

Storytelling in the Graphic Novel

Analysis into the process of developing the novel.

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Abstract

The intention of this project is to gain a clearer understanding of the process involved in the generation of a Graphic novel, the seamless integration of the text with the imagery.

It delves into the manner of representation of serious and politically tense topics through this medium. The nature of political and historical novels is studied through selected pieces of work.

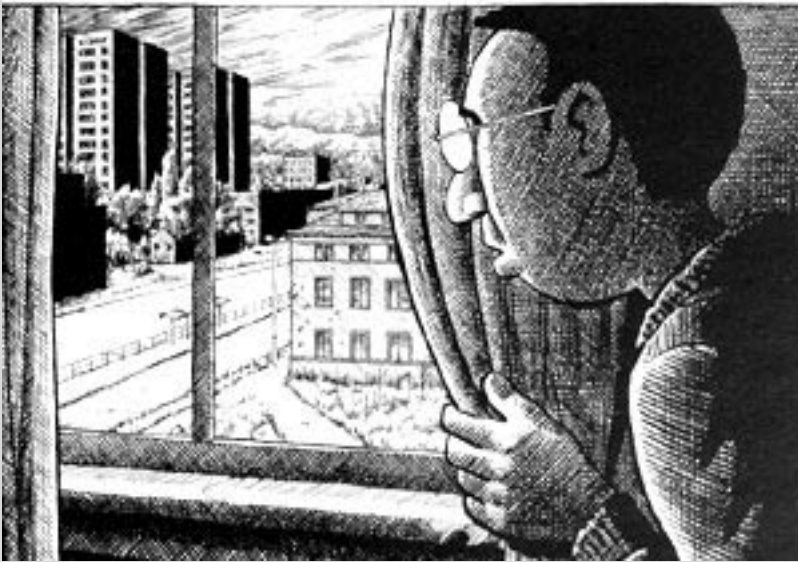
The process involved in the translation of a film into a graphic novel also falls within the spectrum of my study.

Synopsis

- Brief description of the development of the Graphic novel genre.
- Will Eisner and his contribution.
- Political and Historic Novels (Selected Novels)
 - * Marjane Satrapi, "Persepolis"
 - Description of the novel
 - Style of Representation
 - Excerpts from the book
 - * Sid Jacobson & Ernie Colon, "The 9/11 Report"
 - Description of the novel
 - Illustration technique: Process
 - * Joe Sacco, "Palestine"
 - Indian Graphic novel market: Abdul Sultan, "The Believers"
 - Film translated into a Graphic novel: Paromita Vohra, "Unlimited Girls"

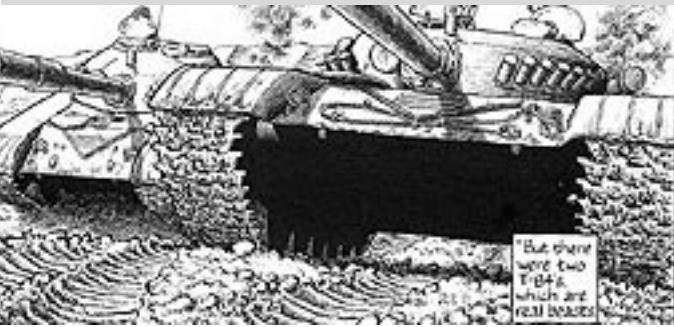


Development of the Graphic novel genre



- Graphic novels are a long form of comics. The two terms run quite parallel. They usually have longer and more complex storylines.
- Moreover they are aimed at a more mature audience.
- It generally consists of a story that has a beginning, a middle and an end rather than an ongoing series.
- As compared to comic books, Graphic novels are bound with a more durable material such as light card or heavier material.
- The term is used mostly to separate work from juvenile humorous material and be considered of a more serious or mature work.
- A graphic novel is basically the idea of a single author and illustrator. It is represented by a combination of words with sequential art.

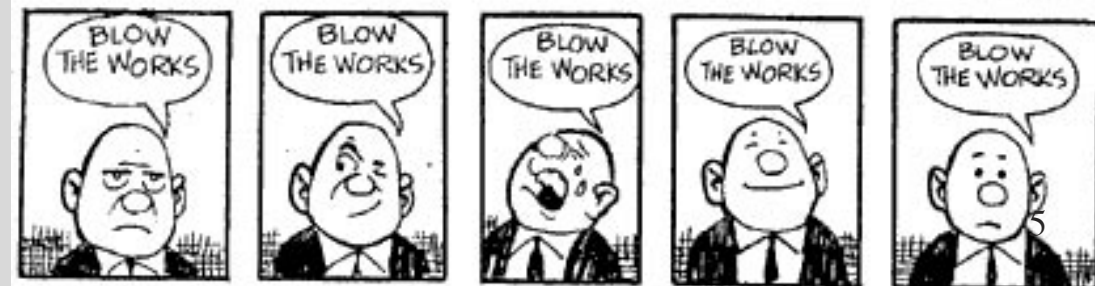
Noted film critic Roger Ebert calls them, "Comics with a yearning for the light". The artist combines images with words and seeks a synergy between his drawing and writing skills.





Will Eisner & his contributions

- Will Eisner coined the name Graphic Novel in order to describe a substantial comic book. It often contains over 200 pages.
- Has a single dramatic storyline or several interconnected narratives. It is accompanied by expressive illustration art.
- "A compelling storyteller."
"Single person most responsible for giving comics its brains."
Eisner is considered one of the more influential comic artists. He was called "the leonardo of the comic book form."
- His contribution began in the year 1936. In the late 1930s, when the comic book industry was just beginning, he created characters that are used even today such as Sheena and Queen of the Jungle.
- In 1978, he came out with his first Graphic novel publication which was, "A Contract with God".





Persepolis- The story of a childhood

Marjane Satrapi

Description of the Novel: Persepolis is Marjane Satrapi's memoir of growing up in Iran during the Islamic revolution. From a girl of 6 years to a teenager of 14 years.

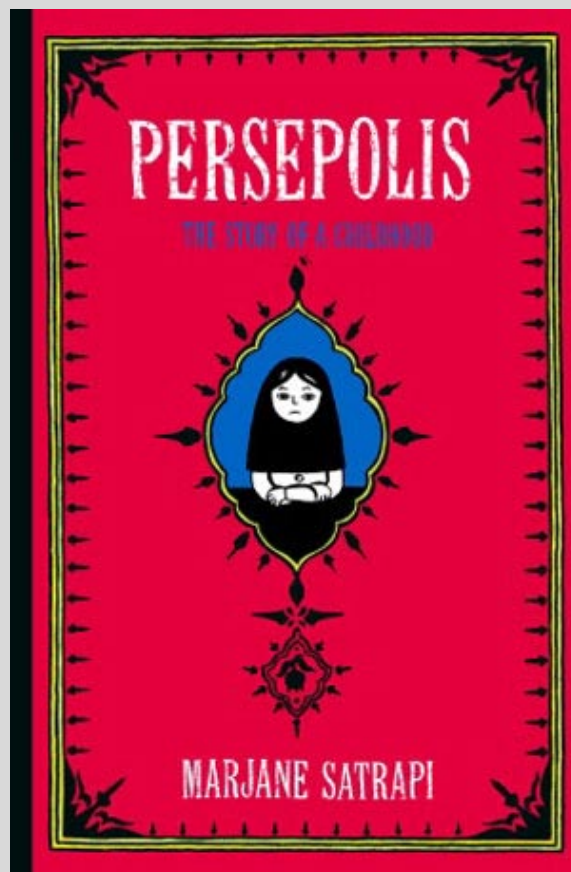
The story of her life in Tehran from the age of six to fourteen. Marjane is the child of committed marxists and grand daughter of one of Iran's emperors. Hence she was able to witness a childhood amidst all the political situations in her country. This was during the fall of a reign in Iran. It brings about the contradictions between home and public life. Its all a child like view of the time. The personal and intimate view is very much potrayed.

The illustrations are primarily done in black and while comic strips.

It is a story of growing up and a reminder of the human cost of war and political repression. It shows how we carry on, through laughter and tears, during chaos. The whole story is portrayed from the point of view of a young girl.

The aspects that are most captivating is the way the child interacts with her environment and the people who exist around her. The book has been chapterised based on the different changes that took place during that time.

"You have to have a very visual vision of the world. You have to perceive life with images otherwise it doesn't work. Some artists are more into sound; they make music. The point is that you have to know what you want to say, and find the best way of saying it.", Marjane Satrapi.



PERSEPOLIS



Persepolis- The story of a childhood Marjane Satrapi

Style of representation:

The wide range of emotions have been portrayed through the use of very simple pen strokes. This consistency has been maintained throughout the book. The book is entirely in black and white.

The characters have been kept fairly basic. The expressions are conveyed through the mere use of characteristic lines.

Process: She begins sketching one page and then decides the number of frames that she wants to put in it. She then sketches a pattern of empty frames and the matter that she wants to say in each of the frames. After that she starts developing the characters and the scenes. For each page she has a list or sequence of content that has to be placed within the page. This is the starting point.

Medium: The illustrations have been done using china ink and a plume. The brush that has been used is similar to the one's used in Chinese writing.

Style of illustration: The drawing style is simple and the figures are basic. The scenes contain minimal detailing.

In contrast to the heavy content of the book, the representation is kept minimalistic. Some of the drawings look like woodcuts. The clothes, backgrounds and other details which are either black or white are effective and create stark contrasts.

Persepolis- The story of a childhood

Marjane Satrapi

"Image is an international language. The first writing of the human being was drawing, not writing. That appeared much before the alphabet. And when you draw a situation someone is scared or angry or happy, it means the same thing in all cultures. He would have the same expression. Images are more direct.", Marjane Satrapi.

The class photo shows a group of girls who at first glance look the same. But then when looked at with more focus the minor differences are visible. The expressions and look in the eyes of the different characters are brought out smoothly.

The book overall has very little text and the illustrations are meant to dominate.

The book is now being converted into a film by Sony Pictures. Marjane Satrapi is currently working on some of the pages and these changes will be incorporated in the film.





Persepolis- The story of a childhood

Marjane Satrapi

The illustration style is straightforward yet the expressions and the mood of the situation is represented. The transition of the emotion from bad to worse is smooth.

For example: The image of emperor shah's picture burning is kept direct.

Since the protagonist is a child, the simplistic style of representation goes with it.

Example: The ten year old girl is torn between tradition and modernity. this is represented in the cover image in which one half shows a girl with perky, short hair and the other is covered in a hijab.



Persepolis- The story of a childhood

Marjane Satrapi

In many cases, Marjane Satrapi makes simple statements and leaves it to the reader to sketch in. The nature of the precocious and careful child is portrayed in her work.

The tensions that existed in the society comes through even in her childhood games. **For example:** In one particular section, The girl is seen thinking of herself as the last Prophet. Here she establishes the rules of a regime. Rule no 8: No old person should have to suffer."

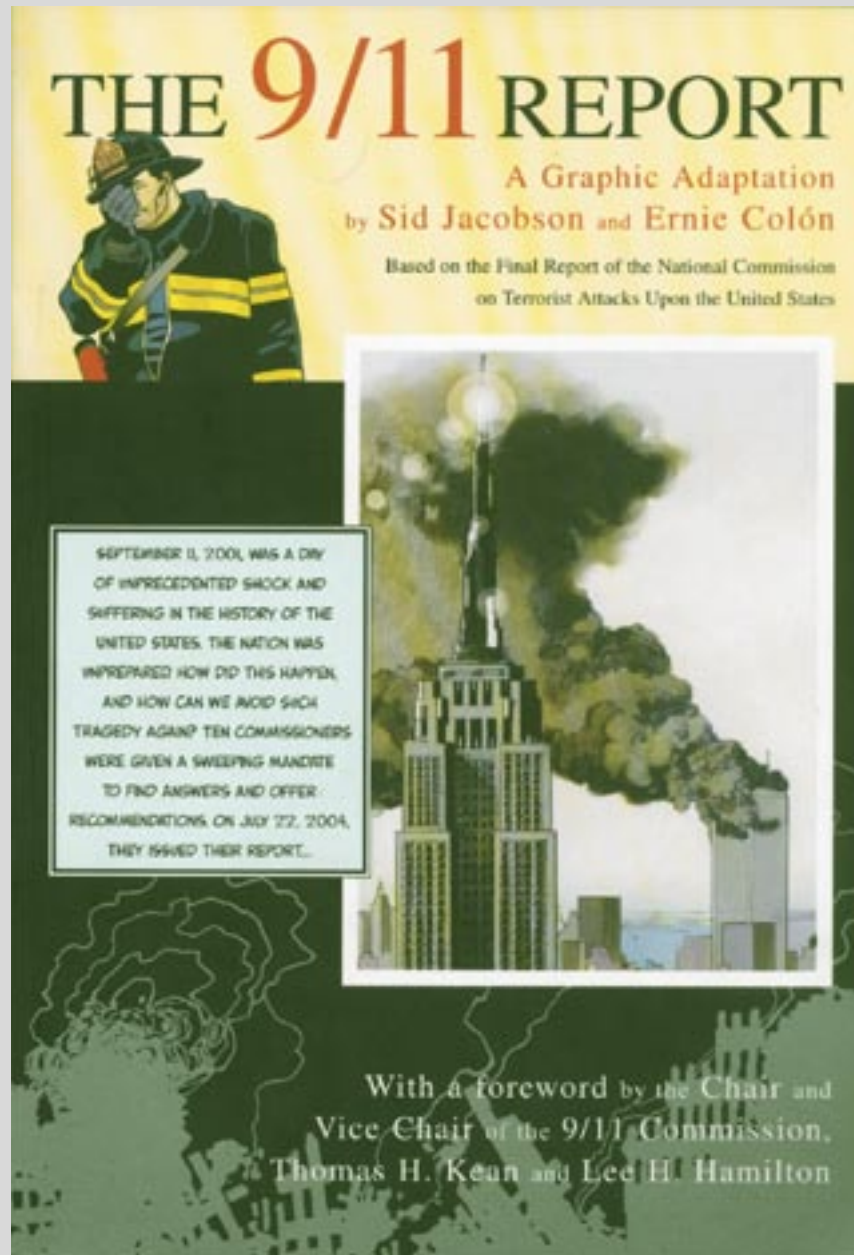
In the following frame one sees her grandmother saying that in that case she would be her first disciple. She then asks her how Marjane would arrange this. To this the girl says, "It will simply be forbidden."

There are a number of similar simple representations that are used in the graphic novel.



Persepolis- The story of a childhood Marjane Satrapi





The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation

Sid Jacobson & Ernie Colon

Description of the Novel:

The book is a condensed version of the 600 pages federal report of the National Commission.

It is a detailed illustrated book of the report, complete with a timeline depicting the events of the day.

Sid Jacobson was the Editor at Harvey Comics.

Ernie Colon illustrated for comics such as Richie Rich and Casper.

The reason to narrate the event in the form of a graphic novel was because the events, names and time of the happening of events got confusing during the reading of the report. A visual narrative made it easier to recall.

Sid Jacobson worked on the Script, while Ernie Colon worked on the illustration of the novel.

The major question raised here is whether a topic as massive and serious as September 11 can be effectively addressed in a comic book format.

What was the most difficult aspect was to avoid any portrayal of their own political opinion as part of the book.

AMERICAN AIRLINES FLIGHT 11



SADAM AL SHIGARI
HUS AL SHIGARI
WALEED AL SHIGARI
ABU AL AZZ AL OMARI
MOHAMMED ATTA
PILOT

UNITED AIRLINES FLIGHT 175



IMADHAN AL SHEHRI
RYEYER BANHAMMAD
AHMED AL GHAFY
HAKZA AL GHAFY
MOHAMMED AL SHEHRI
PILOT

AMERICAN AIRLINES FLIGHT 77



MUHAMMAD AL HAZMI
HALED HOGED
HANI HANLOVE
KHALID AL MICHMAR
SALEM AL HAZMI
PILOT

UNITED AIRLINES FLIGHT 93



AHMED AL NAMI
SAEED AL GHAFY
ZUO JUSRAH
AHMAD AL HAZMI
PILOT

The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation

Sid Jacobson & Ernie Colon

Style of Representation

The more challenging aspect about doing a Non fictional graphic novel is that the research involved is a lot more elaborate. Moreover the seriousness and accuracy of the happening is very important.

Process:

For the faces of the officials and the 19 hijackers, he worked from photographs to create the caricatures. The book has an elaborate and systematic breakdown of the timeline.

Medium:

The caricatures of the people were done from photographs and then digitally rendered. The whole feel of the book has been kept simple with a tan color finish to the book.

Style of Illustration:

The illustrations have stuck to basic figures and expressions. Not too much emphasis is given to the background. At every important step, maps and charts have been included. There is the basic text describing the event, apart from the expressive text that is written in the usual balloon format. The page break up is different from page to page.

Inside the Four Flights

BEFORE 9 O'CLOCK ON THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, A PLEASANT AND CLOUDLESS MORNING IN BOSTON, TWO PLANES, BOTH BOEING 767'S, WERE ABOUT TO TAKE OFF FROM LOGAN AIRPORT.

...AND CHANGE THE HISTORY OF THIS NATION.



BY 9 O'CLOCK, FIVE OTHER ARAB NATIONALS WERE RELATED TO BOARD AMERICAN AIRLINES FLIGHT 77, AT WASHINGTON'S DULLES AIRPORT, HEADED FOR LOS ANGELES AT 9:45.



The 9/11 Report: A Graphic Adaptation

Ernie Colon says that, one of the most difficult tasks in such a novel is to choose what to illustrate and yet not be too offensive or have any sensational looking drawings. But at the same time the violence had to be depicted in order to get the actual picture about the happening.





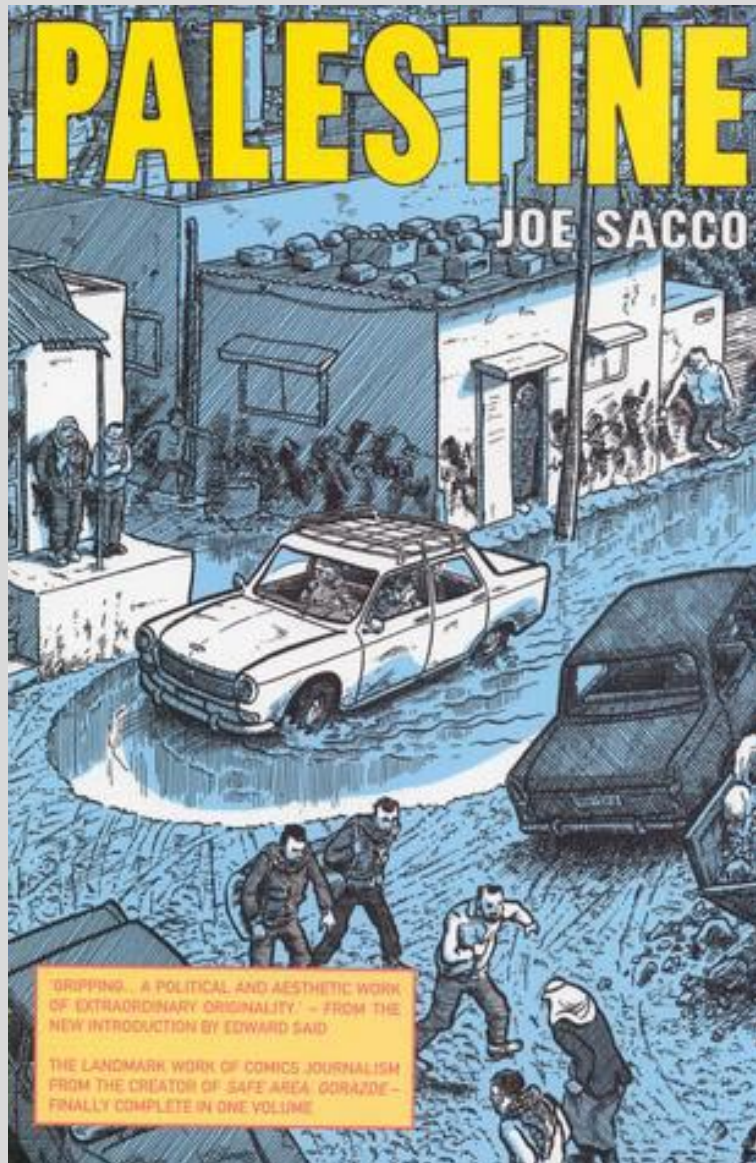
Joe Sacco

Joe Sacco's work completely stands apart in this field of work. No one else in the field has attempted to depict political reportage through this comic book format. He is very much a pioneer in this genre.

His books which are basically like a newspaper report, takes a step further and visualizes it. It delves into the complex issues that people in these war torn areas face. The very fact that they are being represented in the comic book format makes it all more remarkable.

As a child, Joe Sacco had been glued to Mad comics and used to buy reprints of them. He graduated with a degree in journalism, but always had an inclination towards drawing.

In 1992, he travelled to Israel and came back with material that formed the comic book series Palestine. Nothing of the like had been seen before this. It was published by Fantagraphics in 1995. It is one of the most touching and innovative representations of the situation in Palestine.



Palestine

Joe Sacco

Description of the Novel:

Joe Sacco is a journalist, who later became an artist. The gulf war segment of the papers caught his attention and he went to Israel and some areas of Palestine after which he wrote the Book Palestine. Palestine is a collection of short stories depicting the life of people in Palestine during the war.

The book is written in the time frame of 1992- 94. Joe Sacco met up with people living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip area. The book focuses on the everyday life of the people living in this area. The struggles and hardships that they face. It is basically a compilation of the stories told by the Palestinians who are under Israeli rule. It tells the story of women, children, soldiers etc.

The book is presented in a chronological form based on his stay in the region. Most of the stories are based on the conversations that he had with the people in Palestine.

Though most of the situations are seen through the eyes of the people living there, in some sections Sacco's point of view also comes across.

It is like a war reportage which is in a book form. He has named it as Comic Journalism.



Palestine

Joe Sacco

The stories take place on the front line and shows images of the market place that is destroyed by shootings. Images of the soldiers beating people are shown. Joe Sacco speaks to children who have lost their families, refugees and other protesters.

Though the book has exaggerated figures, typical to a comic book format it still manages to retain the seriousness of the war and the potrays the plight of the people in the region.

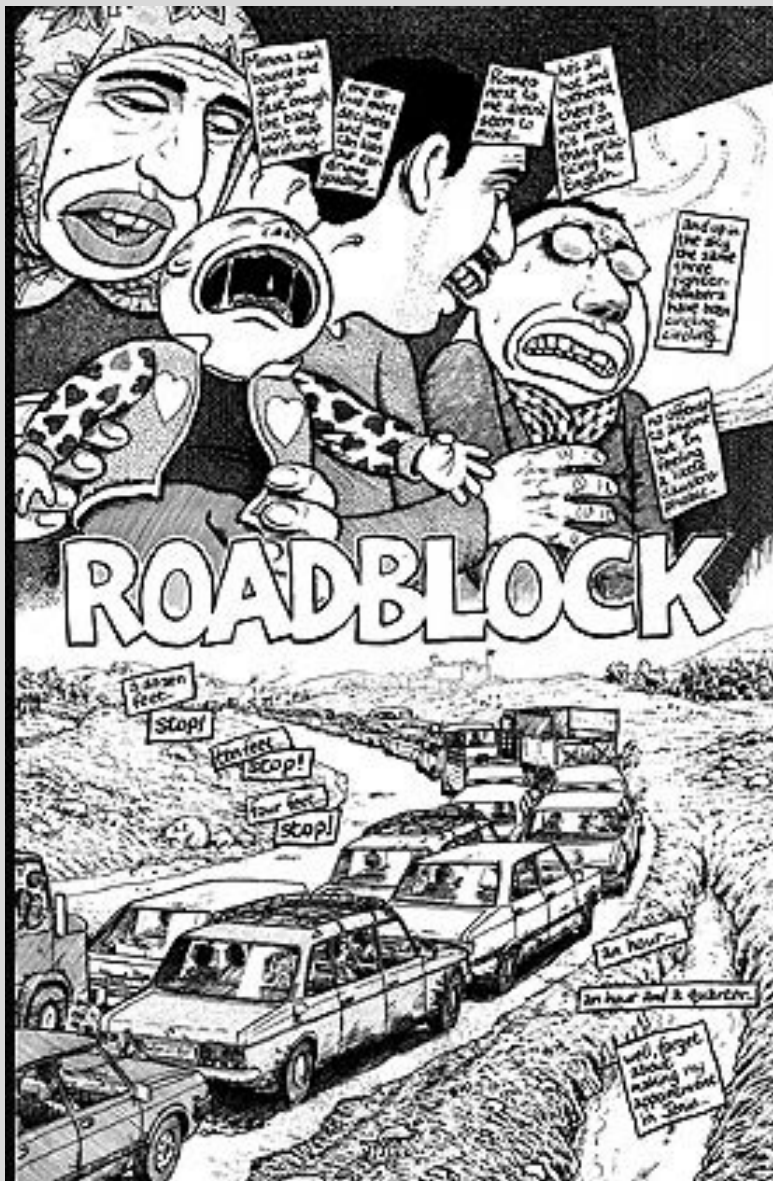
The book leans towards the Palestinian people and the misery they face. It in a sense, gives a one sided view of the conflict.

Style of Representation

The manner of representation is entirely in black and white. The image and layouts are bold. The page is divided in big chunks and in some sections the entire page is dedicated to a single illustration. The renderings are simple yet very strong. Techniques such as cross hatching, stippling are used. The illustration of the protagonist (Joe Sacco) is a caricature. The expressions of the other character are also a little exaggerated in certain sections of the book.

In the book, the character of Joe Sacco himself is more cartoony and the facial features are more exaggerated as compared to the other people in the book. The image of the other people seem to be leaning more towards a realistic approach.

His drawings are stark and realistic. The depressing and chaos like situation are clearly potrayed. Aspects such as poverty and remorse are not neglected.



Palestine

Joe Sacco

Process:

During his 2 months stay in Palestine, Sacco wrote 9 issues. He went and stayed in rented accommodations at the places and the camps. He spoke to people and then drew them out and it was finally published in a single book. The process involved actually experiencing the situation, speaking to the people and documenting the happenings.

Generally when he speaks to the people he mostly plays the role of a Journalist. He tape records the conversations and almost always gets to take a picture of the person. but in case they refuse to be taken a picture of, then he makes a quick sketch of the person.

At times he takes photographs of the scene that he is planning on including in the book. But most of the time he takes notes and interviews people. His drawing are based off his writings.

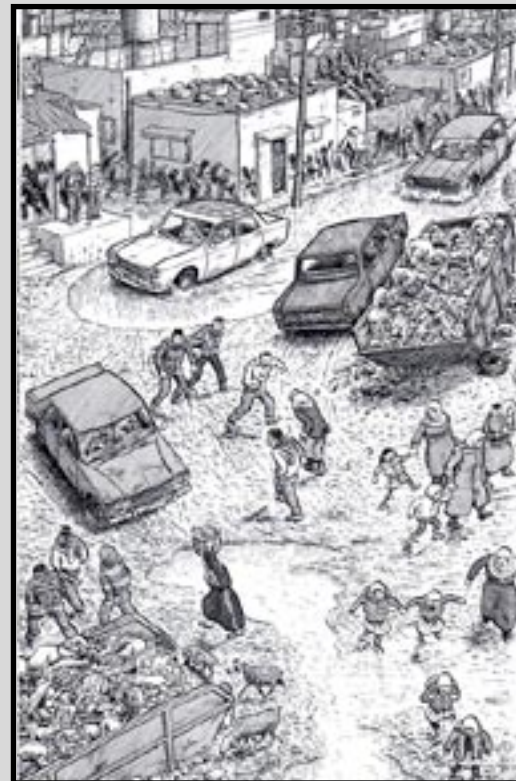
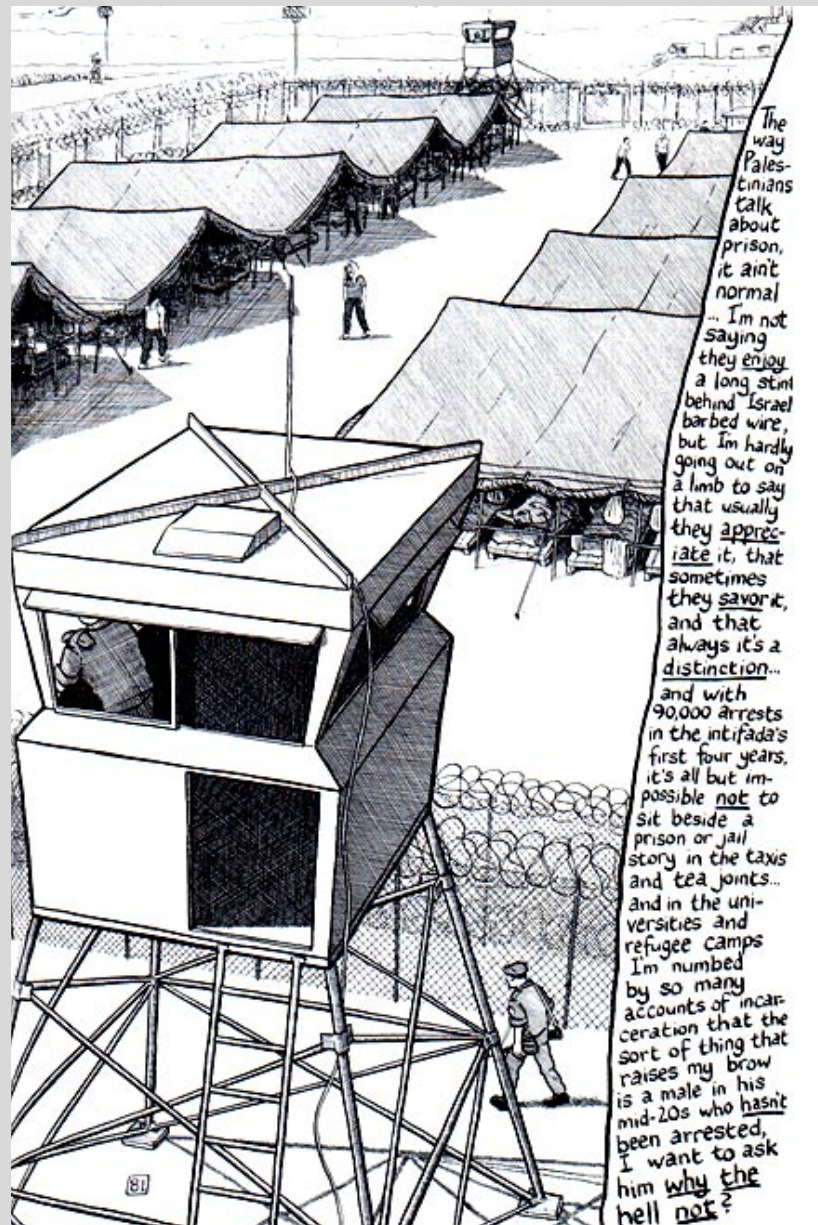
He gets an insight into the war prone areas by making friends and living in the same conditions as those he covers. His work has a very down to earth and rough finish to it. The very essence of the place is brought through. He does not attempt to make the situation look nice and attractive.

Palestine

Joe Sacco

Prison Camp:

There is a whole chapter dedicated to the Prisons. This is because Prisons have become a very common activity and part of people lives in the region. In this section, he has selected one particular prison named Ansar 3 and analyzed the situation there. Since he did not get permission to enter the premises, he asked people to draw out and verbally describe the place. They described the tents, the cots and the general setup of the place. Joe Sacco drew the place solely based on the description given. In some cases he directly incorporated the drawings of the people.



Palestine

Joe Sacco

Jabalia Refugee Camp:

This section consisted solely of images used to communicate the situation in the camp. There is no text in this section. It is entirely said using visuals. It includes images of the walls where the Palestinians have written slogans. Even aspects such as the weather and the area of the place are described. They are all completely visually told.

Example: In this section, there is a very interesting dialogue that takes place. Joe Sacco is seen talking to a few Palestinians. He is discussing the rebellion that they are raising against the Israeli's. One of the sullen looking Palestinians says that he is the only one who has never been to Prison. Later in the lower portion of the page, we see the man saying that he is embarrassed about the fact that he has not been to prison. The way the imagery of the man and the narrative is integrated is very interesting and quite well summarizes the situation in the region.





Palestine

Joe Sacco

Treatment of Images:

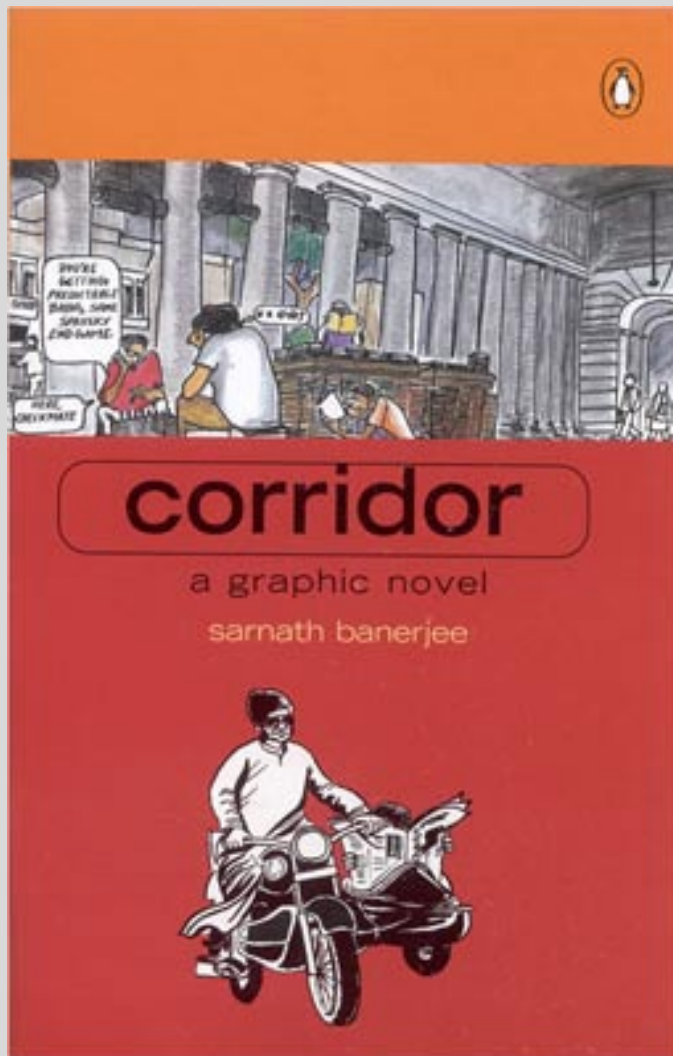
The initial part of the book is a little more on the cartoony side as compared to the later half. As it goes, Joe Sacco has employed a more realistic treatment to his images. It gives a better idea of the scenario. Moreover, considering the theme of the book, the realistic approach gives it a more serious look.

Only in some sections he has used exaggerated facial expressions particularly to portray the trauma faced by the people.

"It's a visual world and people respond to visuals. With comics you can put interesting and solid information in a format that's pretty palatable. For me, one advantage of comic journalism is that I can depict the past, which is hard to do if you're a photographer or filmmaker.", Joe Sacco.

"In a world where Photoshop has outed the photograph to be a liar, one can now allow artists to return to their original function as reporters.", Art Spiegelman.

Indian Graphic Novel Market



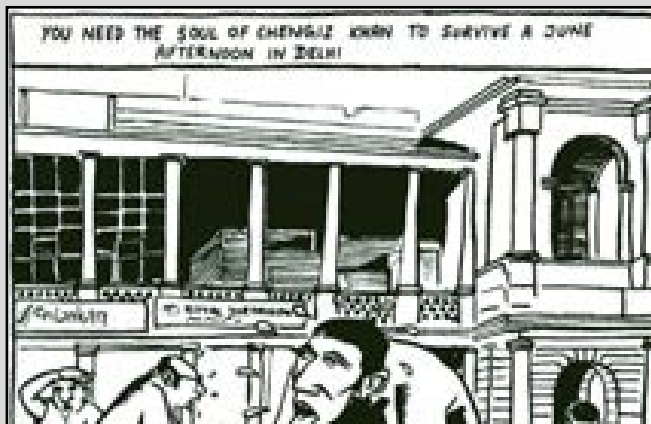
One of the very first people to introduce the Graphic novel trend in India was Sarnath Banerjee. His first novel was Corridor. The story is set in Delhi and Calcutta. The main characters of the book include Rangoonwala who is a bookseller and his customers such as Brighu, Digital Dutta and the newly married Shintu.

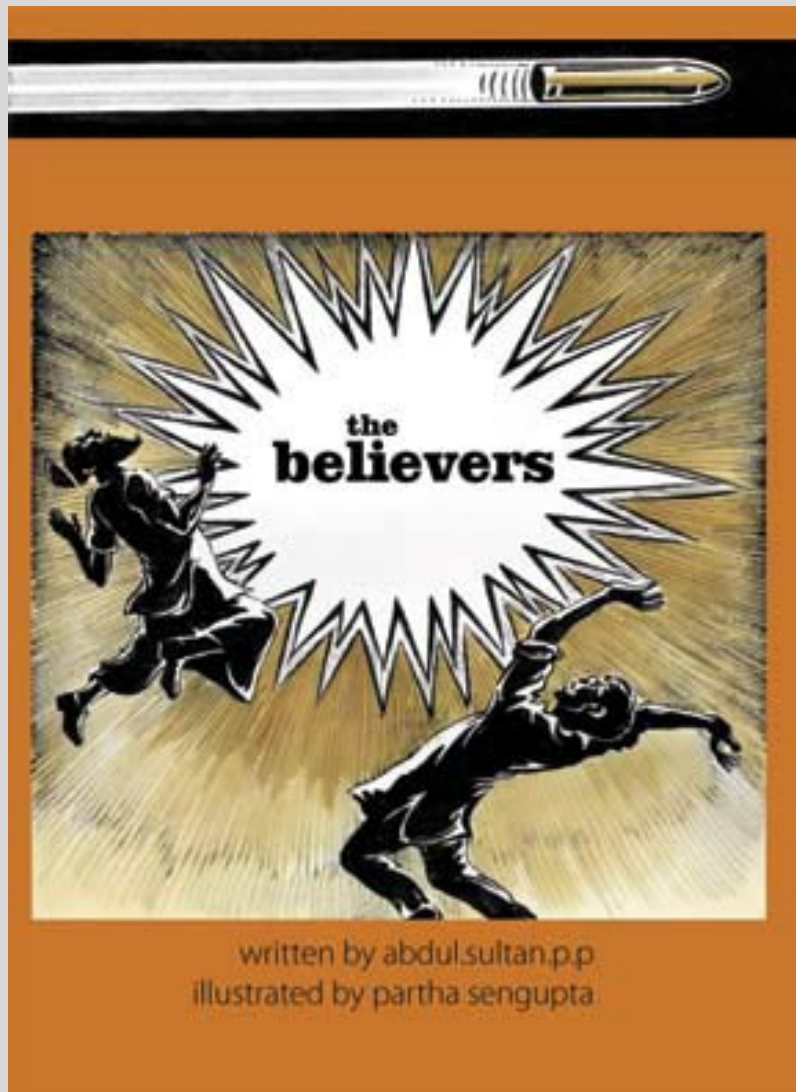
Graphic novel trend has set in rather late into the Indian market.

Another publication was Dubyaman by Jug Suraiya, which is a weekly set of comics that used to come in the Times of India. They were based on the everyday life of people and had an element of satire and humour which was integral to them.

Sarnath Banerjee and his friend Anindya Roy run a publication house known as Phantomville Publications.

One of the books that's was published by this house is "The Believers" written by Abdul Sultan and illustrated by Partha Sengupta.





The Believers

Abdul Sultan— Illustrated by Partha Sengupta

A book on Radical Islam

Description of the Novel:

The novel centres around the religious intolerance and conflicts in the Munnar region of Kerala. The writer Abdul Sultan works with the local daily and hence gets to be in the midst of a lot of information. He is a journalist and hence acquainted with this area.

Plot of the novel:

The story is of a man Hamid and his elder brother Rashid. Hamid is an educated and liberal muslim who has to rush back to Kerala on receiving the news of his grandmother's death. He has been away for 12 years and does not know what to expect. The other character Rashid has turned into an extremist. He is the leader of an organization dedicated to Jihad. Hamid during the course of his time of stay in Kerala tries to digest what is happening but remains baffled. The story revolves around this plot. Overall the story is quite sentimental and emotionally strong. The element of fiction is well integrated with the factual information.



The Believers

Abdul Sultan— Illustrated by Partha Sengupta

Narative vs Illustrator

In a novel such as this, the writer has to be in sync with the illustrator. It is continuously a process of trial and error. Partha says that, he had to try and capture the scenery of munnar. The illustrator has to stick to the mood and context of the text. The most important aspect to be taken care of is that the visuals and the style of illustration do not go out of context with the intended mood of the writing. One of the most challenging tasks for Partha sengupta was the visualization of the characters as per the description of Abdul Sultan. The characters are extremely impressive and the visuals had to convincingly portray this.



The Believers

Abdul Sultan— Illustrated by Partha Sengupta

Style of representation:

The characters are created on par with the narrative. The artwork is simple and unlike some other novels, it does not have any visual exaggerations or extreme out of proportion representations.

The believers is simply drawn and makes use of minimal color, but it still manages to convey the sense of the green Kerala landscape. Partha Sengupta developed the illustrations based on more than 800 photographs that were taken by Abdul Sultan. The novel is fast and the narrative incorporates flashbacks, cuts and tight shots which aid in getting the message across.

“Partha Sengupta brings in an illustrative style which is unmistakably Indian, almost classically so. However this approach of using familiar pictures is somewhat deceptive, because his storyboarding method is contemporary and it often reflects a deep understanding of cinematic techniques.”, Sarnath Banerjee.



Film: Unlimited Girls

Paromita Vohra

Paromita Vohra is a documentary filmmaker and a screenwriter. She has directed a number of films, some being Unlimited girls which is a take on the aspect of feminism in India, Annapurana a film about a woman foodworker in a textile mill, A woman's place which is a documentary film for PBS. She teaches scriptwriting as a visiting faculty at Sophia Polytechnic and is the associate of an organization known as Pukar.

She is creatively comfortable with film as the medium. She like the way one can have several layers, like the way one can include music and other kinds of art. Moreover, it reaches out to many people.

All the films that she has made so far have dealt with gender issues. She has been writing films for long and has now written several of them. But somehow they all tend to be about political issues and more specifically feminist.

She says that, People understand the world in a certain way. That's what one express in the films one see's. Being a woman, parts of her experiences are definitely based on this fact. It's something that she responds to.



Film: Unlimited Girls

Paromita Vohra

The film Unlimited Girls is being converted into a Graphic Novel.

Description of the Film:

Unlimited Girls is a 95 mins film that explores the aspect of Feminism. The entire movie is told through conversations of a narrator named fearless. The narrator joins a chat and builds a conversation with the people there.

Through the journey she meets different characters. These characters highlight the Indian women's movement. There is a policeman who writes films for women upliftment, women shopping at a bra sale, college kids practicing for a dance competition. There are conversations with a woman cab driver and a priest.



The whole film proceeds based on the chat which involves unseen characters such as Atilla_the_Nun, Devi_is_a_Diva and ChankiGirl.

The film uses references from various sources. It mixes fiction with non-fiction. It raises questions about feminism. Such as why do women have an inclination towards feminism but not say anything about it. How do we make sense of the aspects of love, anger, doubt and confusion?

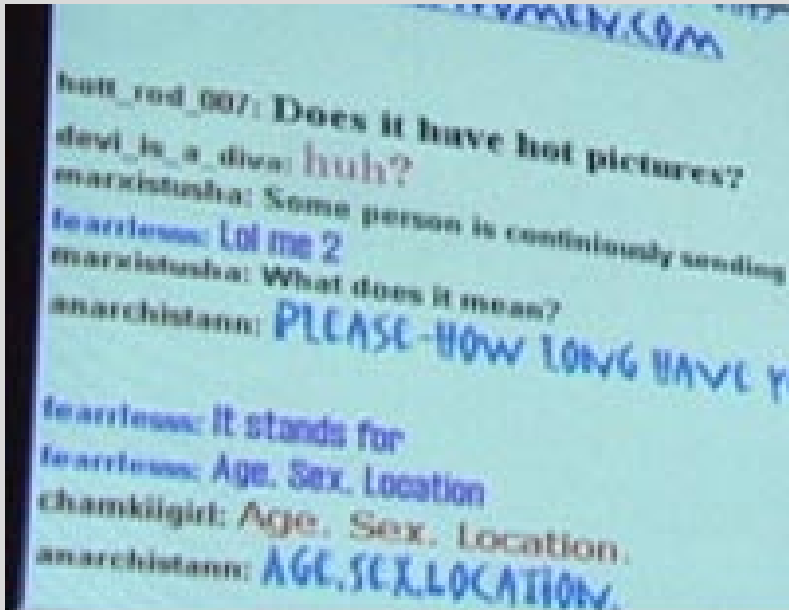
Film: Unlimited Girls

Paromita Vohra

The film has been produced by an NGO in Delhi called Sakshi. This NGO deals with feminist awareness raising and prevention of violence.

This organization wanted to develop a film on young women and their relation to the politics of feminism. The organization wanted to communicate how women in the current world are not connected with the movements that took place before. The film is made in a very modern style. Elements from the post feminist movements have been included. The sudden imagery of Gloria Steinem's poster has been included seamlessly. In a similar manner other references to feminist movements have also been made.

The film also includes an element of humor. The character of the doctor who can cure feminism, the constant display of the diet advertisement during the chat are interesting elements that have been integrated.





Unlimited Girls translated into a Graphic Novel Paromita Vohra & Chitra Venkataramani

The Film is being developed into a Graphic novel.
Chitra Venkataramani is working in collaboration with Paromita Vohra to develop the novel that is aimed at a release deadline in July.

The main aspects that are being taken into consideration is to retain the very essence of the quality of representation in the film. The film has been shot on a digital video and has been kept very basic and simplistic. A few symbolic representations have been used. But in most cases, the film links itself to feminist representations that have been made in the past.

The narrator is not visible throughout the film and this aspect is going to be maintained in the graphic novel.





Unlimited Girls translated into a Graphic Novel Paromita Vohra & Chitra Venkataramani

Style of Representation

The Graphic novel integrates illustration with photography. It will include some minimal amount of text as well.

Some scenes from the film are being directly incorporated in the book with the illustrations. Each page will consist of one illustration.

The movie incorporates a number of symbolisms to communicate the message. In a sequence in the film as part of the chat, the narrator says the line "I feel like there is a snake in my brain". For this section there is a literal translation.

Medium:

The illustrations are drawn using pen and ink and then digitally rendered. In some sections the photographs are integrated into the hand drawn illustrations. In some other sections, such as the fish market scenes, shots from the film are digitally manipulated and then being included in the book.





Unlimited Girls translated into a Graphic Novel Paromita Vohra & Chitra Venkataramani

In the opening sequence of the film we see a person going across the frame—the streets of Delhi. We then see the narrator sitting in front of the computer screen and logging on to the chat.

The scenes at home are based on the photographs that were taken at Paromita Vohra's house. Several shots were taken and then drawn out.



Unlimited Girls translated into a Graphic Novel

Paromita Vohra & Chitra Venkataramani



Fish Market scene: Delhi

The narrator goes to the fish market where women are sitting and selling fish and picks up a crab at the first shot. It is not meant to have any direct symbolism, but is included as a part of the narration.

Unlimited Girls translated into a Graphic Novel

Paromita Vohra & Chitra Venkataramani



Snake in my Brain

This is a sequence that is a take off from the original script, where the narrator says that she is very intrigued by Feminism.

She says there is a snake in my brain and it won't go away, meaning that she is fascinated by Feminism.

Unlimited Girls translated into a Graphic Novel
Paromita Vohra & Chitra Venkataramani



Unlimited Girls translated into a Graphic Novel Paromita Vohra & Chitra Venkataramani



In this section, the narrator goes through the city tracking the history of Feminism and the bra burning issue. Here she ends up at a Bra sale where she speaks to different women.

In this section of the film, a reference is made to the alleged issue of Bra burning that was started in the United States by the feminist women.

Conclusion

" Graphic reportage offers the sense that it has been created in real time, that its slashes were drawn under the pressure of events. Photography once carried this banner, but perhaps drawing now has greater authority.", Art Spiegelman.

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Marjane Satrapi; 2004, "Persepolis", Powell Publication.

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