

# THE INDIAN GRAPHIC NOVEL “THIS SIDE THAT SIDE: RESTORING PARTITION”: GREAT SOURCE OF FANTASY WITH REALITY, UNHEARD STORIES AND SYMBOLIZATION

Aarti Kantilal Jariwala

Department of English  
School of Language  
Gujarat University  
Ahmedabad  
aartijariwala1987@gmail.com

## Abstract

This paper attempts to analyze and understand the history and its representation through the visual-verbal literacy of the graphic narrative. Indian Graphic Novels highlight the district culture globalization process and social media network as a space for history. This article endeavors to deal with the traumatic experience of Partition that reshaped the borders, lives, and communities of the Indian subcontinent. Here it is very important to remember that, in 1947 the year of Independence, changed the whole history of India, and shaped new country and culture. "This Side, That Side: An anthology of the graphic narrative", does not only try to retell Partition history but attempt to capture the nostalgia for home and loved ones last. This article concentrates specifically on the aspect of graphic retelling of the Partition. This graphic book is an anthology of graphic Partition narratives from India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, curated by **Vishwajyoti Ghosh**. This Graphic text includes twenty-eight short graphic stories and each unique to its style of narration and artwork.

## INTRODUCTION

Graphic Novel is an imprecise term used to describe a format that uses a combination of words and sequential art to convey a narration. History in the graphic narratives is a persistent theme as "the visual dimension of the graphic novel contributes substantially not only to our understanding of history can be represented" (Nayer 2016, P.14 ).

The graphic narratives are presented from the pointed view of various now middle-aged people, who did not witness the 1947 Partition. Graphic novel narratives reflect how people negotiated with the epochal moment of loss, pain, and despair. This anthology attempts to look beyond what has already been written about Partition since 1947, roping in both non-fiction and fiction.

Representing history through graphic narratives began in the 1980s with the publication of Art Spiegelman's graphic narrative on the Holocaust titled *Maus* (1986;1991). This graphic text inspired artists and writes globally to represent the unspeakable, repressed, and alternative histories using this graphic medium. Through the juxtaposition of images and words, India's historical events have been represented within the frame of the graphic narrative. These graphic narratives providing information, historical facts, history of below, and upper part. There are lots of novels, which belong to history like, *The Footprints of Partition: Narrative of Four Generations of Pakistanis and Indians* (2015) by Anam Zakaria, examines the transgenerational handing down of painful memories of the Partition by Pakistanis and Indians; *Partition dialogue: Memories of a Lost Home* by Alok Bhalla, describe his personal experiences of the year around 1947, Khushwant Singh's *Train to Pakistan* is also a historical novel set against the backdrop of the violence in the Partition and Bapsi Sidhwa's *Cracking India: A Novel at the Partition* from the perspective of the Parsi diaspora settled in India.

These are some of the works that highlight the bitter legacy of the Indian Partition. All these novels have the power of words, which shows the real scenario of our history. In *Ways of Seeing* (1972), according to John Berger, "pictures can tell a story." *This Side That Side: Restoring Partition*, the graphic novel has the power of words and visuality and it is a powerful tool to describe our historical event more effectively. In this graphic novel Vishwajyoti Ghosh mention many symbolism, fantasy, unheard stories that realize us the critical condition of that particular Partition period.

## USING VERBAL AND VISUALITY INTERPRET AN ANTHOLOGY IN A SYMBOLIC WAY

Vishwajyoti Ghosh, Who curated the anthology says, "The idea was to explore Partition and its effect on contemporary times through the medium of comics and graphic narratives. Hence a visual perspective was

critical." *This Side That Side: Restorying Partition* is an ambitious, complex, and stimulating project, which is the product of the collaboration between graphic artists and writers from the entire subcontinent. In this graphic anthology, Vishwajyoti Ghosh utilizes the stylistic and semiotic peculiarities of graphic narrative.

This anthology is full of black and white images that have multiple meanings. This black and white color for the images should not be considered as a restriction but it produces great remarkable effects. In a very symbolic way, black is a mysterious color symbolize darkness, fear, evil strength, authority, and death. White is the opposite of black and it symbolizes purity, light, calmness, safety, faith, and innocence. So black is full of negativity and white is full of positivity.

"Our perception of the Partition lies, admittedly elusively, in a space where history has ended and the personal experience, often mediated by earlier generations in the family, has taken over. Textbooks cannot take us there, but art certainly can. And *This Side, That Side* does that effectively....By dint of sheer variety, interleaved with tales of the unexpected, uncanny and untold, the collection proves that there are so many other sides besides the "this" and the "that" to this never-ending story".- Arunava Sinha

"**An Old Fable**", the first interesting story of this anthology written by Tabish Khair and Priya Kuriyan. This chapter is based on two women, who claimed that the child was theirs. "The women in green claimed that the child was hers"(Ghosh 2013,p.18). "The women in saffron claimed that the child was hers"(Ghosh 2013,p.19). Here, "women in green", symbolize that she belongs to Muslim caste from Pakistan, and "women in saffron" symbolize that she belongs to Hindu caste from India. Further "the crowd" is also there and they continuously shouted at the behalf of these two women in front of "The King". "The King", with a black coat and black hat symbolize authority towards people, rule over them, sophistication, artificiality, justice, and law. People trust own king so they came to the king with their problems and they found justice. But here the king also had a problem, he is also confused that who is the right mother of that baby. "He had a problem too"(Ghosh 2013, p.21). "Two women having a baby together! It's illogical. It's unscientific! It's unnatural! It's illegal! It's...it's impossible"(Ghosh 2013, p.21).

The first judgment is "...child should be cut in half, and each half was given to each of the disputing mother"(Ghosh 2013,p.24). Later time, the judgment was the change that "the newborn baby was divided into three parts, and everyone (except the baby) lived unhappily ever after"(Ghosh 2013,p.29). A baby is a symbolism of a whole one nation, whose divide into two parts that is India and Pakistan. When implementing the second decision that is the divide in three parts that is India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh. "...this newborn, stinking, undiapered child..."(Ghosh 2013, p.24) this describes a very poor and pathetic condition of people during the rule of Britishers, who suffered a very traumatic mental condition during Partition. So the king said, "...and everyone (except the baby) lived unhappily ever after"(Ghosh 2013, p.29), this describes that the whole nation was not happy with Partition but they just accepted the order of a higher authority.

"**Border**", this chapter is very small but has deep meaning, written by Kaiser Haq and Hemant Puri. The young girl playing hopscotch with the borderlines, which highlights the challenge of the idea inherent to Partition that one belongs either on this side or that. The girl's image in the book is very symbolic and satirical. She has one foot lodged right on the border of two territories, while her second foot remains in mid-air.

Her shadow goes beyond the boundaries, while her slippers lie on her far left. So the conclusion is that the girl is neither here nor there. The slippers may be a symbol of home, are placed conspicuously on either side of the border, indicating a divided homeland. Boundaries are made not just to define us but they also mark the other. So graphic narrative can be defined as a medium that amalgamates words and art to represent the world around.

The next story of this anthology, which is narrated by a child and written by Vidrohi and Tinu Rajan, that is "**Noor Miyan**". In this story, some images are very important which shows us in a very satirical way. One image shows that a man with the trunk on a bicycle heading towards a barbed-wire fence, which symbolize barriers, divisions and interdictions. This barbed wire as an international border and locked trunk image recall paddlers or refugees who pack all possessions into a trunk and want to cross the border and go to Pakistan.

Another side the child's query about Noor Miyan's absence in his and his grandmother's lives. Noor Miyan's departure is unclear to the child so that suffering and trauma are doubled for absent figures and also lack of knowledge about it. "Why did Noor Miyan have to leave for Pakistan? They say there was nothing to hold him here. Does that mean we were no one to him?"(Ghosh 2013, p.64) The child's query about who belongs and who does not but it is a gap between people. This describes a process of partition and in these circumstances how neighbors turned enemies and how people simply disappeared across a line. As a child, we also don't know that Noor Miyan safely reaches Pakistan or not? Is he survived or not? Visuality enables new forms of metaphors and different ways of imagining space adding a dimension, as it were to how Partition itself is imagined.

"**Water Stories**", a perfect blend of visuality and words which influence our mind very deeply. Water stories were written by Appupen and Arundhati Ghosh, which deals with passing down stories by father to his daughter – "In all her father's stories about the land he came from, there was water".(Ghosh 2013,p.130) He tells her, how his mother and aunts worship the water of the river Padma, and the river becomes a vengeful figure, devouring those who tried to leave the land and migrate to the other side after the Partition. He makes

sense of his loss 'a curse of the river Padma' as he narrates his past to his daughter. She symbolizes the second generation who inherit these stories.

When her mother died, she thinks like her father that "my mother did not die of any illness, you know, what? The Padma swallowed her. It ate her up to my beautiful mother, she went into the river one afternoon and never came back I think the Padma knew we were leaving for another land. She stole my mother". (Ghosh 2013,p.132) These sentences and images symbolize the traumatic mental condition of people, who suffered from partition and they don't want to live their house and not want to go to another place. These haunted and hidden traumatic stories of the first generation passed to the second generation and its impact very deeply in their mind.

Malini Gupta and Dyuti Mittal, created "**The Taboo**", with great effort and it has a very strong catchy visual effect. This story is a journey of a refugee woman who, through her effort and the income from her garage, can live behind the "nightmare of Cooper's Camp"(Ghosh 2013,p.246). "Cooper's Camp is one of the largest refugee transit camps in West Bengal..."(Ghosh 2013, p.238) from the time of the Partition of India. An intricate artwork in this chapter showcases a world of women where their expressive faces are blended with the landscape. Visual images are very impactful in this tail and all the images express the suffering of women after Partition who lost their own identity as well as a family during the Partition. "The Taboo" showcases a world where the men give up on their dreams of escaping a gruesome, past while the women folk strive on, even if it means leaving one's husband and surviving as a "taboo".

"**I Too Have Seen Lahore!**" by Salman Rashid and Mohit Suneja, who recounts the experience of a couple from Lahore, Pakistan, who come to Jalandhar, India, hoping to find such information details about the pre-Partition. That couple search for their ancestral house in Pakistan, then they met an excited man named Darshan Singh and he exclaimed them, "I too have seen Lahore! I once went to the zoo there with my father and brothers"(Ghosh 2013,p.209). That couple encounter with Darshan Singh's story when he and his family recounts their travel from Pasrur to Dera Nanak on a train that, "was crammed with people, with little room for anyone else to get in"(Ghosh 2013,p.212) – a journey that made him an eight-year-old spectator of the "tragic harvest of Partition"(Ghosh 2013,p.217). People became enemies to each other and they wanted to kill the people who belong to a different religion, but Darshan Singh suffered a lot in a very small age, and this story of witnessing terrified historical days and memories which full of sorrow. "Sixty-two years and four months had passed before I met Darshan Singh. But the harrowing journey in August 1947, did not leave his mind. Surely, he would have preserved those memories by telling his stories to his children, but deep inside, Darshan Singh's connection with Klasswala is a tenuous one and exist only in his mind. I realized how he must want to speak to a Pakistani to ask of the land he was forced to abandon as a child"(Ghosh 2013, p.218).

"**The Red Ledger**" created by Ankur Ahuja, the tail has a Grandson remembered to his Grandfather's memory which connected with Red Ledger during the Partition period. Red Ledger describes like "Bound in a red cloth, stitched with white thread, it was his daily diary of profit and loss"(Ghosh 2013, p. 170). Many years after grandson remembered the stories connected with grand father's life, "A lot of these stories died with my grandfather, and the rest wondered around in these red ledger filled with grandiose black squiggles in Urdu, that none of us ever learned to read. After he died, all his red ledgers were sold to the Kabadi. All that reminds of him is a certificate from the Ministry of Relief and Rehabilitation that confirmed his status – a refugee"(Ghosh 2013, p.175). In this tail, Red Ledger symbolizes the memories of Grandfather who had a great personality and dominated the whole family and in a present situation, his grandson remembers him because he wants to like his grandfather with high courage.

"**Welcome to Geneva Camp**"- adapted from the original multimedia story 'Inside Geneva Camp' written and created by freelance photographer Maria M. Litwa. "Welcome to Geneva Camp in Dhaka. This is the largest camp in Bangladesh, housing roughly 25000 people in an area spanning three football fields"(Ghosh 2013, p.251). It deals with the macro-theme of Partition when thousands of Urdu- speaking Muslims from Bihar and other states moved to east Pakistan which Bangladesh today. Having obtained the citizenship, the Bihari population was eventually lodged in dire conditions in camp Geneva. Here Maria mentions some stories like Rina, Shabnam, and Putul, these three women stuck with their families along with thousands of people in Geneva Camp during Pakistan. Rina - a 14 years old housewife living in Geneva camp for three months. She said that "I don't go to school anymore although I'd like to. My husband's family doesn't want me to go. They can't afford to send me or even their children to school. We are a family of sixteen members"(Ghosh 2013, p.252).

All these stories which describe here, are very much effective and eye-catching with full of symbolism and imagism. In this, an anthology, remain all stories are also very much enrich with visual impact, symbolism, and almost based on half fantasy and half real. Behind the Partition, there were a lot of hidden stories of people who suffered a lot with mental as well as physical buried and no one knew about those people fought with their people turned to the enemy and died for their right and own identity. Another some tails like, "**Which Side**", "**The Exit Plan**", "**Know Directions Home?**", "**Bastards of Utopia**", "**Milne Do!**"... more on. All the stories of an anthology are strong powerful creations. This graphic anthology is a perfect blending of impactful visuals with words and each story has a lot of interpretation.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Partition of India cannot be simply put aside as just one of the events that occurred on the obscure past. "This Side That Side: Restorying Partition signals the coming of age graphic novels in India" - Jerry Pinto. In the India Partition context, the loss could be of land, identity, loved ones, or a sense of secure national belonging. These selected stories discussed from this anthology of graphic narratives allow us to understand the actual condition of people during the Partition. These stories, through their artwork and narration, demonstrate a possibility of transcendence and freedom from rigid and inhibiting boundaries. Borders are made on land by man, and one can claim that these graphic stories, by the ingenious union of storytelling and visual representation. "Tales of Partition have come to us in many forms, passed on from one generation to another, but none like in this, where art, photography, and text freely mingle to tell stories" - Timeout Delhi.

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