



# Analysis of Sarnath Banerjee's Select Graphic Novels from the Perspective of Semiotics

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## Abstract

Semiotics offers an approach to studying and assessing systems of meanings through texts, symbols, and signs. This analysis attempts a semiotic study of Sarnath Banerjee's two graphic novels, *Corridor* and *The Harappa Files*. This work emphatically exhibits the association of the texts, signs, objects, symbols, and interpretants for acquiring the meaning among these in the graphic novels of Banerjee. The semiotic study is an attempt to interpret symbolic communication wherein signs and symbols are studied alongside their employment. As a graphic novelist, his works exhibit day-to-day Indian experiences filled with signs and symbols. His usage of signs and symbols is fascinating, which captivates the readers to understand their real essence. This study adopts a qualitative research methodology by implementing semiotic theory to comprehend Banerjee's employment of text, signs, symbols, and their interpretations in his two graphic novels and also discusses his portrayal of meanings through these, which aesthetically and cognitively shape these graphic novels.

**Keywords:** Allusion; Metaphor; Panel; Speech balloon; Symbolism.

## Analysis of Sarnath Banerjee's Select Graphic Novels from the Perspective of Semiotics

### 1 Introduction

Sarnath Banerjee (b. 1972) is an Indian graphic novelist, illustrator, and artist. He has published five graphic novels that focus on day-to-day Indian experiences. His graphic novels are autobiographical and anecdotal having a sharp sense of humour. Through his works, he records expeditiously altering contemporary India. His writings generally are multilingual and in vogue among youngsters since they can fit themselves in his characters and narrations.

The semiotic study is the systematized study of sign processes and meaning creation. It is the study of signs, symbolism, signification, allusion, designation, communication, metonymy, metaphor, simile, analogy, and allegory. It also includes non-linguistic sign systems in which drawings and photographs are interpreted through pictorial codes. Banerjee's use of symbolic communication includes specific words, signs, logos, gestures, and pictures.

Graphic novels portray meaning by employing three semiotic systems – linguistic, visual, and spatial (Jimenez et al., 2016). The first system incorporates letters, words, vocabulary, and so on which agree with traditional print texts; the second system incorporates images' and, the third system incorporates the layout, employment of proximity, direction, and position (Anstey & Bull, 2006).

### 2. Materials and Methods

Two graphic novels by Sarnath Banerjee have been selected for this study. The semiotics theory is applied to analyze the novelist's use of texts, signs, and symbols in his writings. The two graphic novels of

Banerjee are *Corridor* (2004) and *The Harappa Files* (2011). This study adopts a qualitative research methodology by implementing semiotic theory to comprehend the novelist's employment of text, signs, symbols, and their interpretations in his two graphic novels and also discusses his portrayal of meanings through these, which aesthetically and cognitively shape these graphic novels.

### 3. Semiotic Study of Sarnath Banerjee's Graphic Novels

*Corridor* is the novelist's first graphic novel on urban conflicts published in 2004. The story is set in contemporary Delhi and revolves around Jehangir Rangoonwalla, a second-hand book shop owner in Connaught Place, and his various customers. *The Harappa Files* is the novelist's third graphic novel published in 2011 comprising an array of graphic commentaries, which assess the excrescences in post-liberalized India. Both these graphic novels possess semiotic elements.

Symbolism refers to the employment of symbols to portray ideas, emotions, qualities, and states of mind. While discussing Shintu's knowledge of sex in *Corridor*, the novelist draws the picture of Lord Krishna and Gopikas who are his consorts and devotees. According to the ancient text in Indian mythology, Lord Krishna is considered an attractive lover; hence, the novelist includes Krishna's picture while discussing romance and sex. Shintu's mother calls him a good boy, and for this, the novelist includes the picture of baby Krishna (Banerjee, 2004, p. 50). Also, Lord Hanuman, a deity known for celibacy is reflected in the panel to portray His celibacy status (Banerjee, 2004, p. 57). While Peshawari discusses sexually unsatisfied housewives taking the wrong ways to quench their sexual desires, the novelist includes photographs of sexy actresses in Indian movies, like Silk Smitha, who usually perform as sexually dissatisfied and frustrated women. Additionally, Peshawari also tells that, due to hunger for sex, the dissatisfied housewife becomes insane and capable of doing unconventional things; to illustrate this, the novelist draws the picture of Smashana Kali, the chief Goddess of Tantric texts, who stands for freedom in action and freedom from human-perceived constraints (Banerjee, 2004, p. 62). When Kali resided in Matahari's barsati, Brighu often secretly goes to Kali's room and stayed with her; he practically was living with her including pre-marital sex. To depict this, the novelist draws that they both share the same toothbrush and their lives are together like yin and yang (Banerjee, 2004, p. 73).

When Shintu received *sande ka tel* liniment from Hakim Hyder Kalandari, the former believed that the liniment would make him a beast to satisfy his wife's sexual desire; to depict this, the novelist draws a pair of horns over Shintu's head (Banerjee, 2004, p. 78). Furthermore, Shintu believed that he had mastered sex after having *sande ka tel* since he could satisfy his wife's entire sexual desires daily. To depict this, the novelist draws the picture of Shintu flying a kite successfully very high in the sky (Banerjee, 2004, p. 86). Brighu and Kali had their first sex on the night of the football world cup finals on 13 July 1998. After watching the match on television, they had their first intercourse. To indicate Brighu's readiness for the sexual act, as portrayed in figure 1, the novelist illustrates a picture of a kettle with a big gooseneck spout (Banerjee, 2004, p. 70) symbolizing the similarity between the two.



Figure 1 – Kettle indicating Brighu's readiness for a sexual act

Actor Rajinikanth is considered a superstar in the Indian film industry. While Hakkim Peshawari mentions the ideal man, the novelist includes the photograph of Rajinikanth (Banerjee, 2004, p. 67). Indians consider a mustache to be masculine and virile. In the advertisement pamphlet of Hakim Barkat Ali, the novelist draws a big mustache to show the importance of virility (Banerjee, 2004, p. 108).

In *The Harappa Files*, the novelist uses symbolism to express his state of unemployment. As he was unemployed from 1998 until he was hired by the GHRRR Commission, Banerjee indicates his despair unemployed state by drawing pictures of lying on the couch doing nothing but just smoking and drinking (Banerjee, 2011, p. 13). Furthermore, the novelist tactfully indicates water scarcity in India through one of his drawings. He draws two empty water bottles nearby a fish bowl in which the fish swims in the water poured from the bottles (Banerjee, 2011, p. 127). In addition, on the 33<sup>rd</sup> weekly meeting of the Harappa Commission, the seventeen bureaucrats had a round-table conference seated around the government-issue oak table discussing the imposition of form 28B. The mutual disagreement between the committee members is represented as members seated facing the opposite side of the oak table as illustrated in figure 2.



Figure 2 – Harappa Commission bureaucrats not in agreement

Moreover, as Indian urban societies face water scarcity post-millennium, the urbanites rely on water cans for drinking water. These water cans are mounted on a water can dispenser. The novelist uses symbolism to convey the scenario that, in contemporary urban society, water can is considered the source of water. Water from ponds, lakes, and seas gets evaporated; later condensation occurs in the clouds, and water comes back to the earth as rain which constitutes the water cycle. As the urbanites rely completely on water cans, the novelist draws this water cycle inside the water can itself by including clouds inside the water can itself (Banerjee, 2011, p.21) as represented in figure 3.

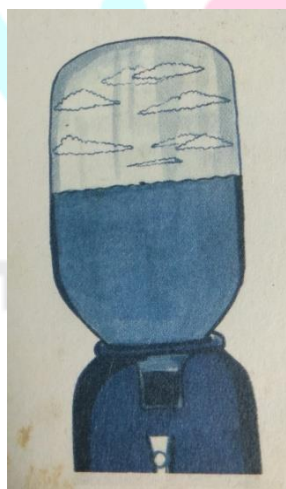


Figure 3 – Water cycle inside a water can

S.S. Sivakumar is a petty bureaucrat in the Department of Surplus Emotion and Nervous Breakdowns. The novelist symbolizes him as a gargoyle (Banerjee, 2011, p. 55). The gargoyles are water sprouts constructed on the roofs of buildings – they are fixed there with their grim face watching all other happenings. Similarly,

S.S. Sivakumar also observes other happenings in his office with a grim face. Spectacles-wearing students are considered intellectual and hard workers in India. This is because these children are believed that they burn the midnight oil to study affecting their eyesight. The novelist draws a picture of a shrewd student wearing spectacles who reads the advertisements of educational coaching institutions for joining one of them (Banerjee, 2011, pp. 68- 69).

Water is the elixir of life. To symbolize this, the novelist draws an open tap from which people and objects flow out (Banerjee, 2011, p. 124-125). Bistro restaurant in Hauz Khas village, an embodiment of glamour and upward mobility, was famous for countless office parties, several dates, and numerous farewell dinners. But later, it was sealed by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi to close down this semi-illegal place permanently. To symbolize this, the novelist draws a locked padlock with images of people who used to go to this restaurant. This shows that not only the Bistro was closed but also the entertainment for many individuals (Banerjee, 2011, p. 170).

Yet another semiotic device Banerjee uses in his novels is metaphors, a figure of speech wherein a word or phrase portrays or symbolizes something else. Youngsters of Delhi generally attend many parties as a couple. Hence, in *Corridor*, the novelist uses the metaphor, “Delhi is the city of couples” (Banerjee, 2004, p. 24) to explain this. When Professor DVD Murthy, completely stoned, talks about death at the midnight with no pain, the others surrounding him thought that he has gone nuts, and the novelist draws a picture of a nut to explain this to his readers as shown in figure 4.



Figure 4 – A nut portraying a confused state of mind

Furthermore, when Professor DVD Murthy smokes Kerala grass, which creates a drug-like effect all through the physis, he calls it a “gift from the womb of Parvati Valley” (Banerjee, 2004, p. 34) and gives some to Jehangir Rangoonwalla. Similarly, when discussing a sexually dissatisfied housewife, Hakim Gulabkhus Peshawari mentions that her husband should only commit suicide because of not capable to satisfy her desire. Here, the novelist draws a picture wherein a husband is standing on a chair in front of a looped rope to commit suicide; and nearby him, on a table, there is a last cup of tea. The novelist uses metaphor to explain this situation (Banerjee, 2004, p. 62).

Yet another instance was Hakim Hyder Kalandari Tartoosie Kaki prescribed and gave *sande ka tel* to Shintu to resolve his sexual problems. The novelist uses the metaphor to explain the effect of this liniment. He told to Shintu that this liniment would make him a tiger as it has aphrodisiac properties, and he writes, “The oil that will awaken ten tigers that lay sleeping inside Shintu; restore his original role as a hunter-gatherer. All that for a mere one thousand rupees, cash or visa.” (Banerjee, 2004, p. 78).

On an early morning, Kali was walking in a deserted street of South Delhi when she was disturbed by an intruder. The novelist employs metaphor and compares this situation with the *Little Miss Muffet* rhyme in which Miss Muffet was disturbed by a spider when she was playing in her swing (Banerjee, 2004, p. 82). Brighu met Gouri on the metro train while he was travelling from Park Station to his home. Despite he was attracted to

her at first sight itself, he was more attracted to his girlfriend Kali; Kali is like an angel. To illustrate this, the novelist draws the Victoria Memorial building in Calcutta which has a statue of the Angel of Victory on the top of the dome; for Brighu, Kali appeared as an angel (Banerjee, 2004, p. 97). Once Kali cooked biriyani and served Brighu. At that time, she asked him whether he was unfaithful during their relationship; it was a tough question for Brighu. To depict this, the novelist draws a picture of Brighu eating a chicken piece from the biriyani but the piece was very tough that he could not remove the bone marrow from the bone; this depicts that it was a very tough question for Brighu to answer Kali.

In *The Harappa Files*, Banerjee uses metaphor to compare the landlady with the hydra, a Greek legendary creature. As the landlady is ill-mannered and sneaky, the novelist compares her to a hydra, a many-headed snake (Banerjee, 2011, pp. 103-104). He writes,

“The hydra was a famous many-headed snake in ancient Greece. Whenever one of its heads was cut off, two new ones emerged. Hydras are famous for their cruel, sneaky nature, their ability to keep attacking you from various angles, and for being practically impossible to fight.” (Banerjee, 2011, p. 103)

Additionally, the novelist also compares the landlady with a doctor. Just like the doctor who shows concentrated attention to the patients, the landlady shows her complete attention toward her tenants. The novelist even draws the landlady with a stethoscope overhearing her tenants through their doors (Banerjee, 2011, p. 103). In another instance, the novelist discusses the peculiar eating habit of Midnapuris of West Bengal. As they consume vast quantities of rice, when two Midnapuris sit down to eat facing each other, it appears as if two pyramids of rice are present on their plate (Banerjee, 2011, p. 165).

Every Thursday evening, Brighu visits AK, a divorcee and a single woman, for having sex with her. Brighu travels by auto-rickshaw to her home every time (Banerjee, 2011, p. 193). As the auto-driver knows about Brighu’s travel to AK home, the novelist illustrates the driver as Puck, the mischievous spirit from William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* who puts love potions into the eyes of the lovers. Moreover, every Thursday morning, Brighu woke up with an uncontrollable desire for sex, and each cell in his body wanted to have intercourse with AK. The novelist compares this with Professor Ivan Pavlov’s experiment that tested the concept of conditional reflex. He trained a hungry dog to salivate at the sound of a buzzer that was formerly related to the sight of food (Banerjee, 2011, p. 195). Just like the buzzer’s sound, Thursdays make Brighu get ready for his sexual act with AK.

AK’s boss is Stardust. Sam is Stardust’s childhood friend; they both went to an all-boys school in the Himalayan foothills. They became best friends welding their bodies, minds, and spirits into one; they became men’s men. To exhibit that they are boyfriends, as illustrated in figure 5, the novelist draws two tiny hands arising from their suits shaking and holding together (Banerjee, 2011, p. 196). Furthermore, once they told their desire to have a threesome with AK. For this, the novelist compares them to ‘The Three Stooges’ (Banerjee, 2011, pp. 197-198) – a trio who were an American vaudeville and comedy team active in the first half of the twentieth century.



Figure 5 – Tiny hands arising from the suits and shaking

In another instance, the novelist employs a metaphor to compare the usage of sugar among different classes in Russia in the old days. One of the characters, Aakar Jain, says that in the old days, the poorest Russians contented themselves with hanging a lump of sugar suspended by a string above their coffee table, where all could look at it while “sipping tea as bitter as injustice” (Banerjee, 2011, p. 142). In an instance, while discussing Bodhidharma’s travels to China, the novelist says that tea plants grew out of Bodhidharma’s buried eyes. It was Bodhidharma who first prepared tea by boiling the plant’s leaves and water; he found that tea serves as gin and tonic for monks – each sip of the concoction rejuvenated every cell of the body (Banerjee, 2011, p. 148). 5-Minuten Fraü is a prostitute who meets her clients at an ‘hour-to-hour’ hotel in suburban Bombay. She generally reaches climax within five minutes of having sex. The novelist compares her to instant noodles – “one can even time her, like a trusted packet of instant noodles” (Banerjee, 2011, p. 188).

An analogy is considered a correlation between two things, generally for explanation and clarification. There are many events that the novelist explains and clarifies through analogies. In *Corridor*, the narrative opens with a mention of the hot climate of Delhi; “soul of Chengiz Khan to survive a June afternoon in Delhi. The streets are empty save a few hardcore urban warriors.” (Banerjee, 2004, p. 3). According to historians, Chengiz Khan (1162-1227) was the founder and emperor of the Mongol Empire, and he conquered much of Eurasia via Mongol invasions consisting of raids, campaigns, and mass exterminations killing millions of people – about 11% of the world’s population was massacred (‘Was Genghis Kahn the greatest leader of the Middle Ages?’, 2022). Hence, to survive the summer afternoon in Delhi, the novelist uses the analogy here. Similarly, the novelist draws a picture of DNA to convey that the streets of Delhi are empty saving some hardcore urban warriors. On such a June afternoon, Brighu searches for a book, *Double Helix* by James Watson, to add to his collection desperately. So, the novelist mentions that he was “hunting for a book” (Banerjee, 2004, p. 3), and, finally, he reaches the second-hand book shop of Jehangir Rangoonwalla at Connaught Place, Delhi.

In *The Harappa Files*, the novelist uses an analogy to compare people and things for explanation and clarification. He calls the contemporary elite Delhiites “present-day Tughlaq” (Banerjee, 2011, p. 31). Mohammad bin Tughlaq reigned Delhi from 1388 to 1389; he was considered a ‘mad king’ due to his eccentric projects of transferring the capital from Delhi to Daulatabad, introducing token currency, experimenting in Doab, and attempting expedition to Kangra, which were all unsuccessful (Byju’s, 2022). As these Delhiites wanted to build a high wall around the city to protect it from the migrant population, the novelist calls them present-day Tughlaq. He also compares crossing Delhi streets with that of Moses crossing the red sea (Banerjee, 2011, p. 31). As it is difficult for the narrator to cross the congested streets of Delhi, the novelist compares it with the Crossing of the Red Sea by Moses, an episode in the biblical narrative. He writes, “I see a gap in the traffic flow – better run and cross the street. It could not have been more difficult for Moses.” (Banerjee, 2011, p. 31)

According to the novelist in *The Harappa Files*, it compares Che Guevara to Tarzan when he visited Africa for seeking new adventures instructing anti-Mobutu fighters on the strategies of guerrilla warfare (Banerjee, 2011, p. 45-46). Jagadish Chandra Bose’s discovery of wireless telegraphy did not reach the authorities due to bureaucratic delays, and, consequently, Marconi received the Noble Prize for his contribution to the development of wireless telegraphy. Because of this, J.C. Bose was very vexed and angry. His anger is compared by Banerjee to attempting to torture and kill ants with his magnifying glass, and he writes, “... J.C. Bose was looking at two fornicating ants, wondering whether to cremate the pair with his magnifying glass or let his good upbringing come in the way.” (Banerjee, 2011, p. 60)

Indians give great importance to education in their life. To comprehend this statement, the novelist compares black men’s liking for boxing with the Indians liking for education. Education for Indians “was what boxing must have been for the black man” (Banerjee, 2011, p. 67). The novelist compares the unlawful, bigshot, affluent, greedy, and tax-evading businessmen with the vampire, which feast on humans as depicted in figure 6. He writes,

“From a dark castle in Romania comes the vampire, a powerful, noble, wealthy creature that feasts on human beings. Capable of turning into a bat by night, these creatures will suck out your blood and your life itself just to add to their own wealth and status. They are usually found in big buildings and conduct most of their business in the dark.” (Banerjee, 2011, p. 88)

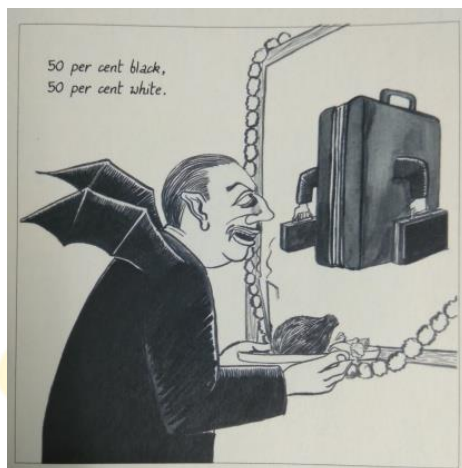


Figure 6 – Tax-evading businessman as a Vampire

Similarly, the novelist compares the Municipal Corporation of Delhi to the kobold, a spirit in German mythology. It always wants to keep things, both living and non-living, neat and organized. Similarly, the Municipal Corporation of Delhi also wants to maintain order, neatness, and organization in Delhi (Banerjee, 2011, pp.176-177).

In *Corridor*, the novelist uses simile as a figure of speech used as a method of comparison for describing two different things. Rangoonwalla attained wisdom and clarity while he was alone in the elevator in the skyscraper at Nariman Point with simple and great ease just “like a sip of water” (Banerjee, 2004, p. 19). In one of the resto-bars, Brighu tells Kali that he feels like Ibn Battuta, a fourteenth-century explorer, on good days. Similarly, the novelist uses a simile to explain Brighu’s state of mind. When Kali was walking alone in the deserted street of South Delhi at dawn, an intruder approached her; but suddenly, Brighu appeared from nowhere making the intruder disappear into the night. The novelist moreover explained this situation, “The intruder disappeared into the night like Bollywood.” (Banerjee, 2004, p. 83). Hakim Gulabkhus Peshawari, a complementary medicine practitioner, compares semen to ghee when Shintu approached him for sexual issues. The former says, “Semen is like pure ghee, it is actually clarified blood, take 100 rotis to make one drop.” (Banerjee, 2004, p. 59)

In *Corridor*, the novelist uses metonymy as a figure of speech to substitute a thing for another, which is related to it. When Digital Dutta and Dolly spend their Friday evening at Central Park, Connaught Place, alone in the darkness, the novelist mentions that “a cloud of sulky silence” (Banerjee, 2004, p. 36) enveloped them; he uses metonymy to explain the silent environment. Hakim Gulabkhus Peshawari compares nocturnal emission to nocturnal pollution. When Peshawari tells Shintu that having frequent nocturnal pollution leads to impotency (Banerjee, 2004, p. 64). The novelist further explained the morning of South Delhi; he compares it with a ghost town, “One in the morning, South Delhi looks like a ghost town. Even Mother Dairy has its shutters down.” (Banerjee, 2004, p. 79). Also, the novelist compares womanizers to the devil and joker. Once when Kali walked alone in the deserted streets of South Delhi, a womanizer approached her and offered her a ride in his car to which she refused. To exhibit the evil intention of the womanizer, as illustrated in figure 7, the novelist draws him as a devil as a metonymy to exhibit his evil intention (Banerjee, 2004, p. 79). There was also another intruder who had a similar bad intention and approached Kali. To depict his face, the novelist draws a joker from a deck of cards wearing a mask as a disguise to hide his original face (Banerjee, 2004, p. 83) as shown in figure 7. When discussing Bonnie and Clyde, the novelist draws two devils to depict them (Banerjee, 2004, p.

87). The novelist mentions the underground Metro Railway of Calcutta to the “bowels of the Calcutta underground” (Banerjee, 2004, p. 91).



Figure 7 – Masks of evil-intention men

An allusion refers to a sign or a piece of information, which indicates something. In *Corridor*, when talking about the H-1B visa at Central Park, Dolly gives a Kanjeevaram smile to her boyfriend Brighu (Banerjee, 2004, p. 36); the novelist uses an allusion to convey her traditional and optimistic smile. On their first night after the wedding, Shintu and his wife played scrabble. They planned to go on their honeymoon yet the place of the destination was not fixed – either Goa or Manali. The novelist shows this uncertainty through the scrabble game (Banerjee, 2004, p.50) as portrayed in figure 8. Morton Foods Limited is a pioneer of canned fruits and veggies in India. They started as a premium food company selling fruits and veggies and later manufactured chocolates, ketchup, and crushers. Banerjee beautifully illustrates this – the turban of a farmer slowly changes into the chocolate wrapper exhibiting the turn of chocolate production by Morton Company. Banerjee also draws a dripping tap to show that just like it, the company turned its production from canned fruits and veggies to chocolates (Banerjee, 2004, p. 55).

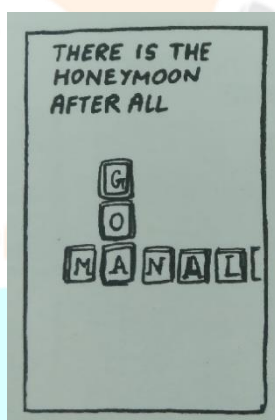


Figure 8 – Honeymoon destination in a scrabble game

Likeness refers to the similarity between places, persons, objects, ideas, or events. The novelist uses likeness to explain some of the happenings in *Corridor*. When Hakim Gulabkhus Peshawari discusses masturbation with Shintu, the novelist includes dialogue from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. In Act V and Scene I, Lady Macbeth says, “all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand” (Banerjee, 2004, p. 59). Peshawari goes on to compare the similarity between semen and ghee (Banerjee, 2004, p. 59).

In *The Harappa Files*, the novelist employs designation while discussing the city of Delhi inside the Outer Ring Road. The designation refers to the action of selecting a place/location for a special purpose or providing it with a special status. He writes, “I am standing on the outer edge of the Outer Ring Road, a vast stretch of road that protects the city from the ‘outer’ and contains the ‘inner’.” (Banerjee, 2011, p. 26)

Banerjee uses the idiom ‘nail in the coffin’ (Banerjee, 2011, p. 28) to compare the detrimental impact of Nano cars on Delhi’s traffic in *The Harappa Files*. This idiom relates to Nano cars that make Delhi’s traffic



more congested than before since many would opt for buying these cheap cars. Oxymoron has been used by the novelist in this graphic novel to discuss apparently contradictory events. R.P. Gupta, IAS, is in “Ministry of Hope” (Banerjee, 2011, p. 50), but those who come to visit him would lose their hope and optimism since he makes them stand in a long queue for a long time and denies giving hope to them. The novelist beautifully registers this in one of his drawings which is portrayed in figure 9.



Figure 9 – Ministry of Hope giving no hope

A panel, also called a frame or box, refers to a drawing on a page that comprises action segments. A page could have one or more panels with or without outlines or borders. In his novels, Banerjee uses different shapes and formats of panels to exhibit emotion, information, tension, and flashback sequences. In *Corridor*, to exhibit a shift in the story, the novelist draws only one action segment in a panel on a single page. For instance, there is a shift in the story when Rangoonwalla tells about his realization to open a bookshop (Banerjee, 2004, p. 18). Hence, the novelist includes only one panel on a page. Also, the same pattern is followed by the novelist when Rangoonwalla explains his disinterest in vipassana (Banerjee, 2004, p. 21). Additionally, to highlight a significant twist in the plot, the novelist uses a single-page panel. For instance, to reveal the twist of sande-kattel’s usage by Maya the maid, the novelist draws the picture of Maya on a single page (Banerjee, 2004, p. 102).

Furthermore, the novelist includes only one panel on a page to highlight a quotation or a fact. For instance, he uses only one panel in a page to convey lines from John Keats’ poem ‘Why did I laugh to-night?’ – “Verse, fame, and beauty are intense indeed, But Death intenser – Death is Life’s high meed” (Banerjee, 2004, p. 27). Also, the quotation of Jean Baudrillard about artifact collectors is depicted in a single-page panel (Banerjee, 2004, p. 7). Likewise, to convey a fact on the universal death rate, he uses a single-page panel (Banerjee, 2004, p. 35). These single-panel pages are illustrated in the following figure 10.

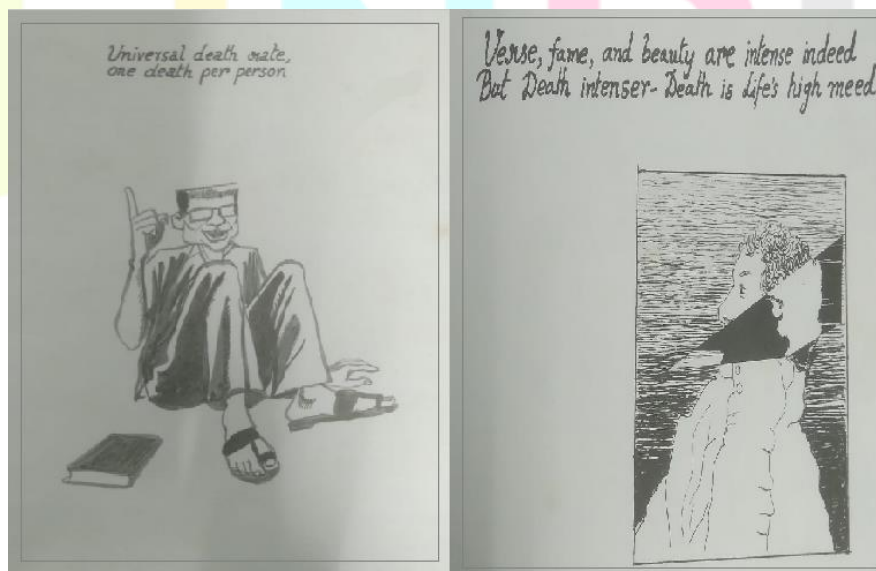


Figure 10 - Single-page panels depicting a fact and lines from a poem

In *The Harappa Files*, the novelist uses a single-page panel to convey the fragmentary narratives that he compiles for the Greater Harappa Rehabilitation, Reclamation & Redevelopment Commission. These panels depict a separate story like Tata's achievement of buying Jaguar Car Company (p. 40), J.C. Bose's inventions (p. 57), the obnoxious overwatching landlady (p. 105), and Asghar Ali Beg's installation of a gigantic cooling system of UBI Building (p. 129).

Although most of the panels have outlines or borders, the novelist has included some panels without outlines or borders to make them stand out from the rest of the particulars. In *Corridor*, while explaining the intimate relationship between Brighu and Kali using a yin-yang image, the novelist draws this in a panel without an outline or a border to highlight this (Banerjee, 2004, p. 73) as represented in figure 11.



Figure 11 - One of the panels without an outline or a border

Similarly, in *The Harappa Files*, the novelist uses panels without outlines or borders to highlight certain problems to highlight them from the rest of the novel. For an instance, since doing illegal business is a threat to a country, the novelist compares the illegal men to Count Dracula, a vampire, and draws the pictures without an outline (Banerjee, 2011, pp. 88 – 90). Likewise, the issue of water scarcity and the third-world is depicted through the character Kamleshwar, a retired garment exporter, wherein the novelist includes the image in a panel without an outline (Banerjee, 2011, pp. 125-127). Similarly, the problem of unemployment in India is also depicted through an image in a panel without an outline. Also, the issue of sugar shortage in Russia is depicted through an image in a panel without an outline (Banerjee, 2011, p. 143). Additionally, round-shaped panels are used in *The Harappa Files* novel to illustrate famous persons for conveying their achievements as the round shape appears different from the rest of the square and rectangle panels (Banerjee, 2011, p. 43).

As most of the images are in black and white colours, the novelist also uses colour images in both graphic novels. In *Corridor*, the novelist uses colour images to illustrate the background of certain characters or to highlight certain particulars. For instance, to describe the background of Digital Dutta, the novelist uses colour images so that his character's importance in the plot is revealed to the readers (Banerjee, 2004, pp. 36-43); as Digital Dutta appears in almost all of Banerjee's novels. Using colour images, he shows the background of his characters to the readers, helping them to get a clear picture of them and blowing their minds with details. In addition, to highlight Hakim's pieces of advice to Shintu, the novelist uses colour images (pp. 65-69); as this forms a major twist in Shintu's life, the novelist highlights this in colour images.

In *The Harappa Files*, the novelist uses colour images to illustrate individual stories in the novel. For instance, he uses colour images to depict the stories of Rathan Tata (pp. 32-40), S.S. Sivakumar (pp. 52-55), the

story of Indian students looking for higher education (pp. 68-71), Calomine X seller in the train (pp. 78-79), Jagat Bahadur (pp. 80-83), Brighu and Girish (pp. 93-96), Rakhaldas Banerjee (pp. 96-97), an obnoxious landlady (pp. 103-105), Dr. Bobby Patel (p. 181), and 5-Minuten Fraii (pp. 182-189).

In addition, in *The Harappa Files*, the novelist only uses mono-colour schemes, employment of a particular colour, to illustrate an important event. He uses only blue colour while illustrating the tea auction (pp. 146-151) as in figure 12(a). He uses only red colour to draw the picture of Bodhi Dharma (p. 150) as in figure 12(b); as Bodhi Dharma, a king from Kanchipuram of Tamil Nadu who moved to China, is considered the father of Kung Fu, the novelist draws him in red to highlight him from other characters. As the colour red symbolizes courage and life (Dutfield & Wolchover, 2022), the novelist employs this colour to exhibit Bodhi Dharma's bravery, valour, and courageousness. Due to bureaucratic delays, Jagdish Chandra Bose's invention of wireless telegraphy arrived late to the authorities, and, instead, G. Marconi received the Nobel Prize for his contributions to the development of wireless telegraphy. To illustrate Bose's dejected state of mind, as in figure 12(c), the novelist uses only brown colour (pp. pp. 58-61) to convey this incident as this colour has negative associations (McLean, 2021). To illustrate the perils of congested Delhi traffic, as in figure 12(d) the novelist uses only red colour sketches (pp. 26-31) as red is also a colour of danger (Ferreira, 2019). Also, as the landlady is obnoxious and a dangerous person, the novelist draws her saree in red colour (p. 104), as in figure 12(e). As the colour green represents the association with ancient roots (Dutfield & Wolchover, 2022), the novelist includes the image of the Chetak Scooter in only green colour (p. 100) to illustrate its vintage make, as in figure 12(f). To depict the victory of Edmund Hillary and Sherpa Tenzing reaching the top of Mount Everest, as in figure 12(g) the novelist draws the picture of bulbs only in yellow colour (p. 202) as yellow symbolizes happiness and achievement in most cultures (Dutfield & Wolchover, 2022).



**Figure 12 – Various mono-colour schemes**

Apart from drawings, Banerjee includes photographs, pencil sketches, charts, posters, maps, and other sorts of visual semiotic modes to provide variation in the visual track and for better comprehension. In graphic novels, all of the above are incorporated especially for utilizing, adopting, and adapting a plurality of visual modes in the communication of the narrative (Pedri, 2018). In *Corridor*, the novelist uses the real photographs of Arnold Schwarzenegger, Aishwarya Roy, Silk Smitha, Rajinikanth, and Manorama to highlight them in the illustration. Similarly, in *The Harappa Files*, the real photographs of a group of youngsters posted on Facebook,

a bungalow, a stationery shop, Jawaharlal Nehru, Ratan Tata, Robert Mugabe, Bhagat Singh, Vladimir Lenin, Jim Morrison, Mao Zedong, and Bob Dylan are included to bring in slice of the life of urban space.

In *Corridor*, a chart on good habits and the ideal boy (Banerjee, 2004, p. 65) is included by the novelist as exhibited in figure 13. He also includes a picture of a real book titled *Message of Youth: Treasure of Vigour Youth and Health* (Banerjee, 2004, p. 44) in this novel. Furthermore, in *The Harappa Files*, the novelist includes posters depicting student achievers in coaching classes (Banerjee, 2011, pp. 68-69) and the movie 'The Three Stooges' (Banerjee, 2011, p. 198).

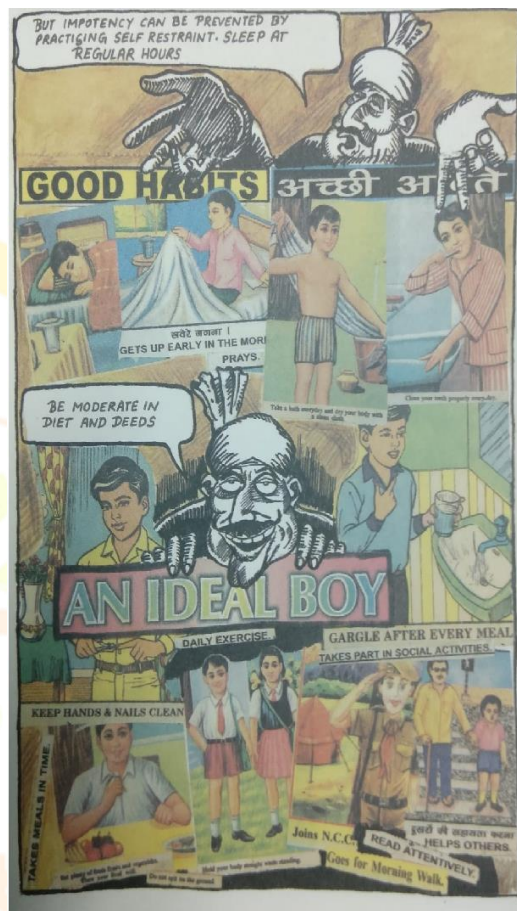


Figure 13 – Chart on Good Habits and An Ideal Boy

A sketch map is a roughly drawn map without exact survey measurements that exhibits just fundamental particulars. In *Corridor*, the novelist includes a sketch map of Connaught Place (Banerjee, 2004, p. 14) just to provide a birds eye view of busy urban city lifepeople, and, in *The Harappa Files*, he includes a sketch map of Delhi city surrounded by the Outer Ring Road (Banerjee, 2011, p. 26). These sketch maps are depicted in figure 14. Also, the novelist includes pencil sketch drawings while illustrating the story of people residing in congested Delhi city (Banerjee, 2011, pp. 26-31); this style makes this story stand separate from the rest of the pictures.

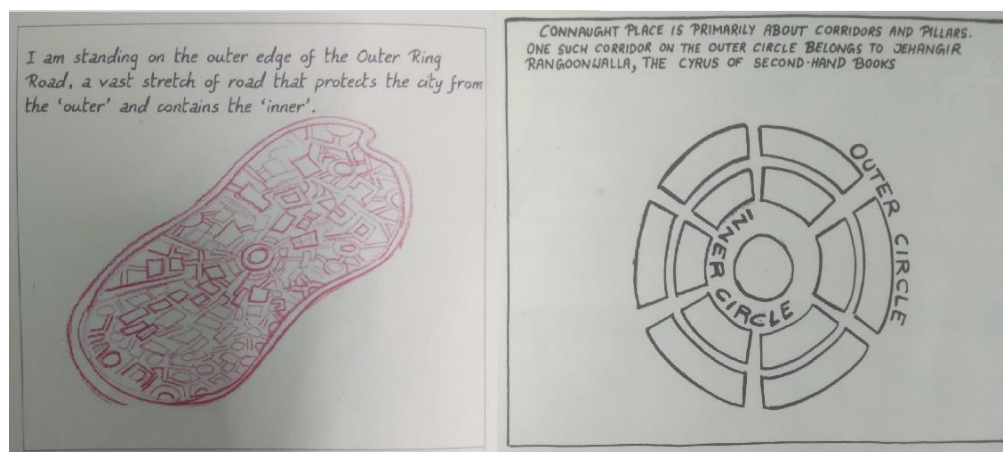


Figure 14 - Sketch Maps of Delhi City and Connaught Place

Furthermore, the novelist uses different dialogue or speech balloons in his graphic novels to express the characters' state of mind and thoughts. The speech balloons are generally given with a pointer to express the characters' dialogue. On the other hand, a thought balloon is given without a pointer to express the characters' thoughts. For instance, Brighu's thoughts about Gauri on the Metro train are given in speech balloons without pointers (Banerjee, 2004, pp. 93-96). Generally, capital letters are not used throughout a novel; but, in *Corridor*, the novelist uses only capital letters (all caps) throughout the novel. Employing all caps portray a strong feeling, a difference in emotion, and greater emphasis (McCulloch, 2019).

Various stylistic devices are employed by Banerjee in *The Harappa Files*, although all the dialogue balloons have text in black colour, the dialogue balloons used in the story of the tea auction have text in blue colour (Banerjee, 2011, pp. 146-151). Also, since the narration in the captions differ from the dialogues in the dialogue balloons (the captions tell the story of Bodhi Dharma while the dialogue balloons tell the details of the tea auction), the novelist includes blue colour text in the dialogue balloons to give a variation between captions and dialogue balloons. Furthermore, to depict the dialogue between a group of seven elderly men discussing a trip, the novelist draws a page full of dialogue balloons with pointers facing all directions denoting the various conversations of these men (Banerjee, 2011, p. 136).

#### 4. Conclusion

The semiotic study of these two graphic novels investigates how meaning is created by Banerjee through texts, signs, and symbols and communicated to the readers. The present study interprets the novelist's verbal and nonverbal signs. Sarnath Banerjee employs semiotics for symbolic communication in his graphic novels incorporating texts and images. He uses texts, images, photographs, charts, maps, posters, panels, and dialogue balloons for amalgamating disparate semiotic resources to express the events for forming meanings and making such meanings evident. His usage of signs and symbols communicates and demonstrates messages, tones, intents, events, and emotions. Additionally, they act as a visual language for readers, as well as aiding in the semiotic analysis of the novelist's narrative, structuring, and drawings reveals a deep level of meanings in different dimensions. His usage of signs and symbols is fascinating, which captivates the readers to understand their real essence. Banerjee's portrayal of meanings through texts, signs, symbols, and their interpretations aesthetically and cognitively shape these graphic novels.

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