

Representating the Nation: A study of *Chacha Chaudhari* Comic Book Series (1969-1990)

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Abstract:

In the post Nehruvian period, the political and social transformations enforced the middle class to reconstruct the national imagination to retain their hegemonic position in the society. In the absence of televisual image, comics provided an effective alternative for the middle class to transform itself into a new class with new values and norms. Through representations, the middle class reinvented cultural values, ethics and norms and projected them as national culture. In the paper, I intend to analyze how the comic book Chacha Chaudhary is implicated in 'politics of self-expression' of the Indian middle class.

Keywords: Middle class, nationalism, cultural politics, visual culture, consumerism, subaltern groups, comics, humor.

In response to the political transformations that convulsed the Nehruvian period, the post Nehruvian period India underwent realignment in which the national imaginary was reconstructed.¹ As Anderson (2006) has argued that print capitalism played an important role in the emergence of nationalism, over the time of period, the notion of nation has been reinvented through representational paradigms in accordance with the values and norms of the dominant class. Eric Hobsbawm (1992) argued that nationalism acquires signification when it is embedded in the popular consciousness and consolidated as democratic system wherein politicians exploit the notion of 'national' to acquire political power in the political community.

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enforced the middle class to reconstruct the national imagination to retain their hegemonic position in the society. In the absence of televisual image, comics provided an effective alternative for the middle class to transform itself into a new class with new values and norms. Through representations, the middle class reinvented cultural values, ethics and norms and projected them as national culture. Ernest Gellner (1983) connected the 'national' with the 'cultural', arguing that culture functions as 'psychic glue' to bind the nation together. Culture is used as an instrument to reconstruct and disseminate the discourse of nationalism. The cultural system is reinvented from time to time to suit the prevailing socio political conditions to retain and consolidate the hegemonic power of the dominant class. Anthony Giddons (1991) in his book *The Consequences of Modernity* argues that the society is restructured in order to create 'the conditions in which time and space are organized so as to connect presence and absence'. He further added that the transformation from one social formation to another implies the double process of 'disembedding' and 'embedding' where in the already existing cultural practices are selectively rejected, appropriated and

combined with the new cultural practices to connect time and space. The same idea is also emphasized by Satish Deshpande (1998) in his paper in which he elaborates how the nation space is reconstructed and propagated by creating 'heterotopias' of nation-space.² The construction of the national imaginary is a discursive practice in which an abstract idea of a homogeneous culture embodying values, ethics, and norms is constructed, and then the abstract idea of a substantially common culture is linked up with concrete geographical space through representational practices. In the study of nationalism, the formation of nation and cultural process are seen as reinforcing each other. Scholars have analyzed the cultural aspect of nationalism as the site of politics, providing an important perspective on how a sense of national identity is constructed and the dominant cultural system is projected and naturalized as national culture. Mondol argues that "nations are precisely universes of meaning that simultaneously construct 'difference' whilst offering an imaginary 'unity' that represents the ego-ideal of the imaginary state of plenitude" (2003:8) . The production and reproduction of national identity occurs

in and through representation. Partha Chatterjee pointed out how the idea of nation is mediated through representation: “nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist- but it does need some pre-existing differentiating marks to work on” (1983:4). The nation is culturally articulated and rearticulated in a particular historical context through reproduction of cultural values. Mondol argues that nationalism is a form of cultural politics because the dominant nationalist group exploits the idea of culture to create its own state in order to seize the power and to legitimize its culture as national culture. Culture is “inescapably entwined with power and is the arena, arbiter and delimiter of nationalist thought and politics (2003:22). Through invocation of the cultural attributes which are amalgamation of already existing and newly created cultural attributes, emotional affiliation is elicited and the masses are interpellated into history.

The emergence of the Indian middle class and nationalism both were product of a long historical process and “predicated on the creation of new forms of politics ,restructuring of norms of social conduct,

and the construction of new values guiding domestic as well as public life”(Sanjay Josh, 2010: xvi).The nationalists invoked the values of the past to interpellate the masses to participate the nationalist movement against the oppressor and created a national imaginary accommodating dreams of freedom and equality of all marginalized groups. In the nationalist discourse, the class structure was criticized, social concern was made as integral part of citizenship and casteism was stigmatized to propagate nationalism that could inhabit the popular consciousness. But in practice, the Indian nationalism remained an upper class phenomenon. Scholars have exposed the nationalist discourse as politics of ‘self-perpetuating’ middle class.³ Even the British were aware of their hegemonic aspirations and labeled the nationalist elites as ‘a microscopic minority’ of educated Indians who could not represent the diversity of the Indian subcontinent.⁴ In spite of their socioeconomic distance from the masses, the nationalists projected themselves as representative of the Indian nation, speaking on behalf of the masses. To justify their claim to represent the masses, they produced the notion of nation as collective imagination of the Indian society serving each one who is part of this

imagination, irrespective of class, caste, gender and ethnicity. At ideological level, the upper caste middle class culture was essentialized and promoted as basis of national imagination. The selectively reformed 'Indian culture' pitted against the western culture and the masses were summoned up to retain and protect the 'Indian culture' in the wake of powerful explosion of the western culture. Consequently patriotism as linked to the retention and protection of the selectively promoted culture helping the nationalists to seize political power and mobilize the masses without altering the social structure. The masses enthusiastically embraced the nationalist politics and participated actively in the freedom struggle for the bright future.

After independence, the nationalists dreamed to imagine a nation that could serve equally its citizens irrespective of caste, class, religion but this desire could not be materialized due to their failure to evolve a potential system, institutions, required mindset and above all could not sacrifice their increasing material desires and aspirations. Rather their aspirations pressurized them to convert their patriotism into an effective instrument to exploit the nation-state, naturalize their desires as public interests. They used the

very idea of nation for which they fought against the colonial power to perpetuate their hegemonic power. The ruling class was not so much interested in nation building as in developing for itself a standard of living, comparable to the western one. Eventually the ideals of democracy, social welfare became an ideological framework to consolidate the power of the ruling class. Before independence the nationalists fought against the colonial power, structure, institutions and its law but once independence was achieved, it continued the same structure to transfer the power from the colonizers to them without distributing the power equally to all sections of the Indian nation. They continued the same slogans and rhetoric that had appealed the masses in the colonial period to evoke emotional affiliation with the nation.

The comic book *Chacha Chaudhary* emerged at a historical juncture when the idea of nation was questioned from a set of different political positions and the cultural hegemony of the middle class was threatened by the rise of subaltern groups. Scholars like Babb and Wadley (1995), Chandra (2008) and McLain (2010) have analyzed the historical connections between the extraordinary

rise of the Indian comics in the 1970s and the historical events of the same period. The political commentators also asserted that the late 1960s and early 1970s were marked by a turning point in the national political culture. The combined effect of the rise of the peasantry and the middle class's perception of the state as being captured by the marginalized groups led to the shift in the way nation was to be imagined. The nationalist discourse which ensured the central agency of the middle class was questioned from a variety of locations. Holding the socialist state responsible for economic disintegration, the middle class shifted its attentions from the socialist state to the market and attempted to reconstruct the idea of nation.

The discourse of Indian nation is shaped by such complex historical conjectures that the Indian middle class tends to derive their insights from a variety of stand points. Their exposure to the western world, Gandhian ideals of non-violence, austerity and self-restraint and Nehruvian vision of the nation as modern, secular and scientific, all contributed to the complex nature of the Indian nation. The relationship of the middle class with nationalism has been

dynamic and constitutive, reconstructing each other in the process. The middle class has emerged as a nationalist section of the Indian society, representing the whole Indian nation and opposing against the suppression of Indian people. In the process of asserting 'indianness' and upholding freedom, the middle class has projected its own interests as interests of all right from its inception. Consequently the middle class has reinvented the discourse of nationalism to naturalize its own aspirations as Indian dream and get its desires fulfilled in a democratic way. Through representation in the comic book, the Indian nation is reinvented in accordance with the middle class world view.

Right from its inception, nationalism has been a middle class ideology. Rather in Indian context, the national consciousness coincided with the emergence of the middle class. Nationalism, being a representational paradigm, has been changed over period of time in line with the changing values and norms of the ruling class. Brass (1991) suggested that nationalism is a movement propagated by the elites to manipulate the masses in order to gain and retain power, rather than being an expression of the democratic spirit.

Analyzing the representational aspect of nationalism, Verma pointed out that the meaning of independence and of Nehru's inspiring speech at the eve of independence was least understood by the masses. It was the middle class who comprehended the real meaning of independence and the future prospects suggested by the power shifting from the British to the native elites. Nehru's speech about India's tryst with destiny triggered fantasies of material prospects and political power in the middle class mind. The rest of India had joined the nationalists in their celebration of independence without understanding the shifting power structures and their own lot in a new nation hijacked by the native elites. Due to their political and social position, they acquired a hegemonic power in the political culture. The notion of 'common man' was constructed to consolidate their own power as representative class and to link the nation state with its citizens. Through the assertion of citizen's rights and the state's responsibility, they pressurized the state to aid in their prosperity. Through media representation, they have represented their own interests and aspirations as interests and aspirations of 'common man'.

The critical analysis of the historical events in the post Independence India reflects the middle class's selective inculcation of the democratic values and reconstruction of the national imagination to perpetuate their socio-political power. During the socio-political chaos of the 1970-80s, the middle class exploited popular cultural forms to assert itself and stake claim to nation. Through popular literature, the middle class values and norms were projected as representative of the national culture and hence must be protected and promoted. The comic book *Chacha Chaudhary* is implicated in the project of nation-building in line with the middle class aspirations. The eponymous hero Chacha Chaudhary provides the link that connects the middle class culture with the national imagination through his adventures, projecting his story as national allegory. At allegorical level, the world represented in the comic book is Indian society in chaos due to the anti-national activities of the irresponsible citizens and national responsibility falls on the middle class to restore harmony in the society. Set in the social and political turmoil of the 1970s and 80s, the comic book functions at two different ideological levels: at one level, the

middle class aspirations and values are naturalized as Indian, and the agitations of the subaltern groups are subverted by promoting the national interest as duty to be privileged over self-interest at another level.

A comparison between R.K.Laxman's 'common man' and Pran's 'common man' can throw some light on the changing contours of the middle class consciousness. R.K.Laxman's 'common man', who is defined as "no mere cartoon figure of fun, but Everyman, the soul of Modern India", remains a silent witness to all historical events and effects of government's policies on the middle class daily life (qtd. in Siegel, 1987: 429). The cartoonist Laxman projected the middle class as passive citizen, suffering silently due to the inefficient state and corruption in politics and everyday life. In contrast to Laxman's 'common man', Chacha Chaudhary does not remain silent over the political scenario. Rather he comments upon the situation and takes an appropriate step to bring social and economic justice. Unlike Laxman's

'common man', he is not always at the receiving end: he traces faults in the system, catches individual culprits and solves the socio-economic problems. While Laxman's 'common man' is seen as observing cynically the disintegration of the nation and the decline of ethics in politics, Chacha Choudhary is committed to build a globalized nation and strives to cure the social evils that contaminate the Indian society. Laxman's 'common man' as victim of the deceit of ideology, is "bespectacled" and has "a permanently bewildered look" (Laxman, 2000: 339). His silence over the political turmoil is mockery of both the nationalist ideology and the middle class aspirations. His passiveness reflects the impotency of both the state and the middle class to strengthen the process of nation-building. The voiceless existence of Laxman's 'common man' points out the hopelessness of the middle class and cynical rejection of the nationalist ideology. The suffering of being at the receiving end has been projected as a dark reality of the middle class existence.

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Fig.1 Chacha Chaudhary and Laxman’s ‘common man’

But Pran’s ‘common man’ Chacha Chaudhary manages to transcend the cynical outlook and asserts himself to bring socio-political changes in the Indian society. The comic book *Chacha Chaudhary* marks the reassertion of the Indian middle class as agency of national transformation both economically and culturally.

The comic book aims at evoking laughter and entertaining the Indian middle class reader with Indian characters and local themes. The kind of humor deployed in the comic book is political in nature; more specifically it tends to be nationalistic humor. By nationalistic humor, I mean it is implicated in

reconstruction and dissemination of ‘national values’. The situations in which humor is evoked are politically embedded in the politics of identity which tends to create hegemonic meanings, connecting humor with different social identities. As humor is based on incongruity, it tends to “constitute a social corrective, aiming at highlighting, eliminating, and even preventing any disruption from what is socially accepted and approved of”(Tsakona and Popa,2011:4).Congruity is rested on constructed distinction between ‘common sense’ and any deviation from ‘common sense’. The national culture is projected as ‘common sense’ culture representating a system of values and norms which has been

selectively constructed and reconstructed in line with the values and norms of the ruling class. Humor serves to function as strategy of inclusion and exclusion: any deviation from 'common sense' culture is ridiculed and hence excluded from the national culture. Humor is politically motivated, though its intention is concealed behind the mask of its projected object that is to evoke laughter. While the values and norms of the ruling class are seen as legitimately common sense and hence excluded from the domain of humor, the cultural patterns of the marginalized groups are seen as potentially source of humor. Humor is "predominantly a conservative, rather than a liberating or constructive, force in society.[...] [A]though humor appears to be a radical alternative to serious discourse in the sense that it is socially separated from the serious mode and is organized in terms of contrary discursive practices, it seems in practice overwhelmingly to support and reaffirm the established patterns of orderly, serious conduct"(Mulkay qtd. in Tsakona and Popa,2011:8).In the comic book, humor is designed to achieve what Riegert termed "politicotainment", a mixture of politics and entertainment aiming at eliciting an emotional response

from the reader(qtd.in Tsakona and Popa,2011:9). In the comic book, through humor the middle class values are naturalized as 'common sense' culture and the marginalized social groups are ridiculed, stigmatized and subsequently excluded from the national culture. To evoke laughter, specific moments in specific situations are created and incongruity is suggested, and the characters involved in such situations are vilified. In the comic book, slapstick humour is exploited; depicting scenes of physical humor involving violent brawls, grotesque appearance, farcical situations and burlesque content. Slapstick humor allows depiction of violence to demonstrate criminality and vulgar behavior of the marginalized groups. In most of the stories, the outlaws plot to humiliate or kill Chacha Chaudhary and initially they seem to be successful but eventually fall in their own trap. The devices that they concoct to challenge Chacha Chaudhary's power ultimately turn out to be source of their own humiliation or misfortune. Humor springs from their imbecilic trickeries and consequent failure of their conspiracies to threaten Chacha Chaudhary. Through the discrepancy between what they plot to do and what

subsequently happens, a ‘common sense’ culture is humorously defined and differentiated to naturalize the ruling class’s culture as national culture. The ‘common sense’ culture is constructed through demonstration of right application of mental power in the moment of crisis. Humor emanates from incapability of the criminal minded person to respond appropriately to the situation. The hero whose mind “works faster than computer” is seen victorious over all individuals who are either incapable of taking right decisions or invest their mental power in the criminal activities in order to gain power for themselves. The character of an individual is decoded on the basis of right or wrong exercise of capacities – mental and physical. The wrong exercise of capacities and subsequent disastrous result for the individual constitute the content of humor in the narrative. For instance, in the story ‘Up and Down’

Chacha Chaudhary (Diamond Comics-259), as happens in other stories, two individual whose background is not revealed, hatch a conspiracy to kill Chacha Chaudhary by entrapping him into a hole. The intrigue to convince Chacha Chaudhary to meet them on the decided location is the central thread of the story. Initially, they seem to execute successfully their conspiracy as they succeed to insinuate Chacha Chaudhary to meet them on the decided spot. But at the right time, they get deceived by Chacha Chaudhary and become victim of their own conspiracy. In another story ‘Dhamaka Singh’s Sword’ *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics- 466), the arch-enemies of the middle class hero Chacha Chaudhary, Dhamaka Singh and Gobar Singh, whose all plans to achieve power in the Indian society are aborted by Chacha Chaudhary, concoct a plan to eliminate Chacha Chaudhary and Sabu permanently.



Fig.2 'Dhamaka Singh's Sword' *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics- 466),

Dhamaka Singh takes the initiative to kill them by chopping their heads off with a sharpened and heavy sword. As sword turns out to be too heavy for Dhamaka Singh to lift, he falls flat when he tries to lift the sword to attack Chacha Chaudhary and Sabu. His failure is followed by his humiliation by Sabu who thrashes him like a child. Both Dhamaka Singh and Gobbar Singh are never eliminated permanently. Rather they are humiliated, and subjugated in order to force them to submit to the dictates of the Indian society.

The Indian nation is represented as nation in crisis threatened by the internal enemies who attempt to destabilize the nation. All

stories, interlinked by omnipresence of the middle class hero Chacha Choudhary, begin with a crisis –social, economic and political- caused by the anti-national agents. In the story entitled 'Tricolor' *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics- 1601) , the eponymous hero is seen as excited to attend the flag hoisting ceremony on the eve of Independence Day, in spite of his wife Binni's disapproval. The independence day signifies both release from the centuries old slavery and a new future marked by prosperity and social justice. The Independence Day carries the Semiotic burden of what the Indian nation symbolizes.



FIG.3 ‘Tricolor’, *Chacha Choudhary* (Diamond Comics -1601)

Nehru defined the eve of independence as ‘tryst with destiny’ : “A moment comes, which comes but rarely in history, when we step out from the old to the new, when an age ends, and when the soul of a nation, long suppressed, finds utterance”(qtd.in Varma,1998). As the Independence Day represents the nationalist ideology, the day is depicted as orchestration of national prosperity, progress and national unity. Due to the semiotic profuseness of Independence Day, it becomes a site of contestation over national identity. In the story, the flag hoisting is deployed to notify the nation as threatened by the anti-national agents only to be consolidated. The seeming threat to the nation is used to naturalize the hegemonic position of the middle class: recognition of the threat is

followed by its elimination by the middle class hero and harmony is restored.

In the story entitled ‘Chacha Chaudhary and Tiranga’ *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond comics-1100), the nation is depicted as plagued by communal violence. The three characters, whose appearance signifies their communal identities, are depicted as suffering from communal doubts leading to the provocation of communal violence. In the story, the state and majority both are seen as impartially working for the betterment of the Indian citizens irrespective of caste, class and religion. The communal violence is not viewed as politically motivated. Rather it is distrust between the communities that caused such riots. In the story, the nationalist discourse of ‘diversity in unity’ is

articulated and the nation is projected as innocent of such heinous crime which is seen as individual crime caused by distrust. The three characters belonging to different communities perceive their economic loss in business and damage of personal properties as acts of communal enmity. Provoked by their perception of their economic loss as communal acts, they transform their local street into a

battlefield between different communities. Perceiving the nation in danger, the hero attempts to restore harmony in the society which he believes is disturbed by some criminal minded individual. The hero traces the criminal who has provoked the incident and reprimands the Hindu, Muslim and Sikh for distrusting each other and jeopardizing the unity of the nation.



Fig.4 'Chacha Chaudhary and Tiranga' *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics- 1100)

The social political and cultural references in the discourse of nationalism work as 'alibi' to consolidate the dominant class view as national view and so subsequently the dominant culture is turned into a national culture which the 'other' classes have to imbibe to be the part of the nation imagined. Although self-interest is central event to their

political activities, yet they have continued imagining themselves as nationalist, striving to consolidate the nation. In the story entitled 'Chacha Chaudhary and Internet Thug' *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics, DE-1701), when his excessive concern for the society is questioned by Sabu and his wife, Chacha Chaudhary reminds them of

his ancestors who sacrificed their lives for the nation and fought in several battles, suggesting the role of his own class in achieving freedom and nation-building. The middle class has claimed the dominant representation in national culture on the basis of their historical participation in the freedom- struggle. The memory of freedom struggle and nationalist heroes is invoked to stake their claim to the nation. Without active participation of the middle class in nation building, the nation is depicted as vulnerable to chaos and disintegration. In the story entitled as ‘Retirement News’ *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics, DE-253), the middle class leadership is projected as prerequisite for building a powerful nation. In absence of middle

class leadership, the future of a newly emerged nation is dark, succumbing to the anti-national agents. Chacha Chaudhary announces his retirement from self-imposed job of serving the Indian society. As news of his retirement spread across the nation, fear and insecurity begin to lurk in every street and anti-nationalists hatch a conspiracy to mobilize all criminals to empower themselves and usurp the national wealth. The frightened citizens approach the middle class hero and urge him not to leave the Indian society unprotected from criminals. At the end of the story, Chacha Chaudhary reveals that the news of his retirement was a trick to arrest the criminal.



Fig.5 ‘Chacha Chaudhary and Internet Thug’, *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics, DE-1701)

However throughout the story, the national importance of the middle class hero is suggested. His absence is used to project the middle class as 'cultural guardian' and reflects the middle class fear of being overpowered by the subordinate social groups. The middle class has dreamed and attempted to create a unified nation, accommodating heterogeneous cultures. But the unified nation has to be rooted in the middle class culture. In the narrative, the discourse of unity in diversity is articulated and propagated but not at the stake of middle class hegemony: the marginalized social groups should sacrifice their aspirations and demand for power sharing and shoulder with the middle class to build a strong nation. In the story 'Brotherhood' *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics, DE-1702), the discourse of brotherhood is articulated and disseminated. The notion of brotherhood is projected as an integral part of the project of nation-building. In the story, members of the middle class are seen as united with each other, shaped by fellow-feelings endorsed by the discourse of brotherhood. In the first three panels, Chacha Chaudhary explains the advantages of brotherhood for both individuals and nation and invokes the

metaphor of family to connect all individuals with the nation. However brotherhood endorsed by Chacha Chaudhary as essential for the national solidarity is threatened by the presence of anti-national elements. The marginalized characters are portrayed as indifferent to the notion of brotherhood. Rather they are projected as antagonistic force to the national solidarity, motivated by individual desire and aspirations.

The middle class's fascination with national heroes tends to coexist with their own self-interest. Rather they manage to adjust their personal interests with their patriotic desire. The dimmed memory of freedom struggle and nationalists has easily overwhelmed them from time to time which get manifested in the narrative. The eponymous hero is popular as Chacha evoking the memory of national hero Nehru who was also known as Chacha Nehru. The family network has been deployed to integrate the hero into every day practices to naturalize the middle class culture as Indian culture. As the common noun 'Chacha' has a range of connotations in Indian context, it functions to elicit emotional affiliation between the hero and the masses binding them together into a whole. Through articulation of emotional bonding, the

masses are interpallded into history. The Gandhi-Nehru legacy was not wholly obliterated. Rather it was selectively continued. The character of Chacha Chaudhary embodies the set of values represented by the charismatic personalities of both Jawaharlal Lal Nehru and M.K.Gandhi. Like Nehru, he is popular as Chacha among children and represents rational and scientific outlook of the Indian nation. Like Gandhi , he advocates the application of non-violence in both personal and public life. But the values endorsed by the Gandhi-Nehru legacy are selectively promoted. The Gandhian philosophy of non-violence is contextualized and its application against the agitations of marginalized people is promoted. The aggression of the marginalized groups was labeled as violent acts and hence must be suppressed by the state machinery. The Gandhian ideals of simple living and high thinking are mocked and their violation is justified through the discourse of consumerism which emphasizes progress through pleasure. (Mazzarrela, 2003).

The middle class's conflictual relationship with the state is noticeable in the narrative. Through state machinery like police, the state is depicted as inefficient to cope with the anti national activities and solve the middle class social problems. The state is seen as taking help of the middle class hero Chacha Chaudhary to solve national problems. The 'common man' Chacha Chaudhary emerges as the sole protector of the Indian society. Through his social engagement with the nation, the middle class represents itself as a nationalist category and hence must be recognized and protected. The state is perceived as inadequate to solve problems to such an extent that citizens prefer taking help of Chacha Chaudhary rather than the state police to solve their problems. Even in some stories the state seeks his help to solve the national issue that could not be decoded by the state machinery. Like a well trained semiotician, he analyzes the signs and decodes them to expose the hidden truths.



Fig.6 'Hunn the Great' *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics, DE-832)

In the story entitled as 'Chacha Chaudhary and Scotland Yard' *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics-739), the police is ridiculed as incapable of solving the social issue. The story begins with a robbery in a rich family which becomes viral through media. Due to widespread criticism of the state's failure to curb criminal activities, the state deploys several detective agencies including CBI, Scotland Yard to trace the criminal. The failure of these agencies to solve the mystery of robbery deepened the crisis, maligning the image of the state as 'protector and guardian' of its citizens. In another two stories entitled respectively as 'Fugitive' and 'Tear Gas' *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics- 1753), the police is caricatured as absent-

mined easily deceived by the criminals. The disgraced police officers approach the eponymous hero to help them to regain their lost reputation. Symbolically the middle class is portrayed as a class in crisis due to the inefficiency of the state. The perception of the state as indifferent to the middle class is naturalized in the narrative. In several stories, the social issues are solved by the middle class itself through the timely assistance of Chacha Chaudhary and the state machinery is symbolically either absent or distrusted.

In almost all stories, the outcasts attempt to either harasses, make fun of or kill the socially recognized middle class hero who eventually succeeds to humiliate and subjugate them. Allegorically the

narrative narrates the story of the nation from the middle class point of view which attempts to naturalize the suppression of the subaltern movement as purging the nation of antagonistic forces. The nation cannot be produced without the production of both “sameness” and “difference”. The presence of the ‘other’ serves to orchestrate the ‘threatening self’ only to reinforce it. The ‘other’ of the nation is constructed through the discourse of criminality. In the narrative, urban archetypes of criminality are constructed and pitted against the middle class. These urban archetypal criminals not only function as integral elements of the structure of the narrative but also help consolidate the cultural hegemony of the dominant class. Sugata Nandi (2010) has argued that the term ‘goonda’, a local criminal was ideologically constructed to protect the urban middle class and illegitimate the claims of the working class over the urban space. The local criminal functions as “an imaginary figure acting as receptacles of anxieties and insecurities of certain section/s of the society at particular historical conjunctures” (Nandi, 2010: 38). There are three major archetypal criminals who embody the fears and anxieties of the

urban middle class and serve to define and justify the hegemonic role of the middle class in representing the nation. The three criminals Dhamaka Singh, Gobar Singh and Raka are depicted as arch-enemies of the middle class representative hero Chacha Chaudhary who strives to protect the urban Indian society from economic and social threats posed by these criminals. These criminals are projected as inhuman outcasts who hail from ‘somewhere else’ suggesting their cultural location as outsiders.

The character of Raka, the main arch-enemy of the middle class hero Chacha Chaudhary, constitutes a major thematic element of the narrative, representing all dark forces including greed, lust, revenge, violence, even political ambitions and craving for power and dictatorship. In the story entitled ‘Chacha Chaudhary and Raka’s dictatorship’ *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics-1259), his background is explained through his conversation with another dacoit Ravan. Through visual description, it is made clear that Raka was born in a working class family and was criminal minded from childhood. In his childhood he was put into jail because of his criminal activities. In another conversation it is revealed how he

became immortal after drinking a magical potion made by vaidya Chakramacharya. In the comic book, Raka represents the violent assertion and craving for power of the working class. The immortal character of Raka symbolically reflects the middle class

perception of their conflict with the marginalized classes as permanent conflict –a problem that is permanently part of the Indian society. In several stories he is seen as a part of a conspiracy hatched by other outlaws to destabilize the nation in order to gain political power



Fig.7 ‘Chacha Chaudhary and Raka’s Anger’ *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics-1491)

In the story, he is projected as enemy of the nation .To destroy the capital of India Delhi , he hijacks an airplane and plans to drop a bomb on the Indian parliament. Throwing a bomb on parliament is symbolically an effort to destabilize the Indian nation. As happens in all other stories, Chacha Chaudhary and his assistance’s timely help saves the nation from destruction. In another story ‘Chacha Chaudhary and Raka’s Anger’ *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics-1491), Raka kidnaps the prime minister of an unknown country and attempts to

take over the charge of the country. Although the name of the country is not mentioned but a careful decoding of the panels suggest that the prime minister of India has been kidnapped by Raka. Before Raka could take over nation, Sabu rescues the prime minister of India and throws him in the depth of the ocean, subverting the threat to the Indian state.

The other two arch-enemies of the hero, Gobar Singh and Dhamaka Singh are archetypal expression of the conflict between the state and proletarian groups. The conflict between the ruling class and

proletariat constituted the major theme of the movies produced in the post-Nehruvian period.(Prasad ,1998) The narrative and characters in the comic book echo the cinematic expression of the conflict between the ruling class and the marginalized group, restructuring the conflict as between the representative hero and dacoit. The character of Gobar Singh is strikingly inspired by the

character of Gabar Singh from the Hindi Movie *Sholay* (1998:153-8). He argues that the character of Gabar Singh embodies the conflict between the middle class oriented state and the political assertion of the marginalized class. The political assertion of the marginalized class manifests in the form of terrorizing the ruling class and extortion of payment from the rich people.



Fig.8 Gobar Singh and Dhamaka Singh, *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics-1615,1354)

In the comic book, both Gobar Singh and Dhamaka Singh are seen as dacoit extorting money from the rich business man, kidnapping their children and demanding ransom. Both the dacoits represent the middle class anxiety and fear only to be expunged by the powerful intervention of the eponymous hero. In all stories that move around the conflict between the hero and the dacoit, eventually fear is displaced: The story begins with the description of the middle

class' fear spreading from one family to another followed by the determination of the hero to solve the crisis and finally the disgraceful exit of the dacoit. In the story entitled as 'Gas Chamber' *Chacha Chaudhry* (Diamond Comics-689), the invocation of mass massacre in the concentration camp executed at the order of the dictator Napoleon is exploited to vilify Gobar Singh as inhuman, illegitimate to be citizen of the Indian state. Gobar Singh tricks both Chacha

Chaudhary and Sabu into trap and prisons them into a chamber filled with poison gas to suffocate them. The conspiracy of killing them in a gas chamber is symbolically destabilizing the power of ruling class. In several stories, both Gobar Singh and Dhamaka Singh join hands to hatch conspiracy to eliminate the hero who is protecting the ruling class's interests. Another story entitled as 'Inside Outside ' *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics-1601) points out ,as the title suggests , who is the legitimate claimant to the state. In the story, the docait Dhamaka Singh sends a message to the film distributor Mani, demanding to pay entertainment tax to him. Through his demand of paying entertainment tax, Dhamaka is seen as challenging the state, refusing to be the object of power. Rather he claims to be the source of power and hence tax must be paid to him. The film distributor refuses to pay entertainment tax to him, asserting that entertainment tax is paid to the state. Facing the death threat, the distributor approaches the hero who succeeds to eliminate the pending danger. Through the narrative trick, not only the middle class fear is invoked and subdued but the marginalized class is also vilified.

The post-Nehruvian period is also marked by political reorientation which paved way for the rise of proletarian politicians particularly in the Janta Party. With the political rise of the marginalized groups especially the peasantry, the middle class came to perceive the democratic system hijacked by the powerful proletarian groups. The Indian politics came to be perceived as dominated by vulgar minded politicians from rural culture who had no political sense, exploiting politics for their personal gains. The Indian politics was seen as "vocational business" leading to the middle class's disillusionment with electoral system (Hansen, 1999 and Corbridge and John Harriss, 2000).In media representation, the politician from the humble background began to be targeted as vulgar and opportunist who misused their political power and democratic ideals and slogans. In the comic book, both electoral systems and politicians are ridiculed. While electoral system is perceived as corrupted by 'vote banks ', politicians are depicted as criminal minded who use their black money and power to win elections. In the story entitled as 'Candidate for Parliament' *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics- 1753), the urban well

In the next panel, through the conversation between Chacha Chaudhary and local Seth, it is revealed that the politician has filled his nomination papers for Lok Sabha elections and he is using his money to gain support, suggesting his criminal background. The hero's suspicion gets confirmed when the politician is seen smoking the same brand of *bidi*. The character of the politician is further suggested in the violent encounter between Chacha Chaudhary and him. The politician threatens Chacha Chaudhary for dire consequences if he tries to expose him. At his offensive behavior, the hero thrashes him badly and hand him over to the police. What is important in the narrative is how the electoral system is perceived by the middle class. The depiction of the national politics in the narrative is completely different from the perception of politics and politicians in the Nehruvian period when politicians like Nehru were respected and regarded as role models to be followed by citizens.

The middle class emerged as urban oriented social category. It was structurally result of the British administration system which facilitated the evolution of the middle class in urban settings. Given the spatial dimension of

the middle class, the nation was imagined as urban space in which there is no sign of backwardness and poverty. Their socialist stance was countered by their dream to build a metropolitan nation. The conflict between the two is managed through a discursive practice: theoretically they advocated the equal distribution of wealth and equal opportunities for all irrespective of class, caste and ethnicity but in practice they deployed spatial politics to usurp the urban space and create a nation based on middle class urban life. Spatial politics is a discursive practice through which the middle class staked its claim to the urban space and naturalized their own space as national space, invalidating the claim of the marginalized groups to the national space by projecting them criminals and vulgar and hence in dire need of domestication. The middle class's enthusiastic support for the slum clearance campaign, launched by Sanjay Gandhi exposed the middle class rhetoric of social equality. The existence of the poor was perceived as an obstacle in the realization of the middle class dream of building a beautiful nation. Instead searching for the ways to root out poverty, the impatient middle class accepted the immediate solution of

cleaning the nation from dirty existence. Varma pointed out the middle class's perception of the poor population:

“The poor have been around for so long that they have become a part of the accepted landscape. Since they refused to go away, and could not be got rid of, the only other alternative was to take as little notice of them as possible. This myopia had its advantages: the less one noticed, the less reason one had to be concerned about social obligations and the less one saw, the less one needed to be distracted from the heady pursuit of one's material salvation.” (1998:130)

In the comic book which is dominantly represents the urban middle class life, the poor is negligibly portrayed. They are seen as encroachers of the urban middle class space or as helpless objects of sympathy and protection. The urban middle class existence is projected as national culture in which the rural culture is absent or marginally represented. The poor is perceived as incapable citizen who can be part of the nation as object of the state power, not as representative of the nation. In the comic book, the poor is depicted as either temporarily present in the city or inhabitant of a remote area, who is devoid of behavioral codes and

aesthetic sense, and easily deceived by unscrupulous individuals. In the story *Mystery of Statue* (DE 320) the working class servant is seen as usurper who use criminal activities to plunder and grab the properties and must be taken under surveillance. The middle class and working class are differentiated through presence/ absence of moral values in their character. The widow sister of Chacha Chaudhary is depicted as a good human being, concerned with the plight of the poor people, symbolizing the *bhadharlok's* behavioral codes. She trusts her servant Gabdu and treats him as a family member. On the contrary, instead of being thankful to her, the servant plans to usurp her property by forcing her to leave the house. The timely exposure of his tricks by Chacha Chaudhary rescues the old woman. Leela Fernandes (2006) argues that the middle class is involved in spatial politics to create a civic order that rested on the exclusion of the marginalized social groups. The middle class exploited the spatial politics to re-imagine the nation through the middle class prism. Doreen Massey also pointed out that “social relations always have a spatial form and spatial content” (1994:168). The middle class identity is linked to a politics of “spatial

purification”(Sibley 1995).The middle class conception of the nation is asserted through a range of political discourses and public sphere, such as middle class civic sense and development of urban aesthetics. The concern with the poor was perceived as an integral part of a democratic polity. At theoretical level, the middle class converged with the state to eliminate poverty and improve the

living standard of the poor but in practice the sight of the poor is despised and taken as obstacle in the realization of the middle class dream of the nation. A concern for the poor came to be perceived by both the state and the middle class as “an abstraction, an unavoidable hindrance best hidden, as far as possible, from view” (verma1998:83).



Fig.10 ‘Raka on Rampage’ Chacha Chaudhary (Diamond Comics-883),

In the comic book, the street is seen as space of contestation over identity. It is the street culture where contestation over urban identity is waged and claims over urban space are rejected and legitimized through narrative logic. The story begins right in the middle of the street life: shopkeepers and customers are engaged in bargaining, employees heading towards their offices; friends meet by chance and get engaged in a conversation .Through depiction of the patterns of

urban middle class daily routine life, the middle class claim over the urban space is naturalized as inescapably middle class space. Having established the urban space as middle class space , then the middle class space is projected as threatened space , threat to the middle class space posed by the outsiders who hail from ‘somewhere’ and are determined to usurp the middle class space. The criminal minded characters envy the prosperity and harmony of the

middle class life and attempt to seize the city by resorting to coercive force. The subordinate groups' claim to the urban space is projected as encroachment of the

middle class space. Their forms of protest are seen as criminal activities and are, therefore, required to be suppressed for national security.



Fig.11 Raka on Rampage Chacha Chaudhary (Dimond Comics -883)

In the story 'Raka on Rampage' Chacha Chaudhary (Dimond Comics -883), in one panel, Raka and other marginalized characters are seen as looking at the urban middle class space from outside and coveting the middle class way of life. Within the panel, distance between the viewer and what is viewed is highlighted, pointing out their cultural location of being outsider. In the next panels, the urban space is depicted as being encroached by the marginalized characters. In one panel of the story, the urban space is set fire, those who resist are killed and families are forced to leave their homes. The panicked citizens approached their hero Chacha Chaudhary

to rescue them and restore the city to its spectacular grandeur. With the help of powerful Sabu, harmony is restored and the encroachers are humiliated and forced to leave the urban space.

Unlike the contemporary western comics, the comic book deployed realistic mode of representation in line with other media forms of the times. The fantastic elements which are considered as an integral part of the genre, are concealed, appropriated or made subordinate to the realistic repertoire to accommodate the Indian reality into nationalist discourse. In post Nehruvian period, in its search of new national identity based on the urban middle class culture, realism was

perceived as viable tool of construction new national imaginary by embedding 'what should be' into 'what is' to incorporate new consumer desires and aspirations into the discourse of nation. Mondol(2003) argues that realistic mode of representation can be seen as 'embedded' mechanism that connect distanciated time-space relations and because of its potential to disseminate and consolidate the national imaginary without interrogation of the ideological production of the nation, the age of nations is also the age of realism in literature and the visual arts. The realistic elements in representation not only allow the ideological meanings pass on without being noticed but also naturalize them as an integral part of society. In the comic book , realism does not confirm the Nehruvian political realities tendency , instead represents the middle class's world view ,taking pride in national advancement and future potential , at the same time grappling with the rise of the subaltern groups .Unlike the political realist art production , the comic book addresses itself to the urban middle class : its economic problems, social insecurity, corruption in society, bewildered young generation and conflicts with the marginalized groups.

The hegemonic discourse of nationalism has shaped the characteristics of realism as it has evolved in Indian context over the period of time. Chakkravarty argued that realism is "the masquerading moral conscience of the Indian intelligentsia in their assumed (though not contested) role of national leadership"(1993: 81). The evolution of realism as mode of representation is inseparably interlinked with the politics of self-expression.

In the comic book, the realistic codes are strictly followed in the production of the narrative, characters and cultural background to reflect the Indian society. However the strict adherence to realism serves to naturalize the hegemonic representation of the middle class as depiction of the Indian society, leading to the marginalization of the subordinate groups. The phantastic elements are embedded in the narrative in such a way that the reader never fails to identify the cultural location of the narrative. The narrative offers a fantasy embedded into reality, coded in such a way that 'the spectator's own image reflected back to him/her. The mirror is adjusted to remove the look of surprise from its face'(Prasad,1998:174).

Like western comics and cartooning , all characters caricatured but the ‘real effect’ is retained through visual description of cultural background as Barthes pointed out “There would always be a corner , a detail, an inflection of space or color to report ..by posting the referential as real , by pretending to follow it in a submissive fashion, realistic description avoids being reduced to fantasmatic activity..”(1986: 145). The art of caricaturing is central to the production of comics but in the comic book, caricaturing is highly selective and is used to mark the marginalized characters. For instance, the appearance of Raka, Dhamaka Singh and other villains is distorted and their faces are disfigured to differentiate them from the middle class culture. The art of caricaturing serves to function as the system of marking different social groups. On the contrary, the caricaturing of the dominant characters is characterized by subtlety and refinements, serving merely propose of the narrative e.g. to produce laughter. The dominant characters are occasionally caricatured, seeming to be dominated by the villains: as their situation changes from margin to centre, their caricature disappears, turning them into refined characters. However, the villains are

permanently burlesqued, depicting them as bereft of human emotions and values. In the comic Book caricaturing is linked to the behavioral codes: the degree of caricaturing reflects their cultural location and behavior patterns.

During the colonial period, the nationalists evolved the discourse of regeneration of Indian culture to mobilize the masses against the British imperialism. The Indian culture was reconstructed and projected as spiritually superior to the west and hence must be retained and protected from the contaminated western culture. The discourse of regeneration of Indian culture not only provided an impetus for the freedom struggled but also encouraged the masses to feel pride in their cultural roots. After independence, the same discourse is rearticulated in different context and the target of the discourse was shifted from the external enemy to the internal enemy. The discourse was rearticulated when the cultural hegemony of the middle class was challenged by the rise of marginalized group. In the discourse, the middle class culture is depicted as ‘threatened culture’ due to decline of moral values in the Indian culture. At the same time, the rise of new consumer

desires and aspirations of the middle class also propelled them to reorient their cultural discourse to accommodate the consumerist dispensation. To accommodate new desires and aspirations of the middle class, the notion of national culture was refashioned and disseminated through the discourse of regeneration of the Indian culture and it was propagated as 'reinventing India' through media representations. In re-articulation of the discourse, the young generation was used as site to reframe the national culture.

In the comic book, the young generation is depicted as 'spoilt children', devoid of 'Indian values' due to the mindless love for materialistic western consumer culture. In the narrative we can trace the theme of an invocation of traditional cultural values and a strong moral framework to resist both vices of consumerism and the rise of subaltern groups. The process of 'regenerating the national culture' is fundamentally linked with the process of reconstruction the hegemonic notion of national culture. In the name of national culture, the middle class reconstituted the cultural values and norms to consolidate its own cultural hegemony and at the same time averted the increasing power of the subordinate

groups. The comic book was a part of a cultural project which sought to transform the national culture to accommodate the increasing consumer desires without discontinuing the traditional values and at the same time, subdue the political assertion of the marginalized groups. In the narrative, the hero emerges as social reformist who is determined to purge the Indian culture of noxious elements that threatens the integrity of the nation. In the story 'Young Generation' *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics-1744), as the title foregrounds the young generation and maneuvers the reading process, the youth is seen as uprooted from Indian culture, disrespecting their elders and committing sins to get small amount of money or simply deriving pleasure in making fun of other people. The older generation is compared with the young generation through the hero's encounter with the younger generation. The selection of an old man as hero itself suggests the anxiety of the older generation to pass on the traditional values to the young generation. In the very first panel encrypted with the title, the young boy orders the car driver to crush the old woman who is unaware of such malicious intentions. The very next panel

depicts all the characters in a single space-time in which one moment determines the behavior of both the older generation and young generation. In this focused space, while the boy is seen as closer to achieve his aim of killing the old woman, the hero enters the scene as savior who rescues the old woman from approaching death-threat. The boy attempts to kill her several times but every time she is saved by the hero and his assistance Sabu. The family network is deployed to project the young generation as bereft of Indian values which uphold respect of elders and sacrifice of individual desires and aspirations for the betterment of the nation. The young boy, who wanted to kill her in order to usurp her prosperity, is humiliated by the hero and submitted to the Indian society, reflecting transformation from bad boy to good boy. The boy realizes his deadly sin of greed and promises to imbibe the Indian values. The realization of the boy is a realization of the reader as it functions as reminder to the reader of what are the Indian values and their importance in Indian society. In the discourse of nationalism, the Indian values are selectively reconstructed in line with the middle class values and norms and linked

with the notion of Indian nation to create a hegemonic notion of the Indian society. The enemy of the nation is simultaneously identified as both within the middle class and other classes. Through depiction of the youth as 'lost generation' fear of disintegration is produced to exhibit urgency of class solidarity. In another story entitled as 'Class Bunkers' *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics-556), the representation of the middle class youth signifies bewilderment, directionless and socially irresponsibility due to absence of social norms and moral values. The two young boys consider education as dull and wastage of time and ridicule their professors as irksome personalities who torture students with their serious moral stories. They decide to bunk their classes and enjoy their time by making fun of helpless people. Unlike the marginalized groups, the middle class youth is not serious criminal. Rather they indulge in pardonable crime to enjoy their life. While the marginalized groups are seen as essentially criminal and inhuman who can do any heinous crime to gain profit but the middle class characters indulge in trivial crime because they have forgotten their family values and lost in materialism.



Fig.12 'Class Bunkers' *Chacha Chaudhary* (Diamond Comics-556)

The two characters misguide the blind man who eventually falls in dirty water and steals the stick of an old woman who cannot walk without the stick. Such delinquency is perceived as trivial and pardonable crime. Through depiction of such anti-social behavior, the middle class youth is not projected as essentially criminal but as individuals who has lost human values and at the same time they are capable of transforming themselves. In contrary to the depiction of the middle class youth, the criminals like Raka, Gobar Singh and Dhamaka Singh are seen as permanent criminals who are inhuman and incapable of transforming themselves into good human beings. In the story the boys are humiliated and forced to mend their ways. Intimidated by Chacha Chaudhary, they submit themselves to the society's norms and promise to behave responsibly. The

depiction of the young generation as bereft of traditional values reinforces the need to reassert the traditional values to hold the nation together. In this project of 'reinventing India', the hero plays the role of social reformist who sacrifices his family life and comforts to reform the society and promote national unity.

The political imagination of the nation has been shaped by the middle class's cultural discourses. It has attempted to influence the state in order to empower itself by creating new values and norms in the public sphere. The popular literature has been viable medium for the middle class to assert itself and influence the state. In the post-Nehruvian period, comics provided a powerful visual medium for the middle class to express its aspirations and dreams. The middle class's changing attitude towards the

state and inclinations towards consumerism are markedly articulated in the comic book *Chacha Chaudhary*.

Notes

¹ The continual postponement of the middle class aspirations, the failure of the state to deliver its promises and the Indo-China war contributed to the disillusionment of the middle class. Consequently the middle class turned away from the socialist state and began to search for alternative sources for fulfillment of their dreams and aspirations. See Varma (1998), Partha Chatterjee (1986a; 1993b; 1998c), William Mazzarella(2003) and Leela Fernandes (2006).

² Deshapnde borrowed the concept of heterotopias from Foucault. He argued that unlike utopias, heterotopias are real places which “enable – incite, compel, invite - people to see themselves reflected in some utopia.” (Deshapnde 1995: 3221). See Deshapnde (1995) and Foucault (1986)

³ For further study, see Partha Chatterjee (1986), Sanjay Joshi (2010) and Varma(1998)

⁴ Lord Duffering argued that a ‘microscopic minority’ of educated Indians could not represent India’s social, economic and cultural diversity. See Sanjay Joshi (2010: 3)

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