Chapter I

Introduction

The Marijuana of the Nursery: Cartoons and Comic Strips

All comics are political.

- Alan More (qtd. in Matthew P. McAllister 1)

. . . a world of freedom . . . you tell a mountain, “move,” and it moves. You tell an octopus to be an elephant and the octopus becomes an elephant. You tell the sun, “stop!” and it stops . . . the normal laws of gravity are defied: bodies become elasticised; inanimate objects become animate; characters are flattened by steamrollers but pick themselves up and carry on again . . . [and] heroes are always finally free and self-determining.

- Rojek 124

This dissertation is an attempt to study the animated cartoon *Tom and Jerry* (T&J from now) and *Amar Chitra Katha* or the Immortal Picture Stories (*ACK* from now) as a cultural-political and historical phenomenon, and analyse how they manipulate identities and images to
construct a potent ideology that sustains the material and cultural interests of its creators.

There is no need to prove the popularity of comics and animated cartoons. They are perhaps the “greatest leisure entrepreneur of the twentieth century” (Rojek 121). They have come to occupy a significant part in our daily lives and have transformed themselves as an integral part of the mass media.

The history of cartoons is closely related to the history of caricature, they are witty and often acerbic form of visual art that originated in Italy in the sixteenth century. The earliest known instances of caricature were the humorous pen portraits by the famous Carracci brothers. Later they came to stand for comic and grotesque exaggeration of physical features, to make loaded intellectual or emotional statements (Azhikode 31). However, it was only towards the middle of the nineteenth century that the modern form of cartoon came into being borrowing heavily from caricature and expressing the viewpoint of the artist. Till then the word “cartoon” (from Italian Cartone, meaning “paper”) was used in its original sense of “a preliminary sketch for a large canvas or fresco painting, for an architectural drawing, for a tapestry design, or for pictures in mosaic or glass” (*Encyclopaedia Americana* 728). Publications like the *Monthly Sheaf of Caricature* and *Punch*...
popularised cartoon in its modern form in Britain. The word cartoon was thereafter used to denote pictorial humour, wit, satire, and parody.

Nothing lies beyond the scope of cartoons and perhaps the only determining factor is the interest of its creator. A cartoon is a single drawing or a series of drawings that make a point, or tell a joke or story. The pictures may or may not be accompanied by words. Sometimes these panels carry captions, and special enclosures called speech balloons with their tail that emerge from the mouth of the speaker and carries the dialogue of the characters. The mode of treatment is usually humorous or satirical. Subjects can include historical and political events, personalities, fads and fashions, manners, customs and rituals, industry and commerce, sports and entertainment, and so on. The matter influences the form and the context influences the mode of representation. Caricature, political and social cartoons, editorial cartoons, pocket cartoons, gag panels, comic strips, comic books, animated cartoons- now appear in a wide variety of shapes and shades. Though the history of animated cartoon is linked to the history of cartoon and comic books its evolution and history need a separate study, which is discussed in the next chapter.

Editorial cartoons are mostly single panel cartoons. They usually appear in newspapers and periodicals and represent or conform to the interest of the “producers and manufacturers of the texts” (Shuker 17).
Apart from being humorous, editorial and political cartoons attempt to make a serious point. One of the most common and popular forms of cartoon is the gag panel which tell a joke in a single panel. However the cartoonist Scott McCloud excludes single-panel cartoons from the category of comics, since (in his opinion) “there is no such thing as a sequence of one” (*Understanding* 20). Non-political panel cartoons became a daily feature of the American and British newspapers in the nineteenth century. The cartoonist who drew them aimed at types of people rather than individuals and satirised everyday life and manners. After the First World War, gag panels acquired greater levels of sophistication and daily panels like *Toonerville Folks, Henry*, and *Board and Room* developed features of comic strips as well.

*Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines comic strips and comic books as “a series of adjacent drawn images, usually arranged horizontally . . . designed to be read as a narrative in a chronological sequence” (554). The comic book has been one of the most popular and widely read mass literary media of this century; as many as two hundred million copies of comics are sold every year in the United States. Originated in 1933 as a vehicle for reprinting newspaper strips, the comic book soon went its separate way as a distinctive narrative art form that related the adventures of characters and superheroes whose roots and inspirations are found in popular detective and science fiction, American folklore, and European
mythology (Inge, *Comic Books* 275). Although the superheroes dominated the form at the start, the titles were devoted to adventure, romance, war, crime, horror, western stories, fantasy, fairy tales, and funny animal fables.

The reason for the popularity and power of comic books, according to Thomas Inge is:

. . . it appeals to the senses; the brightly coloured pages and heavily outlined figures grip the attention of the reader and . . . satisfy the urge of the eye to place the riotous colours of life into a balanced perspective. Second, it appeals to the imagination in its role as narration, and . . . satisfies the thirst for vicarious adventure into words and experiences outside daily reality. Finally, it appeals to the mind in its efforts to create rational order out of the chaos of existence by reducing conflict and complexity into a simplified and therefore less threatening moral battle between the forces of good and evil. (*Comics as Culture* 275)

However, not all comic books and comic strips are successful in achieving these three aesthetic appeals, but at best they simultaneously satisfy the visual, imaginative, and moral sensibilities.

Comic strips and comic books, comprise of a form of graphic art for reproduction that tells stories using both pictures and words. There
are of course, comics without words just as there is theatre without words, but in both cases the tradition of each form admits its most visual extremes. Comic strips is known in French as *bande dessinée* (drawn strip), in German as *Bilderstreifen* or *Bildergeschichte* (picture strip or picture story) in Italian as *fumetto* (literally “puff of smoke,” in reference to speech balloons) and in Japanese as *Magna*, though sometimes known as “funnies” (in English), comic strips and books are not necessarily “comic.” In a gesture towards artistic respectability, recent producers of some comic books have tended to call their work a graphic novel or graphic narratives that tell a single complex story especially for adults (*Worldbook Encyclopaedia* 870).

With the Renaissance accentuating the individuality of the artist, notions of higher forms and lower forms of popular culture were severely questioned (Smoodin, *Cartoon and Comic* 129). Caricatures and cartoons were also widely used for social, political and religious criticism by artist like Annibale Carracci (1560-1609), Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598-1680), and Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770) who reflected the new spirits in their works. Bernini took caricature to France in the seventeenth century and from there it reached Britain. George Townshend (1724-1807) and Arthur Pond (1701-1758) played a vital role in popularising cartoons in Britain. Pond published a collected edition that included the works of contemporary artists like the Carracci and Pier Leone Ghezzi
(1634-1721) in the first decade of the eighteenth century. The satirical drawings of William Hogarth (1697-1764) and Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827) succeeded in taking cartoons to new heights. Hogarth is often considered as the father of modern cartoons. Thomas Rowlandson’s *Dr. Syntax* (1812), in a way, anticipated the modern comic strip with its series of humorous drawings with a recurring set of characters and a continuous story. James Gillray (1757-1815) and George Cruikshank (1792-1878) are remembered for their political satires and sensuous portrayals of contemporary life, respectively.

The increased activity in printing and publishing in the early decades of the nineteenth century flooded the market with a plethora of printed material. Newspapers, magazines, and periodicals enjoyed a wider readership, and cartoons and caricatures became the most popular features of journalism. The middle part of the nineteenth century was a period of transition. The emergence of new industries, the growth of working class and capitalism, the publication of *The Communist Manifesto* (1848), the invention of photography -- all these contributed to the making of a complex age and a creative climate favourable for the development of cartoons. The age also witnessed the transition of cartoons from magazines to newspapers. The upheavals of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars gave political caricature in Britain the opportunity to come into its own. The classic age of British caricature
began with the work of Rowlandson who acquired fame for his social satire. Rowlandson’s contemporary Isaac Cruikshank (1756-1811) designed and etched some of the earliest caricatures of Napoleon Bonaparte, and Isaac’s son George Cruikshank (1792-1878) became more famous as a caricaturist after the death of Gillray. But it was in America that the comic tradition flourished in the first half of the nineteenth century. American Presidents, Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Jackson inspired many single panel cartoons. The lithographic caricatures published by Thomas MacLean in 1830 are often considered the first authentic publication of a humorous magazine. It included the works of artists such as George Cruikshank, John Doyle, and Robert Seymour. *La Caricature*, the first complete comic weekly, was founded in France in 1830 by Charles Philipon (1800-1861). He also ran a daily named *Le Charivari* for the same purpose. Several new artists including Honore’ Daumier (1808-1879) became popular through this publication. Daumier’s drawings and cartoons satirising nineteenth century French politics and society were widely acclaimed. Jean-Ignace-Isidore Grandville (1803-1847), caricaturist, fantasist and proto-surrealist whose big-headed people, seen as if in distorting mirrors and animal analogies (individuals with the bodies of men and the face of animals), are often considered to be among the sources for Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*. In 1841, Henry Mayhew (1812-1887), journalist and
sociologist, and author of the four-volume *London Labour and the London Poor*, founded *Punch*, England’s first illustrated comic weekly. It popularised cartoons in England and served as a model for other humorous magazines. It could be said that the modern cartoon came into existence with *Punch*. The early cartoons published in *Punch* were chiefly woodcuts. They combined words, sentences, and double enders effectively with the pictures. *Vanity Fair* was the first to publish cartoons in colour, and the American *Puck* became a test ground for new styles and ways of expressions. All these magazines had a tremendous impact on the growth and development of the medium. No wonder then that the twentieth century witnessed the culminations of this process “with cartoons and their various comic off-shoots registering an astounding popularity and their success-epitomised, one should say, by the establishment of the Disney Empire” (Kunzle, *History* 20).

In India, humorous drawings, as entertainment rather than as protest spread with the rise of newspapers and illustrated magazines in the nineteenth century, though it is obvious how the long tradition of pictorial art in the country impinges on the work of the illustrators and cartoonists who emerged during the days of colonial rule. As R. K. Laxman puts it, “Just over a century ago the art of cartooning came here from England and struck roots. Although other forms of art like sculpture, carving, poetry, painting, and drawing had been flourishing in
India for centuries, the art of graphic satire and humour was unknown”

(Best of Laxman 3). Ramanand Chatterjee was one of the pioneer illustrators who combined pictorial and literary journalism in India. His magazines, Modern Review and Prabasi featured monochrome and colour reproductions of Indian and European artists. Sukumar Potti the celebrated artist entered the scene through Sandesh, another important early publication. Caricatures without any trace of cruel or grotesque elements were his forte. Partha Mitter, in his book Art and Nationalism in Colonial India, speaks of these early days:

The wide spread of modern innovations of mass communication like printing technology and processes of mechanical reproduction turned urban Indian into a ‘visual society’ dominated by the printed image. Pictorial journalism became an indispensable part of literate culture. (120)

It is still not clear which Indian language newspaper published cartoons for the first time, however Mitter suggests that the Oudh Punch, in Urdu, was a pioneer in this regard (Venkatachalapathy 43). The first cartoon in Malayalam was published in Vidushakan in 1919 by P.S. Govinda Pillai (Thomas, Birth of 11). Kamal Sarkar states that the Delhi Sketch published from Delhi in 1850 was the first to publish cartoons in India. But this endeavour was short lived as the Delhi Sketch was closed
down after the First Indian Independence struggle of 1857. The history of Indian cartoons is still teased out from the footnotes, asides, and digressions of the histories of journalism. A full-length study on Indian cartoon still awaits its historian, except for the attempts of Abu Abraham, A.R. Venkatachalapathy, and a few others.

In an unpublished work, Indu V.V states that the English-owned *Bengal Hurkaru* and *Indian Gazette* were the earliest Indian newspapers to carry cartoons of social and political importance in the 1850s (6). Decade’s later cartoons began to appear in newspapers owned by Indians. The colonial masters became their immediate target. As the national struggle began to gain momentum, the cartoonists ventured to draw the paunchy thick-- set “John Bull” to represent the colonial ruler. The themes of the cartoon of this period were the same and were presented in innumerable variations. “Bharatmata” the mother of the nation in chains with the legend “Imperialism” written on them. Again, the same lady was shown being crushed under the jackboot of John Bull or being burdened with the deadweight of colonial exploitation, only to suggest two instances. *Amrita Bazar Patrika* of Bengal published its first cartoon in 1872. One of the earliest cartoons to make political impact appeared in *Sulav Samachar* in the 1870s. Its message foreshadowed the Ilbert Bill of 1882 that sought to abolish the immunity of European offenders to being tried by Indian Judges (Laxman, *Freedom to Cartoon* 73). *Sulav*
Samachar put the Indian case forcefully. The suggestion of collusion between European Judges and offenders did have an impact, and it led to the Vernacular Press Censorship of 1878 (Venkatachalapathy 42).

No other magazine had such a profound impact on the Indian publishing scene as the English magazine, Punch. It produced a large number of national and regional versions such as The Delhi Punch, The Punjab Punch, The Indian Punch, Gujarati Punch, Hindi Punch, Parsi Punch, and Purnea Punch. It is not surprising, that these magazines revealed their colonial attitudes and they glorified the empire’s civilising mission and viewed the Indians from their high Victorian pedestals of morality and authority (Mitter 179). But the Indian cartoons, instead of countering this perspective, could be seen to slide into their role of the other, rather pliantly indulge in self-parody and self-criticism.

The Delhi Sketch Book, the first Anglo-Indian magazine owned by The Englishman, a leading newspaper, was succeeded by the Indian Punch that professed the Victorian ideas of racial supremacy. Curry and Rice measured the Indians with the same kind of yardstick. Indian Charivari presented witty caricatures of Bengali men and women and was not above racial considerations and prejudices. These magazines published some memorable cartoons like the modern Krishna in a convocation dress playing “the magic tune of education” (Pai, Krishna inside front cover). Mookerjee’s Magazine was one of the earliest to
publish lithographic cartoons (Indu 22). *The Hindi Punch* published the famous caricature of Lord Curzon as an adapted version of Ravi Varma’s famous painting of Saraswati. However they did not give any definite view of India as a nation.

The satires published in *Basantak* would remind one of the social satires of Kalighat pictures. A cartoon published in *Basantak* shows Kali and Siva in modern attire that made fun of the contemporary feminine attire and the Victorian sense of propriety. Major artists like Abanindranath Tagore (1871-1951) and Gaganendranath Tagore (1867-1938) tried their hands at caricature. Jatin Sen’s parodies of Bengali life and his witty sketches of the physiognomy of Bengalis attracted a lot of attention. It could be seen that the emancipation of women was a favourite theme with Bengali cartoonists who according to Mitter “played on men’s subliminal fears” (170). Educated and liberated women were presented from a male perspective as dominating wives and irresponsible mothers. Social issues like the western influence in Indian life, civic administration and mismanagement also became subjects of their cartoons.

Modern Indian cartoons were largely political in nature. The first generation of professional cartoonists in India included all-time masters such as Ahmed Kutty, R. K. Laxman and Shankar Pillai-- the father of
modern Indian cartoons. Shankar entered the field through the *Hindustan Times* and later joined the *Indian News Chronicle*. His cartoons soon made an impact on the public:

The viceroys and governing counsellors began to take note of his cartoons and felt peeved or cheered according to their sense of humour. One of the viceroys had become so benign that he relaxed his imperious stance and asked for the originals of Shankar’s cartoons, although they were pretty uncomplimentary to his lordship. (Laxman, *Freedom to Cartoon 76*)

In 1948 Shankar launched *Shankar’s Weekly*, a magazine exclusively for cartoons, in which several cartoonists of the next generation began their career. Another important cartoonist of post-Independence era was Laxman who drew the deplorable state of the political and bureaucratic circles and the degradation of metropolitan cities through the innocent eyes of his “Common Man” who stands mute and withdrawn, trying to comprehend from a distance certain complex ideologies and the inevitable march of “progress.” Laxman perceives the role of the cartoonist as:

The role of today’s cartoonist is not unlike that of the court jester of Yore. His business in a democracy is to exercise his right to criticise, ridicule, demolish, complain and find fault
with the administration and political leaders, through caricatures and cartoons. (*Best of 1*)

O. V. Vijayan, Abu Abraham and Rajinder Puri were some of the prominent names in the second generation of cartoonists who emerged in the 1960s. As E. P. Unny puts it, “By the 1960’s, a less generous and more intense band of cartoonists came up, notably Abu Abraham, Rajinder Puri and O.V. Vijayan with their focus sharpened by domestic politics running short of moral steam and to an extent by the escalating U.S. hostilities in Vietnam” (37). The work of this second generation of cartoonists had a dark prophetic edge. Soon the Emergency and the Press Censorship Act adversely affected the Indian cartoons. *Shankar’s Weekly* was wound up, Vijayan and Puri suspended their work, Kuttty and Abu lingered. And as Laxman describes:

Only a political cartoonist would fear Utopia . . . . Political cartooning has, however, survived for fifty years in changing India, through the sharp tongues and pencils of its inceptors. During the Emergency of Mrs. Gandhi’s reign, censors blitzed cartoons causing chuckles as well as those including silence. That situation provides a perfect description of the irony in everyday life that the political cartoonist attempts to convey. While always political, India’s cartoon character
satirise without shrill calls to action. They provide the relief
that comes with hearing one’s humour and hope voiced
publicly. (*Freedom to Cartoon* 69)

The new cartoons that emerged from this dark phase were marked by
“irredeemable loss of faith in the state” (Unny 39).

Around this period, in the international scene, the global capital of
cartooning shifted from Britain to America. Fresh talent like Unny,
Ravishankar, Sudhir Talang, and Suresh Savant emerged in India.
Manjula Padmanabhan, Maya Kamath and Ranjini Shetty among others,
ensured female representation. The demolition of the Babri Masjid on 6th
December 1992, a dark landmark in contemporary Indian history as well
as politics helped to revive the cartooning profession to a great extent.
The “Common Man” of Laxman was shaken out of his muteness by this
calamitous event. For several months following the demolition of the
Babri Masjid, cartoonists across the country kept up a steady focus and
energy (Unny 39). The *Economic Times* summed up 1992 with a full page
of selected cartoons that went under the title “When the Lines Overtook
the Word.” Since then Indian politics have witnessed a steady process of
communalisation and the cartoonists have used it to its maximum
especially during the Gujarat riots. But somehow in such a paradise for
cartoonists, the free secular political life got entangled with religion of the
most bigoted type. India being a country of many religions, castes, and sub-castes it became difficult for the cartoonist to separate politics from its religious surroundings. In Laxman’s words “a cartoonist is not sure sometimes if he is trading on someone’s religious toes when he comments on political issue” (*Freedom to Cartoon 90*). Comic art will perhaps evolve out of this dilemma successfully flourishing as one of the several safeguards of democracy.

Yet the picture of Indian cartoons is complicated, as advertisements have become a serious threat to the cartoons. The high degree of crass commercialisation is reflected in the tug of war between advertisement, marketing executives and feature editors over the space allotted to cartoons. As a result, cartoon columns have been eliminated from many newspapers, especially the vernacular newspapers, who allot only a very limited space for cartoons. The serialised form of comic strips has almost begun to disappear. Yet, there are some national dailies that provide “cartoon space” in their editorial page. Moreover, cartoons are at times forced to sacrifice their technical and aesthetic perfection to suit their restricted confines.

It is now necessary for us, to return our focus to comic strips. As mentioned earlier, a comic is a hybrid of words and pictures. It depicts an idea, an incident or a story through a series of pictures. A comic strip is a
sequence of pocket cartoons or a series of social cartoons arranged in a single panel or in several boxes. Each panel is a kind of “still frame” out of a moving sequence. Depending upon the nature of the strip, the characters may appear in short, humorous incidents or in longer narratives employing suspense, drama, adventure or fantasy. To understand comic strips it is important to have an idea of some of the techniques used by its creators. Martin Barker in his books *Comics: Ideology, Power and the Critics* list the chief characteristics of comic strips as:

- They appear at regular intervals.
- They have a continuing cast of characters with relatively predictable behaviour patterns.
- Characters appear within distinct genres, among other characters of the same kind, involved in similar actions and events.
- The frames usually represent a range of things like speech, movement, relationships, emotions, cause and effect, reader involvement and the fictional nature of the comic itself and its character. (6)

The technical hallmark of the comic strips is speech balloons and narrative breakdown. Speech balloons carry the words of the characters and the tail of the balloon accredits a specific set of words to a particular character and shapes his/her personality. The concurrence of the words
and pictures creates a life-like illusion and helps us to “hear with our eyes” (Barker 11). Sometimes the balloons themselves influence the meaning of their enclosures, for instance bubbled balloons denote thought. The arrangement of words within the balloon and even the emptiness of the balloon have their own special significance. The simple mode of presentation of words and pictures brings the characters alive. Bubbles with pointed arrows and spurs on the balloons emphasise the intensity of speech (Fell 109). In his *Film and the Narrative Tradition*, John L. Fell remarks that balloons are “lip-sync” and are “close to the mike” with a strong presence, however discrepant they may be with the perspective of the picture (109). The very incongruity can at times work towards humorous end or towards intimacy.

“Narrative breakdown,” Robert C. Harvey argues “is to comic strips, what time is to life” (8). It reduces action to static moments, but a smooth, sequential progression that ensures a neatly constructed story and visual impact. Narrative breakdown, thus, can be taken as a kind of script having both visual and verbal elements. They split the story/narrative into a series of intelligible daily instalments in accordance with the available space. Narrative breakdown, manipulates time and creates pace, suspense and mood by managing the amount of information, order and direction of the narrative. Harvey holds that the development of words and pictures or the visual-verbal blend as the most unique aspect of a
comic strip, as in comic strips we hear with our eyes. Panels are the visualisation of narrative breakdowns. “The frame or the panel is not simply the boundary of the picture” (Barker 11), it establishes meanings with the world enclosed within it and the “space [between panels] does for comics what time does for film” (McCloud, *Understanding* 7). The literary aspects of a comic strip include character portrayals, tone, and style of language, verisimilitude of personality and incidents, plot and theme. The visual aspects would focus on composition, layout and style. The hybrid character of the medium calls for a methodology of reading where the visual and the verbal are interrelated. However, it is important to remember that this dictum relating to visual-verbal balance may not always be righteously followed in humorous strips and graphic novels. The complexity of graphic novels is such that it calls for a detailed study.

In comic strips, especially those that appear in newspapers where “verbiage elbows the pictures out of the panels” a variety of visual effects and cinematography technique comes in handy (Harvey, *The Art* 14). A close-up adds a kind of intensity to the speaker’s words and by varying the angles and distance, the parade of monotonous panels is rendered as lively as possible. Cartoonists like Lee Flank and Winsor McCay achieve visual variety through sheer stylistic experiments like shading, dramatic lighting, and arrangements of panels in an eye-catching pattern. In brief, the four graphic threads for the visual analysis of comic strips are
narrative breakdown, layout, panel composition and graphic style. Harvey remarks “graphic style is to visual character of comic strips what diction is to language” (The Art 15). A comic strip has a simultaneous character of being both a narrative sequence and a single-page graphic totality. Narrative breakdown is a decisive factor in determining the layout. A cartoonist’s graphic style, like his handwriting, is distinctly his own, nevertheless the style should be appropriate to the subject matter.

Comic strips are sometimes referred to as strip cartoons but they should not be confused with cartooning itself, which as we have already seen has a much longer history. Punch, the first comic book appeared in broadsheets and pamphlets in the eighteenth century England. Wilhelm Busch’s Max and Moritz comic books date from 1865. They were translated by Rev. Charles Timothy Brookes for distribution in America in 1870. This later became the forerunner to many pairs of mischievous children including Katzenjammer Kids. The humorous drawings that accompanied the nineteenth century serialised novels of Dickens and Thackeray as well as the editorial cartoons and humorous pictures published in comic weeklies like Judge, and Life show the different stages in the evolution of comic strips. The circulations of these magazines were limited to specific circles but the comic strip nurtured by them found a wider audience.
Rodolf Topfler, a Swiss artist, educator and author, who is considered by some historians as the inventor of what he called the “picture story” described comics as:

- drama-in-pictures . . . with faces that are alive; they talk, they laugh and cry . . . you have on paper a whole society with whom you can converse . . . (Qtd. in Robinson 18-19)

It was later taken up successfully by the American strip writers. Comic strips were not of course invented by the Americans, but they fostered the growth of the medium and its development to such an extent that today comics are branded and identified as American. American scholars and artists continue to look at comics as “low art.” For instance Jules Feiffer, the famous American cartoonist, characterise comics as “low-brow art, devised by immigrants, or the sons of immigrants, for the entertainment of immigrants” (22). In spite of such apparently belittling comments, the popularity of comic strips continues to grow. In his book *The American People: A study in National Character*, the British anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer observes:

- With the notable exception of *New York Times*, almost every American Newspaper carries comic strips. They are one of the few important bonds (the films being another and the
presidential elections [being the] third) uniting all experience.

(Qtd. in Encyclopaedia Americana, 370)

The early examples of American comics appeared on the back pages of magazines in the latter half of the nineteenth century. However, by the last decade of the nineteenth century the comic strips started appearing in the Sunday pages of newspapers. Joseph Pulitzer started America’s first regular comic section in 1889 in the Sunday World. The “Yellow Kid” in Hogan’s Alley by Richard Felton Outcault (1863-1928) is the first American comic character to achieve individual fame and success. Rudolph Dirks (1877-1968) established the regular use of sequential panels with his Katzenjammer Kids while speech balloons were introduced by Frederick Opper (1857-1937) in Happy Hooligan. It is, however, Winsor McCay (1867-1934) who is often considered as the genius in the field. His fantasy strip Little Nemo in Slumberland is the first comic strip to combine narrative continuity with graphic perfection. His strips with their elaborate settings and intricate drawings are often called “sumptuous visual feasts” (Harvey, The Art 28).

In the first decade of the twentieth century comic strips had a transition from the Sunday supplements to the daily papers. Clare Briggs (1875-1930) invented the daily format of comic strips with his A. Piker Clerk in 1903, and Fisher continued Briggs’ themes of horse racing and
betting in *Mutt and Jeff*. Fisher was a pioneer in many respects. He was the first to direct comics to adult audience. He brought the vaudeville to the pages of comics, established the strip matrix and made the crude style of drawing mandatory. He was also responsible for asserting and establishing the copyright of the artists. Early strips of the decade dealt with a single theme, ventures or one-joke strip or in other words they presented the various mutants of a single situation in different drawings, examples being the *Katzenjammer Kids* and *Bringing up Father* by George McManus (1884-1954). The domestic hassles between Jiggs and Maggie, with the “pie-in-the-face” punch line, reflected the immigrant experience of urban America (Becker 101).

One of the greatest cartoonists of the age George Herriman started *The Family Upstairs* in 1910, featuring the antics of Krazy Kat, Offissa Pupp and Ignatz Mouse in a surrealist background of Coconico country, Arizona. The strip was widely appreciated even by the intellectuals. Herriman switched to the usual cat and mouse relationship with a brick, and produced a complex and cockeyed allegory of love that was a combination of *Parsifal* and *Don Quixote* -- the perfect fool and the perfect Knight. Among Kat’s avid collectors were poet e.e.cumming and Woodrow Wilson. Winston Churchill relaxed himself by reading *Krazy Kat* before cabinet meetings.
By the 1920s comics began to tell full-fledged stories. Captain Joseph Pattison of *Sunday Tribune* popularised the continuity strip. Many strips of the twenties were centred on family life. Frank King’s *Gasoline Alley*, Jimmy Murphy’s *Toots and Casper* and Sidney Smith’s *The Gumps* are examples. A sensitive portrayal of the world of automobiles, *Gasoline Alley* introduced “real time” into the comic pages. It was one of the few strips that permitted its characters to age. Martin Branner’s *Winnie Winkle* and Russ Westover’s *Tillie the Toiler* focused on the lives of working girls. Elzie Segar’s *Popeye*, “the comic epitome of the perfect fighter” gave currency to the spinach myth. However, most cartoons of the period were racially and ideologically challenged in the later years. Sidney Smith’s *The Gumps* and Harold Gray’s *Little Orphan Annie* were concerned with domestic intrigues. Gray’s strip was a successful combination of gothic characters, exotic suspense and homespun right-wing philosophy. By this time the newspapers had become a family institution in America and *The Gumps, Winnie Winkle, and Tillie the Toiler* were the archetypes of the new age.

During the First World War many cartoonists sent their heroes to the battlefront while the others dealt with war themes back at home. George Baker’s *Sad Sack*, Dave Berger’s *G.I. Joe* and the works of Mauldin were some of the comic strips that originated in the war journals of the armed forces and became popular among the civilians too. Bill
Blackbeard suggests that it is “the immense actuality of real (not comically exaggerated or spoofed) suffering, hardship and death that form the crux of realistic adventure strips emerging in the 1920s” (qtd. in Harvey 71). Roy Crane developed the adventure genre and cinematographic techniques in comics. His Captain Easy of *Wash Tubbs* became the archetype of a horde of cartoons heroes in the long run.

The 1930s proved to be the golden age of comic strips in America. The nation sought solace form the anxieties of economic depression in comics and other entertainment Medias. During this time the syndication of non-news entertainment reached its heights. Al Capp who produced *Lil Abner* says “Newspaper publishers had discovered that people bought more papers, more regularly, if they were worried by a comic strip than if they were merely amused by one” (qtd. in Harvey 70). Consequently, adventure strips with their “cliff-hanger endings” and action-packed narratives pushed out the fun and gentle humour (Harvey, *The Art* 70). The new adventures were influenced by the early soap operas like *Little Orphan Annie* and *Apartment 3-G*. The flight of Charles Lindbergh across the Atlantic also influenced strips like *Tailspin Tommy*, written by Glenn Chaffin and drawn by Hal Forrest. *Buck Rogers* by Philip Nowlan was the first serious attempt at science fiction, set in 2025. Adventure strip reached their zenith with Milton Caniff’s *Terry and the Pirates*. “Caniff set his own standards of excellence in the impressionistic
chiaroscuro technique, sophisticated dialogue and cinematic variety in the composition of the panels” (Harvey, *The Art* 72). He also created a set of memorable characters like Dragon Lady and Sanjak, the only lesbian villain in the history of comics. Mickey Mouse, Walt Disney’s anthropomorphic animal hero appeared as a syndicated strip in 1930. Chester Gould’s *Dick Tracy* inaugurated the Detective genre in comics, Ham Fisher’s *Joe Palooka* introduced the world of sports and Al Capp’s *Lil Aber* set the standard for satiric humour. Alex Raymond’s sci-fi strip *Flash Gordon*, inspired many artists. Lee Falk’s *Phantom* was the first costumed comic heroes. The birth of Detective Comics (DC) in 1937 brought a horde of action heroes with mask and colourful costumes. Action comics introduced, Jerry Siegel and John Shuster’s *Superman* (1938) and Bob Kane’s *Batman* (1939) into the family of “the masked crusaders.” But it is surprising to note that no black superhero is born till date.

The advent of television in the 1940s led to the decline of the radio and the newspaper as a popular source of entertainment. However, it favoured the growth of animated cartoon like *T&J* and others. In the struggle for survival, syndicate houses and editors were forced to locate areas where television would offer no competition for their strips. Continuity strips were, therefore, dropped in favour of gag strips and the success of strips like Mort Walker’s *Beetle Bailey* and Walt Kelly’s
*Pogo* proved that it was a right move. *Pogo* is generally perceived as having achieved the maximum of what the medium is capable of achieving (Jezer 172).

In 1940, Donald Duck joined the Disney Club. Other characters like Porky Pig, Daffy Duck, Bugs Bunny, and Mighty Mouse soon entered the animated screen. America’s first female super hero Wonder Woman and the teenage idol Archie Andrews with his Riverdale friends appeared in 1943. New superheroes like Flash, Hawksman and Green Lantern appeared during this time. *Crime Doesn’t Pay* (1942) started the crime series craze. The pernicious influence of the comics on impressionable minds of children came into question in the McCarthy era. Crockett Johnson’s *Barnaby* and Charles Schulz’s *Peanuts* were the most intellectual strip of the period. *Peanuts*, with its “subtle non-sequitur humour and punch” marked a significant development in the history of the genre (Jezer 169). Around the same time *Beatle Bailey* became the trendsetter of the gag strips that took over the post-Second World War comic pages. Characters like Miss Buxley and Lieutenant Flap invited sexist and racial charges but the strip was able to shoulder through all the accusations to a high degree of popularity. Humour became more sophisticated and non-sequitur and it had a sobering effect on the comic scene. Artwork became simple and highly stylized and shadings were generally avoided. Anatomy was handled in a more elastic kind of
manner with the head becoming larger and the face turning more expressive. This resulted in the personality of the characters being given closer attention by the end of the eighties and most strips of the period were drawn in the magazine cartoon style. The fifties saw the comic strips dealing with a variety of themes. Bleechman’s novella-length cartoon poem *The Juggler of Our Lady* appeared in 1952. William Gaines and Harvey Kurtzman cheered American pop culture in *MAD*. Jules Feiffer’s *Sick Sick Sick* dealt with left wing politics and Freudian inner turmoil.

The works of underground artists like Robert Crumb and Gilbert Shelton started appearing in the sixties. The first syndicated underground comic strip *Zippy the Pinhead* appeared in 1970. Underground comics followed a different and unique path of their own. The year also saw the first feminist comic book by Trina Robbins. The life and times of New York Jews found representation in Will Fisher’s *Contract with God*. However, the most outstanding strips of the seventies were Gary Trudeau’s *Doonesbury* and Jim Davis’ *Garfield*. Social commentary gained new relevance with the advent of Trudeau’s *Doonesbury* in the 1970s. For the first time, real people, places, and events were discussed in the comic pages. It was also the age of counter-culture, underground comics and rebellion against the mainstream American ideologies and icons. Trudeau’s college kids were part of the protest against authority with their sharp comments on campus life and society in general.
*Doonesbury* set the minimalist style in fashion and gave it a contemporary look. It ushered in a series of other strips like *Drabble, Dilbert, Arnold, Sally Forth* and *Foxtrot* that did not believe in graphic extravaganza.

The cartoonist Art Spiegelman and the French artist and designer Francoise Mouly published the comic magazine *RAW*. Nicole Hollander’s *Sylvia* was the first syndicated feminist strip in the eighties. Frank Miller’s *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* and *300* were criticised by Alan Moore for historical inaccurateness and homosexual attitudes. Moore and Dave Gibbons’s *Watchmen* portrayed the dysfunctional superheroes in human conditions. Barbara Brandon was the first African-American woman with a nationally syndicated comic strip. Her strip *Where I am Coming From* explores the life and relationships through the experiences of characters like Alisha, Nicole, and Cheryl. Bill Watterson’s *Calvin and Hobbes* and Scott Adam’s *Dilbert* became the generation’s favourites. *Calvin and Hobbes* highlighted the visual aspects of the medium at a time when the verbal was dominating the scene and is often described as “a product of corporate cyber culture” (Laffline 34). However, most contemporary strips were hostile to the black community in the United States.
As comics complete more than hundred and ten years of their life in America, one realises that they have travelled a long way form *Hogan’s Alley*. Old strips like *Gasolene Alley*, *Katzenjameer Kids*, and *Bringing Up Father* are still alive. Some comic characters have managed to evade wrinkles and grey hairs and continue to entertain both Children and adults with their evergreen charm. Peter Kuper, Tom Tomorrow, Carol Lay, Kyle Baker and Ted Rall keep the torch of comics burning. Recently, the graphic novels have gained much wider popularity. From the very beginning comics have influenced American culture and lifestyles, including their dressing and eating habits. They have also provided them with an unending series of cultural heroes. The food habits of Popeye, Joe Palooka and Jiggs have influenced the taste buds of the American people. Buster Brown and Brenda Starr influenced teenage fashion.

Though India has a long and rich history of political cartoons the situation of social cartoons is not very encouraging. A majority of Indian cartoons are political or editorial and they generally appear in dailies and magazines. The comic industry in India still remains immature compared to that of Japan, France, and America. The comics and graphic novels in India tend to be more stylistically similar to western comics than the *manga* (Japanese term for comics), *manhwa* (Korean term for comics) and *manhua* (Chinese term for comics). The sheer diversity in the
cultural matrix of India imposes several regulations and restrictions on
the free expression of the cartoonist. The comics industry in India is
almost sixty years old. Despite the publication of about hundred million
copies a year, the Indian comic industry is still dominated by American
comics. One of the earliest attempts at comic magazine in India was
*Chandamama* (1947).

Abid Surati is generally considered the first Indian comic author.
His *Dhabhuji*, based on the protagonist who is a lawyer by profession,
first appeared in the magazine *Dharmayug*. In the 1960s Pran Kumar
Sharma published *Daabu*. However these experiments remained the only
ones in India in the 1960s. The Indian magazines almost exclusively
published American strips on their pages. Pran created numerous strips,
like *Shrimatiji, Pinki, Billoo* and the popular *Chacha Chaudhary* in the
1970s. Cartoon strips and comic books thrived in the vernaculars,
especially in Bengali. Pratulchandra Lahiri created two strips on a regular
basis for the *Jugantar* newspaper in Bengali and for *Amrit Bazar Patrika*,
in English. Narayan Debnath created local strips that were published as
books from Kolkata. Among his creations, *Nonte Phonte and Handa Bhonda*
are still in circulation and have spawned animated films. His
*Batul The Great* is one of India’s earliest superheroes. Unlike in Japan,
where comics were quickly recognised as a potentially mature medium,
comic readership in India remained confined to children, and the content
remained largely conservative and un-intellectual. Indian Comics were influenced by the Archie comics and series like *The Adventures of Tintin*, only to cite two such examples. In 1967, Anant Pai launched the *ACK* series, discussed later in the study. The objective of the series was to teach children the religious texts and the stories of historical and political figures. *Krishna* was the first in the series. It was followed by *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. The collection now has 426 volumes. This success inspired other publishing houses like Dreamland Publications and Diamond Comics at New Delhi and *Jaico Publishing House* at Mumbai to launch their own series. Pai also launched *Tinkle*, the first Indian comic magazine for children. Another notable Indian comic publishing house *Raj Comics* created memorable characters like Nagraj, Doga, Super Commando Dhruva and Parmanu. By the 1990s, newspapers had started publishing more caricatures of Indian origin. Indian law and democracy permits the journalists and cartoonists to discuss current affairs with reasonable freedom than most others. Some of the famous Indian caricaturists are Joseph Arul Raj, Ashok Dongre, Neelabh Bisen and Bal Thackeray (the Shiv Sena chief). Ashok Dongre is well known for his comic strip *SWAMI* based on the infotech business in India.

Recently *Virgin Comics*, geared towards creating comics rooted in Indian mythology and history launched the comic strip titled *Devi* (2006). Other series include *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*, *Sachin*
Tendulkar: The Master Blaster, Snakewoman, Ramayan 3392 A.D., End of Story, The Asura Analogues, India Authentic, Masked Magician, Shadow Hunter and Spiderman. The Hong Kong based Fluid Friction is the latest multi-national comics company to enter into the Indian comics market. One of their series titled Devashard is expected to be released soon. San Jose’ Bombaby the Screen Goddess (2002) is about a girl named Sangeeta, who doubled as a dutiful daughter by day and as a reincarnated Hindu goddess by night. This strip not widely distributed received acclaim and was featured in Time Magazine.

The Japanese comic industry has also produced numerous series with Indian themes including the use of yogic terminology in Naruto, the Kushan Empire in Berserk. We also find numerous references to gods and demons which Japan and India share in common. Some manga series were also inspired by Journey to the West, the classic Chinese tale of Buddhist monks on pilgrimage to India.

The internet has given rise to a new generation of comic artists who use the internet as their means of production and distribution. The popularity of web comics is on the rise. Web comic artists work within the spirit of the Underground movement and reflect the subversive attitudes of the Underground Comic artists. The web comics however give freedom of expression in content and form to its creators.

“Badmash.tv” is a web site particularly created by and aimed at the Indian
Diaspora. With a large number of white-collar workers and internet penetration in India “Webcomics” provides an outlet for artists who do not wish to distribute their works through the print media. Some of the popular web comics are *Badmash*, *AppleGeeks*, *Making Masti*, and *The Doppler Effect*.

India's first graphic novel, *Corridor* was published in 2004 by Sarnath Banerjee. It was followed by a second foray in 2007. Some of Deepak Chopra’s books such as his retelling of *Kama Sutra*, *Life of Buddha* can be considered partly as graphic novels, for their artwork. Naseer Ahmed’s *Kashmir Pending* and Abdul Sultan’s *The Believers*, deal with Islamic militancy are the other Indian graphic novels, that deserves special mention. The graphic novel is now becoming popular in the sub-continent. The underground comics are literally non-existent in India.

We now have to get back to the international scene for considering some of the general issues relating to comics. Comic strips emerged from the circulation wars of the metropolitan newspapers of the late nineteenth century. The potential of Sunday supplements as circulation-building device was demonstrated by Joseph Pulitzer in his *Sunday World*. Artists like James Swinnerton (1875-1974) and Outcault drew cartoons for the warring journals. Outcault’s *Hogan’s Alley* with its ragamuffin character became a star attraction of Pulitzer’s newspaper. Sunday World’s printers
experimented with a new quick drying yellow ink on this urchin’s shirt and the character was christened *Yellow Kid*. The empires of Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst competed for Outcault and his *Yellow Kid*. The bystanders called these journals “yellow journals” and the kind of journalism they practiced came to be known as “yellow journalism.”

The comics entered another phase of their chequered history with the birth of modern syndicate houses. Syndicate houses are responsible for the circulation and distribution of comic strips, newspaper columns, and editorial cartoons around the world. And to meet the demand comics of the modern day aim at an international audience rather than regional audience. As a result comic artists tend to be as universal as possible and try to ensure diverse reading conditions. Syndicate houses like King Features led to the growth, refinement and proliferation of comic strips. The history and evolution of these syndicate houses have been a complex process that requires an elaborate analysis and the present study does not intend to go into its details.

In recent times comics have succeeded in arising serious critical interest among sociologist, psychologist, and cultural experts. Still majority of the comic readers/viewers are unaware of the complex nature of the medium. At this stage, it may not be out of the context to consider
some of the ways in which cartoons and comics have been studied and analyzed. The first full-length critical study on comic books *Seduction of the Innocent* (1954) was neither a history nor an appreciation. In this Fredrick Wertham tried to show that comic books were a major cause of juvenile delinquency and this disturbed many parents and teachers and added to the general hysteria of the McCarthy era. Even before Wertham, Gershon Legman warned about the so-called baneful effect of violence in comics in *Love & Death: A Study in Censorship* (1949). The attack on comics was continued in James Gilbert’s *A Cycle of Outrage* (1986), Amy Kiste Nyberg’s *Seal of Approval: The History of Comics Code* (1998), Martin Barker’s *A Haunt of Fears* (1984) and recently in John Fulce’s *Seduction of the Innocent Revisited* (1990).

The first writer to attempt what he claimed would be a full-scale history of the comic book was James Steranko. His two volume book titled *The Steranko History of Comics* (1970 and 1972) held the view that pulp fiction of the 1930s was the single most inspiration for the development of comic books. A number of other comic histories soon followed which included Ron Goulart’s *Great History of Comic Books* (1993), Roger Sabin’s *Comics, Comix & Graphic Novels: A History of Comic Art* (1996) and *Adult Comics: An Introduction* (1993), only to name a few. Mark James Estern attempted to produce *A History of the Underground Comics* (1992).
Only recently have attempts been made to analyse comics and animated cartoons on their own terms (by measuring their worth against their own development standards and aesthetic principles) rather than by the irrelevant yardsticks of other related arts. A collection of essays *All in Color for a Dime* (1970) on comic book superheroes edited by Dick Lupoff and Don Thompson helped intimate this development. Arthur Asa Berger’s *The Comic-Striped American* (1974) is a collection of his essays on comics and how it reflects our culture, many of them stimulating and provocative but also debatable. Several books published in the last decade of the twentieth century helped to establish a solid critical footing on which sound commentary and criticism can proceed. McCloud’s *Understanding Comics* (2000) a challenging, imaginative and complex explication of the main features and functions of comic art is related entirely in the form of a comic book. Harvey’s *The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History* (1996) elucidates the major artists and works in the genre.

This leads us to the final part of this chapter, a brief analysis into the inter-relationships between comics and the cinema. In their use of words and pictures, comics are closely akin to films though they are quite different in their essentials. Films are hybrid forms incorporating audio-visual elements. Comics lack sound and motion and thus seem to operate within a much more restricted format. In spite of this, one finds that a
series of visual techniques used in the strips anticipated certain film techniques like editing and close-up. The language of film criticism can be, and often is, used in the reading of a comic strip. But it is not always adequate to account for the possibilities of a static medium which is capable of employing certain special effects to obtain a dramatic impact. Such effects would include a wordless sequence of panels, an unexpected juxtaposition of panels or a large panel coupled with a series of smaller panels. Despite the seeming limitations of the art, a comic strip artist enjoys more control and freedom over the medium than a filmmaker especially because a film is the result of group work. Harvey, employing a cinematic metaphor and describes a comic artist as “a script writer, story editor, casting director and camera operators, prop man and make-up artist, not to mention producer and director, actor and actress” (The Art 171). Fell points out that the strip artist and the film-maker confront common problems of time and space within the conventions of narrative exposition (89). Jerry Robinson in Comics: An Illustrated History of the Comic Strip Art has the following comment on the question of time as it operates in comics and films:

This concept of creating time by a chronological sequence of images proved to be the unique power of the comic strip as well as the film. One frame is essential to the next; each frame truly grows out of the one before and impels a further image as a
result. The comics and their storytelling techniques had an effect on pioneer filmmakers. The cartoonist was always able to use the illusion of time and space. (113)

The give-and-take between the movies and comics increased in the 1930s. Early fantasy strips like Little Nemo experimented with various optical effects and visual techniques. As Robinson has noted, great filmmakers such as Orson Welles, Alain Resnais and Federico Fellini have credited the comic strip for influencing their work.

Comics have also been severely criticised for their complacent and insensitive attitude to the portrayal of social stereotypes, stock characters, racial minorities, and women. They are also tools for the propagation and re-entrenchment of the dominant ideology. In terms of reproducing hegemonic values, John DiFazio observes that “comics generally present values considered important in our society” and these values are invariably related to the dominant classes (qtd. in Williams, *Comics* 141).

There is a tendency to view comics as a pure, simple, and innocent genre. The openness and sincerity of the comics are supposed to place them above politics and exploitation. In recent times this alleged “innocence” of comics has been severely challenged by the increasing number of scholarly and critical studies that the medium has invited. For instance *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney
Comics (1975) is a scathing attack on the Disney characters from an ideologically oriented standpoint. Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattleart draw our attention to “the scowl of capitalist ideology behind the laughing mask, the iron fist beneath the mouse’s glove” (Kunzle, Introduction 11). But at the same time it is surprising to note that no serious study has been undertaken on the T&J cartoon, perhaps the most famous of all animated cartoons.