

Ira Sarma
Visualising Family and Home in the Indian Graphic Novel

The history of the Indian graphic novel reaches back to the year 1994 when Orijit Sen's *River of Stories* was published, but it gathered momentum only twenty years later with Sarnath Banerjee's *Corridor*. Since then around 40 new graphic novels have been published and a lively and innovative scene of graphic narrators has come to the fore, presenting us with a broad range of contemporary themes. Interestingly, the family as an institution does not play a central role in this avant-garde genre. Nevertheless, the protagonists' kith and kin appear on the visual 'stage' and various notions of home and belonging are negotiated.

In my paper I will look at the visual language of such depictions of family and home: What visual vocabulary and imagery are used? Can we identify essential visual metaphors? Is there a visual syntax of family, home and belonging? What does the home that is no longer the family home look like? Looking at the visual representation of family and home in the unconventional and at times eccentric medium of the graphic novel will allow us an alternative and broader perspective on current ideas of kin and belonging.

Contesting the norm?

Live-in relationships in Indian media discourses

Fritzi-Marie Titzmann

As compared to premarital 'dating' which is increasingly acceptable among the urban middle and upper classes in India, 'live-in relationships' pose a far bigger threat because they undermine the sanctity of the bond of matrimony. Cohabitation of unmarried couples has always existed but is in the public imagination mostly confined to the extravagant world of film celebrities or the Hindu pantheon which includes several extramarital, polygamous and other unconventional couple constellations.

Since 2010, the Supreme Court has ruled in favor of women declaring that they should get the rights of a wife, in case of live-in couples. Despite the reinvigoration as relationships equal to marriage in 2015, controversies in the Indian parliament as well as within the society continue. The adversaries' main argument is a known one: the incompatibility of unmarried cohabitation with Indian culture and values. We thus observe an obvious contradiction between the legal framework and its social acceptance. Media discourses reflect these tensions.

A recent trend in television advertisement of staging unconventional social constellations, e.g. a woman's remarriage (in an advertisement by jewellery brand *Tanishq* in 2013), includes an

advertisement released by the tea brand *Red Label* in 2015 featuring a live-in couple facing an awkward family situation that dissolves eventually into intergenerational harmony.

The one-minute commercial visualizes not only an alternative to the married couple but invites to re-imagine the relationship between parents and children as well. Based on the assumption that society and media co-construct each other, this paper asks whether the act of rendering the unconventional visible is already a challenge to the idea of the Indian family as such. Further, it analyzes the conflictual online discourse evolving around the short clip. Particularly looking at viewers' comments reveals conflicting attitudes that reflect the overall discourse in Indian society. On the one hand, the concept of live-in relationships is regarded as a welcome and progressive development but it is considered being a 'western' influence. On the other hand, concerns about the decline of the family system and the rise of a commitment-phobic generation are expressed by self-proclaimed conservatives and YouTube users alike. Apart from the obvious topic of cohabitation, viewers 'see' a multitude of interconnected themes reflected in the commercial and go on to discuss gender roles, sexuality and the visual symbols of 'Indianness'.

Visualizing Kin, Documenting Inheritance Rights at Malerkotla, North India

Rita Brara

Kinship charts feature as official documents that enable the practical purpose of visualizing descendant relatives in order to settle claims to property in agricultural land in north India.

A bound register known as the *shajra nasab*, literally translatable as 'the tree of ancestry', is maintained for each landholder and includes details of the flow of rights from a male ancestor. This register is prepared for each landholder in the village or town during the land settlement of the area and accompanies the compilation of a four-year *jamabandi* or register of land rights and revenue dues.

I shall illustrate the manner in which the *shajra nasab* was documented at Malerkotla, a former princely state in north India, and the changes that have been incorporated since 1890. Both the visual techniques of constructing a genealogical chart and its relationship to former and present practices of inheriting rights invite attention.

For instance, while WHR Rivers introduced the system of genealogical charts in 1848, the anthropological convention of representing men and women differently was already evident in the *shajra nasabs* at Malerkotla in 1890. Over and above, men without sons were visually marked in the record and, further, since heirless lands were inherited by collaterals in that period of history, the record of agnates in the genealogical register was traced from the ancestor who had first acquired land rights in a tract.

Subsequent modifications in kinship charts grew out of changes in the feudal land tenures. Post-Independence, the *shajra nasab* is still vital as proof of descent and as a means of determining a person's share of inheritance. In a nutshell, even today the visual representation of kinship dovetails with inheritance as practiced.

Kaamya Sharma

**'Who needs an occasion to wear a sari? Every day is a celebration': Narratives of the Self and Sari
in Urban Media**

In this presentation, I look at the theme of sari resurgence in print, online and social media of the last five years. I analyze a particular social media phenomenon, the #100sareepact as a technosocial event that combined text, image and hashtag to annex the self as emergent and assembled through story telling. Presenting the sari as habit, event and a resolution of 'the problem of what to wear', I suggest that the success of the pact has to do with its enactment of existing sartorial norms as the agency of self-expression through the performance of story-telling. Following recent fashion scholarship that critiques the paradigm of resistance or conformity to norms and advocates instead that clothing is characterized by ambivalence, I suggest that the sari has transitioned from indexing Indian womanhood as a socio-sartorial norm towards a more individual-oriented narrative of the hybrid, urban woman. In contemporary media discourse, this is achieved both by the technologies of the medium and narratives of the self.

Sourav Kargupta

**A Freeze at the end: Visualizing conjugality, secrecy, and otherness in Ray's
*Charulata***

This paper studies the intricate transactions of 'visual metaphors' between the 'literary' and the 'cinematic' by staging a comparison between Rabindranath Tagore's turn-of-the-century novel *Nashtanīr* (literally, 'The Broken Nest', 1901), and its post-independence adaptation *Charulata* (The Lonely Wife, 1964) directed by Satyajit Ray, concentrating more on the latter. A key proposition of this paper is that the 'visuality' of metaphors (the way they create a visually calibrated space) can travel between these two forms, the cinematic and the literary, albeit with important changes in their deployments and affects, especially in representing spaces of 'conjugality', 'secrecy' and 'love'.

Charulata, often considered the highest point of the ace Bengali director's early style, "marks the end of a certain phase of Ray's engagement with the past", making an "alliance between the "popular" and the 'modern' (Vasudevan: 2001). This paper focuses specifically on Ray's obsessive returns to the visual metaphors, both formal/figural (e.g. use of 'zooming'), and

'material' (e.g. use of the 'opera glass' by the main female protagonist, Charu), and tallies them with the final 'freeze' with which the film comes to a halt. How the freeze-frame, inserted at the very end of this film, reconfigures the metaphors and objects of visual calibration? In situating these threads within the contentious sites of 'modernity', 'realism', and 'Indian cinema', the paper makes the central argument that *Charulata* can be read as a critique of the production of the 'middle class private' as visually pristine, purged of any encroachment of otherness.

Work cited:

Ravi S. Vasudevan (2001). "Nationhood, Authenticity and Realism in Indian Cinema: The Doubletake of Modernism in Ray", in *Journal of the Moving Image*, 2001. Kolkata: Jadavpur University.

Hamsavahini Singh

Women and social changes: The new configuration of kinship and family in Indian Soap opera.

The media scenario in India is both vibrant and dynamic, especially the audiovisual media which is important in the diffusion and reinforcement of cultural values and norms of the society. Due to the high illiteracy rate print media has a limited reach but visual media like Soap opera provides majority of the population with a rich source of information, education and entertainment. My paper will focus on Soap opera and its impact on the new configuration of kinship and family in contemporary India.

Kinship in Shadows

Radhika Chopra

How do you relate to people you cannot see? How would they be imagined, pointed out, counted as kin, even visualised? In this paper I explore the issue of relatedness to ghosts. I base the paper on 'ghost stories' through which people relate their encounters with ghosts not all of whom are or have been kin, but who 'become' related to individuals who encounter them.

Ghosts are troublesome for their haunting refusal to leave the world fractures the lives of the living. The latter need to 'pay attention' to ghosts, to respect their presence in some form even if it is by avoidance. Ghosts then are highly 'social' for they make people do things, feel emotions and craft connections. Most critically they enforce a form of 'visualisation' through the ghost stories that are told about them. Words, sounds, and memory become visual forms through which biographies of ghosts are fleshed out and the ghost made into a proximate person who visually materialises in the story.

Anemone Platz

Glimpses of the family at home in contemporary Japanese society as mirror of major social changes

Family and familial relations are contested in many ways in contemporary Japan. This has become not only visible but also visualized since World War II, when the constitution was changed according to the US-American model abolishing the household system in favor of the model that has the nuclear family as its rotation axis.

One of the areas, where changes are visible, are the ways in which family as well as familial and individual spaces are represented in the house and the home in contemporary Japan. This paper is based on an ongoing research project that looks at how a broader range of variations in Japanese life and living styles have affected physical living spaces as well as the emotional perceptions of home. I will show visual glimpses of family and family members at home on the backdrop of deeper societal changes during the last three decades in times when struggle, economic insecurity and social estrangement lead to an increased interest in reconsidering ones home as space of retreat and familial togetherness.

Framing the house: photographs of family, gods and heroes in domestic spaces in North Kerala, India

Janaki Abraham

In this paper, I look at the ways in which photographs and images of 'family', and of heroes and gods frame the house in particular ways and may be a site of contestation. I look in particular at the context of North Kerala and a caste group called the Thiyyas who have a history of matriineal kinship. I explore the complex and contingent ways in which photographs and other images come to hang on the walls of houses and the ways in which they associate the house with a range of social relationships - whether of the family, a caste group, religious affiliation or political party. Focusing on the social life of photographs in the domestic, points to the power dynamics with in the household and contestations over the way a house is at a certain time 'framed' through these photographs.

After life, before ancestry: postmortem photographs among Aghria farmers and beyond

Uwe Skoda

The presentation starts from a postmortem photograph taken among Aghria farmers in 1981 which is displayed openly in a house where I lived during my doctoral research in Odisha. Analyzing this image

iconographically I will relate it specifically to the frequent inversions of life and death during Aghria funerary rites, but also in the wider context of postmortem photography and earlier indexical practices in Odisha and eastern India. The production of such images, at least in the pre-mobile form, are intrinsically related to funerary practices, the spatial linkages between life and death, ideas around a “good death” and status.

Based on this evidence I argue that this genre of family photographs has been rather neglected in the literature on Indian photographic traditions, because the number of images has been somewhat limited e.g. to urban areas based on an uneven access to cameras or studios, which does not imply an invisibility or non-photographability of death or the corpse. On the contrary, with the recent proliferation of photographic equipment through mobile phones one notices a considerable boom in postmortem photography in rural areas, but also a wider circulation and possible snapshot-ization.

Jagannath and the Making of Odia Community in Chennai

Jyotirmaya Tripathy

IIT Madras

Lord Jagannath and his representation are key to the construction of contemporary Odia imaginary and the latter’s material realization in the making of Odia community in various parts of the globe. Whether a temple dedicated to the Lord or an idol adorning an event or sharing of Jagannath bhajans across social media, Jagannath continues as the originary locus of Odianess which in turn helps in sustaining the experience of an imaginary kinship. The social function of this visualization is not just sacred demanding worship and submission, but also secular in eliciting a response from the viewer that helps create a modern Odia subjectivity. Such subjectivity is formed in the act of representing Odisha as the land of Lord Jagannath as well as in territorializing Jagannath in the maps of Odisha. This secularization comes easy because of Jagannath’s tribal origin, a visible incompleteness of his figure and the historical transferability of his wooden idols. The paper focuses on the use of Jagannath motif in the life of Odia community living in Chennai and its cultural function in the making of Odia family.

De-kinning in the IVF Clinic: Files, Screens and the Making of Embryos

Anindita Majumdar

The assisted reproductive technology clinic or simply the IVF clinic has been the source of much academic research. The image of the embryo (Sarah Franklin) and the ultrasound has been a source of much conversation on the female body, and kinship itself.

Here, in this paper I seek to invoke all of these studies and look at the ways in which clinic documents, the process of measuring and retrieving eggs/oocytes becomes an important source of 'de-kinning'. The word draws from Signe Howell formulation of the process of biologizing the adopted child in transnational adoption processes, to look at how the IVF process which ostensibly depends upon the overt biologization of kin, actually is a process that attempts to unmake kinship.

Taking over also from conceptualizations regarding the medicalization of kinship (Kaja Finkler), I posit that the clinic as a space imagines the gamete, here the egg, as a clinical 'object', which is separated from the body it inhabited/inhabits/ will inhabit. Here, the technology as seen in the ultrasound screen, the process of egg retrieval and IVF itself negates other forms of engagement to create an embryo that is objectified as a product of the clinic. Through clinic files, surgeries, ultrasound screens the process of de-kinning comes alive.

As India becomes the hub of reproductive tourism, marketing commercial surrogacy through its expertise in assisted reproductive technologies—I go back to the operating room to understand the idea of how in-vitro fertilization envisions gametes. This is not an isolated process, as it promises to birth children and families. The larger question therefore becomes how is it that medicine itself imagines kinship. Inspired by and drawing from the works of Charis Thompson, Sahra Gibbons, Sussane Lundin and many others—I position this clinical study within India's emerging infertility technology marketplace.

But why de-kinning? Is it a process before the act of making kin? Or is it the clinic producing its own specific discourse? Or all of this? Though fieldwork narratives conducted in a clinic in South India, I seek to understand the ways in which infertility technology understands and positions kinship in the clinical space.