text':

1. the world(social knowledge)
2. the medium and the genre(textual knowledge)
3. the relation between (1) and (2).

Comic strips present a complex phenomenon with its 'non-serious' implication because of the medium employed and the 'serious' cultural/hegemonic bias at play. The interpreter of a comic strip of the kind of Nante Fante and Handa Bhonda with the social knowledge (here the knowledge of Bengali culture) will employ a dominant social code to decipher meaning. Employing these codes the receiver/interpreter of a dominant culture would definitely subordinate a character of different culture (such as a resident of Orissa as cook frequently seen in Nante Fante or a resident of Punjab as doorman seen in a panel of Handa Bhonda (Figure 2.2) as marginal. The medium (image/illustration) here emphasises the
interpretation/decoding with its visual quality. When studying cultural practices, semioticians treat any object or action as signs which have meaning to the members of a cultural group, seeking to identify the rules or conventions of the codes which underlie the production of meanings within that culture. The creation of cultural text, thus, is a combination and assimilation of dominant cultural codes which are meaningful to both sender/creator and reader/receiver. Understanding such codes, their relationship and the contexts in which they are appropriate is part of what it means to be a member of a particular culture. Marcel Danesi has suggested that a culture can be defined as a kind of ‘macro code’, consisting of the numerous codes which a group of individuals habitually use to interpret reality (18).

Comic Strips such as *Handa Bhonda* and *Nante Fante* as culture specific texts (here Bengali culture) are dependent upon certain cultural signs that are interpreted through the codes. Codes are the operating medium for the creator/ sender. The knowledge of codes enables the message to be understood both by sender and receiver as they share the same codebook. The dress, food habits, customs and characters employed initially create and reinforce the cultural space. *Handa Bhonda* and *Nante Fante* attempts to create a 'micro-nation' by simulating a Bengali socio-cultural space that revolves around certain values, attitudes, beliefs which are supported while others are suppressed.

The codes employed generate the construction of Bengal as an empowered space in relation to other cultures that were assimilated in Bengal for political and especially economic reasons. The myth of Bengal as nation operates even in popular and comparatively 'non-serious' genre like comic strips also. Here it would be pertinent to analyse Foucault's theoretical postulations about power relation in examining how Bengal, for mainly political and economic reasons, have enjoyed privilege over other cultures. Each historical period has its own episteme-a set of relations uniting various discursive practices which shape its epistemologies. Bengal and especially Kolkata had always been the hub of economic opportunities. The process of establishing business centers in Kolkata started in 1717 when East India Company got the approval of doing business freely in India. In the year 1772, according to the Regulatory Act, the Governor of Bengal Warren Hasting became the Governor General of all the British captured states in India. In the same year Kolkata became the capital of India. Kolkata enjoyed more political and cultural importance till 1912. The influence of this made Bengal the centre of political and economical and cultural activities. For economic reasons people from other neighbouring as well as distant states such as Orissa, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan came here with the prospect of achieving economic prosperity. As the main hinterland of the Eastern part of India, it had a large population settled on both sides of the river Bhagirathi. The localisation of industries was the pivotal reason for making Bengal the economic centre. This led to a certain economic colonisation that paved the road to hegemonisation as power was centered in the hands of dominant culture and its members i. e. the Bengali. According to Foucault a particular 'discursive formation' is dominant in specific historical and socio-cultural contexts and maintains its own 'regime of truth' (Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 76). Also a range
of discursive positions is available at any given time, reflecting many determinants (economic, political, sexual, etc). In the context of the present research an analysis of how in Bengali psyche (corresponding to socio-cultural and economic space) the formation of cultural bias is deep rooted and reflects itself in representations such as a resident of Orissa as a resident of Bihar as labour (figure 2.3). This representation is the output of power-relation where the dominant Bengali culture takes the role of 'interpretative community' whose discourses and signifiers are privileged and dominant while others are marginalised. Thus when a panel in Nante Fante images a person from Orissa as cook it signifies subordination and the denotation it imparts is accepted as natural or normal. The non-employment of dominant codes is a mark of those who are 'outsiders' -a category which includes both foreigners from other cultures and those who are marginalised within a culture. In case of the cook or the labourer, it is the non-employment of dominant dress and language of Bengali culture that subordinates such characters. Comic Strips being a visual text has the advantage of facilitating such hegemonisation at play. However, people who feel marginalised are often very well-attuned to analogue nuances within dominant codes.

It would be relevant here to analyse the strips using Jakobson's model of speech communication. Roman Jakobson breaks down the act of communication into six components-addresser, addressee, context, message, contact and code. He offered a model comprising of all the six components to analyse the act of communication. (Lacey 6)

Code is probably the most important of Jakobson's dimension. Codes are any subjects or symbols (like word) which have generally an agreed meaning. Codes construct an agreed meaning within a specific geographical and cultural space and are again constructed by the same. Anchorage is a concept that would be associated with codes in case of comic strips. Anchorage is the supporting words to image. The function of this image is to reinforce the addressee's intended meaning. The formation of codes comprises of various components. Understanding of the genre is also a part of understanding codes. Genre provides addressee, or audience with a clear set of expectations which are used to interpret the 'text'. A horror story is expected to have a skeleton or blood dripping from the title in the front cover. Each genre has its own iconography. What a genre or a text belongs to is derived generally
from the anchoring provided by the title. The choice of codes is related to another semiotic sphere—which would be discussed in another segment of the same chapter. Iconography is also a code used by a specific genre. In case of comic strips familiar iconography such as stars for pains, speech bubbles and thought balloons et al are codes that refer the text to a preconceived genre. Actually codification is a process largely surrounded and determined by conventions. Codes are dynamic systems and change over time. Thus they are historically as well as socio-culturally situated.

The context is the social situation in which the message is embedded. In other words it can be said that context is the information from outside the text or communication, which influences how it is read. Contact is the channel of communication. It is by contact that addressee receives information. It is the medium used to convey the message. Medium is the physical means by which communication is facilitated. Message is the information the addresser is sending to the addressee. Codes play a major role in understanding message as there can be no certainty that the addressee will read the message in the same way as it is intended. Message is sometimes interpreted in a different way because the addressee is a different set of readers or audience and has different access to codes. This probability lies in the aspect that the addressee in that case is not the intended audience. This leads to another semiotic sphere—the aspect of encoding and decoding which would be discussed in subsequent part of the same chapter. However, in case of comic strips the images are used to reinforce the message and words are often used to anchor the image's meaning.

An analysis of the front cover of Nante Fante Collection 8 (Figure 2.4) using Jakobson's model would reveal how these six components of communication functions in constructing meaning.

**CONTEXT**

**MESSAGE**

(contents of Nante Fante Collection)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Addressee</th>
<th>Addresser</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**CONTACT**

(image/illustration and verbal 'text')

**CODE**

The two components that need to be analysed here in detail are the context and the code. The context is the social situation in which the message (contents of Nante Fante Collection) is embedded. In this case it is the then Bengal culture and society particularly of suburban areas when the text (comic strips) was first written. The 'message' is also applicable to the present day context as it is a recent publication.
and a creation of a living writer/illustrator. The codes operate on the message in a multidimensional manner-

1. The curved, easy going lettering of the title imply fun or 'non-serious' subject matter. 'Nante Fante' is in a comparatively bigger font in comparison to 'Collection' implying that the subject matter would be primarily based on the activities of Nante and Fante.

2. The image/illustration of smiling face of Nante and Fante in the right most top of the cover shows the innocence and mischief particular to children of that age and indicates the content of that comic book. The expression of triumphant satisfaction on their face implies satisfaction of defeating an opponent. It is the sign that leads directly to content.

3. The front cover follows the tradition of 'fable' - irrational animals attributed the faculty of speaking and behaving like human beings. Here a tiger is speaking (indicated by speech bubbles) while running after Keltu. It has resemblance with various such texts meant for children. This code here conforms to the fact that the content is meant for children. It triggers the expectation of the target audience.

4. Comic strip iconography such as speech bubbles, etc shows the type of text/genre it is. The type is also emphasised by naming the characters - Nante, Fante and Keltu. It is a social code and nick names are chosen. People of a particular speech community (here Bengal) would definitely make out the sense that the contents of this text would not be formal. The type of dress worn by the characters is also a social code as it is an indicator of which strata of society they belong to. It, therefore, also conforms to the dominant code of a society.

5. Colors used in the cover work as code in triggering the message. Predominantly bright colors such as blue, yellow, green are used so as to imply fun of childhood. The sense made out is that the contents and subject matter would be devoid of gloom.

6. Illustrative quality of the front cover is a code that gives the message that the text falls under the category of purely vernacular comic strips. The illustration is different from modern comics that has the quality of photographic realism (specially Indian comics created in collaboration with foreign associations and has much broader readership reach and space). Illustrative quality as code connotes to the target audience - middle class Bengali reading children especially of West Bengal, Assam and Tripura and the rest of the Bengali Diaspora.

Unlike the previously discussed front cover, the front cover of the three coloured strips (of the coloured series) in Nante Fante Banaam Keltuda ('Nante Fante Versus Keltuda', trans.mine), Nante Fante Lajabab ('Marvellous Nante Fante', trans.mine) and Best of Nante Fante (Figures 2.4; 2.5; 2.6) have contents in colour within the cover. It can be pointed out that both the cover and the pages have an improved quality of paper in comparison to the black and white strips. The price of the strips have also
been increased. This is, however, a marketing strategy that attempts to include and expand to a larger readership. Differences can also be located in covering the whole 'text'. Unlike the black and white strips these strips allot another page apart from the cover (the dedication page) that includes apparatuses such as name of the author, name of the publisher with address, name of cover designer and price tag. All these function as codes to refer to it as a text of recognition. Here a change in addressee has been attempted by changing the look of the text. It also serves as a code, as the look or the quality of binding of a text, for instance, generate different kinds of expectation on the part of the reader. Both the front cover and the back cover have illustrations from *Nante Fante* only. The apparatuses have tried to create a space/world of their own. It is a code that triggers a decodification of *Nante Fante* comics as a separate or better kind of reading material from what has been done so far. It is a whole and not a part. As the back cover of all the three texts is same, it is relevant and pertinent to point out that it as an attempt at creating a homogenous whole regarding the publication of 'Rongin Series' ('Coloured Series', trans. mine). The back cover includes all the characters of the 'message' (the contents of *Nante Fante colour series*). In the left lowermost part of the back cover Hostel Super and Keltu are sitting in the dining table and the cook is attending to the orders of the latter. Colour here is a code in triggering the hegemonic bias at play. The cook is given a much darker skin tint in contrast to the 'central' characters (Figure 2. 7). In the context of the text it can be easily located that he is of different/inferior origin from them as in socio-cultural background and aesthetics of the Bengali majority culture, people with fair complexion are supposed to be superior (?), are generally favoured (?) and are considered to belong to a higher birth. Among the other illustrations, the childish, mischievous yet 'masculine' activities of Nante, Fante and Keltu are given prominence. This functions as a code in generating an expectation regarding the contents of the text on one hand and creating a centre-male/marginal-female hierarchy by excluding girls from the content on the other. In the bottom centre there is a logo of Patrabharrati Publications with address and in the top there is a board held by Nante and Fante. The board contains the list of other comics ('text') of 'Rongin' Series. This is, as said earlier, an attempt to create homogeneity of colour strips as a part of marketing strategy that follows a pattern of uniformed or homogenous codes. Before analysing the front covers of other black and white strips, a comparison should be drawn between the back covers of colour and black and white strips to reinforce and validate the point as to how codes play a prominent role in generating/influencing meaning of a text. The back covers of black and white strips - *Nante Fante Collection 6, Nante Fante Collection 7* and *Nante Fante 7,8,9 (Previous)* collection fail to create a homogeneous space for *Nante Fante* series only because of the lack of homogeneity of codes. The top-most space includes the covers of *Kishore Bharati*, a magazine published by the publisher of *Nante Fante*. The front covers of the series of *Kishore Bharati* are given in a purely advertising style. Another strip from the same publication is projected along with *Nante Fante* covers. This cover as a code would not trigger the expectation so much as that of the back
covers of colour series. The later attempts to occupy a place enjoyed by translated foreign comics in Bengali (such as Tintin or Aesterix) in the target readership. (This research here proposes to question as to whether this can be examined as a move from margin towards the centre). However for a serious reader looking for connotation, the attempt itself is a code as it reinforces its supposedly subordinate status.

An analysis of front covers of the three colour strips from the perspective of functionality of codes would reveal some interesting insights in the reading of such texts.

1. The title *Nante Fante Lajabab* is written in a curved, easy going style with bold fonts. The particular style is a code to refer to the fact that the contents or message of the text would not be gloomy or serious. In the corner of the title the tag ‘Sampurna Rangin’ (‘Fully Coloured’, trans. mine) is a code for the target audience, who are however already familiar with *Nante Fante* black and white series, that it would be more attractive than before and would have to be decoded as intended.

2. The incident illustrated in the cover is of pulling Superintendent, Nante, Fante and Keltu by two young men who have mistaken them to be dacoits and it is clear from their statement that they have finally caught the dacoits. It is a code which would be decoded as conforming to amusement factor or element in children's literature, particularly comic strips.

3. The speech bubbles in the cover correspond to a code emphasizing the 'message' of the text. The language in the speech bubble is the verbal dialogue to the anchorage image of two young men. Referring the super as 'gabbu' (a word used for fat or obese person) indicating his weight and mass is a linguistic code that is encoded specially for the target audience as an elderly person would find it idiotic rather than funny or amusing, unlike a target reader of the specific age group.

The front cover of *Nante Fante Banaam Keltuda* shows Keltu harassing Nante.

1. The illustration is a code to the title as the 'message' of this text would be based on stories of confrontation between Keltu and Nante Fante.

2. A characteristic feature of such type of text is to employ a kind of expression within the speech bubble that does not mean anything if taken as a word, but it is the expression associated to one's sudden unwanted change in the physical posture that can cause even some harm to the person. This is a mischief done by other. The expression of surprise or wonder is also associated with it. The verbal expression "aafars" in the speech bubble connected with the image of Nante is one such expression. It can be taken as a code particularly encoded in such texts. It is a tool/device to reinforce the concept of 'unlimited' fun related to comic strips.
The front cover of *Best of Nante Fante* like the two colour strips discussed above bears the tag “Sampurna Rangin”. It performs the same function as in the case of the *Nante Fante Banaam Keltuda* and *Nante Fante La jabab*. It has employed a sign as a code particularly encoded to refer to the text in close affinity with cartoony style. A 'round shaped sign of an injury or a wound' is seen on Keltu's head similar to that frequently seen in Tom and Jerry cartoon. A reader would definitely decode the text as very closely associated with the amusement element of cartoon. It is a code used as an attempt to place the text in the same canon with more similar 'texts' of popular literature in print and visual media.

The front covers of black and white strip *Nante Fante Collection 6* used such expression in the relay (speech bubble) that is very much culture specific. The linguistic codes-'hatachhara, chimde, markat' do not have any equivalence in English. They work/functions as a code for the Bengali reader of *Nante Fante* that the text would provide a particularly pure local taste and enjoyment in reading. The dress of Hostel Super and Keltu in *Nante Fante Collection 7* is a code that would communicate the message as well as the content and the context of the text. It points out to the time frame in which the text is located. The 'dhoti' and 'Punjabi' of the Hostel Super with black shoes as well as the tight shirt and tight trousers of Keltu with chappal (similar to that of the Bengali movies of 60s and 70s) conforms to the expectation level of the text being purely vernacular strips. The Hostel super is not given any name in any one of the series and represent a type rather than a person. Types are figure who are defined by what they represent rather than being genuine individuals. They are too simplistic. He is signified and codified by his appearance-the fat ,old man with a particular dress, and his behavior-careful about his own eating more than the boys and scolding and beating the boys of the hostel almost always without judging. Nick Lacey quotes Erwin Panfosky's descriptions of the types that were used in early cinema “The Vamp and the Straight Girl…, the Family Man, and the Villain, the latter marked by a black moustache and walking stick…A checkered table cloth meant…a “poor honest” milieu”.(qtd in Lacey 133).

The concept of denotation and connotation is associated with semiotic analysis. These two concepts are closely connected with myth and the medium by which all these concepts are related to the use of codes. Denotation operates at the first order level of signification. The word or words we attach to our perception is denotation. The particular association with the sign that makes a particular sense out of our understanding is the second order level of signification and is termed connotation. It determines the 'negative' and 'positive' attributions of signs. Another concept related to signs is that they have value because they are different from others. What a sign is, is due to what it is not. Most semioticians argue that no sign is purely denotative lacking connotations. When we first read denotations, we are also being positioned within ideology by learning dominant connotations at the same time. It would be pertinent here to mention that connotations are not purely 'personal' meaning - they are determined by codes to which the interpreter has access. Certain connotations would be widely recognised within a
culture. A panel (Figure 2.8) (Debnath, *Nante Fante Collection 7,8,9. (Previous) 10.* would reveal how connotative level of sign can anchor the intended meaning.

Sign = image + verbal dialogue

Oriya cook: superinten babuka bandhulog aasiacchen, apnake bulaichen.

denotation (a person calling three boys)

Connotation

Carrying orders

subordinate

loyal/ruled.

The illustration of the cook/“Thakur” and his broken language as an attempt to make him comprehensible in the Bengali cultural context is the dominant code that the target audience has access to and thus they interpret the 'text' at the connotative level. Roland Barthes in “Rhetoric of Image” shows the subtlety and power of connotations in the context of advertising. Another concept that Barthes emphasises in this context is the concept of myth which is directly related to connotations. Barthes showed that Saussure's sign can become a signifier to create not only a connotation but a myth. In this context he analyses the myth of rose associated with romance (Lacey 67).

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(Adapted from Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (St.Albans: Granada, 1973)p. 115.)
We usually associate myth with classical fables about the exploits of gods and heroes. But for Barthes, myths are the dominant ideologies of our time. Barthes was not concerned with archetypes, untruths or Greek myths and legends, but how signs take on the value of the dominant value system or ideology of a particular society and make these values seem natural. Myth has in fact a double function. It points out and it notifies, it makes us understand the concept and imposes it on us. *Nante Fante* and *Handa Bhonda* -the two strips to be analysed from the semiotic perspective as attempting to construct two types of myth, the myth of Bengal as superior and the myth of friendship between male as 'natural'. Adventurousness, a myth of masculinity generally attached to males reinforced and naturalised through various strips in all the series is also evident.

The construction of the superiority of Bengal can be located if we examine the same panel that is used in the context of denotation and connotation. The point to be noticed is the association with 'Oriya' (belonging to Orissa) and therefore subordinate. A man from Orissa instead of belonging to upper caste (though addressed as “Thakur” and having “tiki”4) does the job of a cook in a place where he is marginal. Bengal here stands as the superior, dominant and mainstream whereas the 'other' (here the Oriya cook) is subordinate. Through the image of the cook we cannot conceive Bengal as superior directly, but at the connotative level the image communicates marginality. It becomes an accomplice to the concept of Bengal as superior. The knowledge of codes of interpretation which are functional here is the knowledge of discrimination between high and low or hierarchy that is true for all cultures. The examination of another panel from *Best of Nante Fante* (Figure 2.9) (Debnath, *Best of Nante Fante* 21) would reveal how hegemonisation functions through various connotative frameworks. The whole collection is coloured unlike the previously discussed one. The writer/illustrator gives the cook a dusky or rather dark complexion in contrast to the main Bengali characters. He is seen both in the back cover of the collection and also in individual stories. In the present panel being discussed he is informing the hostel super about Keltu's hunger strike in his broken language while serving food. Being a colour strip, it shows the contrast not only in language but also in the image prominently. His “paite”5 and 'tiki', the indicator of his upper caste, are seen but he is seen standing in wait and serving beside the dining table both in the back cover and the panel. A person from Orissa need not necessarily be dark. While all the Bengali majority characters are illustrated as fair, a contrast/discrimination has been drawn here between centre and periphery through colour code. People of rural background are also given a dark complexion so as to draw a dividing line between high/sophisticated urban and low/illiterate rural consciously or unconsciously. Culture, like sign, also constructs or formulates meaning out of difference. The 'negative' attribution of the sign (image + dialogue combine) of the cook is determined by connotation and is understood through the contrast of 'positive' attribution of the other sign system.

The very concept of naturalisation of history through myth operates here in order to naturalise the central-peripheral hierarchy (Bengal as central and the other as peripheral). The interesting fact
about myth is that it does not deny things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them; simply it purifies them, it makes them appear innocent, it gives them a justification and clarity. It organises a world which is without contradiction. Myths can function to hide the ideological functions of signs and codes. The power of such myths is that they go without saying. The signs and codes are generated by myths and in turn serve to maintain and reinforce them. In case of *Nante Fante* and *Handa Bhonda* the myth of friendship between two males/boys is generated and reinforced. The friendship between male/boy and female/girl is not supposed to be ‘natural’ or ‘normal’ and treated almost as a taboo in the social context in which the ‘text’ is situated. The later generates another type of connotational framework which is again culturally constructed. The characters are given 'heroic' qualities of helping and saving lives and as the stories are devoid of women characters in the centre, it implies the lack of 'heroic' qualities among women/girl which the central characters exhibit, although in funny and subversive situations.

The first story of *Nante Fante Collection 8* can be analysed regarding the contents relating to masculinity. The story is about hunting tiger. The background setting of the story reflects a Hindu-Bengali majority culture. All the characters are male. The comic element, innocent humour, prompt decision to hunt a tiger explicitly show the innocent mode generally attributed to a 'text' meant for children. But the myth of masculinity attached to the male is generated here through the ideological construct of patriarchy. The females are excluded from the whole content of the story. The image of the tiger is a sign that signifies courage and superior masculine power. The concept of ‘masculinity’ and courage is assembled here through the sign/image. The patriarchal ideology operates at two levels—the exclusion of female presence and making boys agencies to compete on the basis of masculinity. Males are chosen from the human paradigm. Masculinity is chosen in the specific context of courage. The males are 'preferred' in this context and the reality presented is taken for granted and is taken as obvious, thus creating, maintaining and reinforcing the existing myth of male masculinity as natural and superior.

An interesting case study or praxis point is Malcom Evans' analysis and comprehension of cultural and gender codification of such masculinity even in diseases and advertisements related to the prescribed drugs that are built on such myths and meanings embedded in culture. Malcom Evans considers semiotics as something that purports to decoding hidden meanings, delivering unexpected insights and facilitating depth of vision into consumer culture. Semiotics would therefore be considered as defining marketing and research methodology because it has been recognised that culture and communication shape consumer behavior and perception of the world. Evans observes that any depth of consumer insight (particularly where global or cross-cultural harmonisation of brands and communication is at stake) is totally dependent on a holistic understanding of the meanings and mythology built into popular cultures and subcultures—meanings that are not always conscious but usually
subconsciously encoded into language itself as well as other forms of representation, most notably visual imagery. Here it is to be noted that since comic strip provides for a language-image combine, this process of embedding meanings and mythology would work most effectively in this genre. Evans shows how predominant cultural meanings can suppress the pure thinking based on intelligence, observation and knowledge. He refers to one of his conference paper with Dr Linda MacMillan, Principal Marketing Research Executive at Glaxo Pharmaceuticals. The paper was published in 1994 summarising a programme of semiotic and cultural research into migraine carried out in UK by semiotic solutions over the previous four years. The research found that migraine has been represented in UK medical and popular cultures as 'female trouble' and it is "semiotically lost within general headacheness" while it is actually a "separate specific condition of which debilitating headache is just one symptom" (Evans 12). The verbal and visual codes -conventional forms of communication used in migraine therapy advertising and leafleting were verbally complicit with this core cultural meaning of migraine as a trivial 'female' complaint through visual imagery which stereotyped the sufferers as exclusively female, often attractive and faintly eroticised -when actually approximately 40% of the sufferers are male. With a view to make the people understand and give the sufferers relief Glaxo launched revolutionary new migraine treatment IMIGRAN, grounding it in the actual truth associated with migraine. The stereotypical 'female in pain' syndrome was gone and it was replaced by an androgynous head clearly suggesting that there is no gender boundary in migraine. In 1993 it was found that some positive development had taken place because of the campaign. But the conservative, trivialising discourse was still very much in place as were the mainstream migraine advertising codes, now moving into the realms of yet more gothic and sado-machochistic eroticised imagery -an angel dancing with a devil, a woman's head represented as a grenade waiting for the pin to be pulled.

Evans concludes that it is hard to shake off these cultural codes, even when we understand them since one can only work within the prevalent current by diverting codes, breaking them, learning from communications in other product and service categories or from other forms of representation (eg film, literary fiction, art etal). This provides evidence to the important role that everyday language and representation plays in perpetuating cultural codes. Migraine is still migraine (a word based on the older English term 'megrim', which signified a whim or a female extravagance). Perhaps 'migraine' is, after all, one of those verbal signifiers which, like 'monologism' and 'senility' (now Downs Syndrome and Alzheimer's disease), is destined to carry a semiotically contaminated cultural payload until the disease itself is renamed and completely rebranded (19).

It is pertinent here to analyse portrayal of women as characters in the texts of Handa Bhonda and Nante Fante and theorise, from the feminist perspective of representation the paucity, lack of imaginative vitality and attribution of marginal status to them. Exposition of the politics of marginalisation, hegemonisation and hierarchy formation as one of the aims and objectives of this research
can be located in the concept of sexism where women characters are marginalised, given a lower status in the binary of male-female. This tendency is evident when analysed through both their 'presence' as well as 'absence' in the text. The subordination of women and their corresponding lower status becomes clear through the presentation. Their 'presence' which is often silenced or stifled in a gender stereotyped mould reflects their marginalised and dominated identity. 'Absence' reinforces the idea/concept of dispensability of woman in a male dominated space. In this respect, Narayan Debnath's comic strips offer an interesting praxis. His corpus of female characters is very few, but they are presented so carelessly that sometimes it becomes difficult to differentiate their physical appearance with that of the male with an exception to their dress or outfit. Both Nante Fante and Handa Bhonda (two of Debnath's strips examined from the perspective of this research and its hypothesis) have storylines centered around male participation. Female presence is automatically done away with or minimised. But interestingly readership includes females who are oblivious of such intent and overlook their stereotyped and carelessly illustrated appearances.

As a genre, comic strip perpetuates a conscious or unconscious assimilation of the dominant power and hegemonic structure. Dominant power structure is not only indicative of the mainstream which uses cultural tools or artefacts as means of domination through dissemination. It also includes the dominant male proprietorship of culture where women's self-culture is subjugated, even silenced. Just as the culture of the 'other' is placed in the periphery due to their lack of power and privilege and hence 'centre', women characters, ironically, of being in the 'centre', are subjugated. They are apparently a part of the 'centre', but lack the power and privilege enjoyed by the male characters in both narrative and illustration. Comic strip is a printed medium with the advantage of both verbal and pictorial quality. Dissemination through this medium is more effective because of its penetrating ability through illustration into increased readership space. Readers consciously or unconsciously internalise it and assimilate its ideology, in this case the patriarchal ideology of domination.

However, the present focus is on 'exclusion' as well as 'inclusion' of women in Handa Bhonda and Nante Fante and how their exclusion through inclusion makes sense theoretically. The storylines of both strips can be generalised into a pattern of binaries where one party is at constant conflict with the other. While in Nante Fante it is Keltu, in Handa Bhonda each of them is at conflict with the other with an exception in some strips where the opposite party is someone else. Nante and Fante live in a Boy's Hostel. Boy's Hostel as a space totally excludes female presence. Handa and Bhonda read in a Boy's School. In both female absence is naturalised and almost legitimised except their rare inclusion only for occasional development of the plots. Decipherable from the illustration codes such as background and dress viz. half shirt, half pant and chappal with a particular hairdo, both these strips present a time-frame of 1970s and early 1980s. Society of that time preferred residential boys' education whereas girls were kept home and educated and this perhaps results in the exclusion/
absence of the latter structure the comic strip plot that nucleates around boys' life and world. Two collections of Handa Bhonda (Handa Bhondar Kandakarkhana 10-12 and Handa Bhonda Kandakarkhana 13-15) have been examined from the perspective of such a marginalisation process regarding women.

Of the total forty six stories in Handa Bhondar Kandakarkhana 10-12 ('The Escapades of Handa and Bhonda', translation mine) only three instances of women's presence can be deduced while in Handa Bhonda Kandakarkhana 13-15 it consists of six panels out of forty four stories. In page 13 of 10-12 collection a woman is presented and five panels are allotted to her (Figure 2.10). She is the medium through whom Handa plays pranks with Bhonda. Bhonda with an intention to help her gives an umbrella to her. But when she is about to open it some garbage which Handa had put into it comes out and she misinterprets Bhonda for the misdeed. She is wearing a saree in a pattern specific to Bengali culture (dress as cultural code). Her physical details as presented in the illustration are simple and on decoding, provide inferences about specific cultural connotations. She is carrying a shopping bag. From the lack of customary insignias of Hindu Bengali married woman such as conch bangles, specific red colored bangles and sindoor it can be inferred that she is a middle aged widow. Her illustration shows her to be the stereotyped agony aunt popular in Bengali cultural traces such as films etc. The illustrator has carefully blackened a portion of her mouth to show that one of her front teeth is missing. This with her style of knotting her hair in a small bun (known in Bengali language as 'khonpa', the shape and size of which traditionally is said to represent a quarrelsome character) corresponds to the identity of a shrewd, talkative and fault-finding widow, an orthodox believer in strict moral code of life led according to a pattern of rituals and untouchability etc. The anchorage here is so emphatic that her identity is at once communicated to and correlates to her readers'/audience's knowledge and experience of connotations of such representations in print or visual media. She is a typical Bengali woman of little significance. Her sense of relief on getting a protection from the rain is as prompt as her reaction at being fooled. She does not have a name. Though her identity is not clear from the story, her illustration and her reaction are the sources of fun and humour. She does not have a name and a conforms to the notion of type not a genuine individual. A Bengali reader at once identifies her because of the familiarity of socio-cultural ethos of Bengal and its visual representation or codification. The denial of a name is a clear indication of it being typed and also of it being denying signification that is equal to the main characters who have names. This leads to an implication of the writer/illustrator's intention of creating hierarchy and hegemony with a patriarchal bias.

The pictorial quality and picture as code system of comic strips enables a natural communication between the representation and its consumers. As a Bengali reader what struck this researcher in the illustration were the spines of fish and chicken among the dirt that was put in the umbrella. Her subsequent reaction to this is not so much about dirt but about these things which has
violated the purity of her widow life. Bengali widows are forbidden to eat non-vegetarian fare and even any touch of the same is considered a sin- a reminder of the social sanctions that operate in a cultural specificity substantiating the hypothesis of this research about the cultural production and cultural dissemination aspect of comic strips. Her anger at Bhonda is the result of the fear of violation of this sanctity. The illustration conforms to the notion of anchorage, to direct "the readers through the signifieds of the image causing him to avoid some and receive others, by means of an often subtle dispatching" and leading towards a "meaning chosen in advance" (Barthes, "The Rhetoric of Image" 20). However, her role in the story is as subordinate as her actual status. She is presented only for the development of the plot. Handa chose her for his purpose because he knew her nature. She is stereotyped in this comic strip and marginalised. The patriarchal ideology here operates through image-text representation. Another presentation of woman in the same collection occupies only one panel. Handa the in the course of his usual mischievous deeds, gets stuck to a woman in the road. Her illustration distinguishes her from the previous one in the depiction of her with customary insignias. She can be deduced as a married woman. The illustration (Figure 2.11) shows her sense of 'terror' regarding the scene (Debnath, Handa Bhondar Kandakarkhana 10-12 29). Her open mouth and the fear in her eyes is picturised in such a way that it displays the basic femininity (in this case fear). This aspect can be comprehended when compared with a male figure in the previous panel (Figure 2.12). He displays only wonder and surprise. It is natural as Handa’s reckless ride can cause some mess. She is stereotyped and the presentation of her is an emphasis on the fact that women are terrified at little or insignificant things. She is assigned a gender specific and culturally constructed role.

The story “Chhadma Aabaran” ('False Apparel', trans. mine) presents an illustration of a woman who is a man in disguise. A detective takes the disguise of an old woman (Figure 2.13) (Debnath Handa Bhondar Kandakarkhana 10-12 8). Handa was chased by him with stick. It is interesting to note here that Debnath's carelessly illustrated female figures do not show the slightest trace of their physical feminity. It becomes difficult for a reader to distinguish the disguised from the real female. However, disguise is a means to deceive and go 'unnoticed'. Here one detective takes the disguise of an old woman to deceive the criminals. It could both be a conscious or unconscious attempt on the part of the illustrator towards an ironic role reversal. A more powerful strong male is taking the disguise of less powerful female. Her role in this strip can be compared with the disguise of Handa in the same story. Handa takes the role of a Punjabi doorman. Both the detective and Handa take subordinate roles for remaining 'unnoticed'. Disguise of a Punjabi doorman in the case of Handa, reveals the racial hierarchic structure in the dominant culture where a person of an alien race and culture is conceived inferior and assigned stereotyped subordinate roles (for instance within dominant Bengali cultural traces and products residents of Orissa as cooks, Bihari and Punjabi as doorman etc.). Handa takes disguise to hide himself and the detective primary for being unnoticed, but in both the cases it reveals the truth beneath-
the creation of a hierarchy governed by and centred round the dominant culture involving politics of marginalisation. These two subordinate characters -one not belonging to center is marginal and the other, inspite of being in the centre is marginal because of lack of power.

As a male dominated textual space, *Handa Bhonda* lacks variety in women's characterisation. They are denied voice invested on them. They are given the role of housewives - cooking and feeding the family. What is valued in their role is the essence of Bengali femininity. *Handa Bhondar Kandokarkhana 13-15* depicts only six female illustrations out of forty four stories and among them there are only three characters. The first we meet in the second story “Gharoa Party”, (Figure 2.14) is a woman who forbids Bhonda to enter her party because of his dirty clothes. This poor condition of Bhonda was, however, caused by Handa purposefully. She is wearing a saree similar to that of Bhonda's mother and aunt ("pishi" in Bengali language) (page 21 of *Handa Bhondar Kandkarkhana 10-12* and page 26 of *Handa Bhondar Kandkarkhana 13-15*), but the manner of wearing saree is different. The black and white comic strip illustrations do not provide the scope for polychromatic colour usage. The illustrator's only way to differentiate the married one from the widow is to include a black border in the white sari in case of the married woman. However, black in this case is a substitute for red. It is a cultural code. While a non-Bengali reader would only notice the colour difference; Bengali readers would be able to decode the connotations through their cultural experience. For differentiation, yet another process employed by the illustrator regarding the pattern of wearing a saree is a division between rural and urban women. The female figure in question, in her pattern of wearing saree reveals her urban status. She belongs to a comparatively privileged class in urban space both economically and socially and is a party-goer. But however 'modern'or 'urban' she might be, she falls in the same lineage of "types" as other women. Presented as one who frequents parties and is attracted by glam and show, she displays a lack of intelligence in conformity with the prevalent patriarchal ideology where women are presented as pretty and petty. In case of visual texts the signs or the icons become more emphatic. The colour as code can generate a particular meaning and reinforce stereotyping much as the same way as an illustration. As colour and illustration both are visual rhetoric and reflect a close association with the thing referred, it is pertinent to relate the concept to colour usage as it plays an important role in creative works of all sorts. Anna Makolkin has shown how two important writers, Anton Chekhov and William Somerset Maugham, in several of their short stories have used colour either evoke or undermine desired emotional responses (96). If Chekhov frequently uses 'Pink stocking' and 'blue stocking' in order to describe the temperament of his female characters, in William Somerset Maugham's short stories women appear dressed in Black silk or black suits. Chekhovian neo-metonymy in his stories derives from the well-known blue stocking which was associated with a woman of much learning and little charm. In either case the newly created icon/sign/code of colour acts in both ways: either to uphold traditional order or to subvert it. Chekhov's "pink stocking" is an icon of defiance of
the women's movement and their achievements in the area of educating women. The subversive use of 'pink stocking' has been employed by Chekhov to denounce the entire generation of 'blue stocking', the Russian and Western feminists and their cause and to reiterate the myth of the old culture where women are portrayed as pretty, petty, ignorant, illiterate, inept and socially maladjusted.

Thus, Chekhov's semiotic neologism becomes the summary of the old illusory bliss, the nostalgia for the past, the dream about the old civilisation where life was presumably seen in shades in pink, a comfortable order where woman exists as a seductive object, the source of one's natural biological satisfaction. Chekhovian pink stocking is the most all-embracing metaphor of woman's past history, a kinder version anticipating the more categorical Freudian verdict, woman as the embodiment of the 'id'. His soft coloured metaphor was an attempt to seduce the males by the familiar icons of the past old world of contentment and sexual hierarchy where the male was privileged, superior and in control. 'Blue stocking' and the education of women introduced new signs which were anxiety-causing factors threatening the Old World Order, which propogated the 'Pink stocking'.

The story entitled "Uler Gola" ('Ball of wool', trans. mine) of Handa Bhondar Kandkarkhana 13-15 (page 19) has an illustration of a girl. It can be deduced that her entry is only because the knitting of wool is supposed to be a feminine act naturalised and legitimised only the corresponding gender stereotyping just as embroidery, cooking and quarreling with servants is feminine as evident in Kamala Das's poem "An Introduction":

Dress in saree, be girl
Be wife, they said. Be embroiderer, be cook
Be a quarreler with servants. Fit in, oh,
Belong, cried the categorizers (35-38).

The ball of wool is used here as a medium to teach Handa a lesson for tormenting both Bhonda and Buchki. Buchki is the name of the girl who is shown knitting the wool when Handa interrupts her. But the noticeable thing about her presence is the incomprehensibility and ambiguity regarding her sexuality as illustrated (Figure 2.15). She is given a gender specific role but the carelessly illustrated physical appearance obliterates her identity as a female. She is presented in such way that she can hardly be distinguished from male figures in the story's illustration. She is depicted as a half-pant, half-shirt wearing girl almost the age of Handa and Bhonda. Though she is presented right from the very first panel, it is only when her name was spoken in the fourth panel by Handa it became evident that she is a girl. The illustration fails to communicate the identity because of a certain ambiguity in illustration. This ambiguity is the result of the paradox of inclusion (in comic strip space) and also the intention to exclude (from primary signification). The other character that we meet is Bhonda's “pishi” (aunt). She is almost like
Bhonda's mother in appearance as evident in illustration. In all the strips she is presented as engaged in her household work such as getting rid of troublesome cats, rats and deriving satisfaction by feeding others with her own hands (Figure 2.16). To counter and resist assimilating and identifying with the dominant patriarchal ideological position it is important to comprehend the lack of variety both in female characters and their illustrations. Debnath's illustration of female figures make them physically undistinguishable from the males very often. It seems that the author-illustrator is more concerned and more careful about their gender role specificity rather than their sexuality or physical appearance.

Comic strip/comics have more penetrability and reach in readership space than a typographical text. With the combined structure of pictorial-visual and verbal code, comic strips disseminate culture more effectively. Typographical text can provide an occasion to mentally visualise a description according to the reader's creative and imaginative faculty. On the other hand, pictorial-visual codification through illustration in comic strips/comics curbs and limits imagination showing that each mode has its own limitations and advantages in communications. A pictorial-visual code without speech bubbles can also disseminate meaning. The panels depicting the widow also succeed to a certain extent in revealing through illustrations the threat to her sanctity as a Bengali Hindu widow and her subsequent reaction. Hence a combined mode as in comic strips is more effective.

Comic strip follows the same lineage of 'representation' as in linguistic text. Here it is the image representation. The feminist protested against such representation. Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* emphasises the difference between sex and gender (Ruthven 124). Gender is social and cultural construct. The cultural construct disseminates the male proprietorship by endowing gender stereotyped role to females. Discussing representation of women in calendar or 'bazaar art', Patricia Oberoi points out the two processes namely 'commoditisation of women' and 'tropising of the feminine' that account for the heightened visibility of women in popular media- advertisements, bill-boards, hoardings, films and packages-a problematic issue (Oberoi 42). Therefore, it becomes crucial to locate the stereotype in the cultural context that Oberoi refers to as strategies both of 'homogenising and hegemonising'. To simply state that a stereotype is a false image would be to discredit its potential for harm and good and evade the complexity of the relationship between signifier and signified, representation and reality through a simplistic and reductionist assimilation.

The discussion so far has been mainly focused on the construction of a 'text' by different components. It is pertinent to analyse here how readers or audiences read/decode a text. It is at this stage that the reader-response criticism comes handy. Reader-response criticism turns from the traditional conception of a work as an achieved structure of meaning to the ongoing mental operations and responses of their readers as their eyes follow a text before them. This shift of perspective converts a text into a participative activity on the part of the reader. In this type of reading such features of the text such as narrator, plot, character, style, structure as well as meanings are dissolved into an evolving process,
consisting primarily of diverse kinds of expectations and the violations, deferments, satisfaction and restructuring of expectations in the flow of a reader's experience. The general idea is that the meanings of a text are the 'production' or 'creation' of the individual reader. Hence there is no one 'correct' meaning for all readers either of a linguistic part or the 'text' as an artistic whole.

Comic strips are visual texts and the narrative progresses from panel to panel. The readers are engaged with image/ illustration and language text at the same time. Thus 'reading' here is much more complex and imaginative as a process than a typographical text. According to Samath Banerjee, the graphic novelist, reading comics is a coded affair and it is between the panels that imagination really works (Danie 1). In fact, the image/ illustration and the linguistic message are in constant movement and so are the eyes of the reader/audience debating on the question of which to be given prominence. The theory of Wolfgang Iser, therefore conforms to comic strip 'reading' and suits as a theoretical framework on which praxis can be grounded. Wolfgang Iser developed the theory that the literary text, as a product of the writer's intentional acts, partly controls the reader's responses, but at the same time contains a number of 'gaps' or 'indeterminate elements'. The reader, by way of creative participation, must fill in these 'gaps' or 'indeterminate elements' (Iser 28). Iser distinguishes between the 'implied reader' who is established by the text itself as one who will respond in specific anticipated ways to the 'response-inviting structures' of the text and the 'actual reader' whose responses are inevitably coloured by his or her accumulated private experiences. The implied reader however remains controlled by the author through such a strategy (ibid).

The idea of using a particular image (such as "Ure8bamun", "Bihari Thakur", "Bihari" labourer, etc in Nante Fante and Handa Bhonda) conforms to the tenets of the reader-response criticism as propounded by Iser. The writer/ illustrator uses a particular character and image to be decoded in a particular way by readers or audience. The usage as well as responses thus generated are both context specific. As far as Nante Fante comic strips are concerned, the writer/ illustrator by projecting a particular image avoids unnecessary explication and detailing in language (the dialogue of the person concerned) and also provides the reader/ audience with 'gaps' and 'indeterminate elements' to be deciphered from the reader's own cultural contexts. Because of the illustrative quality of the comic strips, the connotation tends to become fixed unlike other literary texts. Nante Fante or Handa Bhonda comic strips are written in the cultural context of Bengal and the target readers are Bengali children primarily. The target reader is the implied reader who is established by the text itself. It is relevant here to relate the comment of the writer/ illustrator of Nante Fante and Handa Bonda comics Mr. Narayan Debnath. When he was asked about the negative codification stereotyping in his strips, he commented that it is a general tendency of people of one region to neglect people of other region. The truth that was thus elicited is that a text does not only conform to such tendencies, but also naturalises and legitimises it. Here lies the concept of the implied reader. A text is a space of participation for both the creator and
the consumer. When a text is created keeping in view the implied reader who shall participate in decoding it, the text automatically becomes a product not only of the writer/illustrator or publisher, but also of the reader/audience who consumes it.

Stanley Fish follows the experience of a 'reader' word by word insisting that what "happens to, and with the participation of, the reader" is in fact the "meaning" of a text (Fish 25). But this relates to an abstraction coined by Fish- 'the informed reader'. Fish argues that real readers can become informed readers by developing linguistic, semantic and literary competence, by making their minds the repository of the (potential) responses of a given text" and by "suppressing, in so far as that is possible …what is personal and idiosyncratic" (ibid). The 'suppression' of the personal in case of popular literature (such as comic strips and more specifically *Nante Fante* or *Handa Bhonda*) would lead to a failure in the expected reception as such texts that are very much context and culture specific, focusing at 'local' rather than the universal or general category. Narayan Debnath, the writer/illustrator of the strips spoke about the ridicule he faced for his "Bangal" identity when he came to Bengal. The reason of inclusion of this fact in this context is that when a text is produced it is linked to culture and history as well. Meenakshi Kumar in an article entitled "When Ethnic Differences are given new Names" in *Sunday Times of India* talks about the specific terms, which are derogatory and pejorative, employed to insult 'the other on the basis of race, religion, region, sexual orientation and nationality. Naming in everyday speech or of any product/text reveals motives at work. Kumar writes:

So, why do we speak in this way? To hurt and offend? Some say hierarchical divisions are strongly embedded in our psyche. Others believe our biases have strong historical links. But sometimes derogatory descriptions reflect reality. If a particular community has been extremely successful at the expense of another, chances are it will be disliked and there will be a host of derisive descriptions of it. The Jews have famously suffered this in much of the English-speaking world, but closer home there are region-specific equivalents (Kumar).

The historical links when considered in the present context of discussion i.e Bengal as a geographical and cultural space offers relevant insights for case study. The prosperity of this place was primarily because of economic reason. People of different religion merged here for economic prosperity. In the context of reception theory it reveals that when the implied readers are people of majority culture (here Bengali), attempt is made to cater to the need of the readers and in the process the deep seated psyche of hierarchical divisions or strong historical links gets reflected in the cultural 'text'. The text-culture
parameter here is in proportionate ratio. As far as *Nante Fante or Handa Bhonda* is concerned, it is very likely to come across such conversation as "matha mota, ja, Orissa ja" which literary means "You chuckle headed, go to Orissa" (trans. mine;) implying that Orissa is the place of chuckle headed persons and inferior in terms of intelligence than people of Bengalis. This is also found in popular media texts. In a soap opera called 'Ramanir Gune' of Star Jalsa, when a domestic quarrel is shown between two sister-in-laws on the topic of quality of cooking, one says "Ami to ar ure bamuner mato randhite janina", "I can not cook like Ure Bamun" (trans. mine;) as the other was flaunting her ability of cooking). The other feels humiliated and replies " Ki ! amake ure bamun bala" meaning"How dare you call me Ure Bamun"(trans mine). The expression "ure bamun" is expressed here in a derogatory sense meaning to become a ure bamun is a matter of demotion and not appreciation and what is reflected is his racial identity and not the cooking quality. This implies that the people of Orissa are meant to become cooks only. In a novel called 'Chandu' by Tillottama Majumder there is a reference to such biases of the people of Kolkata:

And Chandrakanta had realised within these two weeks, Bengali inhabitants of Kolkata are extremely snobbish. They call people of Bihar *khotta*, people of Orissa *Ure*, the residents of Punjab *painya*, South Indians *kashai or asur*, and say they are the non-Aryans mentioned in history, call Marwaris *Maora*, and none of them is called without ridicule or neglect (261; trans. and italics mine).

Kumar in this article says that in respect to the West, in India it is not so much about race as about caste, religion and region. The bias is evident when a North Indian dismisses anybody from South India as a "Madrasi" or a Bengali contemptuously refers to Marwaris as "Madus". People from the North-east are often called "Chinki" or "Chini". The article includes a quote of N. Jayaram who wrote an essay entitled "Identity: A Semantic Exploration in India's society and Culture" that listed the words used in different parts of the country to denote outsiders. Jayaram writes,"The biases are deeply embedded in our psyche and operate at covert level" (qtd in Kumar).

It is therefore evident that the incorporations of culture specific stances in a cultural text such as *Nante Fante or Handa Bhonda* comic strips is a means of naturalising and legitimising such tendencies and thus regulating consumption. In the series *Nante Fante Ki Ananda* the character of “Thakur” is recurrent, but with different illustrations. (Debnath, 17, 18, 45, 47.) (Figures 2.17; and 2.18). The dialogue is used with the same accent and speech referring to his outsiders' identity. The illustrations, though different, is indicative of his regional identity. It may mean that the job of cook is
meant only for them, and not for a person from mainstream culture ensuring an effective reading. In his innovative work *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Umberto Eco integrates the three domains of semiotics identified by Morris (35) and works out an elaborate theory of the reader as an active principle of interpretation in the generative process of the text. He begins with the hypothesis that an author must form a model of a possible reader and must also assume that the set of codes relied upon is shared by the reader. It implies that while using a particular image/illustration or text-image relation as sign in a text, the author forms a hypothetical model of the possible reader in anticipation. He also assumes that for a complete transfer of the response from the author to the reader in reading as a process of re-creation, the cultural context on which the set of codes is operative should be shared between the two. This ensures effective reading. Comic strips ensure conformity to intended reading because of its visual quality. Comic strip illustration is iconic sign. Iconicity is closer to direct perception accounting for the highest modality, that of iconic signs. To describe the extent to which a signified determines the signifiers, the concept of motivation and constrain is used by Daniel Chandler (45). The more a signifier is constrained by the signified, the more motivated the sign is. Iconic signs are highly motivated in comparison to symbolic signs. Greater learning of an agreed convention is required when a sign is less motivated. Comic strip illustration requires less learning to consume what is depicted or illustrated and is therefore more effective than linguistic text. The following diagram may be helpful in analysing the process of communication in case of *Nante Fante* and *Handa Bhonda* comic strips.

Iconic sign + signifier = signified

Illustration of Nante or Fante or Handa and Bhonda + drawing of dress, gestures, appearance (pictorial code) etc along with verbal Bengali speech corresponding to mainstream (linguistic code) = A Bengali boy of thirteen or fourteen years old

OR

Illustration of cook + drawing of his dress, gestures, appearance (pictorial code) etc along with his verbal speech with a mixed accent corresponding to a culture which is not specified or to a virtual non recognised identity (linguistic code) = A person with subordinate position with an unidentified identity who does not belong to mainstream, an outsider or 'other' in respect to 'self'.

In semiotics, a modality refers to a particular manner in which the information is to be encoded for presentation to human beings, i.e. to the type of sign and to the status of reality ascribed to or claimed by a sign, text or genre. It is more closely associated with the semiotics of Charles Peirce (1839-1914) than Saussure (1857-1913) because meaning is conceived as an effect of a set of signs. In the Peircean model, a reference is made to an object when the sign (or representamen) is interpreted recursively by another sign (which becomes its interpretant), a conception of meaning that does in fact imply a classification of sign types. The psychology of perception seems to suggest the existence of a
common cognitive system which treats all or most sensorily conveyed meanings in the same way. If all signs must also be objects of perception, there is every reason to believe that their modality will determine at least part of their nature. Thus, the sensory modalities will be visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, gustatory, kinesthetic, etc. A list of sign types would include: writing, symbol, index, image, map, graph, diagram, etc. Some combinations of signs can be multi-modal, i.e. different types of signs grouped together for effect. But the distinction between a 'medium' and a 'modality' could be summarised as: 'text' is a medium for presenting the modality of natural language; 'image' is both a medium and a modality; 'music' is a modality for the auditory media.

So modality refers to a certain type of information and/or the representation format in which information is stored. Medium is the means whereby this information is delivered to the senses of the interpreter. ("Modality") Pierce's concept of semiotic sign involves referents and interpretants. Referent (need not necessarily be a material thing) is something beyond the sign to which the sign vehicle refers. If representation is only access to reality, it is both significant and critical to determine their accuracy. The concept of modality to refer to the truth value of sign was adopted by Pierce from logic. He acknowledged three kinds of modality: actuality (logical), necessity and (hypothetical) possibility (90). He also classified signs in terms of the mode of relationship of the sign vehicle to its referents -their apparent transparency in relation to 'reality' (the symbolic mode, for instance having low modality). Pierce asserted that logically signification could only offer a partial truth since if it offered the complete truth, it would destroy itself by becoming identical with its object. From the point of view of social semiotics, truth is a construct of semiosis, and as such the truth is truth of a particular social group, arising from the values and beliefs of that group. Modality refers to the reality status accorded to or claimed by a sign, text or genre. Robert Hodge and Gunther Kress declared that “modality refers to the status, authority and reliability of a message, to its ontological status or to its value as truth or fact” (24).

In making sense of the text, its interpreters make 'modality judgements' about it, drawing on their knowledge of the world and of the medium by assigning it to fact or fiction, actuality or action, live or recorded, and they assess the possibility or plausibility of the events depicted or the claims made in it. In fact, the extent to which a text may be perceived as 'real' depends in part on the media employed. Writing, for instance has lower modality than film or television. However no rigid rankings of media or modalities are possible. The following is an excerpt about the response of a child on cartoon: The interview was conducted in course of general conversation with the interviewee Sourasnata Debnath on 26 October 6.30pm. The interviewee is a boy of 6 years old and reading in class 1 in an English medium school. He belongs to a middle class Bengali family.
Q. Do you think the cartoons that you watch really exist?
Ans. Yes, I thought that they really exist. I did not know whether we are humans or cartoon. Then my mother said these are not real. These are cartoons.

Q. What do you feel when you read and watch Nante Fante? Are they real?
Ans. No.

Q. How do you know?
Ans. They are drawings.

Q. If they were drawn as us, like photos. Then, will you think the same?
Ans. Yes, Kochikame are like human beings. But I know they are cartoons.

Q. Why do characters of Kochikame (Figure 2.19) appear to you as human beings. They are also drawings?
Ans. They have lines in their body. When they speak lines appear in their face.

Q. Which channels do you watch?
Ans. C-Beebies, Cartoon Network, Hungama, Pogo and Disney channel.

Q. Which cartoons or movies do you watch?
Ans. Sinchan, Doraemon, Ben10, Power Rangers, Chota Bheem, Amar Chitra Katha, Ramayana-the Legend of Prince Ram, Krishna and Balaram, Mickey Mouse, Handy Many, Chota Bheem aur Krishna, Sinchan in Treasures of Buri Buri Kingdom, Patliputra-the City of the Dead, Chota Bheem-Journey to Petra, Doraemon-the Movie Nabita and Dinosaur and many others.

Q. Which cartoons do you like in comparison to others?
Ans. Doraemon, I like Doraemon movies and Sinchan Movies.

Q. And others?

Q. What differences do you notice between them?
Ans. Sinchan and Doraemon do not show shadows. In Chota Bheem sun and shadows seem real.

Q. And in drawing?
Ans. Sinchan and Doraemon are totally cartoon.

Q. What is age of Sinchan and Nobita.
Ans. Nobita reads in Class v and Sinchan is five (5) years old.

Q. Which cartoons/serials do you like- the one that are based on a child of your age or those based on others?
Ans. But children also watch cartoon or serial like Power Rangers.
Q. Have you seen Ramayana?
Ans. Yes, Ramayana-The Legend of Prince Ram.
Q. Who is the hero?
Ans. Of course, Ram.
Q. Did you notice Vibishana in it?
Ans. Yes.
Q. How is he?
Ans. Good. Ram is good, so obviously Vibishana is good. Vibishana is Ram's company.
Q. Have you seen any cartoon with girl as main character like Nobita Nobi or Sinchan?
Ans. No, not a single one (wonder).
Q. How is Shizuka in Doraemon?
Ans. Shizuka reads with Nobita. She loves bathing very much. Nobita and others go to watch her bath and she pours a bucket of water on them. Do you know how it could be understood. It was shown that the body of them gets wet with sudden pouring of water. (smiles)
Q. What if Shizuka was not there? I mean she is not so important in Doraemon?
Ans. Nobita is mad after Shizuka. If Shizuka is not there for whom Nobita will take the help of Doraemon. Nobita takes the help of Doraemon to win the favour of Shizuka.
Q. And Shizuka?
Ans. Shizuka often goes with Suneo, the other rich boy of the same class by saying just a sorry to Nobita.
Q. How do you use colours in your books?
Ans. Many of the books consist of image with colours, we just copy it. And in others I give body colour to human beings and green and black to Rakhsasas.
Q. Why?
Ans. They are always shown like that.
Q. How are villains shown?
Ans. In Ben 10 movies the villain is Vilgax. When I see him it seems that a tree has dried and for a long time it was not given water.

We accept the terms in which reality is constructed within the medium. This is not confined to children, since when absorbed in narrative (in media), we frequently fall into a 'suspension of disbelief', without compromising our ability to distinguish representations from reality. Pierce reflected that in contemplating a painting, there is a moment when we lose the consciousness that it is not the thing, the distinction of the real and the copy disappears (58). Whilst in a conscious comparison of a photographic image with a cartoon image of the same thing the photograph is likely to be judged as more 'realistic', the mental schemata involved in visual recognition may be closer to the stereotypical simplicity of cartoon images
than to photographs. People can identify an image of a hand when it is drawn as a cartoon more quickly than when they are shown a photograph of a hand. (Ryan and Schwartz 66-67). This underlines the importance of perceptual codes in 'constructing reality'. Umberto Eco argues that through familiarity an iconic signifier can acquire primacy over its signified. Such a sign becomes conventional the more its addressee becomes acquainted with by stages of progression. At a certain point the iconic representation, however stylised it may be, appears to be more true than the real experience and people begin to look at things 'through the glasses of iconic conventions' (Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* 204-5).

Semiotics studies representations and the process involved in representational practices. Semioticians believe that reality always involves representation as a defining feature of sign in that they are treated by their users as 'standing for' or representing as other things. Photograph or film does not simply record an event, but is only one of an infinite number of possible representations. All media texts, however realistic are representations rather than simply recordings or reproduction of reality. Cinematic apparatus always operates selectively, limiting, filtering and transforming its raw material. Photographic realism in comic strips, therefore, in an attempt to approximate reality 'devise' the process of drawing, imitation and reproduction. Cartoon like illustration conveys the aesthetics of realism in its own way. It is not an attempt at a re-production of the image; it is a creation in a different medium and genre operating in its own world. A more detailed analytical comparison and modus operandi of photograph and cartoon style blended in graphic novel genre has been undertaken in chapter three.

Modality judgments involve comparison of textual representations with models drawn from the everyday world and with models based on the genre. They are therefore obviously dependent on relevant experience of both the world and the medium. Robert Hodge and David Tripp's semiotic study of "Children and Television" focused on the developments of children's modality judgements argues that watching television soap operas can involve a kind of psychological or emotional realism for viewers which exist at the connotative rather than the denotative level (86). Viewers find some representations emotionally and psychologically true to life. It is the 'generic realism'. Some media draw on several interacting sign systems: television and film for example utilise verbal, visual, auditory and locomotive sign. Medium itself is also not neutral, each medium has its own constrains and as Umberto Eco notes, each is already charged with cultural significances. (Eco, *Towards a Semiotic Enquiry into the Television Message* 267). For instance, photographic and audio-visual media are almost invariably regarded as more 'real' than other forms of representation. Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen argue that the material expression of the text is always significant, it is separately variable semiotic features (Kress and Leeuwen 231).

Hans Robert Jauss, who is usually associated with Reception theory, was concerned with the way in which literary works are 'received' by their readers over time. He attempts to theorise the way in which their 'consumers' receive art works individually and collectively. Karlheinz Stierle in his
article "The Reading of Fictional Texts" suggests that the German term 'Rezeption' as used by those known as Reception Theorists, "refers to the activity of reading, the construction of meaning, and the reader's response to what he is reading. (Stierle 83) Stuart Hall divided the process of meaning making in three 'moments' -the 'moment of encoding', the 'moment of the text', and the 'moment of decoding' (Hall 128). Moment of encoding is done on the part of the author/creator/artist/illustrator. It can be a conscious or an unconscious act. The 'text' may be coded with an eye for the target audience who has an access to the codes, but may be differently decoded. Encoding may be termed as 'authorial intent'. Searching only for authorial intent should not be the process of reading as it assumes that meaning does not change across time. But sometimes an addressee's intention is often contained in the text particularly when selling/marketing is involved. He would be moulding the text in such way that audiences would prefer to read it. The process of 'coding' of the text such as in case of *Nante Fante* and *Handa Bhonda* has been done by the author with an eye for the target audience i.e children of a particular age group. However due to cultural influences, certain codifications tends to take place unconsciously and these codifications of the text could be decoded differently by another set of readers different from the target audience, as this research entails. The following diagram would give an insight how this process functions in case of *Nante Fante* and *Handa Bhonda* :

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AUTHOR</th>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>READER/TARGET AUDIENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Narayan Debnath</td>
<td>Nante Fante/Handa Bhonda comic srips</td>
<td>Hindu Bengali middle class children generally of 8-14 years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CODIFICATION</th>
<th>DECODIFICATION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different decodification</td>
<td>Different set of readers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHILDREN</th>
<th>RESEARCHER LOOKING FOR CULTURAL CONNOTATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The moment of the text refers only to the contents of the image/illustration and associated verbal language in case of the 'texts' undertaken for the research. As the diagram shows, the act of decoding may be conscious or unconscious process. The readers looking for cultural connotations would decode the
text consciously while unconscious decoding is done on the part of children whose act of decoding the text is devoid of conscious or critical examination and analysis. It is relevant here to remember that the act of decoding is never a passive act. However the terms 'unconscious' and 'passive' should not taken as synonyms. Unconscious would mean decoding the text as author would intend the target audience to decode it and conscious would mean decoding of the text in a different manner not intended by the author. But both conscious and unconscious decoding are basically active processes because in both the reader and the target audience decode for 'construction' of meaning.

To analyse the process of decoding is perhaps the most complex function in semiotic analysis because of diverse reading involved in it. Readers subscribing to dominant or hegemonic reading, negotiated reading and oppositional or counter hegemonic reading would decode the same text in different ways. Dominant or hegemonic reading is done by those readers perhaps who are the target consumers and for whom the text is intended. Nante Fante or Handa Bhonda targets at the majority-Bengali Hindu middle class children of a particular age group. This category of readers will decode the text by way of identification. Following Gombrich's methodology, in the case of reading Handa Bhonda or Nante Fante comic strip in Bengali, the Bengali reader who enjoys central position in the cultural hegemony (vis-à-vis readers belonging to marginal culture in Bengali cultural context, such as Oriya or Bihari) shall adopt the dominant reading strategy and identify with the central protagonist and the cultural situations coded by means of recognition and recall leading to perception corresponding to Gombrich's 'Beholder's share' = the collection of perpetual and psychic acts through which the spectator brings an image into existence by perceiving and understanding it.

RECOGNITION + RECALL + THEIR COMBINATION = PERCEPTION.

According to Gombrich, there is no 'innocent look'; perceiving images is always influenced by our knowledge of the world and of other images. Since the text in question is comic strips, therefore, they need not necessarily bring into existence an image rather they might, in all probability go for a matching or tallying of their reality and image presented in the strip and end up with an identification unconsciously or subconsciously. But in case of a reader belonging to those cultures who are represented as 'marginalised' or 'dominated' in these comic strips, there are two alternative possibilities of decoding strategy:

1. In the case of a reading where readers from such cultures happens to be unaware of the hegemonic implications of such cultural codifications, they might have few doubts and questions during the process of decoding, but these would be generally overlooked. In such a negotiated decoding/reading the ultimate end result is more or less conformation to the decoding intended by the author.

2. In the oppositional or counter-hegemonic reading as in the case of this research undertaken, the decoding would be different from what is intended by the author for the target audience and would question, resist, even negate or subvert the dominant reading strategy as well as negotiated
reading and the resultant influences. Hence, such a reader would resist identification with the cultural presentation in the 'text'.

However, what is important to point out in all types of reading is the active nature of encoding/decoding. Encoding is not just sending a message and decoding is not just receiving a message. They construct meaning. Decoding is likely to be different from the encoder's intended meaning. Umberto Eco uses the term 'aberrant decoding' to refer to a 'text' which has been decoded by means of a code different from that used to encode it (Chandler 92). But comic strips with fixed type of code resists 'aberrant decoding' and paves the way of hegemonisation and hierarchy formation more easily. Comic strips contain two different types of codes - language and illustration (the visual image). Readers from a different language can decode the content from the illustration if they do not know the language. In case of comic strips the visual image is the sign, the illustration works as a signifier and the meaning it conveys is the signified i.e. concept.

Paradigmatic analysis in semiotic theory seeks to identify the various paradigms i.e. the pre-existing set of signifiers which are embedded under the manifest substance of 'texts'. These are set of signifiers placed at the back of the mind unconsciously. This structural analysis involves a consideration of the positive or negative connotations of each signifier as there is a 'choice' between what is chosen and what is not. The choice is set from the same set that includes both the 'present' and the 'absent'. Whereas the first category affirms to 'positive', the second one leads to 'negative' or subdued or inferior as a selection is always based on preference. The use of one signifier rather than another implies a preference. Paradigmatic relations are the oppositions and contrasts between the signifiers that belong to the same form which those used in the in the text were drawn from.

The main issue to be considered in paradigmatic analysis for the hypothesis of this research which is based on the concept of cultural association of the 'texts' is why a particular signifier rather than a workable alternative is used in a particular/specific context. This aspect is often referred to as 'absences'. It is closely related to Saussure's concept of the value of signs. According to him, signs take their value from what they are not. Paradigmatic analysis also involves comparing and contrasting each of the signifiers present in the 'text' with absent signifiers that might have been chosen. The use of one signifier over another from the same paradigm is based on factors such as technical constrains, codes, conventions, connotations, styles, rhetorical purpose and the limitation of the individual's own repertoire. Apart from all that, it is also based on an ideological construct. This ideological construct functions as a determiner in interpreting a 'text'. Meaning is not transmitted to us; we actively create it according to a complex interplay of codes or conventions of which we are normally unaware. This convention is embedded in us because of certain ideologies and when we chose a thing out of same paradigm, actually we give preference to it over others. The paradigmatic analysis in semiotic study helps us not to
take 'reality' presented/ projected having a purely objective existence which is independent of human interpretation. 'Reality' is a construct and we, as members of a culture, play a role in constructing it.

Semiotic study includes commutation test in order to make out why a particular sign is preferred and how it is influenced by the construct we call 'normal' subsequently imposing a presupposed 'naturalness' in our conscience. Commutation test is the replacement of one sign by another (Lacey 64). It illustrates how powerful paradigms and syntagsms are in image or any kind of analysis. "By substituting objects for other sign in the same paradigm, and decoding the new meaning, we can isolate what contribution the original sign is making to the meaning of the sign" (ibid). This research involved the analysis of some panels from Best of Nante Fante using commutation test so as to examine the contribution of the original sign (the panel as it is) in constructing the meaning of the sign -

1. The first panel- (Debnath 47, Figure 2.20)

   Nante and Fante sitting in a red jeep and talking about their coming jeep race competition with Keltu. For the purpose of commutation test two kind of replacement is done. The first one is from human paradigm and the second one is from paradigm (set) of cars or means of communication. Taking into account the given context the verbal (syntax) form is-

   Two boys sitting in a red jeep preparing for their jeep race competition.

   The alternate possibilities are given as follows where girls are chosen instead of two boys from the human paradigm and jeep is replaced by another type of vehicles

   a. Two girls sitting in a red jeep preparing for their jeep race competition;
   b. Two girls sitting in a red cycle preparing for a cycle race competition;
   c. Two girls sitting in a red horse for a horse race competition.

   First possibility seems awkward from the presupposed concept of normalcy regarding gender because jeep is an object that is considered purely a masculine car compared to other cars. The second one is much more natural but only from the perspective of the present day situation. The same thing would have been unnatural if viewed from the time frame in which the strip was written. The third one seems unnatural because of the connotations of masculinity, active and dynamicity associated with a horse. Gender construction and gender stereotyping does not equate activity and dynamicity with girls. They are considered passive and docile. The interesting fact about these two alternatives are the different contributions of colour 'red' makes in these three. The concept of the red colour provides a romantic, passionate and soft association often relate with femininity while in the first alternative it was a symbol of male masculinity. The main focus regarding the commutation test that comes out from the analysis is the strength of a sign in constructing meaning. It does not only construct but is constructed by social norms which are themselves creation of a particular ideology. The 'text' plays a significant role as here the researcher's choice of alternative is also the product of her readings of cultural texts such as literary texts or movie.
Another instance analysed for the purpose of commutation test from the same strip is as follows -

An elderly person is worried because a house is on fire and a baby is left inside. He seeks the help of Nante and Fante. Nante rescues the baby. (Figure 2.21; and 2.22)(the given one in the text)
The commutation test is as follows:

1. An elderly woman seeks help from *Nante and Fante*.
2. A girl rescues the baby by climbing a tree.

The first one seems more 'natural' than even the given one since women are generally projected as 'damsels in distress'. They are 'chosen' for this purpose. The second alternative seems 'unnatural' because the act of rescuing or any heroic deed involving physicality is conceived as masculine. Rescuing by climbing a tree is not natural for girls. It is the gendered construction and stereotyping that is embedded unconsciously within us and this is the factor that makes the alternative seems unnatural.
The first replacement is adjusted because the male is old and seeking help. He is not presented with his masculinity. Information or meaning is not contained in the world or in any 'text'. The projection of Bengalis as superior to 'others' as a reality in *Nante Fante* and *Handa Bhonda* comic strips is a construct and is constructed through the 'choice'/preference of Bengalis as central. This choice is done on the basis of majority/ minority paradigm or hierarchy.

The analysis of the theory of 'absence' (in absentia) of alternative signifiers from the same paradigm tend to penetrate into the 'construct' in choosing a preferred signifier. Two kinds of 'absences' present themselves for examination in this context. The first one is that where absence 'goes without saying' i.e. absence is taken for granted and seems 'obvious'. The second one is the 'absence' which evokes question by its lack of presence. But what is relevant here is the dependence of meaning construction on reading strategy. In the context of Bengali *Nante Fante* and *Handa Bhonda* comic strip, the absence of Oriya identity of the Oriya cook in the majority Bengali culture is taken as 'obvious' from dominant or hegemonic reading strategy. But from counter hegemonic reading strategy that this research has adopted, the very absence of Oriya identity would evoke question. For a Bengali dominant or hegemonic reader the presence of, for instance, a person from Orissa as a cook stereotyped in the role is taken to be normal. The fact that a person from Orissa is denied the role of the hostel super (who happens to be always Bengali) in such strips is an absence which is taken for granted. On the other hand, a resident of Orissa as a counter - hegemonic reader would immediately take note of this absence in the specific role and this absence would automatically raise questions about deliberate cultural hegemonisation. According to Daniel Chandler, "Analysing textual absences can help to reveal whose interests are served by their omission" (63). Hence in the case of *Handa Bhonda* and *Nante Fante* comic strips an analysis of textual absences of Oriyas in the role of hostel super or a central character tend to reveal that the interest of the writer belonging to the Bengali majority mainstream culture that is
served by such absences. The Oriya cook is a Brahmin. If viewed from the perspective of caste hierarchy, he is to be situated at the top (only within his own state and community). But in Bengali-majority culture his high caste is ignored and he is presented and subordinated as cook.

Binary oppositions play an important role in constructing ideology and meaning. Binary oppositions reflect, construct ideology and in turn is constructed from a deep rooted ideology themselves. Binary oppositions are created by dominant ideology on the basis of a significant dividing line and this line is created by dominant power structure where dominant takes the form of 'self' and dominated the 'other'. Binary opposition is an important factor governing the structure of language also. Opposites function in determining meaning more clearly than synonyms. Within a culture, there are some terms which might be described as paired 'contrasts, since they are not always direct 'opposites'. The emphasising factor about binary opposition is that it is a feature of culture and comes to seem natural to members of culture. Many pairings of concepts (such as male/female and body/ mind) are familiar to members of a culture and may seem commonsensical distinctions for everyday communicational purposes even if they may be regarded as 'false dichotomies in critical contexts'. Masculinity and femininity are binaries that are constructed and considered as opposites by cultures or member of a particular culture. An object is attributed gendered characteristic by society and is drawn from the same paradigm set. Male and female are not 'opposites'; yet cultural myths routinely encourage us to treat them as such. Guy Cook offers a simple example of how images of masculinity and femininity can be generated through a series of binary opposition in literary texts. (Cook 115). He instances two consecutive speeches from the beginning of a scene in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*:

JULIET: Wilt thou be gone? It is not yet near day;  
       It was the nightingale, and not the lark,  
       That pierc’d the fearful hollow of thine ear;  
       Nightly she sings on yond pomegranate tree.  
       Believe me love, it was the nightingale.

ROMEO: It was the lark, the herald of the morn,  
       No nightingale. Look, love, what envious streaks  
       Do lace the severing clouds in yonder east;  
       Night’s candles are burnt out, and jocund day  
       Stands tiptoe on the misty mountain tops.  
       I must be gone and live or stay and die.

(Romeo and Juliet III , v).

Cook notes the following gendered oppositions:
Indeed we may also note that Juliet emphasises on sound while Romeo relies on that which is also stereotypically gendered association. It is through the repetition of such association that a constructed reality is generated and sustained. This kind of paired signifiers shape the preferred reading. Such linkages seem to become aligned in some texts and codes so that additional vertical relationships (such as male/mind; female/body) acquire apparent links of their own. Silverman notes, “a cultural code is a conceptual system which is organised around key oppositions and equations, in which a term like ‘woman’ is defined in opposition to a term like ‘man’ and in which each term is aligned with a cluster of symbolic attributes” (Silverman, 36). The dilemma or contradiction of culture in generating meaning from a pair of opposition is resolved by a dreamlike working over of myths. Myth reaffirms which is 'chosen' as preferred and that is why 'good' or the myth constitutes a repeated reframing of paired opposites which are transformations of primary pair. These layers begin with classifications based on physical perception and become increasingly more generalised.

Paradigmatic analysis provides more interesting case studies when applied to popular culture and visual images than to literary text. Exploring a basic opposition of wilderness/civilisation, Jim Kitses analysed the film genre of the western in relation to a series of oppositions - individual/community; nature/culture; law/gun; sheep/cattle (Chandler, 86). The working of binary opposition in constructing and maintaining the dominant power structure is also analysed to show how it works in the apparently simple comic strips by means of its visual narrative. The strip/story chosen for this purpose is the story of hunting tiger. (Debnath, Nante Fante Collection 8 3) All the rural people of the village seeks help of the Superintendent because he has a gun. The appearance, and the body language/non verbal communication of the characters present in the story generate a binary opposition that helps to maintain a presupposed 'truth' or 'reality' regarding 'centre' and 'margin' (Figure 2.23):

In case of visual images the working of binary oppositions is often very significant. While contrasting and comparing the logos of two major computer companies namely IBM and Apple, a series of associated binary oppositions can be generated. As far as colour is concerned the IBM logo is monochromatic or single colored while the Apple logo is polychromatic or multicolored. Moreover, the former appears to be more formal and hence mechanical and distanced, while the later is more warm,
human and lively. The former is also logical while the incoherence and lack of logic in the mixed up rainbow colours of the later generates more humane appeal. The IBM logo has a repetitive structure and is therefore predictable and conformistic whereas the Apple logo is a nonrepetitive structure and therefore unpredictable and nonconformistic (adventurous). The apple logo also seeks to symbolise a negation and rejection of the binary of black and white as well as the linearity of IBM logo. The form of the former is straight and bold whereas that of the later is curved and outlined. Moreover the bitten apple also alludes to the Biblical association of knowledge as forbidden, adventurous pertaining to loss of paradise for the more human earth.

The syntagmatic analysis of text (whether it is verbal or non-verbal) involves studying its structure and relationship between its parts. The study of syntagmatic relations reveals the conventions or 'rules of combination' underlying the production and interpretation of texts. The use of one syntagmatic structure rather than another within a text influences meaning. Syntagmatic relationship can be based on sequential, spatial and conceptual relationships. Narrative is based on sequential (and causal relationship e.g. in film and television narrative sequence), there are also syntagmatic forms based on spatial relationships (e.g. montage in posters and photographs, which work through juxtaposition) and on conceptual relationship (such as in exposition or argument). Many texts contain more than one type of syntagmatic structure, though one may be dominant.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEVELS</th>
<th>SYNTAGMATIC RELATIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>signified</td>
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<td>signifier</td>
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(Diagram adapted from Daniel Chandler’s *Semiotics for Beginners*)

Structure can also effect/modify the meaning of a text. It can be formed conforming to a particular ideology or can form an ideology by its syntagms. Open ended texts, thus, subvert or resist the closed type of text. Closed type of text with a fixed closure or by giving a resolution helps in 'preferred reading', but open-ended text resists dominant strategy of reading and gives a scope to generate rather than to merge in a dominant or preferred reading.

Edward Sapir famously remarked, 'all grammars leak' (Sapir , 38). Those who would learn from semiotics should search for structural leaks, seams and scaffolding as signs of the making of any representation, and also for what has been denied, hidden or excluded so that the text may seem
to tell the truth'. Sequential syntagmatic relations are about 'before' and 'after'. As the research focuses on visual forms i.e. comic strips, the analysis should primarily be based on sequential relations. But comic strips consist of spatial syntagms (as in the case of analysing a single panel) within the sequential, it is pertinent to analyse the thrust areas of the research taking sequential as well as spatial relation at the same time. Sequential syntagmatic relations are essentially about before and after, spatial syntagmatic relations include:

- Above/ below
- In front/ below
- Close/distant
- Left/ right (which can also have sequential significance)
- North/south/ east/ west, and
- Inside/ outside (or centre/ periphery)

Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leeuwen identify three key spatial dimensions in visual texts: left/ right, top/ bottom and centre/ margin (99). Semiotic narratology (narrative theory) is concerned with narrative of any mode—literally or non-literary, fictional or non-fictional, verbal or visual. Narrative is related to sequential syntagmatic relations. Semiotic study has done much in this field mostly related to cinema/film. However, perhaps the most basic narrative syntagm is linear temporal model composed of three phases—equilibrium-disruption-equilibrium. Roland Barthes argued that narrative is basically “translatable-international, transhistorical, transcultural” (Barthes, “Textual Analysis of Poe’s ‘Valdemar” 79). Barbera Stern comments that plots can be actualised in any medium capable of communicating two time orders (film, dance opera, comic strip, interactive media and so forth) and can be transposed from one medium to another (qtd. in Chandler, 151). As far as narrative sequence of comic strip is concerned, it is very close to film/cinema. According to Narayan Debnath, writer/illustrator of Nante Fante and Handa Bhonda comic strip, comic strip is like cinema because it also needs script and shot division with a single difference that one is moving while the other is static. (as told in an interview to the researcher, included in chapter IV of this thesis). Hence, analysing the sequential order of comic strips would be parallel to the film theory.

As paradigmatic elements (rather choice of elements) imparts/implies a content, the narrative form itself has a content of its own; the medium has a message. Marshal McLuhan has quoted that medium is the message (56). Narrative is such an automatic choice for representing events that it seems unproblematic and natural. The use of familiar narrative structure serves to naturalise the content of the narrative itself. Where narratives end in a return to a predictable equilibrium this is referred to as a narrative closure. Closure is often affected as a resolution of an opposition. Structural closure is regarded by many theorists as reinforcing a preferred reading. The conventional narrative (in dominant forms of
literature, cinema and so on) also play a part in the constitution of the subject. While narrative appears to demonstrate unity and coherence within the text, the subject participates in the sense of closure (in part through identification of character).

Narrative may imply continuity where there is none. Foucault's poststructuralist history of ideas is radical in insisting instead on 'ruptures', 'discontinuities' and 'disjunctions' (Foucault, *The Order of Things* 97). Reflecting on his exploration of historiography in his book entitled *The Content of the Form*, Hayden White observes "Narrative is not merely a neutral discursive form…but rather entails ontological and epistemic choices with distinct ideological and even specifically political implication" (ix). He adds that "real life can never be truthfully represented as having the kind of formal coherency met with in the conventional, well- made or fabulist story" (ibid). Narrative structures seek to render invisible their process of selection and alignment of events in a consecutive chain. Critics have used narrative theories to analyse how cultures have chosen to represent themselves through their narratives.

To investigate the theoretical postulations and frames on sequential narrative (syntagms) in comic strips this chapter examines a story/ strip from *Handa Bhondar Kandokarkhana 4-6*. The purpose is to show how the narrative structure represents the cultural conscience of the reader or writer himself. The strip is of two pages-first page is of eight panels and second is of seven panels. The story is a simple narrative of how the temporal deafness of Handa and Bhonda's "pishemoshai" (uncle) creates chaos in his shop, irritates his customer and how finally this very deafness helps to catch Handa and Bhonda redhanded while stealthily having lemonade. The narrative conforms to the simple story telling style of describing a funny incident. There is no gap or diversion in the narrative. As far as entertainment value of such comic strip is concerned, this strip has much element to suffice that need of the audience/readers. The narrative seems unproblematic and natural- "pishemoshai" becomes deaf due to Handa and Bhonda's loud whistle, he misunderstands the requirements of the customer because of his temporal deafness, irritates them and in turn is harassed by them, lastly hears 'hearing aid' instead of lemonade takes the hearing aid and catches Handa and Bhonda while having lemonade and punishes them. The story also conforms to the basic narrative syntagm (linear temporal model) composed of three phases-equilibrium-disruption-equilibrium.

The familiar narrative structure naturalises the content of the narrative. As *Handa Bhonda* is meant for a target audience Bengali reading children of eight to fourteen years, it has the hidden/unconscious agenda to inculcate moral values in children as most children's literature does. Handa and Bhonda exploit their uncle not for a good cause but for stealing. So his sudden recovery from his deafness and their resultant punishment is an indicator of 'chance' operating in the lives of man. The story has a narrative closure as it conforms to a balance-misdeed leads to punishment. It reinforces the 'preferred reading' as it is predictable and readers are well-informed about it. The reality presented is a fictional reality and it is obvious because real life can never be truthfully represented. Like 'choices'
involved in selection of main characters, paradigmatic narrative is also operative through a 'choice' This story is divided in fifteen panels. The panel wise content analysis would be helpful in understanding the narrative/syntagmatic relations.

**PANEL 1:**
A) Characters: Handa, Bhonda and gymnast teacher Bondababu.
B) Background: A Shop where both Handa and Bhonda are shopkeeper in their uncle's absence. The figure of Bondababu enters.
C) Content: Bondababu gives his introduction and asks for a whistle.

**PANEL 2:**
A) Characters: Bondababu and Handa
B) Background: same shop.

**PANEL 3:**
A) Characters: uncle, 1st customer (Bondababu), and Handa.
B) Background: same shop.
C) Content: the whistle of Handa makes uncle deaf.

**PANEL 4:**
A) Characters: Handa, Bhonda, uncle and the 1st customer. (Bondababu)
B) Background: same shop.
C) Content: customer denies to accept the used thing and goes out agitated.

**PANEL 5:**
A) Characters: uncle, Handa and Bhonda.
B) Background: same shop.
C) Content: uncle advises how to sell things.

**PANEL 6:**
A) Characters: 2nd customer, Handa and uncle
B) Background: same shop.
C) Content: 2nd customer asks for a wig.

**PANEL 7:**
A) Characters: Handa, Bhonda, 2nd customer and uncle.
B) Background: same shop.
C) Content: uncle misunderstands customer's words because of his deafness and gives a lock instead of wig. (“tala” instead of “Parchula”)

**PANEL 8:**
A) Characters: uncle and the 2nd customer.
B) Background: same shop
C) Content: The customer furiously throws the lock (which uncle has given to him) towards uncle.

**PANEL 9:**
A) Characters: uncle and the third customer.
B) Background: same shop.
C) Content: Uncle regrets his deafness. 3rd customer enters.

**PANEL 10:**
A) Characters: same as the previous one.
B) Background: same shop.
C) Content: customer says something, uncle misunderstands due to his deafness.

**PANEL 11:**
A) Characters: same as the previous one.
B) Background: same shop.
C) Content: uncle misbehaves with the customer as he misinterprets customer's words.

**PANEL 12:**
A) Character: Handa, Bhonda and uncle.
B) Background: same shop.
C) Content: Handa and Bhonda plans to have 'lemonade' as uncle has gone deaf. Uncle hears 'hearing aid' instead of lemonade and becomes happy with their idea.

**PANEL 13:**
A) Character: same as the previous one.
B) Background: another room in the shop interior.
C) Content: Handa and Bhonda are having lemonade. Uncle enters hearing the sound as he has already put on the hearing aid. He catches them red handed. He scolds them and tells that they have told him about the aid.

**PANEL 14:**
A) Characters: same
B) Background: same as the previous one
C) Content: Handa and Bhonda looks puzzled and told that they had said about lemonade.

**PANEL 15:**
A) Character: same
B) Background: same as the previous one.
e) Content: Handa and Bhonda are being beaten by uncle. Uncle can not hear their screaming as the hearing aid has been fallen from his ear.
However, as far as the narrative sequence is concerned the comic element of the story lies in the misunderstanding of words. The 12th panel is the turning point of the narrative where Handa and Bhonda are shown to be totally ignorant of the fact that uncle has heard 'hearing aid' instead of lemonade.

The story can be analysed as a bipolarity- rationality of adults and mischievousness of children. The equilibrium that is projected at the outset is that children are generally advised by elders (uncle advising how to sell things). This 'normal order' is disrupted by the sudden deafness of the advisor and the resultant chaos and finally equilibrium is restored through the punishment of the offender (Handa and Bhonda in this case). The 'normal order' that is set in the narrative is the dominant concept of 'normalcy' which is seen through the eyes of elders. Here it can also be interpreted as the writer's unconscious 'mature' self operating although the 'text' is meant for children. The final equilibrium discloses a concept (punishment of children for misdeed) which is dominant and leads to a narrative closure. In fact, this narrative is an automatic 'choice' for representing events and the fast progression of the plot results in a closure and ease a preferred reading.

But it is interesting to note that the dominant or hegemonic readers (i.e. children of a certain age who are the target audience of this strip) are supposed to reverse position and become oppositional reader. The equilibrium that is set is 'normal' for adults and not for children as mischievousness is taken to be a for granted activity for children. What is seen functioning here is the 'unconscious' elder/dominant self of the writer/illustrator who imparts his mature self ideology to the construction of intended meaning. And on the part of children, it is an unconscious reading or assimilation of the dominance or supremacy as entertainment. Ironically such type of text is being read for their fun or entertainment value only.
NOTES

1. Colloquial Bengali words frequently used to show anger to someone younger in age. “Markat” is a Bengali word for monkey. “Chimde hatachhara” means 'skeletal idiot'.

2. The typical Bengali lower garment consisting of long cloth piece, traditionally white in colour, worn often in a very fashionable manner depending upon the occasion.

3. The traditional Bengali upper garment known as the “kurta” in the rest of India.

4. Small ritualistic tuft of hair usually at the back of the head to serve as a marker for a caste or creed such as the Brahmins and the Vaishnavites.

5. The sacred white thread worn across the chest slung from the shoulder generally by the Hindu Brahmins.

6. A medical term, It is a chromosomal condition caused by the presence of all or part of an extra 21st chromosome. It is named after John Langdon Down, the British physician who described the syndrome in 1866. Often Down syndrome is associated with some impairment of cognitive ability and physical growth, and a particular set of facial characteristics. Individuals with Down syndrome tend to have a lower-than-average cognitive ability, often ranging from mild to moderate disabilities. Many children with Down syndrome who have received family support, enrichment therapies, and tutoring have been known to graduate from high school and college, and enjoy employment in the work force. The average IQ of children with Down syndrome is around 50, compared to normal children with an IQ of 100. A small number have a severe to high degree of intellectual disability.

7. Known in medical literature also as Alzheimer disease (AD) is the most common form of dementia. There is no cure for the disease, which worsens as it progresses, and eventually leads to death. It was first described by German psychiatrist and neuropathologist Alois Alzheimer in 1906 and was named after him. Although Alzheimer's disease develops differently for every individual, there are many common symptoms. Early symptoms are often mistakenly thought to be 'age-related' concerns, or manifestations of stress. In the early stages, the most common symptom is difficulty in remembering recent events. When AD is suspected, the diagnosis is usually confirmed with tests that evaluate behaviour and thinking abilities, often followed by a brain scan if available.

8. A term that usually refers to a person belonging to Orissa (usually a Brahmin) in mainstream Bengali culture. Such persons are engaged as cooks in Bengali household. The term is derogatory in sense.

9. Traditionally a term used to denote an inhabitant of erstwhile East Pakistan and now Bangladesh, opposed to the 'Ghoti'- a resident of West Bengal. In the context of legendary East Bengal and West Bengal (the 'Bangal vs. Ghoti') and the socio-cultural rivalry between the two that spreads even to the East Bengal-Mohun Bagan feud on the football field. The Bangal language is characterised
by a dialectical variation of Standard Bangla spoken in West Bengal as the literary language and promoted from Kolkata, the centre of Bengali diaspora.

10. An actual conversation heard on 2nd August, 2011 in Kolkata. (Two persons were quarreling on something).

11. “Ramanir Gune”. Star Jalsa Entertainment Network. Kolkata. 25 August 2011. This is probably derived from the famous Bengali saying- "Sansar sukher hoy ramanir gune" (meaning 'a family attains happiness by the qualities of the women in that family', trans. mine), itself a patriarchal construct that shows gender stereotyping of women as the homemaker and the one on whom the onus for a good and happy family rests.

12. Full title “Kochira Katsushika-ku Kameari Ken Mae Hashutsujo” (literally, "This is the police station in front of Kameari Park in Katsushika Ward"), is a long-running comedy manga by Osamu Akimoto. It has been continuously serialised weekly since September 1976, with over 1700 chapters published, making it the longest-running manga series in history. “Kochikame” takes place in the present day, in and around a neighborhood police station (koban) in the downtown part of Tokyo, and revolves around the misadventures of a middle-aged cop, Kankichi Ryotsu (Ryo-san). Kameari Koen is an actual park in Tokyo's Katsushika ward; the police box is fictional but modeled after a real one located on the north side of Kameari railway station. The manga has brought considerable fame to the neighborhood, and draws sightseers from all over Japan to a (usually vacant) police box in a nondescript residential neighborhood. There is only a vacant lot where the police station is actually supposed to be located. “Kochikame” is shown on Hungama TV.

13. Stuart Hall with members of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in Brimingham described these three possible reader positions. O'Sullivan added a fourth position which they termed an aberrant reading, in which preferred reading is not understood and the text is read in a deviant fashion. (Lacey 88).


15. The contrast and comparison is drawn by Jean-Marie Floch. Daniel Chandler in *Semiotic for Beginners* incorporates this to trace the binary oppositions in visual images. But the interpretation is not imitated here. It is reinterpreted in the light of the research hypothesis.
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