

To

Ma and Baba

**CONSTRUCTING A 'NATIONAL POPULAR' :
THE HINDU INDIA IN AMAR CHITRA KATHA
(1970-1991)**

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
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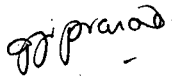




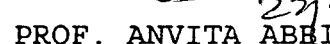
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CERTIFICATE

It is certified that this dissertation entitled
"CONSTRUCTING A NATIONAL POPULAR: THE HINDU INDIA IN AMAR
CHITRA KATHA (1970-1991)", submitted by Ms. Nandini Chandra
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of
Master of Philosophy degree of this University, has not been
previously submitted for any degree of this or any other
University and this is her own work.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed
before the examiners for evaluation.


 G.J.V. PRASAD
SUPERVISOR


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NANDINI CHANDRA

CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this thesis is to study Amar Chitra Katha's role in reproducing Hindu cultural consciousness in the name of preserving the 'national heritage' of India. The purpose is to see how it deploys its images, myths and narratives through the comic medium, to make the transition from 'Hindu' to 'national' seem so natural. It is necessary in this respect, to examine Amar Chitra Katha's re-writing of the 19th century orientalist nationalist historiography, to see how women are marginalised from this history in order to maintain their eternal feminine essence and deified-reified as objects of myth. The purpose is also to see the operations of Amar Chitra Katha within the culture industry. The idea is to study the politics of representation at the level of the market as well as the various institutional bodies such as the school; consequently its value as children's literature and its links with pedagogic practice.

Within this framework, what emerges as the central problematic of my thesis is this - that despite its representation of an ideal Hindu state underwritten with the ideology of feudalism, it derives its profit from the bour-

geois capitalist state. The resultant concept of nation as enshrined in Amar Chitra Katha thus overlaps between two shared interests and two sets of hierarchies. The agenda of Amar Chitra Katha can then be defined as the need to circumvent the 'real' conflict that is inherent in the concept of heterogeneity and to bypass the real contradictions of class, caste and gender by subsuming them under a false heterogeneity of titles that are drawn from the seemingly varied genres of history, legend and mythology. Thus what masquerades as 'novel', 'different' and 'plural' can actually be put under the hegemonic bourgeois genre of biographies. So much so that the nation itself is identified in terms of an individual's inspiring life history. Hero worship then becomes an important element of representation in children's literature such that it fosters in them a sense of national identity. The fact that the primary identity between hero and child is one based upon religion is what defines the nation in Amar Chitra Katha. Therefore it becomes imperative to discuss certain general issues in this chapter that are related to Amar Chitra Katha's status as children's literature. A specific discussion will be undertaken in section III.

Children's literature is here referred to in the strict sense of being a function of the market, 'as a specialised sub-sector within the culture industry' created to suit the image an adult has of what a child is or should be at any specific historical moment. My focus on Amar Chitra Katha's comic medium is intended to highlight its marginality from the literary canon and its simultaneous centrality as a popular genre. But unlike the amorphous audience of most popular genres, juvenile literature is distinguished by 'a virtually captive pre-determined audience.'² The ideological charge Amar Chitra Katha carries consequently draws upon two sources - the 'innocence' of its address to children and the reliance of its narrative on the 'naturalness' inherent in the photographic realism of its drawings. These are in turn modelled upon the post-Renaissance European art form adopted to Indian themes by Raja Ravi Varma in the late 19th century. This potent combination then becomes the means through which Amar Chitra Katha charts a cultural history of India. This history is mostly *denoted* as opposed to its connotative function to preclude other recordings of the past as well as to establish its hegemony over other ways of recording the past. This history draws its witnesses from the fabrications of 19th century orientalist-nationalist

writers and establishes this as the dominant historiography, thanks to its mass distribution network. The role of the distributive channels in disseminating symbols and icons associated with the essence of India then needs to be explained through the monopolistic tactics deployed by its founder-editor Anant Pai who is also its marketing genius. It also needs a discussion of the technology industry, the bureaucracy and the various institutions of the state that operate as a controlling mechanism over the complex cultural product that is the Amar Chitra Katha. The intention of this work is to show how Amar Chitra Katha circumvents these censors 'by disguising the future ideal system as past in order to criticise the present'.³ The purpose is not to ignore as a corollary those rare historical conjunctures when an Amar Chitra Katha comes up with a liberating narrative due to successful or unsuccessful negotiation with the various demands placed upon it, but to stress the rarity of such occurrences.

Finally the intention in this chapter is to see how in Amar Chitra Kathas the medium is not the message. For going by the mobility of the comic medium one would imagine that Amar Chitra Katha supported a mobility in social relations too. On the contrary, its enactment of history is directed

to support and re-inforce the status quo.

At the outset, one must refer to Walter Benjamin's famous essay, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction'. Benjamin argues that 'the techniques of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the domain of tradition.'⁴ The increasing reproduction of images is seen as part of the de-sacralization of society. But as Stephen R. Inglis shows in "Suitable for Framing"

In India, mechanically reproduced images continue to participate in the reality of the "objects" or personages depicted and this participation - the active association of the image with its sacred source - helps to account for the nature, popularity and ubiquity of images in modern India.⁵

While the business of chromolithography presses started at the turn of the century confirmed Amar Chitra Katha's agenda of preserving 'tradition', it brings to light the closeness of Benjamin's concept of 'aura' or the authority of the unique art object to Marx's concept of 'the fetishism of commodities'. Thus despite the commodification of Gods involved in these reproduced images, it continues to mystify and exude a ritual interest. While it is debatable whether the values perpetrated by these images are of the same nature as that which attached to traditional worship, this much is certain that the sheer profusion and ubiquity of

these picture-Gods and personages has resulted in large-scale recruitment of the Hindu urban middle classes as a political force, if not a sacred one. This is evident in the aggressive mobilizations of the Hindutva brigade and their extensive use of this modern 'bazaar' iconography. To the extent that Amar Chitra Katha representations reproduce this iconography and make it a legitimate vehicle for recording the past, we must discuss the unique features of Amar Chitra Katha that distinguish it from calendar illustrations.

II

The difference of Amar Chitra Katha illustrations lie in their action-oriented comic medium. In that sense, the comic medium is more akin to the film medium than it is to the photographic image. Using Barthes' analogies in 'The Rhetoric of Image', one sees that while photographic reality involves an awareness of having been there' or 'the stupefying evidence of this is how it was, giving us, by a precious miracle a reality from which we are sheltered',⁶ the dramatic element or the advance in action is constituted by the de-stiling of the images through the continuity images of the comic medium. Just as the photographic image is related to 'a pure spectatorial consciousness', the film medium

depends on a more projective, more 'magical' fictional consciousness.⁷ The film medium consequently involves an awareness of "being there" rather than 'having been there'. The photograph can at best represent 'a flat anthropological fact', it cannot aspire to history on its own. The film on the other hand, with its present continuous narrative can establish links and therefore construct a history. In short then, one can classify the photographic image and the moving picture frames of Barthes with the iconic/mythic and narrativising/historicising impulse of Amar Chitra Katha respectively. These divisions cannot be too neat as the two consciousnesses overlap in such a way that both history and mythology can be used as interchangeable terms. While myth is historicized to prove its authenticity, history is mythologised in order to relate it to current political obsessions - the creation of a coherent Hindu consciousness identifiable with Indian-ness.

Considering the authority that is invested in the written word, it is very difficult to find a text that is exclusively made of images. There will be a minimal written caption. Barthes delineates two functions from the linguistic message that accompanies any image namely, anchorage and relay. While the anchorage text is meant to 'direct the reader through the signifieds of the image causing him to

avoid some and receive others, by means of an often subtle dispatching, it remote-controls him towards a meaning chosen in advance.'⁸

The anchorage text in other words becomes an occasion to display its overt ideology, in consonance with dominant social morality. The relay text is found in cartoon and comic strips. The text is no more than 'a scratch of a dialogue', and it is complementary to the image, 'the words in the same way as the images are fragments of a more general syntagm and the unity of the message is realised at a higher level than that of the story, the anecdote, the diegesis.'⁹ The idea is to use dialogues for advancing the action and to add only those meanings that are not to be found in the image itself.

The anchorage and relay functions of the linguistic text seem to be analogous to the still photograph and moving picture frame of the image text. But this analogy will not hold in the case of Amar Chitra Katha because even if the relay text performs a strictly denotative function and is fully transparent, the same cannot be said for the still frames of Amar Chitra Katha however natural it comes across. This is because, their representational imagery is after all drawn according to pictorial codes of perspective and lines

that have a history of its own just as there is a history to the way this particular art style has been perceived over the years. Moreover, 'depicted images... tend to impress themselves on us at a deep, subliminal level and to stay with us, influencing our thoughts and actions as much, if not more than words do'.¹⁰ And anyway, as Barthes says, 'images are polysemous, they imply underlining their signifiers, 'a floating chain' of signifieds, the reader able to choose some and ignore others.'¹¹ So it does not make sense to equate the denotative intent of a linguistic message with the denotative intent of an image. The purpose of the anchorage text is precisely to curb or restrict the connotative message of the image. In *Amar Chitra Kathas*, the anchorage text is able to say things that will steer it clear of the censors. It may also imply meanings that seem on the surface to be completely contradictory to the picture.

Take for example, a page from *Rani Durgavati* [see fig.1]. We have a frame in which the Rani sits majestically astride a horse, a cloud of smoke behind her to suggest furious riding, as she weilds a spear in the air. Several brown bare-bodied men with ornate head-gears, feathers sticking to some, horns around others are shown fleeing for

their dear lives in the foreground. They are not only dark, but the whites of their petrified eyes bulge out prominently. One of them is shown clutching his head in despair as the Rani presumably strikes the fear of death unto him. The written caption to this agglutinative image merely says that "the Rani declared many wars". From the earlier panels, we come to know that these wars have been declared on the small neighbouring tribal kingdoms in order to replenish the Rani's empty treasury. The continuing panel shows the Rani standing imperially over one of her Gond tribesmen (she is herself a Chandeli princess and is married into the Gonds), the tip of her sword's blade pointed at him as she warns him, - 'you can grab as much loot as you like, but don't you dare harm the city'. Around them, hectic plundering is going on. There is gold peeping out from chests and caskets as the Gondmen help themselves to the treasures of their neighbouring brothers; one Gond man on the right hand corner is shown clutching a golden vase, his face glowing with greed. One can see that these signifieds are floating beneath the signifiers and the text makes no references to them at least overtly. The writing in the succeeding panel too picks up a single message, namely that of the Rani's noble, altruistic nature that is not visible through her body language. As the men carry the wealth to fill the

Rani's coiffure the Rani, in a typically masculine posture, ram-rod straight and hand akimbo, observes philanthropically: 'Now we must think about the welfare of the state'. Nowhere does the written text warn us of the Rani's imperialist behaviour even as it berates Akbar for lusting after other people's territory.

The anchorage function of the text is apparent in so far as it does not acknowledge the racist manner in which the Rani behaves or the racist inflection with which the tribes people are drawn not only exaggerated in their ethnic features to fit into the 'picturesque', but contemptible in their behaviour as timid and avaricious. So much so that the Rani has no faith in her own men. But even if the text were not guiding us to see only the Rani's noble nature and if we had only the pictures to rely on, we would still have seen the Rani in a glorious light. The ambiguity of her paternalistic high-handed relationship with her subject Gond men would perhaps have become more apparent, but all said and done this wouldn't have deterred us from seeing the Rani as heroine. This is because her primary identity as a white Rajput woman has been established at the outset. Consequently, any gesture she makes whether imperious or charitable can only be viewed from the moral high ground which the reader shares with her. The imperious behaviour of the Rani

will not be castigated because that in any case is not a target for castigation. So when Akbar is criticized, it is not his imperialist tendencies that are being criticized, but his identity as a foreigner, 'an infidel'. By the same logic, the Rani should be seen as a foreigner amongst the Gonds but on the contrary the Rani is not only perceived as possessing an unquestioning right to rule by virtue of her benevolent despotism but she is shown as having done a great thing by marrying into the Gonds, if not an actual sacrifice. The pictures are inscribed with this consciousness. Her extra feminine attributes can be justified on the ground that it helps to introduce novelty and difference into the dominant paradigm of the Hindu versus Muslim narrative and is moreover occasioned by a historical juncture that demands these sacrifices from women. Thus we see that visual images do not exist in an ideological vacuum. The system of representations relates men and women to the 'real conditions of their existence'. Following Althusser, ideology is at once an allusion to the real world and an illusion of it. Amar Chitra Katha in this respect can be seen as a supporter of the status quo in so far as it harks back to an utopian past of aristocratic privilege. This dream is interrupted by interventions of the market and other institutions of the state as Amar Chitra Katha is not only embedded in them but

also draws its profit from them.

III

It becomes necessary to refer to Amar Chitra Katha's status as a cultural product in the goods service industry. Drawing upon Adorno, Nicholas Garnham describes culture industries as "those institutions in our society which employ the characteristic modes of production and organization of industrial/corporation to produce and disseminate symbols in the form of cultural goods and services generally, although not exclusively as commodities."¹²

According to Garnham, profit maximization takes place in these sectors through audience maximization. "Since one of the use-values of culture is novelty and difference there is a constant need to create new products which are all in a sense proto-types."¹³ And since the cost of production is so high compared to the marginal returns from every copy, the only way to make profit is by expanding the number of sales and hence the audience base. This trend was evident in Amar Chitra Katha's early years when its readership was constituted by a wide cross-section of the population. The market was then centrally focussed upon the domestic audience. But slowly, this stable market was forsaken as the

sales began to drop and more likely, as a more lucrative market was found among the NRIs. Since Amar Chitra Katha enjoyed a monopoly in the field of comics publishing, it segmented this market by re-packaging its titles in new volumes of 10s and 3s. Also special bumper issues and deluxe issues were published. Old issues were brought under politically appealing banners like the Sikh series from the land of the five rivers, which was brought out when the Punjab crisis was simmering in the early 80s. In other words, the cultural good or Amar Chitra Katha was spread across a cultural repertoire and across other media as well (LP records, audio cassettes, videos etc.) to reduce the risks involved in selling a single product. Also, the regional language comics publication and distribution rights were sold to local houses through the late 80s and the 90s. The English language Amar Chitra Katha's price was hiked in comparison to the other languages. (Its paper/colour quality improved). This differential status of the English Amar Chitra Katha was further reinforced by bringing out a selection of 100 titles from the entire corpus while the production for the remaining titles was closed in 1991. These 100 titles were moreover picked by the editor because of their selling potential in the Hindu NRI market. Thus a loosely defined secular market was given up for a more lucrative and

a narrow market that invariably came to inflect its reception on religious lines.

The hand of the editor Anant Pai in these market calculations is obvious. Not only was he the supreme arbiter in matters of conception and production as far as the editorial staff was concerned, but the hierarchic divisions in the IBH office, vis-a-vis the illustrators, the script writers, the editors, the proprietor H.G. Mirchandani in an increasing order becomes apparent from the interview with Anant Pai enclosed in Appendix I.

Whatever concessions Amar Chitra Katha made were a direct response to the censors or claims operative in the market and the various institutions of the state. It is here that the figure of the child looms large upon editorial considerations. The overt morality and ideology of the anchorage word text, the subliminal picture codes, then become the cues via which Amar Chitra Katha negotiates its way.

IV

The purpose of children's literature, Peter Hunt tells us is seen in terms of its "effectiveness for education, language acquisition, socialization/accltulturization or for

entertainment.¹⁴ Amar Chitra Katha scores on all points as far as self-publicizing is concerned. Amar Chitra Katha's endeavours to become a useful pedagogical tool is seen for instance, in the seminar held to study 'The Role of Chitra Katha in Education' in February 1978. Then again it insists on the native antecedents of the comic medium, in the indigenous bas relief and murals of Bharhut, Sanchi and Ajanta respectively to establish its value as guide to cultural heritage as opposed to its borrowing of cartooning styles from western strips such as Asterix [see fig.2&3]. At the same time, it strives to maintain its status in the 'fun' industry. Its willingness to adapt to technological advances made in the field of media is evidence of this. The child constructed out of the above assumptions would therefore need to grow up very fast in order to contribute to the social/market dynamics of the system.

Perhaps that is why there is a tendency in Amar Chitra Kathas to counter the dominant idealist position of children's literature practitioners. The children of Amar Chitra katha consequently do not embody spontaneity, purity and natural virtue. Nor are they protected from depictions of violence and sexual innuendo. The only concession made is to a certain image of youthful valour. As is said in How to Read Donald Duck Comics,

the adult corroded by the trivia of everyday life blindly defends his image of youth and innocence. Because of this, it is perhaps (and least expected) the best place to study the disguises and truths of contemporary man.¹⁵

What insights of the child will a study of Amar Chitra Katha yield considering it hardly ever presents the child in its frames. If children are at all presented, they are shown in roles that will define their future so in effect the adults are read back into their formative years, their childhood inflected with signs of heroism and martyrdom. Family and school, the two domains they inhabit are differentiated institutions. I am referring here specifically to the Amar Chitra Katha titles on freedom fighters. One look at the vast Amar Chitra corpus shows that most of the hagiographies of saints, biographies, and life episode stories come under the freedom fighter theme, no matter the age in which they lived. The school is an institution that is most urgently in need of reform. Home has its own sets of taboos and restrictions but at least it provides a refuge from school. The freedom imperative of the narrative inspires the protagonist to leave both home and school, the two most secure bourgeois institutions. Scenes of conflict, fights, injustices abound as do scenes of women's brutalization and eroticization. But far from being motivated by the opposi-

tional view point that children must be exposed to conflict in order to recognise its worth in changing society, this selective iconoclasm of Amar Chitra Katha is fostered by the glamorisation of violence (accepted as norm) and the sexual innuendo of its drawings. The conflicts in Amar Chitra Kathas are therefore of a communal, sexist and racial colour that nevertheless pretends to be a-political and colourless.

Government intervention towards the development of a child culture is visible in the creation of the following institutions and landmarks.

- 1) The Children's Film Society started making films for children in 1955.
- 2) The Children's Book Trust was established in 1957, under Shankar.
- 3) The National Book Trust was established in 1964.
- 4) The National Council of Educational Research and Training was established in 1961.
- 5) The B.C. Roy Library was established under Shankar's direction in November 1967.
- 6) 1979 was declared International Year of the Child.
- 7) The first National Children's Book Fair was held in Calcutta in 1983.

- 8) Through the 80's translation of Soviet Children's books was promoted in different Indian languages.
- 9) 1985-1986 was declared as UNICEF Year of the Girl Child.
- 10) 1990 was declared International Literacy Year.
- 11) 1991 was the SAARC Year of the Girl Child and (1990-2000) was the SAARC decade of the Girl Child.

Considering the glaring shortcoming of the state's commitment under Article 45 of the Constitution, in providing free and compulsory education for all children under the age of 14, the Lokshala Programme for universalization of Elementary Education came up with the following directive in its Nauri Declaration, May 31, 1985 -

We do not regard education as a means for converting the child into a 'national resource', an 'input' into the national economy or a 'useful product'.... Instead, the schools need to be transformed into community-managed social institutions (rather than being viewed as state-controlled prescriptions) where children first understand the world they live in, then participate in it and eventually intervene to re-define it.

Amar Chitra Katha we can see, stands totally counterpoised to this view of children's education even as it critiques state controlled prescriptions. It completely ignores the needs of the child as defined by the above listed institu-

tions as well as by socio-economic and cultural factors like increasing unemployment, persistence of child labour, bad health conditions, depleting common property resources, widespread consumerist culture and rising atrocities on women that have a direct relation with levels of enrolment and dropout. Amar Chitra katha ignores the child's contemporary existence except in the most token sense because the child it addresses belongs to a very privileged class.

V

The literature on Amar Chitra Katha encountered so far consists of a heap of newspaper articles and two academic essays in a volume called Media and Transformation of Religion in South Asia edited by Lawrence A Babb and Susan S. Wadley, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia 1995. These essays are 'The World of Amar Chitra Katha' written by Frances W. Pritchett, and 'The Saints Subdued: Domestic Virtue and National Integration in Amar Chitra Katha' written by John Stratton Hawley.

In the first essay, F. Pritchett examines Amar Chitra Katha's public policies within the comic industry. It lists Amar Chitra Katha's vast corpus classified into systematic taxonomies, it discusses Pai's ideological inclinations vis-

a-vis the conflicting claims and demands of minority communities, it shows Amar Chitra Katha's inadequacies as far as askewed representations are concerned, e.g., it identifies Amar Chitra Katha's Hindu bias in the absence of any Muslim in the 'Makers of Modern India' series, it sees Amar Chitra Katha's partial treatment of the British colonial officers as compared to the rough-cut villains of the Mughal period, it notes the racialisation of Amar Chitra Katha's drawings, the rationalistic humanization of its depiction of animals. But despite this systematic exposure of so many negative features, there is a tendency to accept Pai's rationalisations at face value. Pritchett also tries to draw a balance sheet of the good and bad characteristics of Amar Chitra Katha such that the final word is a recommendation of its humanitarian mission, despite the minor problems, e.g.

Readers who happen to be of the wrong gender, the wrong politics, or the wrong religion will find themselves only scantily represented.



But again Amar Chitra Katha readers will also be led to hate untouchability and to feel outrage at the plight of the poor and to admire the gallant deeds of at least some women and some non-Hindus. And they will never... feel hostility towards one another. They will have a strong, positive sense of India as a multi-cultural nation in which they can all work together.¹⁶

A liberal humanist reading of this kind fails precisely because it cannot see the ideological underpinnings of an

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image, say an image of multi-cultural India. Whose model of multi-culturalism is Amar Chitra Katha talking about anyways? If as Pritchett says women, non-Hindus and non-conservatives are alienated by the Amar Chitra KATHA vision, then it leaves it with a very small readership of urban middle class boys. While this is not the case, as is evident from its phenomenal success among a wide cross-section, my task in this chapter becomes to counteract this superficial and simplified reading of Amar Chitra Katha. I propose to do this by examining the politics of the policies Amar Chitra Katha adopts to gain such popularity.

Hawley's essay limits itself to the hagiographies of six Hindu saints. The aim is to see "the process of selection that makes an Amar Chitra Katha saint a saint".¹⁷ His aim is also to elaborate Pai's theological commitments as worked into the matrix of these hagiographies, 'especially his vision of the inclusiveness of truth'.¹⁸ Hawley's methodology is quite rigorous. He studies each of the six hagiographies through a method of comparative analysis with traditionally extant versions on their lives. This enables him to authoritatively make out what details have been left out in the Amar Chitra Katha versions. He sees in these omissions, the trick by which the politically reformist

message of the bhakti saints is subdued. Not only this, but their attack on the caste hierarchy of Hinduism is sidelined by the accent on the personal transcendence of the saints. Hawley exposes Pai's paradoxical position as a scientific rationalist considering the fact that he refused to publish issues that were full of superstition and dogma such as the Santoshi Ma title. He rightly sees the resolution of these dilemmas and contradictions in the images. Hawley not only establishes Amar Chitra Katha as a quasi-public institution but also sees Pai's complicity in games with political parties. Unlike Pritchett, he recognises that the line between Indian and Hindu is a blurred line in Amar Chitra Kathas and that

'Hinduism' as a distinct internally consistent system running parallel with other 'religions' is an invention of the 19th century.¹⁸

My study begins therefore where Hawley's ends with a comment on Amar Chitra Katha's complicity with VHP-type national integration programmes. While Amar Chitra Katha doesn't have an outright communal propagandist message to relay, it nevertheless makes use of the seemingly 'secular' Hindu symbols and icons to naturalise its universal claim upon a national ethos. What does this mean - does it mean that the modern secular discourse must avoid discussion of

religious matter at any cost? Or does it indicate how the de-sacralization of images brought about by the techniques of mechanical reproduction have made them susceptible to being used as political weapons?

This is because the myths, even as they might be antiquarian and of dubious moral worth in the present context are nevertheless not communal per se. Where does their communal inflection derive from? How does the differentiated status of Hindu culture elect itself to being the superior most religion, even to the extent of the race of its votaries - the upper caste Hindu male being its representative voice.

These are some of the questions I propose to grapple with in the subsequent three chapters, dealing with Amar Chitra Katha's treatment of history, women and the politics of its market operations.

It would be pertinent here to reveal the randomness with which I have selected the Amar Chitra Kathas for study. These were mostly picked up at the Daryaganj Sunday market for Rs.3 a piece. This randomness helped me to find things that I would have probably missed had I concentrated on a few select issues chosen on a-priori grounds.

Notes

1. Dorfman and Mattelart, How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic, Translation and introduction by David Kunzle [International Gene 1975], p.30.
2. Ibid., p.30.
3. This line is used by the editors cum translators of The Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci, Quintine Hoare and Nowell Smith to describe Gramsci's critique of the Gentile reforms in the Italian education system under the Mussolini Government -

`The apparently conservative' eulogy of the old curriculum in fact often represents a device which allowed Gramsci to circumvent the prison censor, by disguising the future (ideal system) as the past in order to criticise the present'. [International Publishers, 1971], p.24.
4. Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art' in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' in Illuminations, Collins 1968, p.233.
5. Stephen R. Inglis, 'Suitable for Framing' in Media and Transformation of Religion in South Asia, ed. by Lawrence A. Babb and Susan S. Wadley, [University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995], p.52.
6. Roland Barthes, 'The Rhetoric of the Image' in Studying Culture: An Introductory Reader, ed. by Ann Gray and Jim McGuigan, [Edward Arnold, 1993], p.23.
7. Ibid., p.23.
8. Ibid., p.20.
9. Ibid., p.21.
10. Elizabeth Chaplin, Sociology and Visual Representation, [Routledge, 1994], p.3.
11. Roland Barthes, op. cit., p.19.

12. Nicholas Garnham, 'Concepts of Culture - Public Policy and the Cultural Industries' in Studying Culture, op. cit., p.55.
13. Ibid., p.57.
14. Peter Hunt, Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature, [Blackwell Publishers], 1991, p.43.
15. Dorfman and Mattelart, op. cit., p.31.
16. Frances Pritchett, op. cit., p.105.
17. J. Stratton Hawley, op. cit., p.107.
18. Ibid., p.108.
19. Ibid., p.130.

CHAPTER - II

RELATING ORIENTALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

RELATING ORIENTALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

The attempt in this chapter is to see Amar Chitra Katha's treatment of history or to be precise its re-writing of 19th century nationalist orientalist historiography into the comic medium. While nationalism in the 19th century was evinced in response to what Sudipto Kaviraj calls 'an elusive internal principle'¹ not identifiable with boundaries on a map and based on traditional collective identities; Amar Chitra Katha nationalism of 1970s and 1980s arises within the larger movement of modernity and post-independence dis-illusionment-industrial capital, a territorial sovereign state, a regime of rationalist cognition and a milieu where differences and divisions among communities have been reified.

That this reality of the bourgeois state is underwritten with individualism and contractual relations is evident in the fact that it has to look towards the past for an invocation of homogenous collective identities. This is because patriotism can be only forged in conditions where there is a greater common bonding and a lessening in the valorization of group differences. And so we find Amar

Chitra Katha borrowing the vocabulary of passion - freedom, glory, sacrifice, blood - that nationalism as a movement required and which is provided in the present context by an appeal to the communally inflected identities. One of these identities is caste. Arjun Appadurai argues, that even though the major caste divisions as they stand now are a product of British systems of quantification and enumeration; 'refracted and re-ified in many ways through British techniques of observation and control', they are nevertheless 'not a figment of British political imagination'² alone. This is because British orientalism encountered and overlapped with an indigenous social system of classification that was no less orientalist in its gaze as far as essentialising India was concerned. The inscription of these identities into the matrix of administrative practice and everyday political life (as empirical data) however is the reason for the contemporary salience of the caste and communal questions. It is not such a paradox then if modern nations keep stretching the limits of their antiquity and pretend that they have always existed as a certain collective. As Hobsbawm would say, not only tradition but 'even historic continuity had to be invented'.³ Thus the attempt in the selective appropriations from the past is to find the 'colligatory function'⁴ or what joins past A to past B and

so on, an inherent function of the present continuous consciousness of the film/comic medium, referred to in chapter I. E.g. Hindu, Aryan, Brahmin and Indian are used interchangeably. The idea is to mark the fact that 'what is invoked is a new people. They are Indians, neither the continuation of earlier Hindus nor the [medieval] Muslims.'⁵

Amar Chitra Katha's *Rana Pratap* illustrates the continuity principle necessary to create 'a unilinear national hagiography'. Here a history of the Rajputs is constructed to prove the point that they have risen to defend 'our motherland' every time there has been a foreign invasion, be it the Greeks, the Khiljis; the slave dynasty, the Mughals or the British.

The comic begins with seven cameo shots of the history of Chittor before panning on to the hero Rana Pratap and his mission to free Chittor from subjugation. Here is a shot by shot account [see figs.4-7]. The first shot covers the entire page. It is a close-up portrait of the Rajput archetype; an old guard looking the reader straight in the eye. His 'pagdi', the U-tilak on his forehead, the flamboyant white beard combed on either side with a parting in the middle, the spear and shield carry the symbolic message that as long as this Rajput is there, the fort stretching out in

the backdrop will remain impregnable. The word caption locates this 'brave Rajput in Rajasthan which is in the western part of India'.

The second shot is a general one of the Rajputs in combat with the enemy. The word caption does not specify who this enemy is; but the picture text shows them as ferocious looking Muslims; apparent from their beards.

The third shot continues with another battle scene. The enemy soldiers are shown wearing helmets and tunics that betray their Greek identity confirmed in the word caption of the fourth shot. In the fourth shot, the Greek soldiers with their clean shaven faces are fore-grounded as being slaughtered by the Rajput army. The word caption in the fourth shot, introduces a chronology into this general song of the Chittor Rajput's bravery. It says, 'In the 8th century A.D., they (the Rajputs) vanquished the Greeks' irrespective of the fact that there was no Greek ruling class to speak of in the 8th century B.C. wiped out by the Romans. This immediately cuts into the fifth frame on the next page that reads. 'Their queens were no less. The queen of Chittor Karma Devi defeated the powerful army of Qutubddin.'

Karma devi is shown resplendent in a golden armour as she wreaks havoc in the ranks of the enemy; charging val-

iantly ahead (astride a horse) with a naked sword. While the Queen is drawn in great realistic detail, in varied colours; both the armies are depicted in a confusion of sketchy outlines and painted over in shades of green. The next shot is in direct contrast to the frame containing Karma Devi. It shows a scene of mass-scale immolation, Rajput women preparing for Jauhar. The backdrop is divided into two segments separated by a pillar. The right hand side reveals an arena where women are burning themselves on separate pyres. Their bodies are visible through the leaping flames as they sit intact, with their hands joined in intense prayer. There is no recognition of pain. The left hand side shows a group of women preparing to join the women on the right hand side led by Padmini who occupies the foreground. There is a curious 'exposed' quality to these women in the way their 'odnis' are deployed. Consequently, the feeling one gets about the body is not of its vulnerability to pain; but its potential for erotic ravishment, its gendered nature. This is further compounded by the word description of this scene as 'the gift of the Rajput women to fire'. The context is given as the women's need to save their honour from the tyrannical Alauddin Khilji of the 14th century.

The fifth and sixth shots are supposed to dissolve into each other - the Rajput woman as warrior conflated with the Rajput woman who immolates herself. There is no difference between the two as long as they are confronting (or not confronting) the common enemy.

The final shot shows the Chittor fort as manned by Mughal soldiers who the text reveals are 'the first ever conquerors of Chittor'. This is the culmination then of the glorious Rajput history from where Rana Pratap will take his cue to start the second phase of glorious resistance. These seven shots are the justification of his mission to free Chittor even at the cost of his life, and even as other Rajput princes had accepted the suzerainty of the Mughals. These seven shots have a snap shot value. Their photographic consciousness of 'having been there' is used to exemplify a single theme - that of Rajput resistance. The word text accompanying them, deliberately uses a passive historical voice to connect the discrete shots together or to collegiate and stitch them up in order to effect a continuity. But the life of Rana Pratap cuts this documentary narrative short and breaks in with an active voice or the 'being there-ness' of the cinematic style. The action and the drama begins as it were, with the shot of Rana Pratap taking an oath before an icon of Ma Chandi. Each shot hereafter is

dependent upon the other for an explication of the narrative.

The investment of an Indian identity in a fabricated Rajput past, e.g., will not work in a bourgeois democracy like India, since, it is bound 'to cut out or under-value unforgettable pages of national history',⁶ e.g. according to Romila Thapar, the Rajputs enter the scene of Indian history only around the 9th and 10th centuries A.D. The Amar Chitra Katha give no inkling whatsoever of the foreigner status of the Rajputs; or of their artificial assumption of Kshatriya status. They were also provided with genealogies which connected them with either the solar or lunar race, "thereby conferring upon them the utmost royal respectability in keeping with the tradition of the Puranas."⁷

Thus we see that the national hagiography is linked with the construction of Hindu majoritarianism.

Also,

Narratives are not for all to hear, for all to participate in to an equal degree... For the recipient of the narrative cannot be just anybody. It is only some people belonging to particular categories who are privileged. As A.P. Acharya has shown, Muslim children could not come easily under the narrative contracts held out by Abanindranath Tagore's wonderfully coloured folk tales. There are very real frontiers of indifference and

contempt which would keep them out.⁸

Amar Chitra Katha has a similar problematic. It is addressed primarily to a Hindu upper caste audience even as this address is marked by its trans-regional national spread. e.g. the Rajputs are not only naturalized as Kshatriyas; but their martial valour is seen as a symptom of the Aryan race - the sons of Rama as it were. Their martial spirit is not only useful in countering the colonial construct of the Hindu as effete but more significantly to justify their militarization vis-a-vis the Muslim invasion in the middle ages. The pitting of the Hindu war cry 'Har-Har Mahadev' against the Muslim, 'Allah-o-Akbar' in umpteen battle scenes in Amar Chitra Katha further fuels divisions in today's communally charged political atmosphere. The Muslim interregnum is anyway made responsible for the deterioration of the status of women. Not only is Sati glorified but innovative rationalisations are supplied in every case to locate women's bodies at the centre of the identity debate. I shall be treating the women's question in the next chapter.

The lower caste Hindu is likewise drawn into the fold of the Aryan-Indian continuum through the invocation of the Vedantin one-God principle. As John Stratton Hawley illus-

trates, the attack of the Bhakti saints on the caste system is interpreted in Amar Chitra Katha to mean personal transcendence. The valorization of Vedic Hinduism makes the ubiquitous presence of the Puranic Gods in the Amar Chitra Kathas seem almost contradictory. This contradiction is however breached by conflating the time of history - linear, homogenous and calibrated - to include the time of myths. e.g. the time of myths is placed so far back on the historical axes to be almost beyond the scrutiny of scientific rationale.

As Kaviraj says

Given this temporal structure (of history), distances cannot be reduced by any imaginative conceptual technique. The present time is equally calendrically distanced from past times. Its impersonal distances cannot be abbreviated or otherwise infringed by affection. The time of myths doesn't have this calibrated quality. Present times can feel closer to Ram-rajya or whatever other stretch of the past appeals to the imagination.⁹

So while myths are historicized by giving them an incredible antiquity, history is mythologised to make it contiguous to the present.

The attempt in this section is to find Amar Chitra Katha's links with pedagogic practice as far as teaching history is concerned. The opening frames of the Amar Chitra Katha on *Rash Behari Bose* shows the boy Rash Behari in a history classroom 'resenting every word the teacher uttered' [see fig.8]. The teacher says -

The people of Bengal have little courage.... That is why Baktiar Khilji could conquer Bengal with only seventeen cavalrymen.

Rash Behari challenges the teacher by counteracting this alleged weakness of the Bengali/Hindu by asserting that there were 'more men'. This corrective costs him an expulsion from school. Thus even as the Amar Chitra Katha does not tell us the source of Rash Behari's information, it invests it with authority by the price he is made to pay for it. The teacher is made into a villain - a Muslim looking one, since he has a beard minus a moustache, a standard in Amar Chitra Kathas for distinguishing Muslims from non-Muslims.

Rash Behari's subsequent career shows him striving to create an alternative Hindu male. First, he trains as a soldier and then he goes on to send shiploads of arms and

ammunitions for the revolutionary cause of Indian Independence. But it is his expulsion from school that marks the first act of heroism.

For the boy Rabindranath Tagore, school is a dull place not able to match up to the fantastic goings-on in the bubble (literally) of his imagination, filled as it is with Amar Chitra Katha type ogres and mythological beings [see figs. (& 10)]. Alternative schooling takes place in the lap of nature in the cultured home environs. The inspiration to set up Shantiniketan is because of the mistrust he feels towards the educational system that can 'only kill the pleasure of learning' - 'I don't think it will break the chains binding them. It helps them to get jobs, that's all'. Amar Chitra katha thus carves advertising space even within its own narratives, feeding on the dissatisfaction it promotes about the teaching of history in schools and hence, its projection of itself as a viable alternative.

As opposed to the dull and inaccurate documentation in text books, it proposes to breathe life into 'the characters and events from the musty pages of Indian history'. The idea contained in the slogan 'education through entertainment' is to dynamize the potentially exciting material of Indian history made musty by school authorities and

government boards. It plans to achieve this by the translation of this material into the popular genre of comic books and deploy its techniques to animate and re-inscribe the earlier narratives with the discourse of modernity. (This shall be discussed in the next section.) It is the modernity of the medium through which these 19th century nationalist debates are re-activated for us; as is evident from the class room episode in *Rash Behari Bose*. Here bravery is constructed in confronting the teacher. This glorification of the challenge to authority in the conservative context of Amar Chitra Kathas can be explained by the two dominant streams of historical consciousness in contemporary India as outlined by Krishna Kumar in Learning through Conflict. These are the 'received' perspective and the 'rival' perspective respectively.

While the received perspective does not perceive Hindu-Muslim relations as being the central theme of Indian history since medieval times; those who uphold the rival perspective believe that the full story of India's past is not being told in our schools mainly because of the dominance of the received perspective. On just about every event that touches upon Hindu-Muslim relations, the 'rival' perspective claims to have more facts to reveal than what the received perspective might acknowledge as facts.¹⁰

The rival perspective is reflected in the media and the collective memories/oral lore. E.g. in 1989 during the

national election campaign, Congress used its control of state T.V. simultaneously to popularize Hindu epics, to identify Rajiv Gandhi with his grandfather and thus with the birth of the nation, to identify Nehru with progress and prosperity; and to censor opposition Parties.¹¹

I have quoted this passage not only to show the state's partisanship but also to make it clear that the aim in this chapter is not to uphold the so called 'received' perspective; (which can hardly be called secular) against the rival perspective, into which Amar Chitra Katha seemingly fits, as exemplified by the Rash Behari Bose encounter. But despite this self-representation; it constantly negotiates between the two perspectives and historiographies by mediating the communal charge of its narratives. This is done in order to maximize its audience by incorporating minority groups and religions like Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism within the Hindu fold. This inclusive principle should not be confused with a secular outlook because it does not intend to destroy the exclusion principle which lies at the heart of the narratives. The end result of this negotiating process is the deployment of insidious and subtle tactics to cover a wide range of national audience; even as it does not address them equally. The ambiguous positioning of Amar Chitra Katha is further highlighted in its attempt to make an interven-

tion in the institutional imparting of history by conducting an experiment on 'The Role of Chitra Katha in School Education' in February 1978. The idea was to steal the credibility of pedagogic text books representing the 'received' perspective and associated with success in exams, by proving the greater efficacy of Amar Chitra Kathas for the purpose of securing marks. Amar Chitra Katha therefore excels not only in pedagogic practice but also retains its 'rival' claim to exclusive cultural truth. This cultural truth is a single point programme, whose purpose is the critique of secular-minded bourgeois institutions. So even as it extols the tradition of ancient gurukuls in *Aruni and Uttanka*, it teaches irreverence for the teacher figure in *Rash Behari Bose*.

II

When a specifically nationalist programme begins to find articulation, 'political' demands are made on the popular genres and the modern is inscribed on to the popular.¹²

So even as Amar Chitra Katha shirks off the modernity of the secular bourgeois democracy; the medium of its nationalist articulation and the techniques it deploys are steeped in the project of modernity.

The mediation of the Indian subject into cinema and painting was a mediation into modernity because this 'complemented the growth of Indian capital and Indian Industry in the early part of the 20th century.'¹³

Just as cinema, a popular art form 'transfigures, inflects and radicalizes the iconography it inherits', so Amar Chitra Katha too transforms the 19th century nationalist narratives by re-inscribing them with what Srivatsan refers to in the context of the photographic image as the 'ideologies of neo-imperialism, communalism, the re-structuring of patriarchies and the micro politics of subjection.'¹⁴

For example, the iconography of Amar Chitra Katha is inflected with communal, sexist and racial overtones. In the Amar Chitra Katha on *Chhatrasal*, we study two frames that illustrate this coding [see figs.11 & 12]. In the first frame, we are shown Ruhalla Khan, Aurangzeb's general sent to finish off the Bundelas in his camp. It is the eve of battle and Ruhalla Khan is shown preparing for the night's revelry, pouring wine while his guard ushers him to the dance hall. The dancing girl is presented in arched movements so as to reveal a significant portion of her belly. Her curves and navel area are also considerably exposed. The angle and foregrounding of the woman is such

that it reminds one of the mujra scenes in Hindi films with the camera closely following the woman's body part by part.

The contrasting frame is one where Chhatrasal, the Bundela hero is shown commemorating his victory over Aurangzeb's army. The dancing girl in this frame is fully dressed. It is the dance that is being enjoyed and watched and not the girl. Thus Mughal debauchery is contrasted here to the celebratory atmosphere of Chhatrasal's court. What are then the specifically 'modern' markers of the comic medium?

Firstly, it is the technique of western style oil painting that Amar Chitra Katha deploys to represent its historical and mythological characters such that the narratives appear natural and the opposite of constructed; thanks to the illusionism which is seen synonymous with reality. This kind of painting was first pioneered by Raja Ravi Varma who used the illusionistic style to draw scenes from the Puranas - 'Giving the Gods features as accessible in space and time as the actors in the rapidly growing urban theatres of the period especially the Parsi and the Marathi theatres',¹⁵ Ravi Varma in turn influenced Phalke to produce 'Indian images on the screen' like 'Raja Harishchandra'. Amar Chitra Katha draws from these two mediums as well as

from several other sources inscribed with modernity. An inventory of such visual influences on Ram Waeerkar, one of the foremost and most prodigious illustrator for Amar Chitra Katha since its inception will highlight my point.

In an informal interview, Waeerkar mentioned the following sources for his Amar Chitra Katha illustrations.

1. Ram Waeerkar imagined and visualised *Krishna*, Amar Chitra Katha's first title, drawing on the 'Krishna Gopala' of Prabhat Studios directed by V. Shantaram.
2. Rama was imagined upon Ravi Varma's 'Rama', in preference to the illustration of Rama with a beard found in the 'Pothi' traditions of Maharashtra and Karnataka (even though a beard makes so much more sense in the context of the 14 years of vanavasa. The appeal of the clean-shaven look was greater for the artist because of its association with the orientalist idea of Indo-European common ancestry. As Waeerkar says, 'Such was the ubiquity of Ravi Varma paintings that any house without a Ravi Varma print must be a non-Hindu household'. He also admits to tracing the profiles of Hollywood/European actors and actresses for Amar Chitra Katha models.

3. The more immediate inspiration came from the banner artists of the 1940's to 1960's such as Deenanath Dalal, Raghuvir Mulgaonkar, and S.N. Pndit; who drew Nargis in 'Barsat' in August 1948. These groups of painters were not only trained in the academic style of the J.J. Schol of art but were involved in many other visual discourses besides - advertising painting covers for literary magazines like Hans, Dharmyug and Stree, cartooning etc. But the broad tenor of their art consisted in drawing Puranic themes that were heroine based and erotically charged and which made extensive use of cinematic frames. These female bodies were not only covered in diaphanous clothing but posed in angles that highlighted their hour-glass figures curves and cleavages. Western Realism was adorned with decorative Indian strokes, according to Waeerkar.

4. Norman Rockwell's illustrations for the Saturday Post and Esquire magazines were another inspiration for Ram Waeerkar.

5. While for Mughal depictions, the Miniature school of paintings were used; the same sources could not be relied upon for a description of the Hindu Gods, 'as they were shown in Mughal affect'. A dichotomy was set up between ancient Hindu and medieval Mughal motifs as regards jewel-

lery, pagdis, configuration of beards, costumes etc.

The indigenous sources like the miniature schools of art, Kalighat pats, the Ajanta murals, bas reliefs at Bharhut and Amravati and Elephanta were not used because of their stylistic representation. While the whole agenda of Amar Chitra Katha was precisely to conceal stylistic codes and claim to be natural and thus historically authentic.

Thus we see how patriotism that depends on collective identities like caste and religion for its sustenance, by giving primacy to the western oil painting techniques is forced to return to the domain of individual subjectivity enshrined in this kind of modern art form. This is because the bourgeois audience as revealed earlier will only understand or appreciate the language of individual subjectivity. Not only is the focus on one or two main individuals; but this focus is further arrested by the foregrounding of the head (face versus the body in the individual frame). This suits the comic medium as it enables it to register the myriad shades of facial expressions through which the story is mobilized. Also the pictures are in boxes; unlike the unbroken vista afforded by the indigenous art forms. According to Anant Pai these indigenous art forms constitute the true inspiration of Amar Chitra Katha rather than the comic

features and cartooning styles adopted from the west visible. According to him the speech bubbles are the only new things.

Gulam Muhammed Shaikh tells us that in traditions of Indian painting, 'a certain mobility informs the spatial structure' which allows the eye to traverse in multiple directions'. The post-Renaissance European academic style on the contrary 'arrests and stills' the gaze.¹⁶ As we have seen earlier that the action in Amar Chitra Kathas is built right into the series of continuity pictures and the narrative follows the eye from one frame to the other. The single frame itself makes for passive viewing as in the case of the Amar Chitra Katha cover illustration. The action depicted in them would be incomplete without the sequence.

While stylizations and cartooning effects are used for Pancatantra, Jataka and the regional folk tales, Pai rules them out in the depiction of historical and mythological titles. The reason he gives is the condition of historical authenticity. The naturalistic style of drawing alone can represent the past as it was, without mediation, and reproduce characters in all their physiognomical richness. He places a similar charge of historical empiricism on Amar Chitra Kathas' 'extensive research', e.g. the pains taken to

establish the identity of the persons on the right hand side and left hand side of Swami Vivekananda as he delivered the famous speech in the Parliament of Religions in Boston, or the need to accurately depict Shivaji in his 5 ft 3" greatness. The premium placed in accurately representing Hindu Gods in this context becomes not only frivolous but also politically motivated.

III

Given the broad common assumptions of Amar Chitra Katha and text book historiography, their duplication of the Millian periodization (ancient/ Hindu, medieval/Mughal and modern/British) and dynastic genealogies, one must seek the difference between them in Amar Chitra Katha's pick of sources, mostly literary, either legends and ballads or colourful adaptations. It is not as if (as discussed earlier) the community identities of official accounts are the products of British orientalism only, but they are to a great extent mediated to us through an elaborate process of 'refraction and reification' (Appadurai) based upon the colonialist methods of organizing and fact finding of its census quantifications. Thus for literary pieces, we have the novels of Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyaya like *Devi Chowdhury Rani*, who, the Amar Chitra Katha tells us, features in

the report of Lieutenant Brennan, quoted by Hunter in his "Statistical Account of Bengal". Bhai Veer Singh's *Sundari* is based on a popular folk song. *Rana Kumbha* is adapted from the famous book on Kumbha by Harbilas Sarada. The story of Randhira has been drawn upon the account given by Lt. Col. Mark Wilks in his History of Mysore and Vamshavali, a work in Kannada published by the Mysore Palace. *Durgadas* has been adapted from accounts of Col. James Tod as well as popular ballads. Thus we see that indigenous accounts often overlap with and draw from accounts of British colonial officers. These literary works have a greater appeal for the comic genre of Amar Chitra Katha as it needs no justification to further abbreviate and adapt that which has already been cut loose from its contexts or excerpted.

The reification into popular mass produced commodity status manifests in the images in the tension between the iconicity index and the narrative index. While the iconicity index is determined by the sacralising potential of the traditional narratives, the narrative index on the other hand is generated by 'the secularizing potential' of the popular comic medium. While the iconicity index can be described as a condition of deep freeze, a converging uponness, what Geeta Kapoor terms 'frontality' with respect to Indian popular art or bazaar at which marks the emergence of

the modern art, the secular narrative force is bent upon dissolving the arrest of this gaze; through its deployment of continuity pictures. So Amar Chitra Katha narratives (in terms of images at least) are constantly marked by a tension between deification and re-ification, more so in the case of the women subjects (discussed in the next chapter). But mostly the tensions are resolved in favour of stereotypes, that keep oscillating between these two indices. The stereotype then becomes the icon-builder; it both activates and freezes the narrative. Therefore we have the evil, lusty and treacherous Mughals, whose evil, lusty and treacherous ways are narrativised in the context of the object of their lust, the Rajput widow identified with territory, and their treacherous ways shown in relation to the brotherly feeling amongst the Rajputs, clans-in-arms, rushing to each other's rescue.

An example is from the concluding frame in *Randhira* [see fig.13]. The narrative terminates with the episode of Randhira taking on twenty-five armed men single-handedly. The word text illuminates us that the legendary Randhira is 'blessed by Lord Narsimha'. Till the narrative was operative, Randhira was just a hero in action but in the final frame his historical status is super-imposed with iconic

significance. Thus Randhira's royal head, turbanned and with swirling moustache is counterpoised against an icon of Narsimha the lion headed lord vanquishing the demon. The narrative element has been 'freezed' here to contain the 'deity' and the 'deified' in a single frame. The moral of the narrative - the code of Hindu/royal machismo - is also apprehended through this symbolic image.

In the freedom-fighter series, the list of personages who are selected for canonization are those who have a marginal status within the mainstream Congress body politic, e.g. Senapati Bapat as opposed to Jawaharlal Nehru, the extremists rather than the moderate leaders; e.g. the introduction synopsis on *Senapati Bapat* says that 'he had the courage to criticise even Gandhiji', and the introduction to *Chandra Shekhar Azad* says that he was helped 'by no less a person than Jawaharlal Nehru'. Considering the fact that *Amar Chitra Katha* did not deem Gandhi and Nehru as fit subjects until the penultimate issues; (while *Jawaharlal Nehru* was the last title of *Amar Chitra Katha* to be published in November 1992. *Mahatma Gandhi* was published in 2 parts in July-August 1989) obligatory references to their centrality and greatness can at best be construed as left-handed compliments. This is illustrated by the following example taken from *Senapati Bapat*.

The two concluding frames consist of two sharply contrasted images. The first frame shows a garlanded Nehru in the foreground releasing a white dove against a backdrop of the Parliament and a sea of humanity. The national flag flaps iconically from the roof of the Parliament and there are loudspeakers fixed in the region of the crowd which is cordoned off from Nehru. The caption on top of the frame reads - 'On August 15, 1947 the struggle put up by millions of patriots bore fruit.' Underlying the frame is the comment - 'In Delhi Pandit Nehru hoisted the national flag'. Counter-balancing this accent on national, the caption on top of the second frame reads - 'In Pune, Bapat was given that honour'.

The picture shows a humble half-dhoti clad Bapat standing in attention to the hoisting of a smaller sized national flag. The national anthem is presumably being sung by the small group of men also standing in attention behind Bapat. This more earnest and less spectacular instance of patriotism stands out against the grand posturings of the likes of Nehru who have grabbed power at the centre by alienating the millions indicated by the cordoned off public who have thus been robbed of the fruits of their struggles. Bapat is one such true son of the soil who is committed to local level

social activities and is not interested in power lust.

Not only are the Amar Chitra Katha heroes more committed, but their brand of revolutionary terrorism seems to suit the needs of the comic medium. Its propensity for action - bombings, mauser guns, assassinations, Japanese and German submarines, smuggling of fire arms, get-aways, hide-outs, chases, disguises, subterfuges, dramatic confrontations and martyrdom played up in action-packed death scenes - is woven in a morality tale whose lesson is courage and a very intemperate version of courage at that. In the context of Gandhi's hegemony over national politics through satyagraha methods, this articulation of a militant ideology has an insidious subtext. This is the valorization of group differences (both communal and regional in nature) under the banner of national integration.

E.g. Jatin Mukherjee or Bagha Jatin is shown rescuing Bengali Hindu girls from the clutches of lustful Englishmen [see fig.14]. When the father of one such victim thanks Jatin for saving his honour; Jatin retorts back: 'But the honour of mother India will be safe only when we have thrown off the yoke of British rule'. These titles on the revolutionary leaders not only take their oaths on nation as a mother figure - Bharatmata'; but also construct a broad

regional networking through their underground connections - Bengal, Maharashtra and Punjab being the three spots of high revolutionary activity. In terms of pictures, their close attention to the regionalisms - landscape, physiognomy, costumes and accessories - not only evoke a sense of disparate autonomous communities but also forge them into a common bond of nationalism by revealing their common militant agenda as opposed to the moderate Congress politics, e.g., while the Amar Chitra Kathas on Bengali revolutionaries like *Bagha Jatin* and *Rash Behari* show a topography of rivers, banana fronds and palm trees, of women dressed in red-bordered sarees, of palm-leaf handfans, of blouses with frilled sleeves, of Calcutta buildings jutting out in the background, so is the *Bhagat Singh* comic full of details that speak of the regional codedness of Punjab. Thus a region gets instantly identified with a certain code and the nation is built upon this sense of a trans-regional solidarity, e.g., pilgrim spots are charted across the body of the nation such as Alfred Park in Allahabad where Chandra Shekhar Azad attained martyrdom and Jallianwallah Bagh in Amritsar and of course Kalapani or the Cellular jail, in the Andaman where Veer Savarkar had been imprisoned. All these places are 'anointed with the blood of the patriots'. Another curious thing about these revolutionary titles is

their choice of disguises that seem to cut across a large social spectrum-caste as well as religion. Pathan and Pujari are two favourite disguises followed by that of a sweeper. Acting dumb and deaf is another tactic to assume anonymity. While the Muslim is visible in disguise; he is ironically absent from the canon of freedom fighters. There is only one Muslim called Pir Ali who appears in the 1857 Revolt series, that too as a filler in the comic on *Beni Madho*. The cover does not mention that Pir Ali's story fills the concluding 5 pages while *Beni Madho* has 28 pages.

In the construction of the nation, the territorial/regional boundaries are often blurred with the national, as in *Rani of Kittur*, where the Rani's last lament is that she did not die fighting for Kittur, immediately followed by the words - 'God help Kittur, help my country!' The concluding caption describes her as a forerunner of the Rani of Jhansi, among the first to resist British rule in India. Thus even as the nation is read in retrospect, the British rulers who are supposed to grant this national awareness are treated in a very mild manner compared to the vehemence with which the Muslim invader is constructed in all the Rajput comics. The Britishers are not only portrayed as helpless duty bound officers, appreciative of

Indian 'pluck' - example of which can be seen in their prodigious documentation of this admiration as in *Rani of Jhansi* and *Beni Madho* [see fig.15]. *Amar Chitra Katha* shows this documentary evidence in italicised letters of praise. The officer who arrests the beleaguered Bagha Jatin is quite rueful about his duty and shows his sympathy by offering him water and covering him with his coat.

We have seen how the medieval period is characterised in *Amar Chitra Kathas* by the exclusive representation of the martial races - the Rajputs, Marathas and Sikhs and how these representations reinforce communal stereotypes about Rajput valour, Mughal lust, Mughal imperialism. It would be a useful exercise to study the good and bad stereotypes of Mughals, embodied by Akbar and Aurangzeb respectively, in order to see how they contain between themselves the beguiling heterogeneity of Muslim snapshots. The flexibility of frames and representations offered by the sheer number and conflicting versions on the same subject or theme in *Amar Chitra Kathas* enables us to study these stereotypes within a larger perspective e.g. Raja Harish Chandra appears as an epitome of truth in the comic titled on his name, but in *Shunashepa*, he appears a virtual villain in his readiness to sacrifice Shunashepa in exchange for his own son. The idea therefore is to study Akbar and Aurangzeb through a narra-

tive woven out of references to them in other people's stories. For studying Akbar's representations, I use the following titles - 1) *Rani Durgavati*, 2) *Birbal, the Clever*, 3) *Tansen* and 4) *Jahangir*.

In *Rani Durgavati*, Akbar makes a cameo appearance as the imperious emperor, fighting against whose lustful designs, the Rani becomes a martyr. This glorification of the Rani is totally misplaced considering the fact that she herself is a small-time imperialist. She hopes her Rajputani glamour will rub off on the Gond tribes people and draw them into the fold of homogenous Hinduism, e.g. she exhorts her men with the injunction 'don't let those infidels pollute our pure land'.

Thus it would seem Akbar is no more alien and exploitative than the Rani herself. But of course, the *Amar Chitra Katha* does not warn us of this.

In *Tansen* and *Birbal the Clever*, we see Akbar's relationship with his famed gems - Birbal and Tansen in the light of the eclecticism and composite culture practised by Akbar. Although friendship and affection prevail every time, there is a note of capriciousness on his part as he freely submits to the rumour-mongering of the jealous courtiers and agrees to banish and punish his favourites at

the slightest pretext. The overall picture we get from these Amar Chitra Kathas is one where Akbar for all his caprice is in essence benign, as shown by his portly and cheerful bearing. This may well be an extension of the Hindu ambience that surrounds him (see the highly aestheticized frames in *Tansen*, [figs.16 & 17]).

In the Amar Chitra Katha on *Jahangir*, we see a very different Akbar. Caught in the forebodings of Jahangir, the cheerful Akbar becomes enmeshed in a dark discourse of court intrigues from where he emerges, as the tormentor. Jahangir is shown as constantly traumatised by the feeling that Akbar does not love him. He is touchy about every snub and the slightest favour shown to his rivals especially Abul Fazal whom he gets killed. If on the surface, Akbar favours Jahangir, in practice, as in the elephant fight, he very ambiguously supports Khusrau's elephant. This to some extent justifies Jahangir's misgivings about his father.

Akbar is the great emperor as is evident in the eclecticism of his invented religion Deen-e-elahi, he is a good guy but there is no out and out eulogy.

For Aurangzeb, I shall use the following Amar Chitra Kathas - 1) Dara Shukoh and Aurangzeb, 2) Chhatrasal, 3)

Durgadas, 4) Raj Singh.

Dara in *Dara Shukoh* and *Aurangzeb* is used as a foil to call Aurangzeb every name that the Hindu reader will be able to vicariously endorse. Dara calls him a 'bigot', 'a prayer loving Mullah who can't be expected to fight, though Dara's military capacities are no better. In the opening sequences, there is an elephant fight where both Aurangzeb and Shujah get thrown off their horses. It requires a Jaisingh to intervene and effortlessly hold the rampaging elephants at bay to the cries of an envious crowd - 'These Rajputs are fearless' [see fig.18]. It is a fact of the Rajput *Amar Chitra Katha* titles that wherever greater Mughal military genius is pitted against the spirited and valorous Rajputs, it is the latter who emerge victorious, e.g. there is a deliberate attempt to undermine Aurangzeb's military genius by playing up his religious fanatic side. He is never shown without his rosary and the Koran in the backdrop. This is not piousness; as is evident some pages later when a delegation of Sanskrit scholars visits Shahjahan's court in order to request him to intervene and stop the cruel pilgrim's tax that Aurangzeb has imposed. While *Shukoh* is the good Muslim, *Aurangzeb* is not.

In *Chhatrasal*, we see Aurangzeb the fanatic at his persecutive best. Even though he doesn't directly come into the frame. Because he lacks military prowess, he gets his back by using the state power and machinery to inflict violence on and harass Hindu devotees. Thus in page 4 [see fig.19], the young Chhatrasal, victim of Mughal persecution (his parents have killed themselves rather than submit to 'the humiliation of being captured') comes upon a scene where the soldiers are whipping Hindu devotees in front of a temple, who run helter-skelter. The text says that young Chhatrasal, 'blind with rage charged at the Mughal soldiers and killed both of them' to the cheers of the devotees. Pictorially, this scene is invested with a lot of moral indignation visible in Chhatrasal's face, as he weilds his sword skillfully and with a lot of relish on the Mughal soldiers, who are shown dramatically falling down. While one soldier is beheaded as is evident from the blood around his neck that is yanked backwards and the blood that drips from Chhatrasal's sword, the final frame shows Chhatrasal's sword (again dripping with blood realistically shown in daubs of red) cutting against the Mughal soldier's blood-stained hands that are the only visible part of his anatomy. Chhatrasal's face is screwed up in an ugly grimace. Action

lines are drawn in semi-circles to follow the swishing movements of Chhatrasal's blade. The overall effect of these drawings is a palpable relish in violence which is defined by a Hindu hitting out at a Muslim with a vengeance.

Given this persecution and bigotry of the Mughals epitomised by Aurangzeb, we have the Rajputs generous and secular spirit enshrined in Durgadas, who makes sure that Aurangzeb's grand children who are in his custody are returned to Aurangzeb proficient in Muslim theology and Koran.

In *Raj Singh*, Amar Chitra Katha's rendition of Bankim's historical novel, there is a cameo in which Chanchal Kumari, the Rajput princess crushes Aurangzeb's picture under her feet to show her aggressive defiance to the general practice of Rajput women marrying Mughal princes, in effect a refusal to become part of his harem, e.g. even Aurangzeb's Rajput wife Jodhpuri Begum expresses hostile feelings against him and wants to warn Chanchal Kumari against marrying him. The story sets off the idealized romance between Chanchal Kumari and Raj Singh who is sent to rescue her, against the sordid and more worldly Muslim love triangle between Daria, Mubarak Khan and Zeb-un-Nisa, (Aurangzeb's daughter) mired in extra-marital relationships. The cumulative effect of this derived narrative on Aurangzeb is a reinforced view about his

evil nature.

This narrative we can see is constituted at the level of private history disclosed in literary texts and ballads. The representation of landscapes, costumes, sensibilities sexual and religious preferences in Amar Chitra Katha not only make use of the literary tactics and plots but transform them by using codes of cinematography (e.g. the shading and silhouetting, and the frames used in the *Tansen* comic). History is narrativised and made anecdotal because of a lack of evidence and also to fit in the 'popular' and dominant perspective of history, e.g. in the comic on Humayun, there is an episode where Humayun is fleeing from the battle scene. On the way his horse plunges into a stream. He is rescued by a 'humble' water carrier. The image is embroidered with the following words - 'when his own kith and kin had proved treacherous a humble water-carrier displayed such loving loyalty' [see fig.20].

The loving loyalty of a humble water carrier becomes an occasion to comment on the treacherous nature of Muslims. But the subtlety is unsettling and proves the point I have been trying to make in this chapter: that history is far too crucial for Amar Chitra Katha to leave it to school textbooks or use it for openly propagandist purpose in the

manner of the RSS shakha literature. Therefore Amar Chitra
Katha produces a completely negotiated version of Indian
history in its annals.

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CHAPTER - III

WOMAN OF SUBSTANCE

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In Amar Chitra Kathas, the figure of the woman is invariably inscribed in mythology. On the one hand, mythic speech decorates and venerates her into a deity or iconic stature, on the other hand, it reduces her to a tautology - a statement of fact/sex.

What marks out Amar Chitra Kathas from other comics in the market, both Indian and foreign, is the considerable visibility of women and the voice invested in them. These representations are however conditional upon terms of pseudo-subjectivity or an object-subject relation such that 'she is an object who is also a subject and so can actively desire her own object status', 'who can adore, attend to comfort and voluntarily prostrate herself in front of the pure subject MAN'.¹ (Simone de Beauvoir from The Second Sex.) (In the context of Amar Chitra Katha, she can burn herself cheerfully for his sake.).

The attempt in the present chapter is to see how the Sati-Savitri-Sita paradigm is mediated in Amar Chitra Kathas to produce a deceptive heterogeneity of representations of women.

While mythology and legend are useful to treat women's marginality from history, at the same time, they provide a cover to the Hindutva forces to re-fashion the Hindu ideal of femininity for a Hindu majoritarian post-Independent India. In the absence of a concrete Imperial power, the restructuring of nation takes the form of re-structuring patriarchies 'under the sign of the upper-caste and masculinist middle-class' whose Swadeshi rhetoric is moreover 'supported and underwritten by powerful international interests'.² While the particular class and caste interests of these fundamentalist forces motivates them to fight the socialist inflection of the Nehruvian measures related to the protection of minority rights and minority development, the inclusion of women and children in these welfarist policies leads them to reformulate their stand against the welfare state. This is because the subsumption of the women question into policies for health and literacy would agree with their programme for women contained within the domestic sphere. One must add here that any positive intervention of the State legal or bureaucratic in bettering the condition of women's lives has been a direct result of the challenge thrown by the left-oriented women's movement that shaped itself through the 70's and 80's - the operative decades of

Amar Chitra Katha.

But as far as Amar Chitra Katha's treatment of woman is concerned, whether it be her deification or conspicuous eroticization and brutalization, one does not find any trace of this challenge; and there is hardly any attempt to temper its blatantly sexist vocabulary. As we saw in the previous chapter, its adaptation of the 19th century nationalist historiography is heavily negotiated and deals with its communal charge in subliminal and surreptitious ways, but the de-politicized arena of mythology, it appears, provides Amar Chitra Katha with a space where woman is directly available for consumption.

I

Discussing representations of women in 'calendar' or 'bazaar' art, Patricia Uberoi points out the two processes namely, 'commoditization of women' and 'tropising of the feminine' that make the heightened visibility of women in popular media - advertisements, bill-boards, hoardings, films and packages - a problematic issue. Therefore, it becomes crucial to locate the stereotype in the cultural context that Uberoi refers to as both 'homogenising and hegemonising'.³ To simply state that a stereotype is a false image would be to discredit its potential for harm and

good and evade the complexity of the relationship between signifier and signified, repression and reality. Since in Amar Chitra Kathas, the stereotype inhabits mythical space, I shall use Roland Barthes' explication of myth as 'a secondary semiological system', or 'meta language' in order to question its ideological underpinnings.

According to Barthes, 'we are dealing in any semiological system not with two, but with three different terms... the signifier, the signified and the sign', the sign being 'the associative total of the first two terms'⁴ e.g. the signifier woman imbued with the signified coyness would give us the sign of the coy woman. This is of course at the level of the language-object relation where the arbitrariness of the relation is apparent. There is nothing definitive or fixed about the coyness of the woman. In fact, she can easily dissociate herself from this coyness in order to assume more empowering signifieds. But myth being 'a secondary semiological system' makes use of the sign transferred from a primary semiological system and uses it as a signifier, e.g. the sign of the coy woman entering mythic space as a signifier is not only drained of the contingency of coyness but it becomes inscribed in her for all eternity. Any other signified she may want to take up would have to be inscribed upon this basic 'signifying consciousness'.

In Amar Chitra Katha mythic speech works at the dual level of picture and word. But picture being more imperative than writing, it inserts itself with instantaneous and primary significance. Thus even if the word bubble were to deploy a woman in a militant and active role, at the level of the imagery, it is her delineation as the coy heroine-eyes lowered in a posture of erotic submission and anticipation within the Sati-Savitri-Sita paradigm, that leaves a mark on the subliminal imagination. For e.g. in *Tales from Durga*, Durga the destructive Sati principle is shown demolishing demons in the battlefield, but her face is suffused in a warm and benign light. The myth, it seems, has lost its historical consciousness even as it enacts that history. As Barthes says, 'things lose the memory that they once were made'.⁵ This suppression of 'the traces of production' of what Amar Chitra Katha calls 'heritage' and 'tradition' under 'a self-evident appearance of eternity'⁶ is what its cultural regeneration project is all about.

The motivation behind this suppression of the invented nature of its projected tradition therefore needs to be investigated at the level of ideology. This brings me to Althusser's position on ideology as constituting an '(illusion/allusion)'al relation to reality.

In Ideology, men represent their *real conditions of existence* to themselves in *imaginary form*.⁷

Not only the form but even the so called 'real conditions of existence' are imaginarily produced. It is this inscription of the imaginary in material practice, in the form of the tacit, the assumed and the unspoken that is responsible for the reproduction of the existing conditions of production and exploitation.

Through its techniques of mass production - oleography, lithography - Amar Chitra Katha is able to replicate habits of thought and images common to generations, thus enabling the perpetuation of certain communities at the cost of others.

Tapati Guha Thakurta referring to calendar art tells us how these pictures with their clever deployment of 'the tactile aura of oil painting, ...play upon the spectator-buyer's sense of acquiring the real thing which the image showed. It opened up for a mass-clientele a novel mode of entering and possessing the pictorial image.'⁸

Amar Chitra Katha's adoption of this kind of representational art form has not only given it a dominant, pervasive appeal but established its crucial edge over

indigenous pictorial representations of the past.

It has done this by forging a trans-regional unified Hindu ancestry, through an exclusive focus on high caste Hindu women (to be able to say to its child readers - "these exalted women are in effect your mothers"). These connections are no doubt borrowed from 19th century orientalist-nationalist attempts to ward off colonial accusations of a degenerate Hindu past consisting of effeminate/barbaric men and abject, victim women. This debate moreover starts locating women within the culture, tradition and nation triumvirate, and using them for what Uberoi calls 'the tropising of the feminine.'

Whether women are sought to be rescued by colonialists in reformist articulations or used as a trope by nationalists/orientalists to 'recount the wonder that was India', what is being contested in the 19th century historiography is not women's 'real conditions of existence' vis-a-vis changing patriarchies but the national identity in strictly religious/Hindu terms.

The Amar Chitra Katha agenda in this respect can be encapsulated in the introductory summary to the issue on Ranak Devi -

The status of women in India through the ages has been conditioned by social, economic and political factors. In ancient India, women were treated with respect. Although women had to look to men for protection, she did not have to live in seclusion.

No restrictions were placed on her movements, nor was she denied the right to education. Gradually women came to be relegated to a position of little or no importance in society. In medieval India, where battles were fought frequently, women came to be confined to her house lest there be a threat to her person and honour.

In spite of the precautions taken, there were instances of women becoming helpless victims of power politics-pawns in the ego games of rival kings.

Ranak Devi (inside cover)

There are many assumptions implicit in the above passage. The idea, it seems, is not so much to deny the existence of a pre-modern/indigenist patriarchy but to prove its superiority to the western patriarchal model brought about by modernity, in other words to say that women never had it so good in the Vedic past. On the one hand they had respect and autonomy, on the other they had to look to men for protection. The 'deliberately classicized tradition' this passage refers to is deeply implicated in the language of liberal bourgeois individualism. The consequent autonomy of self that was invested in women is manifested in rationalisations for Sati as the supreme act of the self and in the case of Savitri it is seen as her need not only 'identify

her life with her husband's... but identify her death with his.'⁹ Rather than proving the social mobility of women, the reference to 'the social, economic and political factors' indicates 'the unalterable hierarchy' of the mythic world, where men hold the key to production and women are granted freedom of movement and the right to education.

The new patriarchy as defined by the nationalists not only borrows from the liberal vocabulary of rights and democracy but seeks to distinguish itself 'not only from the West, but the mass of its own people'.¹⁰ The dasi in Amar Chitra Katha at best remains a silhouetted figure holding a fan in the backdrop. This reformulated patriarchy is negotiated out of the two domains - the inner/spiritual sanctum where women live and the outer/public male sphere. But the politics of segregation is masked by the language of liberal democracy and by the presence of women in both the inner and outer spheres in Amar Chitra Kathas. For e.g., the statement 'she did not have to live in seclusion' refers to the medieval period and can be construed as a dig at the system of 'purdah' and the Indian Islamic arrangements for Muslim women. The Muslim interregnum is anyway constituted to mean 'a threat to her (the Hindu woman's) person and honour'. The Muslim invaders are thus made responsible by this logic

for the fights between Hindu rulers as well in short, for a general degeneration of moral standards. Also the Amar Chitra Katha women's appearance in the public space is a highly mediated one. She either comes in disguise or in 'exceptional' given roles like the court dancer, the queen of the dacoits, the woman spy, the Buddhist nun, the warrior queen etc.

In this mythic space, women are no longer people 'but goddess spirits and as such not alive or growing but sculpted by the requirement of the emerging power'.¹¹

It is a notable feature that most women-based Amar Chitra Kathas end with either a pictorial or word representation of a sculpted icon, sculpted according to the region-specific dimensions and style [see figs.21, 22, 23]. Irrespective of whether these women were born in the hoary Vedic pasts or not, they are embodiments of the Sati-Shakti principle, and hence the tendency towards their iconisation. This deity stature is acquired in the course of the narrative which constructs the woman as the victim of 'power politics-pawns in the ego games of rival kings'.

While Shakti is the provisional aggressive female form, Sati is the eternal feminine principle. Thus every Shakti rupa embodied by the un-conventional Amar Chitra Katha

heroine needs must return to the Sati status quo. The assumption of Shakti identities is moreover related in 19th century nationalist historiography to the onslaught of colonialism, and as an example to the men folk to activate themselves. This is because the territory of the nation is made analogous to the female body and colonialism therefore becomes akin to violating the purity of the women of the nation. Thus the struggle is conceived very definitive over the site of the woman's body. The two Rajputani tales that became most pertinent in this context are the grisly tales of Panna and Hadi Rani. While Panna, the queen's maid embodies the Sati principle sacrificing her own son for the sake of the throne of Mewar, Hadi Rani enacts the Sati principle by be-heading herself and presenting her head as a memento and example to her husband, who hesitates on his way to the battlefield. This is intolerable to Hadi's sense of Rajput pride. She comes up with this irrefutable logic

It is my physical form which makes him waver. Why not destroy this obstacle?

The danger she perceives and which leads her to this act of Sati is not to her own physical being, but the extended female self of Prabhavati, a Rajput princess whom Aurangzeb wants to forcefully marry. Besides, she doesn't want the

memory of her physical form to weaken her husband's resolve to fight. It is with this intent and also from a sense of propriety vis-a-vis the danger that is facing Prabhavati, that Hadi Rani does not let her husband consummate the marriage. Hadi's mission is successful because inspired by his wife's sacrifice, Ratna Singh fights valiantly to save the Rajput honour and having gained victory, kills himself to join the brave Hadi. But for this reciprocal act of Ratna Singh, most Amar Chitra Kathas have the same logic of Sati. Women burn themselves so that that men can fight without worrying about their women's honour or get weakened by desire for their bodies.

The Amar Chitra Katha issue on *Ranak Devi* is about the folk heroine from Gujarat whose tales the synopsis tells us,

'are recounted in countless homes of Gujarat and whom little girls are taught to look upon as the very embodiment of virtues which a woman should aspire to possess.'

Sati here is not an act of self-erasure but an act of self-fulfilment. Since it is so inscribed in the self, the question of an external/institutional principle imposing or commanding this act cannot arise in this discourse. External agency is totally superfluous as far as Sati is concerned. At best, the external agency can facilitate or

interrupt the act. Consequently, we have a narrative in *Ranak Devi* whose progress depends entirely on how the subject overcomes the obstacles placed on her way to Sati-dom. The narrative proceeds in a series of vignettes of torture whose intensity keeps increasing successively not only in terms of Ranak's abjectness but the reader's impatience with the entire ritual of torture such that, one wants it anyway to end somehow. This contains all the elements of rape as described by Susan Griffin in 'the Politics of Rape' as 'the obsessive representation of an eroticized female masochism'.¹² From Made from this Earth:

...a woman's erote femininity is measured by the degree to which she needs to be hurt, needs to be possessed, needs to be abused....¹²

Ranak's series of misfortunes take place in the following order. Firstly, her husband is killed in the battlefield thanks to the treachery of his nephews, even as Ranak sits in front of the goddess and prays for his well being. Secondly, the nephew leads Siddharaj, the enemy to her bed chamber where he makes a pass at her. He goes on to kill her two children, the baby by throwing it brutally against the floor and the young son with a sword, in front of Ranak's horrified eyes. All the gruesome details of the violence are built into the shots. The middle panel in page

24 shows Ranak holding her dying son's head on her lap as he cries for 'wa... a... ter'. His eyes are open as Siddharaj decrees that no one should give him water. Next to them is the bloody corpse of the baby. Hereafter, Ranak's desire for becoming a Sati keeps intensifying with every act of torture inflicted upon her. Siddharaj leads her to the battlefield where he severs the dead king's head and holds it tantalisingly in front of her eyes, but refuses to give it to her as she holds out her hand to receive it. Ranak's efforts to secure her husband's head make her pursue Siddharaj all the way to Gujarat on foot as he rides on a horse. Through the journey she keeps pleading with Siddharaj to give her the head 'so I may join him in death'. As her abjectness increases, her spiritual/magical powers also begin manifesting themselves. Mount Girnar is so moved by her plight that it rolls down its boulders in sympathy, and at night Ranak's spectre haunts and curses Siddharaj for torturing a pious Hindu widow. But this only increases his decision to prevent Ranak from being a Sati. Thus the act of Sati is totally inscribed in woman's autonomous will, it is totally dissociated from any religio-scriptural commands. Thus even as Siddharaj provides Ranak with her husband's head and a pyre to burn herself, he takes perverse pleasure in not letting anyone light it. 'Now let me see how you

become a Sati Ranak, ...now why don't you work your miracles?' he taunts her. So finally Ranak prays to Mother Amba to light the pyre and the next moment it bursts into flames. The next panel shows people scrambling to collect the 'sacred embers' and the last two illustrations show the shrine 'where people come from far and near to pay homage to her memory' [see fig.21]. The process of deification is simultaneous with the transcendental immolation of the female body, the root of all malaise.

Other folk heroines who are shown similarly sublimated include Joymati of Assam and Kannagi of Tamil Nadu. Both have shrines built in their honour as emblematic of their sculpted goddess status.

In the Shakti-Sati paradigm of Amar Chitra Kathas, while the woman is seen as naturally given to Sati as an act, her donning of Shakti forms is 'constructed' and provisional, contingent upon certain historical moments. While Bankim's *Devi Chowdhury Rani* depicts this historically given role Bhai Veer Singh's *Sharan Kaur* shows the opposite, where her Shakti form is more real than her abjectness even though the Shakti rupa is an outcome of training. But *Sharan Kaur* is an exception rather than the rule. Moreover her identity is wrought on the text of Sikhism, a religion constructed in

opposition to Hindu principles as much as it is represented to be the training ground to fight Mughal persecution [see figs.25-27].

The introduction to *Sharan Kaur*, an adaptation of Bhai Veer Singh's novel says, 'how, given an incentive, a positive philosophy to boost a morale and proper training, even a timid and shy woman can be transformed into a fearless and brave heroine'. Helplessness we have been told in the *Guru Nanak* issue, is anathema for Sikhs. Thus even as *Sharan Kaur* is first inducted as a helpless victim, her training as a spy, entails the following things - physical agility, quick wittedness, committing murders in cold blood and swordsmanship. All these features mark her off from the Sati stereotype of passive erotic compliance. Somewhere down the line, her masculinised body and self is supposed to put men (Hindu men) to shame for they were unable to come to her rescue when she was abducted by the Mughal soldiers. But even as her Shakti manifestation is prompted by the context of Muslim aggression, it is not a provisional state of affairs as it is also prompted by something as eternal as saving a woman's honour. Ambushed by four Pathans, *Sharan* realises that 'it was useless to play the helpless woman' and so she challenges them to a fight and outwits them by her swordsmanship.

In *Devi Chowdhury Rani*, the Devi's deification is a deliberate strategy in order to rally men around a cause, the cause being, the robbing of the rich to donate amongst the poor Robin Hood. The Robin Hood here is Bhabhani Pathak who wants a potent symbol of queen mother that will sufficiently inspire his band of dacoits to obey him. Devi is chosen because 'she has beauty, money, courage' the requisites to command worship. But she still has to be trained to be queen - in martial arts, literature, sacrificial rituals etc. to confirm her Shakti incarnation. But the ideology of 'Pativrata' and 'Sahadharmini' are so deeply entrenched (as embodiment of the eternal Sati principle) that Devi is shown tired of 'playing queen' and wants to go back to her domestic life. Thus Debi, the fiery and notorious leader of the bandits returns to her polygamist and spineless husband's house as a new bride, her past neatly wound up, except as the narrative tells us, 'that her training in the forest helped Prafulla to become an ideal house wife....' The Shakti principle is extremely provisional and holds till the token lesson is taught. Thus one sees that the either-or of the Sati-Shakti paradigm is a deceptive one because there really isn't a choice between the two principles as they are not equally balanced. While the Shakti

rupa is an active principle and Sati as an act is also an active role, Sati as the eternal feminine principle is the status quo to which the Shakti rupa must revert. Sati as an act of self-erasure is often the culmination of a career of Sati as an eternal embodiment. Thus in the Sati-Shakti paradigm while Shakti is provisional Sati is not. This leads me on to discuss in the next section the means by which Amar Chitra Katha depicts a highly mobile status-quo.

II

In the mythic space, since women have the best of both worlds they must be shown cutting across the inside and the outside. This is achieved at the level of the images by investing the domestic space with the natural ambience of the world outside and domesticating the outside with a sense of an artful decor. The domestic sphere for e.g. is extended to include nature such that Nature - lush, pure and innocent becomes woman's natural home. The houses she inhabits are full of gardens and groves. She is usually seen clinging to some creeper or flower bough. This nature investment in women also enables the artists to imbue the heroine with a seductivity that needs must be mediated and euphemised over as it is intended for an audience of child readers. But in draping the sexual potential of women's bodies,

it invariably makes use of diaphanous material and clothing of a minimal, skimpy cut, thereby enhancing the eroticity of women-figures. In the process it also differentiates Hindu garments from the fully covered, heavy texture of Muslim garments, as if to emphasise the absence of stitching in Vedic times, knots abound in the costumes of goddesses and apsaras, as a knot below the navel, and a knot to tie the thin piece of cloth around the breasts. But difference is also sought to be asserted from the 'vulgar' label that attaches to the reclining and cavorting nudes of European neo-classical paintings from where Ravi Varma and his descendants borrowed their models. Tapati Guha Thakurta elaborates vis-a-vis Ravi Varma's Pauranic paintings -

`nudes entered Ravi Varma's compositions through a side-door, their modesty retained by a smattering of clothing their Indianness established by the new roles they took on from the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Sanskrit epics. It seemed there was an inverse relationship between the mythic and the erotic in these paintings of Ravi Varma - as if ancient myths and legends provided the artist the license to indulge in a sensual display of women's bodies, while the erotic image itself found a social and divine cover.³

For example, in *Amar Chitra Kathas*, allusion to the heroine's physical beauty is immediately followed by calling into mind her goddess stature or connection as the case may be. As Rukmini walks to the temple in *Krishna and the False*

Vasudeva, 'the myriad eyes' of her suitors' 'follow her every movement, drinking in her beauty' [see figs.29 & 30]. The panel shows an equilibrium between the sacred and the profane. At one end, a suitor sighs, 'Alas! she can never be mine,' at the other end, another pipes in that 'she is the Goddess of wealth incarnate'. This is followed by a panel where Rukmini is shown making elaborate offerings to an icon of Parvati, addressed as 'the faithful consort of Shiva'. The icon is in a position of frontality, it has flattened contours showing the Goddess' flat non-human face and closed eyes. Contrasted against this sculpted icon is the flesh and blood form of the sensuous Rukmini, who we realise must occupy the middle ground between gods and humans - thus confirming the nymph like status of the Vedic women. This simultaneously legitimises the male voyeurism 'by directly incorporating the erotic experience within the religious and mythological narrative'.¹⁴ In the Amar Chitra Katha issue on *Shiva and Parvati*, male voyeurism is naturalised in a frame that is directly borrowed from the theme of a bathing Sussann spied on by the elders.¹⁵ Parvati who has failed to seduce Shiva with her beauty now resorts to severe physical penances. Two curious sages keep steady watch over her activities from behind trees and bushes, sometimes wondering at her endurance, at other times worrying about

the fact that she is starving herself. The penances not only bring down Shiva but are supposed to enhance Parvati's beauty 'like gold burnished through fire'. Is this then a prescription for beauty or a legitimation of the vrata or fasting ritual prevalent among Hindu women?

Also, goddesses in general and Vedic women do not have to undergo pregnancy. Parvati for e.g. is divested of her reproductive function. Kartika is born of Shiva's sperm alone. Sexual union is delinked from the reproductive function. Artificial births consequently rule the roost in the ancient past of Amar Chitra Kathas. The attempt here is not so much to critique the received myths per se even as I cannot help critiquing them; since there might not be a consensus over its reception, but to see how Amar Chitra Katha handles the representation of sexuality and sexual roles inherent in these myths as it is particularly pertinent to children. For e.g. in The Birth of the Kuru Princes, Kunti refuses to mate with other men as Pandu her husband enjoins her to do, Pandu tries to overcome her problems of morality by invoking a more glorious past, where 'women were free to conduct their lives as they desired. They were not even bound to one man.... The practice was considered right, and not immoral. Besides, it is eternally favourable to women.' Thus even this female utopia of the

past is used to divest Kunti of whatever limited autonomy and choice she has in matters of her own sexuality. The above argument confirms Amar Chitra Katha logic because in the name of acknowledging women's autonomous status in the past, it deprives Kunti of the present by letting Pandu decide who her partners in mating should be.

Pandu's union with Madri is described in quite explicit language. Madri looks 'irresistable' to Pandu, evoked in the metaphors of 'spring stirring' and therefore he seeks 'a compulsive union' with her even as he knows that this will lead to his death as prophesied by the deer's curse.

There is considerable sexual rivalry between Madri and Kunti, the two wives of Pandu. Madri is shown to be jealous of Kunti because she has been chosen as the reproducing organ of the Pandu lineage. Kunti too is jealous of Madri's fatal consummation with Pandu. She reproaches Madri -

This hero had all along been guarded by me with benevolent care. How could he overlook the restraints of the deer's curse? ...O Madri you should have protected him, why was he *tempted* in this secluded place? ...How could he *bestir* himself, in this manner while with you?

and finally,

Madri, you are more fortunate than I because you witnessed the bloom of delight on the face of our husband.

This is accompanied by an inset bubble signifying Kunti's tortured imagination that shows Madri and Pandu in rapturous embrace [see fig.31].

Bheema and Hidimbaa's union is referred to as 'a sport' in the Mahabharat series on *Ghatotkacha* [see fig.32].

She sported with Bheema in various places till in due course she gave birth to a mighty son.

This mighty son instantly grows up to be a young man as a concession to Hidimbaa's demoness status. Thus we see that sexual union that is generally euphemised over is openly represented or referred to in 'the case of the exceptional woman' figures like Madri the temptress, Hidimbaa the demoness, Padmavati the seeming sorceress and Amrapali the prostitute/courtesan.

Sexualisation for the venerated woman of the Hindu high caste/class takes place through other means for e.g. Savitri is given the best training in music, philosophy and astrology. Access to education and the highest learning is not shown to be a male prerogative. But this is contingent on the consciousness of the mother who knows 'she has to be sent away to another home', even as the father tells her that girls 'are like flowers and will be scented any place

they go.' The primacy of the father and daughter relationship in Amar Chitra Kathas can be seen in the context of the premium given to girl children in government policy culminating in 1990-2000 being declared the SAARC decade of the girl child.

In Amar Chitra Katha, it takes the pattern of the daughter refusing to leave the father's home, for e.g., as Savitri comes of age, her father becomes conscious of her sexuality as he watches her on her lone promenades to the temple hill through his palace window. As a passing horseman pauses to admire her, the father suddenly realises that she has to be married off [see figs.33 & 34]. But Savitri is so over-qualified that no one is willing to accept her as bride. Swayamvara is the only option left to her. Savitri refuses this method (not marriage so much) and tells her father she would rather stay with him than go in search of grooms. The picture text inflects Savitri's consternation at the prospect of leaving the parental home/father with an erotic undertone in the way her profile is projected in the foreground with closed eyes and the father looking on, as he says, 'sin will befall the father who doesn't marry off his daughter' [see fig.34]. Somewhere along the line, due to the dominant representational mode in which women are shown,

and because the female here is agonising over the separation from her father, an accidental incestuous angle is introduced which seems to point to the father's awareness of the destructive sexual potential of his daughter.

In *Padmavati*, Padmavati keeps her lover imprisoned by a bewitching system of sign language that only the lover's friend can decipher for him. She does this because she bears an undue attachment to her father and vice versa and hence parting cannot be conceived. She has to be proved a witch before the father can bear to part with her and banish her from the kingdom. Only in *Hothal*, the relationship between the father and daughter is not resolved in the conventional sense of the daughter leaving the father's house. Hothal stays by her father's side till he breathes his last and continues to live alone even after her mission of avenging the result to her father is accomplished. Her marriage to Ojhadham is not shown as destined in the sense that she is not constructed in the typical mould of the feminine waiting in anticipation for the masculine.

But despite the profusion of doting liberal fathers, there can be no doubt about the centre of authority. Savitri has to ask her father for permission even when she wants to take a short walk; Parvati has to ask her father before

she can say 'yes' to Shiva, and Sanjna, Surya's wife thinks twice before returning to her father's home lest he should say, 'a woman's rightful place is by the husband'. The lesson is to transfer one's loyalties effectively from one centre of patriarchal authority to another.

The swayamvara or the ceremony in which the woman is supposed to choose her own partner is one of the glorified features of the ancient past. But far from being an exercise in self choice, it is an arena where the father and brother of the woman put her on display in a physical space arranged for this purpose. Her so-called autonomy is a spectacle since the conditions of her choosing are heavily defined. Under strictly regulated conditions - rules of archery, a selective list of invitees, dance performances etc. - the marriage arena is converted into a battlefield where men fight over each other to be the sole proprietors of a female body. The woman becomes the prize object, the excuse for the show of strength, armoury, and the latest fighting skills. And in most cases, like the Rukmini and Draupadi swayamvara, the bloodshed is often directed against the woman's family. Frustrated by Arjuna's winning of Draupadi, the gathered Kshatriya princes want to turn their wrath against Drishtadyumna and Draupada; in Rukmini's case, Krishna not only almost kills Rukmi, the brother of Rukmini,

but humiliates him in the worst possible way. He shaves off one side of his head and moustache in front of the stricken eyes of his sister, when Rukmi tries to stop Krishna from abducting her. Rukmini is not greatly affected. But this is not all. The Swayamvara not only includes fights, archery competitions, military displays, chases and abductions, but is followed by the rites of marriage where the winning groom is felicitated with a feast and a dowry.

Beyond this romantic whisking away by the macho dream-lover lies an idyllic world of the extended family that consists of the entourage of co-wives and their children, for e.g. when Arjuna brings Subhadra to his family, Draupadi refuses to welcome them. A sulking and unreasonable Draupadi is however won over when Subhadra prostrates herself before her in a gesture of submission, 'I am your maid, elder sister, I will do whatever you want me to'. Draupadi we are told is 'moved and ashamed'. Repentant, she embraces Subhadra saying, 'let our husband be ever prosperous'.

Polygamy thus is the most naturalized institution in Amar Chitra Kathas [see fig.35].

III

This brings one to the typology of heroines in Amar Chitra kathas: the Mythological, the Classical-Romantic, the Folk heroine, the Freedom fighter and others.

I The mythology category includes goddesses, minor goddesses, celestial nymphs, humans born as a result of some God-given boon, and spouse of Gods e.g. Durga, Sita, Parvati, Ganga, Savitri, Urvashi, Menaka and Sanjna.

Most of these Goddesses do not have an independent standing; Parvati is worshipped because she is the consort of Shiva; the various Shakta cults are of course shown to worship Kali in her various manifestations but their anti-Brahministic rites are highlighted to give them a negative accent [see figs.37 & 39] associated, with sorcery, black magic and human sacrifice. If Ganga need to be brought down to earth, Bhagirath doesn't pray directly to her but to Brahma and Shiva who will tame her uncontrollable tumult and flow (a metaphor for female sexuality). She is depicted as a nubile nymph cascading down as she steps off the threshold of heaven [see fig.40]. She says to herself mischievously that she would take the unwarned Shiva by surprise and carry him all the way to the nether world by the force of her torrent. But instead, Shiva catches her in his matted

locks. Ganga is shown flailing her arms about, distraught. Ganga is the continuum between the sacred and the secular, between heaven and earth, but her sacredness is a function not of any internal principle but of her contact with the various sages she encounters and who check her terrible flow and sanctify her further, as for e.g., Jahnavi who gulps her down in one mouthful. The Ganga story illustrates the point that even in Goddess-women, there is always scope for greater purification and improvement.

II The Classical Romantic Nayika embodying the literary and aesthetic ideal of the feminine is drawn from the Sanskrit epics - the Mahabharata and Ramayana stories for e.g. Kalidasa's Malavikagmantra, Bhavbhuti's Malati Madhava and Harsha's Ratnavali. What is celebrated here is not only love and female sexuality in their myriad dramatic nuances, but also the concept of conjugal/companionate marriages within a broadly polygamous structure for instance in Ratnavali, after a series of misunderstandings and heartburns, when the jealous first queen realises that the heroine, subject of her husband's amorous attention is actually a cousin and of royal lineage, she is overcome by shame and instantly takes steps to bring about the union between the two separated lovers. Vasavdatta leads Ratnavali to King

Udayana and says - 'My lord, accept my cousin as your wife'. This is generally the paradigm for endings in this genre.

III Folk heroines - We have already discussed Ranak Devi Panna and Hadi Rani. The idea is a valorization of the region-specific Pan-Indian Hindu feminine ideal of sacrifice and 'pativrata'. But despite this pan-Indian projection, the Rajput/Maratha/Sikh women hold pride of place in enshrining this motif. Joymati from Assam and Kannagi from Tamil Nadu are the exceptions. Joymati is shown tied to a tree, blood trickling down her forehead as a man with a whip tries to extract information about her husband's whereabouts. The husband does come a couple of times to see if his wife wants him to surrender. But each time she drives him away fearing an insult to her sacrifice. This is the enactment of sati all over again so that the husband is free to accede to the throne. The woman's sacrifice of course takes place behind the scenes, in the domain of the legendary. Also there is some chance, as the introduction says, that people 'will doubt her very existence'. This is answered by the emblems of deification set up in her honour 'a temple built for her by lake Jaisagar' and a wooden post in the lake to mark the peepal tree to which Joymati was tied as she breathed her last.' Kannagi adapted from the Tamil epic *Silappadikaram* enacts the myth of the pure and devoted

woman, the sati whose anger burns down the city of Madurai to ashes. But her fury doesn't command total destruction as even in the peak of her fury she remembers to spare the old the disabled and the children. This tale too ends in a sculpted icon and temples built to honour her memory [see figs.22 & 23].

IV Rani of Jhansi, Rani of Kittur, Durgavati, Rani Abbaka Freedom fighters - are some of them. The task of reading the nation in retrospect prompts Amar Chitra Katha to see these women in more or less the same light - women who left the confines of their domestic sphere to engage in combat in the battlefield and thus win martyrdom. But what motivates these women to don the male armour and storm into the battlefield is not only the idea of territorial liberation, but also the sense of preserving the kingdom till the regent prince grows up to claim and defend his own. Their role as mother is what is foregrounded.

Thus we find qualifications in the text to the effect that these warrior queens were not naturally aggressive. It was only because of a lack of a peaceful alternative that they took to arms (for e.g. the Rani of Kittur). But having donned the armour, they could surpass any man in terms of logistics and military skills (driven by the furies as it

were). Another notable fact is that the queen is the only fighting woman in the entire army. Female leadership is thus accepted only on terms of exceptionality. Mass recruitment of women as troopers, gunners and nurses is evident in *Rani of Jhansi* in a token illustration to preempt the formation of the latter days Rani of Jhansi regiment under the INA. More prominence is given to the kum-kum ceremony that is organised to inspire confidence in women where traditional women discuss amongst themselves the kindness and generosity of the queen, 'I must tell my husband....' [see fig.41]

V As regards Heroines from 19th century novels, I have already discussed them like *Devi Chowdhury Rani*, *Kapala Kundala*, from Bankim's novels, Sundari, Satwant Kaur and Sharan Kaur adopted from Bhai Veer Singh's novels.

VI *Others* refers to a category where women are doubly othered. Othered not just with respect to men but from the high caste Hindu woman of royal lineage enshrined in the Amar Chitra katha corpus. Their departure from the idealised feminine is sought to be rationalised in terms of the essential wiliness of women. This wiliness becomes apparent in the slippages of patriarchy. But because myth is a totalising structure, it cannot admit slippages or gaps in

its structure; it therefore needs to incorporate them in the either-or binary either as a golden-hearted prostitute or the demoness termed-woman. While the demoness Hidimbaa proves her worth by betraying her monster brother Hidimbaa in order to prove her loyalty to her human lover Bheema; the prostitute Amrapali is unable to accept Bimbisara, even after he decides to renounce his violent ways because she is the property of the kingdom and is bound to the state that patronized her. The state has moreover legalised her prostitute status by building a garden house for her over which complete vigilance is kept [see fig.]. But these women operate in the same field of patriarchal force as the more venerated heroines. What is instructive here is to see how women who don't seem to fit this either or binary are presented. These come in the racially inflected forms of blood sucking demonesses, - poison-fanged Putnas, bloodshot eyes, canine teeth, black skin, green horns are their pictorial features [see fig.38]. These ugly spectacles have to be taught a lesson - for e.g. Surpanakha's ear and nose are cut off; the moment Padmavati is proved a witch, she is abandoned in the jungle, and so is Vasavdatta. Vasavdatta is a dancing girl who doesn't entertain or fancy any men in the city. The only man she ever fancies is Upagupta, the Buddhist monk who tells her that he would come to her only in

her need. Thus she is driven away from the city, pelted with stones literally for her refusal to conform with its laws [see fig.42]. Only when these women give up their material existence by seeking out Buddha's path are they able to transcend themselves and regain respectability.

The problem as I see it in Amar Chitra Kathas is how to handle the contempt which is the other and invariable side of veneration, the official attitude towards woman. For instance in Subhadra, the classical poise of the archetypically feminine Subhadra is shaken as Arjuna whisks her away in the chariot [see fig.50]. The illustration shows Subhadra being picked up in a whizzing-whoosh movement such that her skirts ride up revealing shaded dark regions of her inner legs, and her face is a grimace as she loses balance and utters an incoherent 'wh... wh... what' in comic-derisive fashion. The obscenity angle of the picture is because of this derisive element.

In the massive heterogeneity of stories on women in Amar Chitra Kathas is there then not a single woman whose story defies the mythic incorporation?

Hothal, the medieval Apsara in her human incarnation resolves her life contrary to the rules of the mythic struc-

ture. She is not eroticized to begin with. She is neither depicted as frail and nubile in the tradition of celestial nymphs. More than love, it is friendship that rules the relationship between Hothal and Ojhadham. He is drawn to her by the power of their friendship. There is an almost androgynous quality to their attraction. Moreover, she is the only heroine who doesn't submit to the rules of patriarchy. She flies away the moment Ojhadham breaks the oath of secrecy to which she had sworn him concerning her origins. Ojhadham, under pressure to save his male honour/respectability and satisfy his sons' curiosity of their mother's patrilineality reveals her celestial origins. The circumscription of what seems a medieval folk tale by a Vedic Apsara is the only device that can redeem it into the fold of mythic speech. But the narrative still invests Hothal with a series of empowering signifieds.

From the tale of Hothal, one also becomes aware of the basic signifying consciousness of myth in Amar Chitra Katha as constituted by the sign of freedom. This sign of freedom is moreover, like the freedom available in heaven, which Hothal tires of as leisure associated with freedom is forced down one's throat. Similarly the freedom principle of the mythic heroines of Amar Chitra Katha is so given and naturalised as to be almost unacceptable.

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12. Susan Griffin, 'The Politics of Rape' in Made from this Earth, quoted in The Oppositional Imagination.
13. Tapati Guha Thakurta, op. cit., p.WS-97.

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15. The theme of Sussanna Spied on by the elders is a subject taken up with relish by artists of the 16th to the 18th centuries, "as an opportunity to display the female nude...." Representations of Sussanna and the Elders is also a telling portrayal of the way a biblical theme that upheld female chastity was converted in the hands of male painters into 'a celebration of sexual opportunity'. Guha Thakurta, op. cit., p.WS-97.

CHAPTER - IV

MARKET , POLITICS

MARKET, POLITICS

In 1967, UNESCO endorsed the use of comics as a vehicle for communicating cultural values. Prior to that the comics market in India was completely dominated by foreign titles - Phantom, Mandrake and Superman being the more popular ones for e.g. Phantom was not only serialized by the 'Illustrated Weekly of India' but it was also brought out in comic magazine form by the Times of India Group, as a means to utilize the sheet-fed Gravure machines in the non-calendar season. *The Times of India* Phantom comic was under the guardianship of Anant Pai who devised the tactic of devoting half the comic, 16 pages, to indigenous material scripted by him with titles like 'Around the World with Kunju Pillai'. By 1967 however, Pai was disillusioned with the exclusive profusion of western children's literature and the concomitant colonisation of young minds educated in English medium schools and so he hit upon the proposal of 'acquainting' Indian children with their 'cultural heritage' in consonance with the UNESCO dictum. The Indian Classics Illustrated or Amar Chitra Katha was the outcome. To begin with, it did not have any takers least of all the Times of India management who had by then converted the comic magazine into a full-fledged 'Phan-

tom' edition. India Book House Pvt Ltd., under H.G. Mirchandani was the only publishing concern willing to take on the experiment. Warming up with the publication of 10 Classics Illustrated titles like Cindrella, Jack and the Bean stalk, for which it had rights in 8 Indian languages, the 11th title *Krishna* published in February 1970 became the first title of the Amar Chitra Katha corpus. Thus, in order to counter western cultural imperialism, foreign comics in Indian languages, gave way to Amar Chitra Katha, the first native/Indian comic in English. Indeed, it was translated in 38 different languages as the sales gradually picked up, but the master copy was always in English.

The present chapter focuses on Amar Chitra Katha as a cultural commodity. By cultural commodity, my reference is not only to a product of the capitalist mode of production but to its cultural circumscription that strives to mask this commodity existence or which like 'gift-exchange... pretends to put the law of self-interest into abeyance' and pretends to be 'playing for stakes that are non-material and not easily quantified'. This is evidenced not only in the changed title of the banner under which Amar Chitra Katha was sold, i.e., India Book House Education Trust instead of India Book House Pvt. Ltd., but in numerous advertisements

that present Amar Chitra Katha as gift objects, a collector's item such as 'Give Your Child a Gift He'll Treasure Forever. In one such advertisement titled 'The Birthday Present', a little boy is shown talking to his 'aunty' on the phone, telling her what gift he would like for his birthday - 'Amar Chitra Katha, of course' [see fig.44].

It is necessary here to clarify that children's literature is in any case characterised by the spirit of gift exchange since in all but a few cases it is bought by parents for their children. Amar Chitra Katha simply makes use of this context to define its national educative function of spreading cultural values.

Nicholas Garnham defines culture as 'the production and circulation of symbolic meaning... a material process of production and exchange, part of, and in significant ways determined by, the wider economic processes of society with which it shares many common features.' The cultural process he further adds, 'is as much, if not more about creating audiences or publics as it is about producing cultural artefacts and performances.'² Distribution then becomes the key process through which a commodity acquires its cultural significance. In case of Amar Chitra Katha, the process of distribution involves complex ideological manoeuvring with a

whole set of differential institutions - the bourgeois democratic state, the educational apparatus, various minority communities, political representations and the media industry. This manifests in the form of audience maximization - an imperative need of the goods and service industry. As Garnham points out, 'the cultural commodity resists that homogenization process which is one of the material results of the abstract equivalence to which the commodity form aspires.'³ The resultant drive for novelty within cultural production means that in general the costs of reproduction are marginal in relation to the costs of production and hence the thrust towards an expanding audience base as 'the preferred profit maximization strategy'. This is evident in the serialised nature of Amar Chitra Katha's distribution networking - sold through news-stalls such that the anticipation for the next title was perpetually kept alive by the publicizing of it in the previous issue. At one point of time, Amar Chitra katha was bringing out almost 3 issues per month. The heterogeneity of its titles was an added factor in keeping any homgeneising label at bay. Before discussing the dynamics of Amar Chitra Katha's consumer classification, one must reflect upon the political ambience in which it flourished to ascertain the true nature of this heterogeneity.

The operative decades of Amar Chitra Katha spanned between the seventies and the nineties. These were the years of the erosion of the Nehruvian secular and socialist ideal. They were marked moreover by a growing elitisation in Congress politics, the formation of coalition groupings and the rampant communalisation of the electorate in 'a milieu where division and oppositions among communities are institutionalised as political facts'.⁴ This broad coalitional logic among the ruling strata was sought to be translated into 'a national popular' consensus by means of mass media channels. These were not just anonymous and impersonal but at the same time they allowed for the participation and interaction of millions of people who were otherwise unknown to each other. The fact that Amar Chitra Katha also hogged a part of this national visual space transmitting in the process, symbols and images that embody 'a common experience and a collective memory', made it instrumental in 'winning and shaping consent so that the power of the dominant classes appears both legitimate and natural'.⁵

Thus, Amar Chitra Katha not only identified its potential consumer, but also shaped and classified it - youth markets aligned to the latest technological finds, brought up in urban set-ups and roughly in the age group 8-14 years.

Children the consumers were seen as distinct from parents, the buyers. While the child was seduced by the 'fun' element involved in comics as a medium, the parent was given the line that this fun would only enhance the educative potential of these comics. The idea was to project Amar Chitra Katha as tailor made to suit market demands on education. The increment sought through investment in Amar Chitra Katha would then be returned via the same market circuit. For example, the mixture of mythology, legend and history in which Amar Chitra Katha sells itself approximates to the general knowledge that is an imperative for competitive examinations like the U.P.S.C.

But even as the production and consumption of Amar Chitra Katha is seen to be driven by the pragmatics of the market, Amar Chitra Katha fulfilled a real need among the Hindu middle classes for secular traditional literature. In other words, Amar Chitra Katha acted as a substitute to the grandmother figure with her sack of tales from the Puranas, the Upanishads, the Sanskrit epics, Kathasaritsagar, etc. in an ambience characterised by nuclear families, cut-throat competition and spiralling consumerism.

These tales were secular as opposed to sacred, to the extent that they were part of an everyday life. But they

were nevertheless embedded in religious traditions - the rituals, code of ethics, and the ideology of ruling Hindu culture. Hence they couldn't be universally applied to a nation that was constituted on secular principles. These were enshrined in the Constitution as an impartiality of the state in matters of religion. But ironically, this very impartiality allowed the state to overlook rationalisations of culture such as the one proposed by Amar Chitra Katha. Amar Chitra Katha's patriotism that selectively drew from a fixed Hindu past could at best claim a trans-regional Hindu consciousness for itself, since it down played serious caste and class divisions.

The problematic lies with what Joseph Tharamangalam calls the traditional Hindu model of secularism, in terms of ancient Hindu ideals, religious tolerance and equality of all religions - the metaphysical basis for this model being 'the transcendent unity of ultimate reality'.⁶ Amar Chitra Katha espouses this high Vedantic core too, as is evident in its absorption of the teachings of Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism and Sufism. As John Stratton Hawley reveals, Amar Chitra Katha thoroughly domesticates the subversive nature of the bhakti movements and their attack on the hierarchic basis of Hindu faith (not just its caste system) by reducing it to an equality of vision that an enlightened saint sup-

posedly shares with a low-born.

This Hindu model of secularism is not a viable one not just because "its mode of toleration has historically included absorption, subjugation and marginalisation of religious minorities",⁷ but because the expanse of it is so large that it threatens to lose sight of itself unless it defined itself against some 'other'. This 'other' conveniently takes the form of Islam and Christianity. Most Amar Chitra Kathas contain an antagonist who is either a Muslim in consonance with the Mughal/medieval period or Christian in the British/modern period. Their alienness has to be maintained at all costs in order to justify an ancient Hindu past they did not share and which in effect no one could have shared.

The attempt in this chapter is to see how this communally inflected agenda of Amar Chitra Katha works itself into its sales strategies. What are the contradictions and diversions produced in conforming ideology to profitability?

On the one hand, Amar Chitra Katha ideology works in the interests of national integration based on a homogenised Hindu past and marked by the force of an indigenous cultural imperialism. On the other, its saleability lies in the at-

tractiveness of its medium. These include the action panels and the colourful continuity pictures aping cinematic movement. Its desirability as commodity value further inheres in the images that are made seductively realistic by techniques of western illusionistic painting and mechanical reproduction such as oleography, photography and lithography. Consequently the comic book can be read at two levels - words and pictures, words ideally kept to a minimum. So pictures have a definitely more insidious-subliminal effect as discussed in the first chapter. It is also evident in the following example in the Amar Chitra Katha on Guru Nanak [see fig.45].

A panel is divided into three frames and is headed by the words - 'During his wide travels, he enlightened and reformed many souls. Among them were Sajjan the thug, Kauda, the cannibal and Nurshah'. Each of the three frames illustrates the encounter between Nanak and the souls who are reformed. While the first two characters are specified by roles which mark them out as objects of reform, the third one is merely a name and is not followed by any epithet or given role. It is only by looking at the image beneath the word-text that we can get an elaboration of this name. Sajjan, the thug is shown as falling repentent on Nanak's feet, Kauda, the Cannibal is predictably demonised, hairy

and with canine teeth, looking at Nanak who stands at the opening of the cave filtering the sunlight in his golden robes. Nurshah we conclude from the image text must be a courtesan not only by her costume but by a decanter and wine that are placed between Nanak and her curvaceous figure. Thus in the gallery of sinful people, a woman's name is enough to signify her as prostitute. Those children, whom this word text, by omitting to specify Nurshah as courtesan is supposed to protect, will draw far more dangerous inferences from the suggestive picture text.

I

A bourgeois state requires for its legitimation images of an encouraging future, not nostalgia for the past, images that could help confuse the present with socialism, not with feudalism.⁸

Amar Chitra Katha ideology in so far as it upholds the traditional Hindu model of secularism can be placed among the anti-secularists or against the Nehruvian model of the secular bourgeois state. What is attacked here is not religious pluralism so much as the protection of minority rights. For e.g. Pai holds the bourgeois secular state as responsible for the emotional disintegration of the nation. He says -

Arjun Singh wanted to ban Sanskrit from Kendriya Vidyalayas on the ground that if we teach Sanskrit, we will have to teach Persian and Arabic as well. That is the height of stupidity our leaders can go to... As a matter of fact, we were together as a nation in 1947. You see, right from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, though there were different kings ruling, it was one India or 'Akhand Bharatam'. Whether the rituals are performed in Bengal or Kerala the standard mantras are the same. [see Appendix I p.2]

The idea very clearly is to replace the bourgeois democratic state with a Hindu theocratic one as far as Pai's vision is concerned, where the standard mantras 'will be the same all over'. This nostalgia for the past is very often underwritten with a feudal ideology as Kaviraj points out, but at the same time, the representations of the past are inscribed with a blue print of a future utopia. This is because all such critiques of the bourgeois state still work very much within the framework of the bourgeois state and are part of the legacy of Enlightenment rationalism and Industrial capital. Thus while the Amar Chitra Katha stories glorify the past, the two or three sides of advertisements that frame these stories carry the utopian vision that Kaviraj prescribes as necessary for the legitimation of the bourgeois state. The past of Amar Chitra Katha is used to project a future also enables it to criticise the present.

In the words of Achin Vanaik, 'an Indian Thatcherism'⁹

is operative here such that the privileged nation within the nation is always in tension with the less-privileged one. As liberalization becomes a full-blown reality of Indian economy, this tension is gradually disappearing from the text of advertisements. Either this less privileged nation is left to fend for itself in keeping with the spirit of liberalization or it becomes a spectacle and provides exotic relief against consumer commodities. But in Amar Chitra Katha's formative years i.e. in the 70's the tension was still apparent. Thus even as the advertisements pointed towards today's liberalised economy, they embodied a more moderate world-view where the accent was on thrift and security. This was because industry was still controlled by swadeshi capital and hence the cautionary consumerism of the advertisements. The majority of the advertisements in Amar Chitra Katha are for patent food stuffs-brands that became household names through the 1970's like Cadbury's Gems, Parle's Poppins, Dipy's Jams and Squashes and Ravalgaon sweets. The other ostensible section of the advertisements is devoted to Saving schemes in various banks for young people, paving the way towards their economic independence and secure future for e.g. the advertisement for the minor's account of the Oversea's Bank shows Meena as 'the proudest girl in the class' because she pays for the trip to Kashmir

from her own pocket [see fig.46].

The advertisements for the Canara Bank Account lay down more gender specific role models. Their Saving account schemes promise different things for boys and girls. While it can 'turn a harrum-scarrum' little girl with pig-tails into an efficient and thrifty housewife, the little boy is going to become an architect by 2011 A.D. under the same Saving scheme. All the parent needs to do is to collect that loose change from the everyday purchase and deposit it in the Canara Bank saving box, which is called a T.V. (also shaped like one), perhaps as a substitute for the real T.V. set that was still absent from middle class homes. Small change is not yet outdated and thrift is still a virtue. The Bank of India advertisement similarly advises the parents to plan their son's education in such a way that he will never have to feel insecure.

Security acquires a different dimension in the Maltova advertisement titled 'The Maltova Gang Springs a Surprise....' [see fig.47] Here the Maltova Gang decide to throw a surprise birthday party for Dhiru, the boy from the orphanage. As Minnie tells them, 'they never celebrate birthdays at the orphanage', two big tears roll down her cheeks. 'Everyone was silent. They all knew and liked

Dhiru, the little boy, who never smiled'. So they pool their resources together and spring their surprise to get as reward 'the biggest smile you ever saw' on the face of the boy who never smiled.

This story and others relating the activities of the Maltova Gang reveal the gang's Scouts and Guides like function, basically doing good deeds in the Enid Blyton fashion. The advertisement ends by extending an opportunity to the readers to become members of the Maltova Club (not the Gang, please note) by simply sending jar labels or inner seals from Maltova packs. The picture of the orphanage that one gets from this episode is as grim as one that falls short of celebrating birthdays. While the Maltova gang members do exhibit a sympathetic cognisance of the less-privileged 'other', this sympathy is totally diluted by the imperative to subscribe to Maltova drinks and if possible to seduce this 'other' into its charmed fold too, if only very briefly.

Amarnad, the voice of the Amar Chitra Katha series in the form of audio cassettes and L.P. records is marketed as bringing 'entertainment into education'. Education in the context of a dominant service economy becomes no more than a knowledge bank, data to be processed according to needs of

the particular media and audience. This media we also know is subject to the rapid advances in technology of the highly industrialized countries of the West and Japan. The comic medium is no different. Just as Pai adopted a certain kind of information to the comic medium in the 60s, he is now willing to pack the same material to video, audio-visual, Internet and CD ROM systems in the 90s. The idea is to keep the child abreast of the latest in computers or keep abreast of the child who has to anyway keep up with the latest in R&D in order to live up to the expectations of the market. I have already referred to the general knowledge potential of these comics. Simulating and supplementing this G.K. potential of Amar Chitra Katha stories is the Jeevan and Hanu advertisement of LIC, the two fact find-outers who dole out knowledge in theme based capsules of interesting/exciting facts ala 'Ripley's Believe It or Not'. There are advertisements that make extensive use of the comic medium - Ram and Shyam, the naughty six year old twins who feature in the Parle poppins advertisement, the Dipy's and the Binaca advertisement. Pai illuminates us -

Over the past 10 years, I've used the comic medium to teach children the principles of banking, the need to save money in a bank (adventures of Shiru, a project for the Canara Bank); on protein nutrition (Tarang Triumphs) on cotton cultivation and coffee cultivation (projects of American Spring and Pressing Works Ltd.), on prevention of cancer

(The Mystery of the Missing Cigarettes, a project of Goa Cancer Society), a book on Nuclear power ('The Power of the Atom' for Nuclear Power Corporation of the Department of Atomic Energy, Govt. of India).¹⁰

Pai also insists upon the educative potential of Amar Chitra Katha. Comics were produced with the child in mind, and they could 'serve as an anteroom to learning'. He delineates the medium's native inspiration in Ajanta murals, stupas at Bharhut and Sanchi, Amravati and Elphanta. He quotes Patnajali's Mahabhashya 140 BC as the earliest reference to Chitra Kathas.

In the pictures themselves men see the blows raised down on Kamsa and how he is dragged about. At Ajanta many paintings have short captions or verses relating to the painted themes. Illustrated manuscripts like Kalakacharya Kathanaka depict something very similar to modern Chitra Katha.¹¹

According to Pai, the speech balloons are the only new feature of the modern day comic. Interestingly, the themes of most of these comic strips used for advertisement purposes are western, even as the characters are Indian. The emphasis on 'brainwaves' or ideas that strike from out of the blue in the manner of western detective fiction is a constant feature in them. I must clarify here that even as Amar Chitra Katha doesn't hold complete control over the advertisements, the vision of a certain India that it

projects supported by the swadeshi entrepreneur goes down well with its agenda whose feudal ideology is thus overwritten with a capitalist one.

But Amar Chitra Katha monopolistic tactics, as far as the field of comics, particularly and children's literature in general is concerned, was pretty effective if not ruthless. As a result, it managed to spawn quite a number of publishing ventures under the India Book House Education Trust banner. Understanding Science, Echo Books, Chaturang Katha, Let us Know India are some of them. At the same time, it had distribution rights over some of the major international comic titles. On September 1, 1984, IBH Pvt. Ltd. released Laurel and Hardy, Superman, Super Spy James Bond and Amitabh Bachchan as Supremo under the banner of Star comics.

Speaking about sales tactics, Pai says, 'I had restricted promotion to conduct quiz contests on India history and culture (over 150 contests so far held), one-act play contests, elocutions, fancy dress and mask colouring contests, but the publishers of Diamond comics gradually won over booksellers by liberal discounts and won over children by catering to their need for adventure and slap-stick humour.'¹² Pai quotes Diamond comics publishers as admit-

ting that they are nowhere near Amar Chitra Katha in quality, style and content but it is their strategy of flooding the market with 10 titles a month, followed by aggressive salesmanship and innovative promotional techniques that have paid rich dividends.

Thus the picture one gets is of Amar Chitra Katha's sophistication and superior ideals versus the cheap tactics indulged in by the ruthless Diamond comics. While Amar Chitra Katha appears to genuinely care for children, Diamond comics limits itself to profit. This is evident through the seminar on 'The role of Chitra Katha in School Education' organised by India Book House Education Trust on 14 February 1978. An experiment was carried out in '30 top schools of Delhi' to show that students retained better knowledge of history through Amar Chitra Katha than through text books, but despite the outcome of the project and the seal of approval it got from the authorities of the Ministry of Education, NCERT and the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, Amar Chitra Katha did not become curricula material in India. According to Pai, Amar Chitra Kathas are used in Asian study centres in Malaysia, Hongkong and Holland.

Again, Amar Chitra Katha's promise of 'screening each word and each picture' because they have a lasting impact on

unimpressible minds is supposed to come through in its apparent attempts to shield the child from unnecessary display of violence and sex. Pai's abhorrence towards superstitions led him to refuse publishing issues on Santoshi ma, Manasa devi, Satyanarayan and Vishvakarma on the grounds that they represent 'degradation of Hinduism', even though these comics would have guaranteed sales. These Gods are particularly objectionable also because they emerged after the 10th century A.D., the date conclusive of the influence of Islam. Pai tells us:

- There is no dogma in Vedic thought. Dogmas appear only after the 10th century. [see Appendix, p.6].
- India's religion is actually philosophy. When you are teaching how to do Sraddha ceremony, that is not religion, when you are talking about Vedic literature and what man thought that, is religion.
- The whole concept of Satyanarayan must have come as a reflection of the Muslim Allah on the Hindu mirror. In order to punish Karavati, who forgets to eat prasad he makes her ship sink. The concept of a punitive God is a later interpolation created by some Brahmin in the 10th century. {see Appendix I, p.5}

From the above statements made by Pai, we derive the

following conclusions - punitive gods are to be declared - 'later interpolation' to the Puranic pantheon, in effect expelled. The monotheistic absolute principle of Vedantic Hinduism is supposed to constitute the true religion of India as opposed to rituals like 'the Sraddha ceremony' and the 'eating of prasad'. The assumption behind these ideas rests in an internalisation of the values of Enlightenment rationalism. The fact that Christianity and Islam proffer an absolute monotheistic God as well doesn't seem to bother Pai very much. The attempt moreover to historicize mythology arises from the need to read according to the western calendrical time frame. The Puranas are therefore sought to be legitimised and sanitised as historical texts even as chinks are found in their historical armour and authenticity. The Vedas on the other hand, are part of a historical consciousness that is too ancient to be hegemonised by western rationalism.

The introduction to *Surya* drawn from an account in the Puranas strives to justify this inclusion by referring to Surya's superior status in Vedic religion. Thus even non-linear, non-western Vedic time is brought into the purview of western historiography's homogenised time frame even as it is not measured according to the western calendar. The idea is to prove their authenticity, a driving need of cul-

tural nationalism in the 70's and 80's.

Pai insists on keeping the domain of children's literature 'a-political' or free from the motivation of political parties. The idea is not so much to keep the young minds unsullied and un-biased but to keep Pai from being forced to take sides. Thus when Sonia Gandhi approached Pai to do an issue on Rajiv Gandhi with the following inclusions -

1) Indira Gandhi was hounded during the Janata Party rule 2) Operation Blue Star happened because there was no alternative and 3) Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated because the V.P. Singh government removed the SPG cover, Pai refused citing the case of the *Jayaprakash Narayan* issue brought out during the Janata government's rule, which contained no negative references to Indira Gandhi despite pressures to do so. In keeping with the critique of the bourgeois state, all governments and all political parties are considered the same, and Pai's sympathies are with no particular party. The diffuse Hindu nationalism he supports had not by then taken the shape of a concrete electoral party at the national level. It wore a mere cultural mantle that suited the 'a-political' interests of Amar Chitra Katha ideology.

In the early 80's, in the build-up to the Punjab cri-

sis, Amar Chitra Katha assorted the separate issues on the Sikhs - the Sikh Gurus; adaptations of Bhai Veer Singh's three novels - *Sundari Sharan Kaur and Satwant Kaur*, Bhagat Singh and *Bidhi Chand*, a Sikh legend under the slogan - 'The Land of the Five Rivers' (13 titles released and re-printed on June 1983) [see fig.28].

In completely identifying Punjab with Sikhdom, one would feel Amar Chitra Katha was going against the grain of its own Hindu-centred nationalism and bowing to the rich Sikh clientele by cashing in on their demand for a separate identity, but as Pai says, -

Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs are really Hindus. The 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh never said it was a separate religion. He called it the Khalsa panth like Dadu and Kabir panths - Let the rituals go and true religion prosper. In the Guru Granth Saheb, the name of Rama appears more numerously than in the Ramayana. [see Appendix I, p.13]

Thus we see in most of the adaptations of Bhai Veer Singh's novels and in the titles on the Sikh Gurus, even as the martial and spiritual spirit of Sikhism is extolled, they are seen in response to a fixed Muslim/Mughal antagonist [see fig.]. If *Sundari* and *Sharan Kaur* convert to Sikhism, it is because their Hindu husbands are too weak to protect them against Mughal encroachment upon their honour. The masculanised and armed female body in both cases becomes

a lesson to Hindu males to take stock of their virility. While Hindu practices are critiqued, Muslims are shown as oppressors/persecutors. e.g. Hindu ritual practices like the thread ceremony and sun-worship are criticised in the *Guru Nanak* issue. The Muslim is shown as objecting to the subversive nature of Guru Nanak's teaching itself - 'There is no Hindu or Mussulaman!' and for sleeping with his feet pointed towards the Kabba, in short for being 'infidels' or non-'Mussalman'. Large scale atrocities of the Mughal emperor Babur are described, and the persecution of the Sikh gurus is referred to in *Bidhi Chand* and depicted in the manner in which the stallions for Guru Arjan Singh are confiscated by Shah Jahan's soldiers [see fig.27].

So it doesn't really matter if the Hindu and Muslim Punjabi is completely sidelined since the Sikh is after all part of the Hindu family. The appointment of a specialist on Sikh beards; the sending of scripts and illustrations to the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee, Amritsar, for proof reading and approval become more a bid to avoid later censorship than a capitulation to their separatist tendencies.

The apparent concessions to the minority communities is thus made with a sleight of hand. for e.g. Ravidas, the

Camar saint according to John Stratton Hawley,

is made to enunciate a theology that sounds very much like the Vedantin position held in esteem by many Indian new elites.... Brahmins joined by merchant caste groups such as the Birlas whose charitable Trust underwrites the publication of the script for Pai's videotape "Ekam Sat".¹³

This explains the odd-ball presence of the G.D. Birla issue, the sole industrialist figure in the entire Amar Chitra Katha corpus.

The tremendous networking of Amar Chitra Katha marketing management becomes evident in the negotiations that are worked with various minority groups, national political leaders, members of the Central ministry, industrial magnates as well as the political expediency of the time and place in which a particular Amar Chitra Katha gets released.

For instance, in appeasing members of the Valmiki Sabha who objected to the description of Valmiki as a dacoit, Pai enlisted the support of Jag Jivan Ram, the then Deputy Prime Minister, who is also a Dalit. Similarly *Chokha Mela*, another Dalit title was released in the thick of caste riots that broke out in Aurangabad. Pai recruited the services of Buta Singh a Dalit leader for inaugurating the comic at a function organised in Aurangabad. He also organised abhang

singing contests to spread the message of social amity.

In *Chokha Mela*, there is no attempt to resist caste hierarchy, but the focus is shifted to the celebration of Dalit personal transcendence. Chokha's violation of the Brahmin code, like entering the village temple, is not attributed to political agency but an invisible, involuntary voice within Chokha, depicted as a white circle on his chest - the inexorable voice of Vitthala. Far from questioning Brahmin superiority, it projects the Brahmin priest at Pandharpur in a sympathetic light. He is shown as grappling with the mixed responses evinced in him by Chokha's intense devotion. It goes at lengths to show the inner monologues and wranglings of the priest after he has spied on Chokha Mela and even assaulted him - [see figs.48 & 49]

Why did I hit him? Mahar he may be but...
...but he did obey my orders and leave Pandharpur
He did not come my way. Instead, I came here and
spied on him.
I have acted despicably. What right did I have
to spy on his innocent games?
O Lord, forgive me for my low behaviour.

The two Jaina tales, *Vidyut Chora* and *Angad Datta* are a contradiction in terms. They reflect a high-surveillance police state necessitated by the acts of dacoity and murder rife in the jungles and cities alike. The thugs are mostly in the robes of Sadhus and the Brahmins are shown as hypo-

criters who swindle merchants of their hard earned life savings. The idea perhaps is to depict an order on the brink of collapse, where the power is passing from the hands of the corrupt Brahmins to the merchants or trading community, among whom Jainism was most popular. The teachings of Jainism are reduced to the concerns of the trading community. As the introduction to *'The Adventures of Angad Datta'* says -

From the stories included in this book... we know that the merchants of ancient India were full of enterprise and the spirit of adventure. They explored new territories and established trade links with the outside world.

The didactic import of Jaina stories like *Vidyut Chora* seems to be reduced to catching thieves.

Similarly in the Buddhist tales for e.g. *'Duggatta's cook'*, an attempt is made to Hinduize Buddhism, e.g. *Duggatta's cook* is none other than *'Sakha* or *Indra*, who leaves behind a shower of precious stones and jewels. Similarly in the titles on *Ashoka* and *Bimbisara*, the emphasis is on their non-Buddhist identity and Buddhist good deeds. When *Bimbisara* has been imprisoned by his son *Ajatshatru*, he consoles his weeping wife with the remonstrations - *'Take heart, my queen'*. Remember the prince who spurned his kingdom to

redeem mankind' [see fig.36]. The panel contains an inset balloon of a beatific Buddha. Buddhism can at best be an inspiration while the fact of its separate religious status is downplayed with reference to politicking monks like Devadatta who is the real hand behind Bimbisara's murder. Also Buddhist ambience other than in the Jataka tales is full of references to the tantrik vajrayana sect characterised by bloody sacrificial rites, sorcery and assumption of mystical and diabolic powers as in *Malati and Madhava* [see fig.37].

In the words of the writers of *Khaki Shorts and Saffron Flags*,

pluralism is made into a spectacle
through a process of co-option
which never spells out the
grounds for appropriation.¹⁴
nowhere is the accent on non-ahimsa the cardinal
principle of both Jainism and Buddhism.

This leads us to the next section which traces Amar Chitra Katha's segmentation of the domestic market vis-a-vis the investment of 'new' Hindu capital.

II

Thus Buddhist, Jaina, Sikh and Dalit identities were collated in a national field that is riven by sub-national

agitations based on caste, religion and linguistic identity. While these popular movements of opposition to the Indian absorption and repression were taking place, the country under Rajiv Gandhi went in for a greater liberalisation of the economy and promotion of tie-ups between indigenous capital, multi-nationals and NRIs.

It was the distinctively Hindu complexion of the NRI that led to the turning point in Amar Chitra Katha marketing strategies and the eventual decision to stop production of new titles in 1991.

'Hinduism Today', an NRI paper (April 1995) issue carried a feature on the search of NRI parents for Hindu books for their children - 'stories that include concepts like Karma, ahimsa, dharma, daya, dana, bhakti and the Gods and Goddesses'. The shopkeeper of Landmark, a leading bookshop in Madras who is approached leads the parent 'to a rack packed with hundreds of Amar Chitra Kathas'. So is Suruchi Bhandaar, the RSS bookshop in Jhandewala, Delhi packed with Amar Chitra Kathas.

It is obviously not Amar Chitra Katha's fault if it is of special use to Hindu parents and appropriated by communal interests groups. Just as a secular discourse and historical characters as disparate as Gandhi, Tagore, Shivaji and

Ramakrishna are appropriated by the RSS. By the same logic Amar Chitra Katha's Hindu nationalism was made diffuse by a national community of readers, cutting across caste and religious lines.

But the lucrative NRI market and the turn Hindutva politics has taken in the 80's and 90's has ensured that Amar Chitra Katha can no longer be read without its Hindu load. The mid-80's marketing strategies of Amar Chitra Katha is dominated with the publication of special issues in threes and tens, single special issues like the *Dashavatara*, deluxe bound volumes of ten, mini-series based on the Ramayana and Mahabharata. All these special issues were in effect a re-packaging of the old stuff for a more affluent market designed with a strict Hindu accent. At the same time, a Mahabharata mini-series in 42 issues begun in March 1985 was hastened up from its intended 60 titles to coincide with the telecasting of the Mahabharata serial on Doordarshan. An advertisement to this effect reads - 'Read it to enjoy your Sunday viewing'.

The subsequent loss in Amar Chitra Katha sales is attributed to the T.V. and video boom. There was a slide in Amar Chitra Katha sales from a record million copies in 1981 to 28,000 copies in September 1992, the market for Amar

Chitra Kathas having reached a peak in 1986-87.

Considering the fact that the Ramayana and Mahabharata TV versions depended entirely on Amar Chitra Katha representations for a comprehension of the visual code - costumes, jewellery, sets, weaponry and other accessories even the physical typing of the cast the loss in sales due to a greater popularity of these serials cannot be a serious reason, as the two media mutually reinforced each other instead of promoting conflicting pictures.

The T.V. versions' translation of Amar Chitra Katha - into a medium that had greater mass appeal and greater cultural hegemony - also vulgarised it and catapulted it into the realm of high consumerism and high media technology:

Even though the serial (the Ramayana) catered to mixed audiences, its most noted triumph was marked in annexing the upper middle class urban youth with no moorings with Indian realities to Rama's cause... It provided to the new aggressive social class spawned in the 80's a packaged, collective self-image which with the mobilizing by Hindutva became the motivating force for changing, by force and violence, the image of the country itself.¹⁵

Thus, even as the Amar Chitra Katha content remained the same, they were challenged by the emergence of 'a new aggressive social class' mobilized by the Hindutva forces to

re-package themselves. Also the new titles being printed since the mid-80's were increasingly at the mercy of groups and Trusts that had commissioned them. Editorial creative autonomy was restricted. The outcome was verbose comics of the likes on Gandhi and Nehru as for instance, the series on the Indian National Congress was commissioned by the Congress Party to mark the Congress centenary in 1985.

Slowly, the rights for the regional language Amar Chitra Kathas were sold to local publication houses. IBH printed and distributed only the English language comics whose covers were made into glossies also prices were considerably hiked up and paper quality improved as compared to the regional language Amar Chitra Kathas. Presently, the English Amar Chitra Katha is sold at Rs.20, whereas its counterpart distributed by Diamond comics in Hindi is sold for Rs.10. At the same time, the Editor's choice or a selection of 100 Amar Chitra Katha titles, mostly mythologies was brought out after 1991, the closing date of Amar Chitra Katha production to be published from time to time [see fig.54]. This further narrowed the scale of the Amar Chitra Katha corpus to emphasise its Hindu dominance.

Not only was the NRI market a profitable diversion channel for Amar Chitra Kathas, but the loss of its sales

after 1986-87 was adequately absorbed by Tinkle born in January 1980 with the identical purpose of making education more enjoyable, and given an overtly secular and participative dimension as if to make up for Amar Chitra Katha's lack on both counts. Tinkle is supposed to be the highest selling English language magazine for children in the country today. [Pai]

Finally, the logic of global capital made it unnecessary to keep up with the nationalist label. Nationalism in the strict sense of economic patriotism was losing its validity. The boom in cable T.V. networks had further compounded the impossibility of keeping the information channels under control.

The swadeshi accent on cultural insularity can at best remain a political slogan under present circumstances. This shouldn't be taken to mean that there is no need for a 'secular' literature of the kind Amar Chitra Katha made patent under the auspices of 'the glorious heritage of India'. The context of cultural nationalism has changed definitively from the 70's. It has become more aggressive if at all, among the earlier section of its constituency. So even as Amar Chitra Katha lost out on a loosely defined and larger national community of readership by the termina-

tion of production and popular distributive channels like the news stands through which it was circulated, it gained an audience among the urban, upper-middle class youth who are also recruits to the sharply defined Hindutva forces and the NRI market. This was made possible by the differentiated packaging of the Amar Chitra Katha from the earlier product intended for the domestic market as for e.g. Amar Chitra Katha has been put on the Internet and Pai is looking for collaboration to put it on CD ROM. The production and consumption side don't really balance each other because of the monopoly status of Amar Chitra Katha in the market in the absence of rival players. Amar Chitra Katha has conveniently segmented the market in such way that it makes maximum profit in the NRI field, while having sold the rights for the distribution of the regional language comics to local groups to be sold at lesser rates.

Thus we find that Amar Chitra Katha's agenda of national integration has led in the course of these two decades to a stage where its identity as cultural commodity in the market need not be marked.

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EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE

In the preceding pages I have not undertaken an in-depth semiological analysis. Nevertheless I have tried to relate the images in Amar Chitra Katha to images in other media - films, advertising, T.V., the late 19th century paintings of Ravi Varma, the more recent banner drawings of artists like Deenanath Dalal and S.N. Mulgaonkar, western comic strips like Donald Duck and Asterix. At the same time, I have tried to explore the ways in which these imagined representations relate to real conditions of existence, for instance, the child who is addressed by Amar Chitra Katha as well as the child who is not. In so far as both of them share in the dominant consciousness of a visual national popular, defined in terms of Hindu iconography, Amar Chitra Katha can be situated as deriving from a consciousness, already existing since the 19th century.

So often, I found myself criticising the myths as much as the Amar Chitra Katha representations of them. In fact it became very difficult to distinguish between the received myth and the Amar Chitra Katha version. This was due to the definitive mode in which Amar Chitra Katha records the

myths, repressing their 'polysemous' identity in order to relay a single, monolithic message. This was intended to effect a national integration that is Amar Chitra Katha's avowed goal. But the national integration at the level of the imagery has its own politics of aesthetic codes as is evident in the subsumption of the different styles - Pahari/Mughal miniature/sculpture into the hegemonic western representational style. A study that focusses on the differential impact of these various pictorial codes, would yield interesting insights as far as Amar Chitra Katha's claim of nativism is concerned. Owing to my lack of art training, I haven't been able to really explore this assimilation of the traditional into the modern form.

An alternative to Amar Chitra Katha? It is not really possible even if we were to sanitise and re-write the content of the word text to fit in with what current marketing lingo would dub 'politically correct'. This is because at the level of imagery, the mimetic style is too deeply entrenched with the modern sensibility and its hegemonic force cannot be tackled at the level of cultural production alone. e.g. the body of woman, as depicted in Amar Chitra Katha is the same for all women irrespective of the role she plays.

But one can always stress on a critical process of 'un-learning' rather than call for a ban. Anyway, Amar Chitra Katha is designed to evade censor. The traces it consequently leaves in an audience of child readers is all the more insidious and effective. To begin with then, one could start by referring to this attempt to read Amar Chitra Katha and its politics.

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APPENDIX - A

TAPE-A: SIDE-A -
TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH ANANT PAI

NC - Nandini Chandra

AP - Anant Pai

18 December 1995

NC: Could you describe the aims and ideals with which Amar Chitra Katha started?

AP: The Times of India was interested in comics but not for the sake of comics. They wanted to keep their sheet-fed Gravure machines busy. They had a lot of work during the calendar season, otherwise it was mostly free. Around that time Mr. P.K. Roy (of Times) had an offer from the 'Superman' comics for distribution rights for the Indian sub-continent. He passed that project onto me. I did quite a bit of research. I met about 47 youngsters, checked with them as to what they love to read and why. I found that Phantom was very popular; probably because the Illustrated Weekly used to serialise it. So in my project report I suggested that we bring out a comic magazine, 16 pages of which would be Phantom; the remaining 16 pages would be matter which I scripted like 'Around the World with Kunju Pillai' etc. Very soon after, they made it a 100 per cent foreign magazine.

NC: How did the idea for Amar Chitra Katha come to you?

AP: I had visited Delhi in February 1967. At the junction of Ajmal Khan Road and Gurdwara Road in a place called Maharaja Lal and Sons a quiz contest was on. The youngsters seemed well-informed on Greek mythology but they couldn't answer a simple question like who Rama's mother was; this in Delhi where the Ramlila is held in every nook and corner, and on the Ramlila grounds on such a massive scale for 10 days. It came as a surprise to me that Indians are alienated from their own culture, thanks to the secular movement (laughs).... Our people are getting alienated from their culture because of Enid Blyton stories. Nothing wrong with Enid Blyton stories but when they read only Enid Blyton stories and they do not know....

By this time I'd decided to do something about it. I approached many publishers. The TOI was busy with their own projects. India Book House was the one organisation which was willing to accept the project

even though I worked on the project for a pittance, i.e. Rs.500 per book. The average speed for three full years was one comic in three months. I hardly got Rs.175/- per month; but it was an emotional involvement and I wanted it very badly to succeed. This is how it clicked ultimately.

What strengthened my resolve was a trip to the Elephanta caves by steam launch; where a child of four years pointing at a boat which went past ours at a greater speed, asked whether it was imported. That means children have subliminally internalised the logic that any good thing can only come from the west. That is what I thought ought to be stopped. Unless they could be made to feel that our country also could produce good, great and competent people.... During this time, I was never employed by IBH. I accepted doing house journals and all kinds of odd jobs to supplement my income; anything to make it a success.

The reason why our nation has not risen is because there is no emotional integration, whatever is there is being destroyed by successive governments, e.g. Arjun Singh, he wanted to ban Sanskrit from Kendriya Vidyalayas on the grounds that if we teach Sanskrit, we will have to teach Persian and Arabic as well. That is the height of stupidity our leaders can go to. Luckily someone filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court disputing his whole logic as fallacious. As matter of fact, we were together as a nation in 1947. You see right from Kashmir to Kanyakumari, though there were different kings ruling, it was one India or Akhand Bharatam. Whether the rituals are performed in Bengal or Kerala, the standard mantras are the same. It is untrue that the Britishers helped to unite us or first brought the idea of nation to us. From at least 500 B.C. i.e. two and a half thousand years ago, India has been one country (5000 years).

The green signal to start Amar Chitra Katha was given on July 1, 1967 by Mr. Mirchandani of IBH. We had the right of producing Classics Illustrated series in 8 Indian languages. After producing titles like Cinderella, Jack and the Bean stalk, the eleventh title was Krishna. It took us almost one year to sell the 20,000 copies of *Krishna*.

NC: Why did you pick on mythology?

AP: I was interviewed on Rama during the Ramajanmabhoomi movement. I don't believe Rama ever existed as a

person in this land, but that doesn't make Ramajanmabhoomi a less important issue to the Hindu mind. In all probability, Rama is a myth. In Tagore's Valmiki Pratibha, Valmiki says, *Kavi, tobo mono Bhumi Ramer Janmosthan* or (your mind is the birth place of Rama; even truer than Ayodhya on the banks of river Sarayu).

What happens therefore is not necessarily the truth; but the fact that Ramajanmabhoomi is held sacred in the psyche of this 2000 years old nation of our own. The fact that it forms the fabric of our culture, our civilization.

NC: What is your understanding of mythology?

AP: Mythology is accretions. No nation is without its mythology. America created its mythology through the funnies.

NC: What do you do when there are contesting versions of the same myth?

AP: Nowhere do we find the concept of Laxman-rekha except in Krittivasa's Ramayana of Bengal. We choose from what is the most popular version. Our first Ramayana comic was based on Valmiki's Ramayana. In Tulsi's Ramayana, Sita becomes so docile but in Valmiki's Ramayana, she holds her own against Rama, reproaches him, reprimands him. *Sons of Rama* was based on Bhavabhuti's Uttara Ramcharitmanas. Mahiravana was based on Krittivasa's Ramayana of Bengal. I always mention the version on which the comic book story is based, but above all, it is the concept of Rama as an ideal man, the ideal of brotherly love which has held together a nation that matters most.

NC: Is there a pure Indian past then to which the Amar Chitra Katha harks back?

AP: Our roots go back to at least two-and-a-half thousand years or more and anything that old is more precious than something which is only 300 or 500 years old, e.g. the fact that Babur broke the temple in 1526. What is the history of USA, hardly two and a half centuries. Modern leaders like Mayawati keep dividing our nation.

NC: Are you referring to a Hindu past?

AP: The word Hindu is a new concept. Persians used to refer anything South of the Sindhu river as Hindu. The Persians (Parso) and Indians are from the same

stock.... Everyone has a right to his own past, to his own culture. In our zeal to be secular, we are denying our heritage, our past to our children... our constitution sounds great. It says no educational institution which receives grant from the government can teach religion except the minorities. In reality, it means only the Hindus cannot teach. As a result, whatever little the child receives from the parents is his/her only source or background to his culture. In our broadmindedness we have done this. The constitution does not apply to the minorities.

NC: What do you mean when you say religion?

AP: By religion, I don't mean rituals.

NC: Do you accept the fact that the framers of our Constitution did not think up anything new. They just continued with the same British colonial model?

AP: Some of them did think, it was Nehru who said that we should continue with the earlier system.

NC: Did you attempt to invent anything new through Amar Chitra Kathas?

AP: I am just trying to recast; to narrate what was. I am not inventing. This country is great. I have not invented anything.

NC: What is the nature of research which you used?

AP: Research good heavens! We have done our research correctly. Take *Vivekananda*, I must have read at least 2000 pages before I approved that 32-paged script written by Pradeep Waul e.g. the sequences where Vivekananda goes to Debendranath Tagore to ask if he had seen God. We also have to show where he asks the question. My artist painted a panel in which he showed this exchange taking place in Debendranath's house. I did some more research and found out that it was in a house boat that this question was asked. So I had to change the illustration. Similarly, when he talks in the Parliament of Religions in Chicago, we have to know who was there to his right, who was there to his left.

NC: Did Amar Chitra Katha never fictionalize?

AP: Amar Chitra Katha never fictionalizes. In *Bagha Jatin*, we might have selected an already fictionalized exchange between Jatin and his mother from somewhere.

I am a student of psychology. I conduct these personality development classes for adolescents and young adults called Partha. It is not what has happened (Ghatit) that is necessarily true; but its interpretation that helps in confidence building. If someone calls you an ass I can't prevent that man from calling you names; but I can change your interpretation of what an ass is. Since there was a lot of opposition... to the comic medium per se, I conducted an experiment on the role of comics in school education. 930 students from 31 top schools in Delhi participated in the experiment. A text was chosen. I deliberately chose *Sultana Razia* for its apparently secular credentials. Secularism means there should be no hesitation in teaching Sanskrit in schools.

India's religion is actually philosophy. When you are teaching how to do the sraddha ceremony; that is not religion; when you are talking about Vedic literature and what man thought, that is religion. The greatest thing about Indian thinking is that it is open. I am grateful to destiny that I was born a Hindu e.g. I can get away by saying that Satyanarayan was an ass of a God and no fatwa will be issued on my name. I am proud to be a Hindu. The whole concept of Satyanarayan must have come as a reflection of the Muslim Allah on the Hindu mirror. In order to punish Karavati who forgets to eat prasad, he makes the ship in which she travels sink. This concept of a punitive God is a later interpolation created by some Brahmin in the 10th century.

NC: Why does Amar Chitra Katha play up the biographies of the revolutionary leaders while Gandhi and Nehru comics appear so late and are so dull.

AP: It is not just Gandhi who contributed to the freedom struggle. It was because of people like the Safekar brothers, Savarkar, Bagha Jatin, Bhagat Singh and their fiery brand of patriotism, the kind of sacrifices they endured that we have got our independence. Successive Congress governments have of course tried their best to erase or down play this contribution. As for the *Gandhi* comic, it was murdered by Gandhi's follower, who had the copyrights e.g. Jeetendra Desai was eager that everything should be included, so it became verbose.

I used to think of Gandhi as a superman till July 1958, when I read the Q'uran. When Gandhi died, I did not eat for one and a half days, but on the day I read the

Q'uran rendered into English by a devout Muslim; he just shrank from his size. It was then I realised that above everything else, he was a politician.

TAPE-A: SIDE-B

...There is no dogma in vedic thought. Dogmas appear after 10th century. The Puranas are full of dogma.

NC: What is the readership pattern of Amar Chitra Katha in terms of age?

AP: Children start reading Amar Chitra Katha between the age of 8 and 14; readership keeps diminishing till at 18, it reaches a zero; but surprisingly it picks up in the 35 plus age group. May be grown-ups read aloud to their children. Throughout, we were very aware of this parent readership. We've received glorious tributes from parents.

NC: Do you see Amar Chitra Katha as serving as alternative to textbook history?

AP: While textbook history can be tampered with, by the government, I use my freedom to see to it that the history we provide is as authentic as possible and not twisted to meet secular requirements. As a matter of fact, extracts from Amar Chitra Katha have been used in textbooks all over the world, in Germany e.g. parts of the Mahabharata have been used for textbook history. Also used for Asian studies in Malaysia, Singapore, Holland.

NC: How have T.V. serials like Ramayana/Mahabharata affected the sales?

AP: T.V. serials have affected the sales. Tinkle came down from one lakh five thousand to fifty thousand copies. Now again it has gone up probably because of the participation I give to readers, but never to its original sales figure. Amar Chitra Katha still re-prints and is now available on Internet. It looks very beautiful because the computer colours are more vivid.

Both Amar Chitra Katha and Tinkle have helped to bind the nation together. Right from the student's leaders of Assam; Sikhs of Chandigarh have given me glorious welcomes.

It is our leaders who help perceive differences, leaders lack vision and they have a vested interest in

making people feel insecure.... For us awareness means fighting for our rights, no one is bothered about their duties. That is what our education system has done.

NC: Are you trying to say all troubles are self-created and there are no material causes for grievance?

AP: The way you perceive that is more important. The way the leaders make them perceive, problems are magnified. If there is a grievance, it has to be removed, but they believe in making mountains out of molehills. In Arunachal e.g. they were such wonderful people 10-12 years ago, now they are taking such extreme action.

NC: How do you negotiate the various demands and claims upon a story or a character, say the demands placed by commercial and community interests?

AP: The Tirupati Tirumalai Devasthanam offered to buy thousands of copies if I were to bring a comic on Tirupati Venkatarama. I went through the script. It was full of myths and superstitions so I refused even though. Mr. Mirchandani said it would be profitable. Similarly, Fevicol offered to buy thousands of copies of Vishvakarma. It's a very foolish concept. So long as a child doesn't feel ennobled there is no point doing an issue. Sonia Gandhi wanted to bring a comic on Rajiv Gandhi. She approached me through Murli Deva Rao (Congress Maharashtra State unit President). We prepared the script, Sonia Gandhi wanted 3 changes (or inclusions):

1. When Janata Party came to power, they hounded Indira Gandhi.
2. There was no other alternative but to send the army inside the Golden Temple.
3. Rajiv Gandhi's assassination was owing to the withdrawal of the SPG cover.

My contention was that all these are political statements and I don't want to make political statements against any party. In the script of *Jayaprakash Narayan*, the author had been very harsh on Sanjay Gandhi and Indira Gandhi, but I had those parts expunged. I told Murli Devarao, - Rajiv Gandhi is very brave, he didn't bother about minor threats. I don't mind making him a hero on these grounds. So we returned the advance money. We don't cater to party politics and in this regard the company has always stood by me, though grudgingly.

NC: Does Amar Chitra Katha have an editorial agenda?

AP: `Satyam Bruyat, Priyam Bruyat; Na Bruyat Satyam Apriyam; Priyam cha asatya na Bruyat'.

`Speak the truth that is pleasant. Do not speak the truth that is unpleasant but just because it is pleasant, don't speak it if it is untrue.'

This has been the motto of Amar Chitra Katha. History may be correct about names and dates, but very little of it is truthful. Upto age 12, I do not want to expose children to cruelty. Once they are exposed to violence, they become insensitive to hurt. T.V. programmes do a lot of harm, e.g. in the issue of Akbar, Bayan Khan's headless body was hung by Akbar the great. Of course he was only fourteen at that time but I didn't have to show that.

NC: Did you sometimes use the political pulse of the moment to sell your comics?

AP: When riots between caste Hindus and scheduled castes were brewing in Aurangabad I brought out *Chokha Mela*. *Chokha Mela* was released in the thick of riots. I also organized a quiz contest and an Abhang singing contest. The first prize went to a Brahmin boy and another prize went to a Mahar boy. So you see Amar Chitra Katha is with a mission.

As far as possible, I want to remove the bitterness, so I don't want to show the unpleasant aspects of the caste system.

In the 'March to Freedom' series; I wanted independent American western references to corroborate the Indian historian's versions. I also devoted 2 pages on those Britishers who had helped Indians progress so that youngsters don't get carried away. The standard of information here is very low. Someone on T.V. said the other day that the advaita Vedanta concept came from the Sufis.

NC: Are you aware that the Amar Chitra Katha images have constructed a dominant vision in terms of the Indian past?

AP: Yes, when the issue on Ambedkar was being brought out, P.G. Siroh the artist wasn't very well. The picture he drew of Ambedkar for the cover of the comic was erroneous, in the sense it bore... no resemblance to the real Ambedkar. But I compounded the error and since then,

through the length and breadth of this country, in the Sachivalaya/Mantralaya; the same picture/illustration has been used, by his followers too.

NC: Why did you only use the realistic illusion-based style of drawing?

AP: Because of the needs of the comic medium; one has to show expression, mobility of face, a body, one has to be able to identify the person which is not possible in case of stylised art. The main model was the classic illustrated series based on photographic realism e.g. Prince Valiant etc. I had made it clear that stylisation was out except in stories from the Panchatantra and Jakka Tales; where I allowed them to use cartooning, as the identity of the persons wasn't important. Fidelity was paramount in the case of historical characters. I had also requested Mr. Mirchandani to get a mannequin from the U.S.A. (it was a wooden doll with moveable hands) for artists to use as a model. Besides, every month, we would release a circular to artists for references.

NC: What was the style of functioning between artists and editor?

AP: The idea was conceived first, I would draw a synopsis. Between 1967 and 1971 I was alone. In 1971 Kamala Chandrakant came as associate editor and was a major influence in as many as 75 titles. Subbu Rao came in 1974. This basic synopsis would go back to the script writer with comments and suggestions. While Kamala Chandrakant did the language editing, Subbu Rao was assigned the plot editing.

Mostly the script was written in English except for a few titles written in Hindi by Kamlesh Pandey which I translated into English. Yagya Sharma was a very good translator into Hindi. He was familiar with the film medium (I didn't have to edit much as far as Yagna Sharma was concerned). He knew the importance of the dramatic, of the movement between panels and continuity pictures. After all a comic can be used at various levels - at the level of words, illustrations, costumes etc.

NC: Weren't there any major differences of opinion between the editorial/illustrating staff? Was your word the final one?

AP: The Gita was the only title which I had scripted, so

when Kamala Chandrakant made certain changes in the language, polished it so to say; I overruled the changes.

NC: Did you have any guidelines for your artists/script writers?

AP: I used to say two things to them.

1. Whatever you have written, if you show it to a child when he is hurrying out to play and the child can listen with rapt attention, then you can relate to a child.
2. Don't spell out the moral of the story. It should be implicit.

NC: How do you relate to children?

AP: Partha is my voice. I don't believe in using any word which is not to be found in the child's dictionary. Lots of youngsters remain backward because of a sense of sinfulness. I tell them you are all programmed by the thoughts which you have imbibed and once you know how you are programmed, you can re-programme yourself. Whatever you do with the intention of causing some good is punya; only that which is done at the cost of someone else's happiness is an act of sin. Beyond that I don't believe in sinfulness.

The Partha sessions begin with this chant. 'This day is a very good day, this hour is a very good hour, this minute is a very good minute because we are going to learn from Uncle Pai, the secrets of success.' The centre of attention shouldn't be too much in oneself. Another thing I tell my children is that I don't want to spread superstition. This Mansa devi and Rani Behula are a lot of stupidity. I feel very happy when youngsters question my ideas. I don't want anyone to believe me. I want them to think for themselves.... I believe in the vedantic philosophy....

We need someone who can emotionally move people. Baba Saheb Thackeray can't move people in the right direction. When a child learns about people's struggles and sacrifices, he learns to sacrifice for other members of the family.

NC: What do you think is the present scope of the comic medium vis-a-vis invading technologies?

AP: I do not mind when a new medium comes. We must use this medium to counter the foreign invasion, to impart education.

The teaching system hasn't changed at all - one of the reasons why ACK became so popular is because teachers are so stupid. CD ROM has a lot of potential. I am willing to co-operate with anyone who is using CD ROM... but for lack of funds.

NC: Do you think there has been a change in the concept of what a child means over the years?

AP: Earlier I used to say, once your child is 12, the time to give him advice is over, now I have brought it down to 10. My formula for parenting is a mnemonic aid Partha:

P is a pattern for the children.

A stands for total acceptance of him.

R is respect his autonomy.

T is tolerance when he doesn't conform to your views.

H is honour as one king would look upon another.

A is not to analyse his actions especially in other people's presence.

NC: Don't you feel uncomfortable using the same role models as the RSS.

AP: My heroes are not necessarily perfect. When I use Shivaji, I don't say whatever Shivaji did was good. But it is true that an early age I don't want to subject them to unpleasant facts. The personal self-worth and affection given by parents or someone like me can transform people. Ruchira Rathod, an average student was so moved by a stupid cassette made by me that she secured 82% in the HSC and finished her MBBS.

I show the minus points of heroes too. I emphasise the how of minus points, I destroy the awe from the minds of people I call Gandhi a 'bum'. But Shivaji was a great man. He saw with his own eyes the Bhawani temple being destroyed by the Muslims, yet whenever he saw the Q'ran, he treated it with a lot of respect. He was secular in the true sense. The Rajputs were complete bums. According to Colonel Tod, Rana Sangha refused to fight because there were some hundreds of cows between the fort and the enemies.

NC: Since you believe in leaving out unpleasant things, why didn't you expunge the Padmini title.

AP: Padmini's act was voluntary but not preferably a role model. It was done very early. One learns on the job.

NC: How do you account for the great number of women in Amar Chitra Kathas?

AP: I have seen my aunts etc. play a greater role than their husbands. I can't imagine my cousins coming up except for my aunts. For the family a woman is capable of sacrificing much more than the man. I was orphaned very early in life. I studied in a Kannada medium school so when I came to Bombay, English-medium schools refused to admit me because I couldn't answer their questions in English. But every school that had ever denied me admission, has invited me for the purpose of honouring me.

NC: Then, how come Amar Chitra katha is targeted at a largely English speaking readership, since you say you suffered because of the English language politics.?

AP: Tinke has wider readership than ever Target, Chandamama and Children's world put together. This particular division of IBH is capable of handling only English sales. When Amar Chitra Katha was re-started, we sold the rights for the other language production and distribution to other publications, to Malayalam Manorama, to Diamond comics for Hindi and to Inka Prakashan for Bengali, Marathi, Gujarati and Kannada. The English reprint of the comics uses better quality paper hence it is priced at Rs.20; Rs.10 more than its language counterpart. The English comic has a large NRI market. In fact, I went out of my way to convince the management to have other language reprints. The highest sales is in Malayalam.

TAPE-2: SIDE-B

NC: What kind of public relations do you maintain?

AP: A 13 year old girl studying at Presentation convent, Srinagar recently wrote to me asking if she could be my friend despite the fight going on between Kashmir and India. I get a huge fan mail from the North East. I've contributed to binding the nation together. When I build the self-esteem of the child, he respects me. A person who has no self-esteem hurts another, he can be most cruel. A community which is happy about its image does not feel insecure. It will help others. Once a very important personality asked me to define what a Hindu is? My answer was anyone who by tradition

believes in the Karma Asura and Vivara is a Hindu. Jains, Buddhists and Sikhs are that way Hindu. The 10th Guru, Guru Gobind Singh never said that it was a separate religion, he called it the Khalsapanth, like Dadu and Kabir panth. Let the rituals go and let true Hinduism prosper.

In the Guru Granth Sahab, for instance, the name of Rama appears more numerously than in the Ramayana. I've the advantage that I am well-informed. These people don't know. If the person is genuine, people listen.

NC: Did you release the Sikh titles compiled under the Sikh banner for political reasons to suit the sales?

AP: When the Sikh wanted their identity, we tried to put all Sikh titles together and sell them.

NC: Comment on the popularity of Amar Chitra Katha?

AP: I've been a major crowd puller wherever I've been. In Calcutta, there was such a crowd that I'd to announce that one Amar Chitra Katha would be given free as an incentive to whoever left the hall. Nowhere in the world have Presidents and Prime Ministers released comics. Prannath was released by Gyaniji, Rajiv Gandhi release *Birth of the Indian Nation*, Indira Gandhi released *Rama Krishna*.

NC: I feel that one reason why the Amar Chitra Katha stopped production was due to the onslaught of global capital logic. What do you think?

AP: In allowing consumer industries, we are paving the way for another colonization. It is a threat to our traders, our economy. KFC may be stupid but technology is good. What one must do is reject consumer industries and use their technology. The reason why Amar Chitra Katha stopped production was because it was no longer profitable. The biographies and historical titles were never very popular. Hence, out of the 436 titles the 100 that are reprinted again and again are mostly mythologies, with a smattering of *Rani of Jhansi*, *Rana Pratap*, *Subhas Bose*.

NC: What kind of autonomy did the illustrators enjoy?

AP: Shivaji is only 5 ft 3" tall. I spent hours convincing my artist to not make him very tall. But he kept insisting "Shivaji is my hero, how can I make him

short". After hours of discussion, we came to a compromise 5 ft 6".

NC: Doesn't it bother you that Amar Chitra Katha represents polygamy, Sati and women's bodies in a light which betrays a sexist attitude. Don't you think it is dangerous to be so casual when the target audience is children?

AP: We can't measure by modern standards that which has happened so many years ago. Man has descended from Bonobook? and not apes. The gene map of Bonobook is 98% identical with that of man, and they had a matriarchal system. The Mahabharata is our history. It reflects the values of a time when society was transforming from polyandrous to polygamous one and hence Draupadi's 5 husbands. When I first did Krishna, (now it has been re-done from the Bhagvat Purana), I didn't want anything irrational. It's not my job to modify, I may delete but I've no right to modify.

(anant)

APPENDIX - B



इन लड़ाइयों में जीत रानी और उनके सैनिकों की रही।



राज्य का कोष जल्दी ही फिर से भर गया।



FIG.1: RANI DURGAVATI (pp.16-17)

महाधनक बड़ा हुआ तो बड़ी सुन्दर कन्या
से उसका विवाह हुआ।

स्वामी, आपकी माता ने
आपके लिए पकाया
है।

हँ - हाँ... सुगन्ध तो बड़ी
अच्छी है!



FIGS.2 & 3

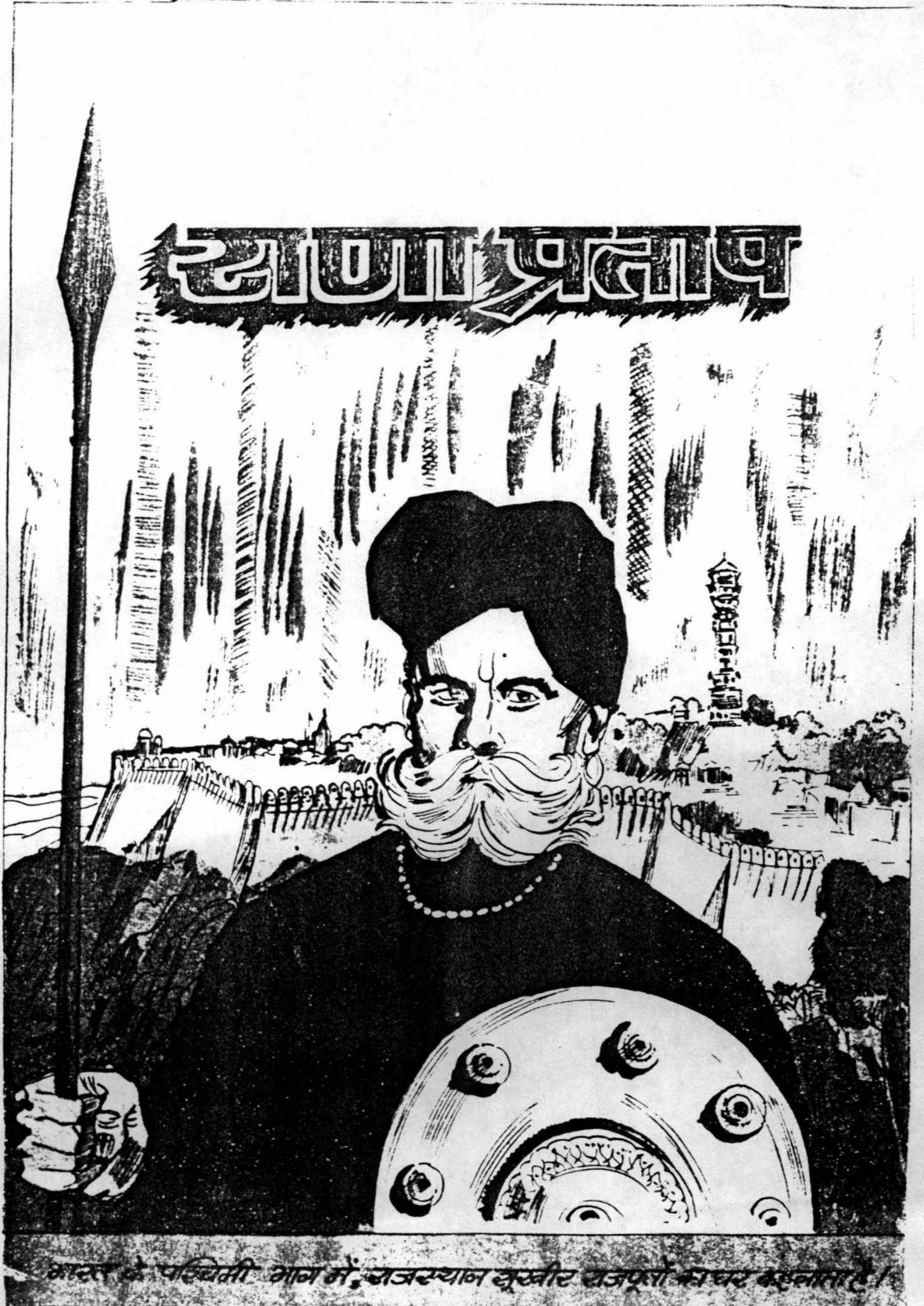


FIG.4: RANA PRATAP (p.1)

इतिहास साक्षी हैं कि देश की आन के लिए राजपूतों ने अनेक युद्ध लड़े।



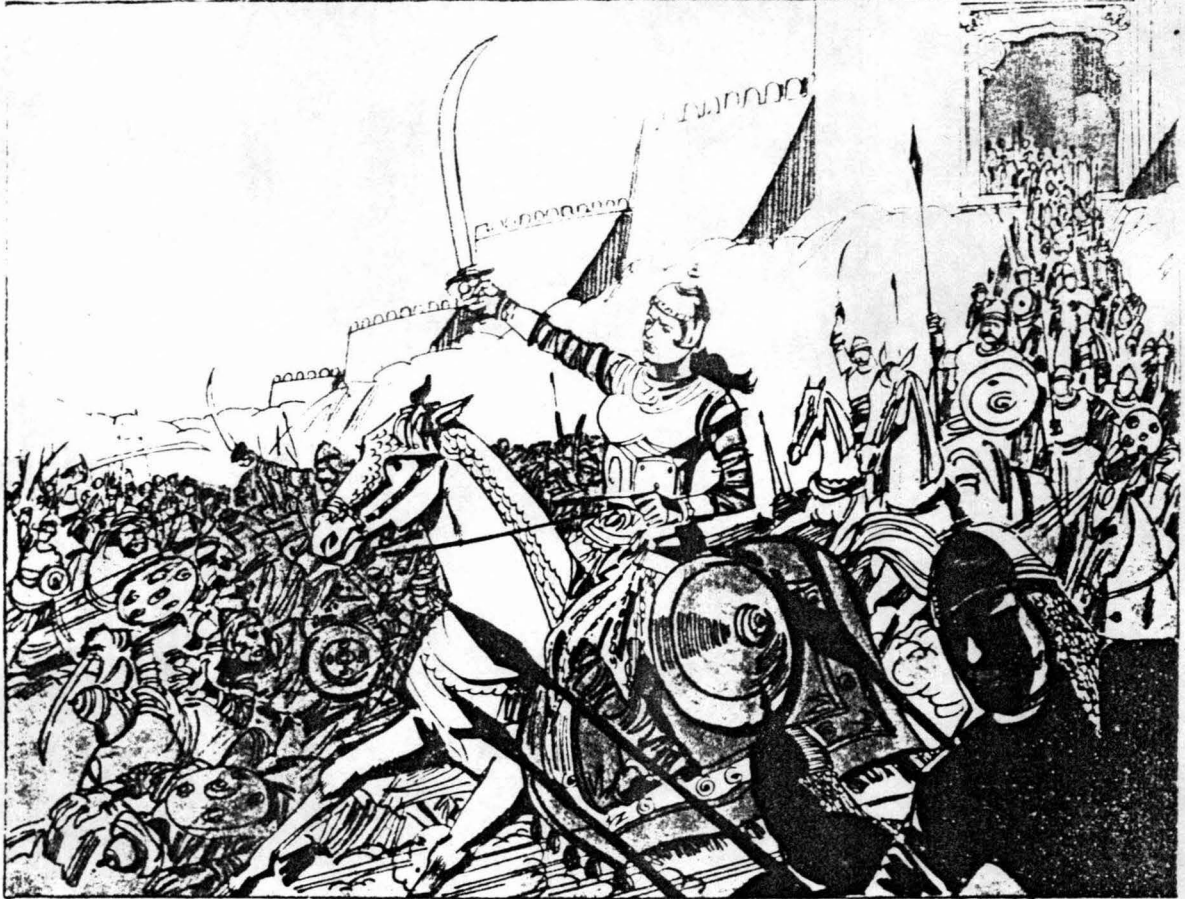
इनमें भी चित्तौड़ के राजपूतों की वीरता तथा त्याग के कारणों से सबसे बड़े-युद्ध कर रहे।



इससे बीआठवीं शताब्दी में उन्होंने मुगली आक्रमणकारियों के दौल अड़े किये।



और उनकी लारियाँ भी किसी प्रकार कम न थीं। चित्तौड़ की महारानी वर्म देवी ने कुतबुद्दीन की शक्तिशाली सेनाओं को पराजित किया था।



चौहहवीं शताब्दी में आततायी अलाउद्दीन खिलजी से अपने मान की रक्षा के लिए महारानी पद्मिनी तथा चक्रेणें राजपूत महिलाओं ने अपने को अग्नि की भेंट चढ़ा दिया था।



FIG.6: RANA PRATAP (p.3)

चित्तौड़ पर अधिकार करने में सबसे पहले सफलता पायी थी मुग़ल आक्रमणकारियों ने।



लगभग सभी उच्च राजपूत शासकों ने मुग़लों का प्रभुत्व अंगीकार कर लिया था। नहीं किया था तो केवल चित्तौड़ के राजा प्रताप ने।



FIG.7: RANA PRATAP (p.4)

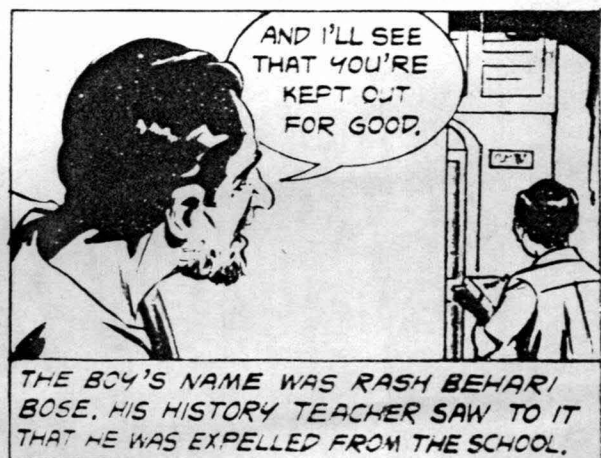
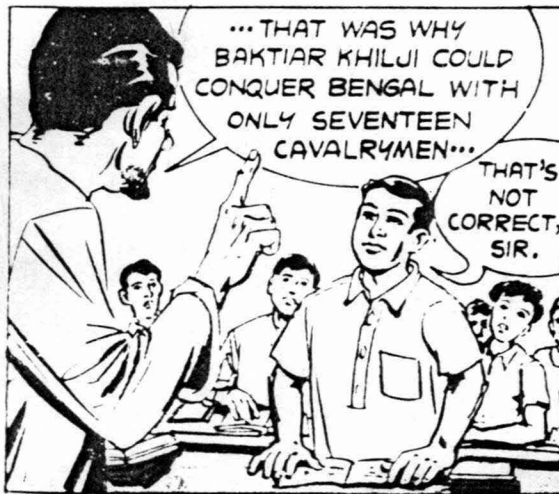
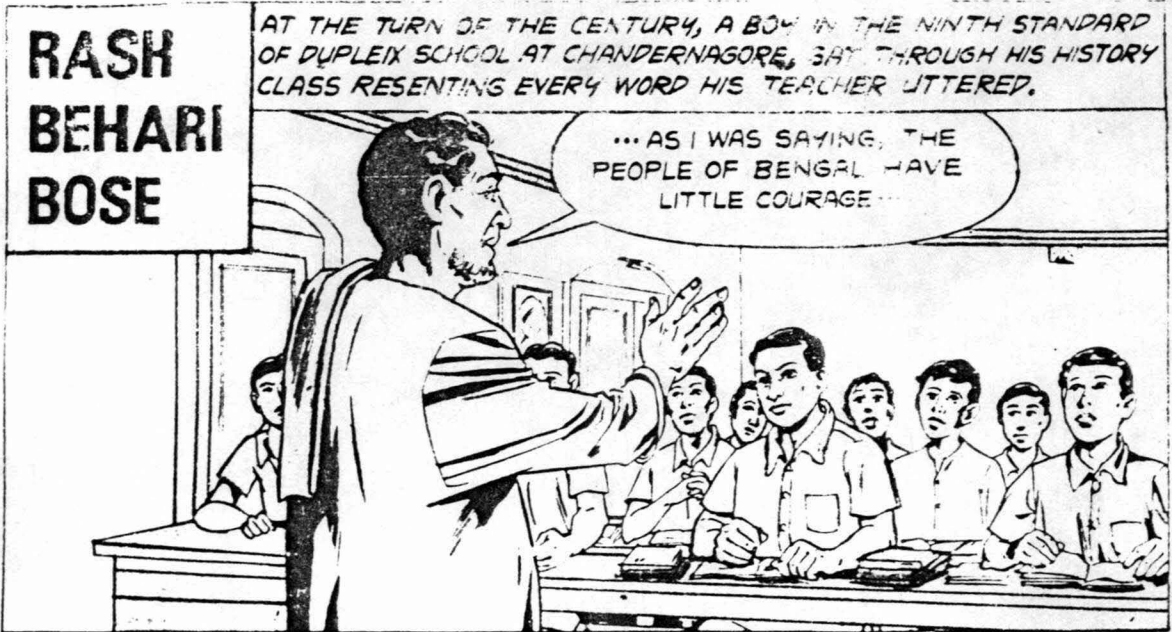
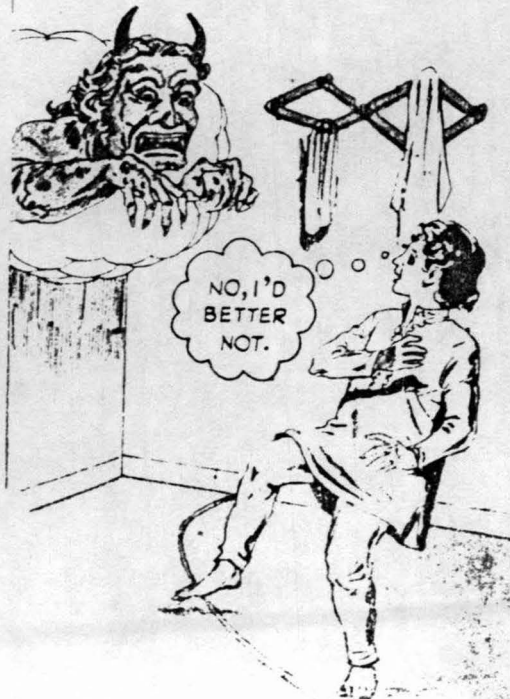


FIG.8: RASH BEHARI BOSE (p.1)

EVERY EVENING, ISHVAR WOULD READ OUT AND RETELL STORIES FROM THE RAMAYANA TO RABI AND THE OTHER CHILDREN OF THE HOUSEHOLD.



WHEN THE LITTLE BOY WAS TEMPTED TO STEP OUT OF THE CIRCLE, AN UNKNOWN FEAR WOULD GRIP HIM.



FIGS.9 & 10: RABINDRANATH TAGORE (p.2)



FIG. 11 : (p.27)



FIG.12: CHHATRASAL (p.32)



LEGENDS ABOUT THE SUPERHUMAN MIGHT OF RANADHIRA GREW AND CHILLED THE HEARTS OF RIVAL KINGS. HE EXPANDED HIS EMPIRE AND MADE MYSORE STRONG.

♦ AN AVATAR OF VISHNU

FIG.13: RANDIRA (p.31)

ONCE, WHEN HE WAS TRAVELLING IN A TRAIN -



PLEASE LEAVE MY POOR GIRL ALONE.

SHUT UP, GRANDPA

WHY ARE YOU SHY, DARLING?

THE SCOUNDRELS!

WITH A ROAR, JATIN BENT THE BARS THAT SHIELDED THEM...



...AND CHARGED.



WE ARE GRATEFUL TO YOU, MY SON. YOU HAVE SAVED OUR HONOUR.

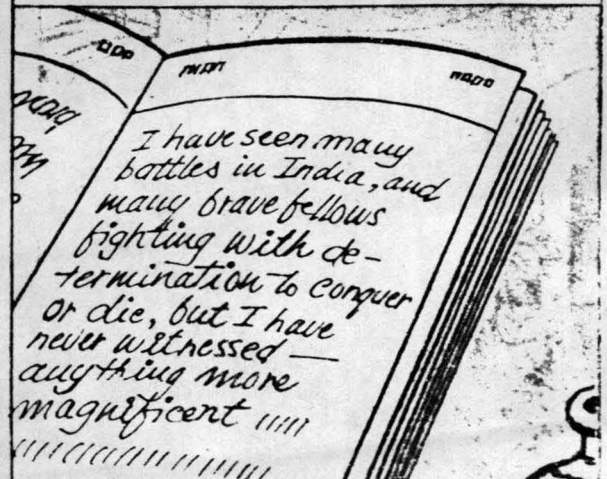
BUT THE HONOUR OF MOTHER INDIA WILL BE SAFE ONLY WHEN WE'VE THROWN OFF THE YOKE OF BRITISH RULE.



FIG.14: BAGHA JATIN (p.13)



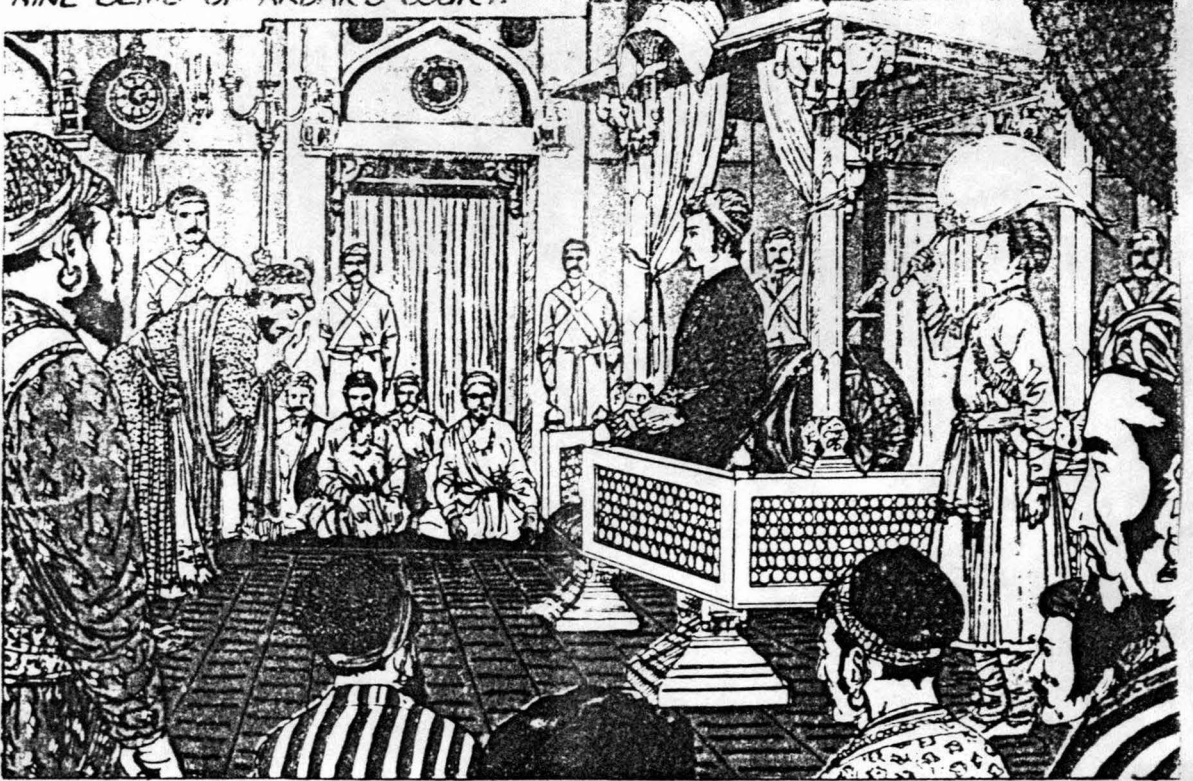
LATER, SIR HOPE GRANT WROTE IN HIS DIARY ABOUT THE EPISODE.



* BAYONETS

FIG.15: BENI MADHO (p.11)

TANSEN ARRIVED IN AGRA IN 1556. HE BECAME KNOWN AS ONE OF THE "NINE GEMS" OF AKBAR'S COURT.



AT NIGHT TANSEN WOULD SING HIS MELODIES NEAR AKBAR'S BED.



IN THE MORNING TANSEN'S SOUL-STIRRING "TODI" OR "BHAIRAV" GENTLY WOKE UP AKBAR AND HIS NOBLES.

SUBHANALLAH! YOU SANG THAT BEAUTIFULLY, TANSEN! HERE KEEP MY PEARL RING.



FIG.17: TANSEN (p.17)

DARA SHUKOH & AURANGZEB

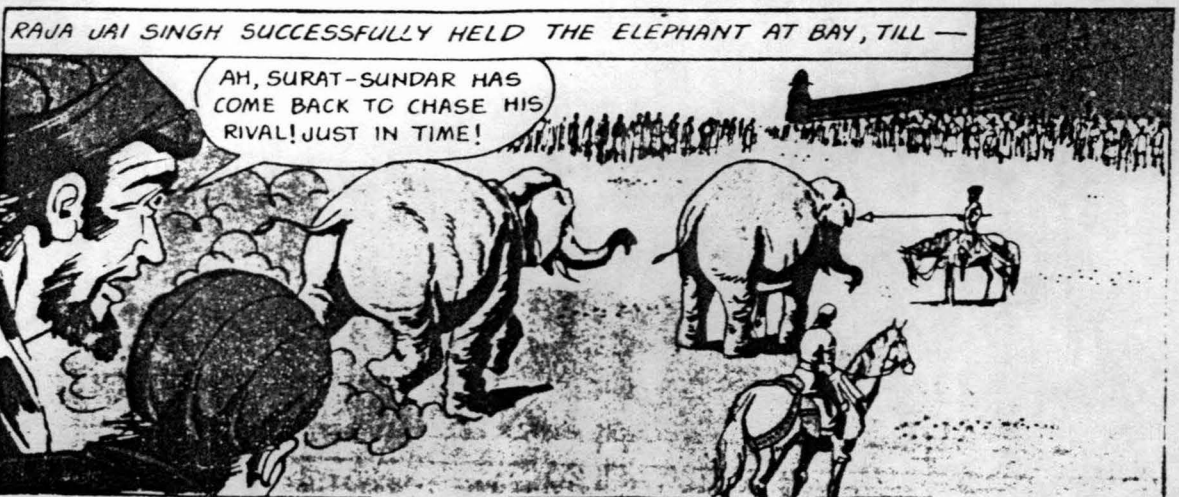
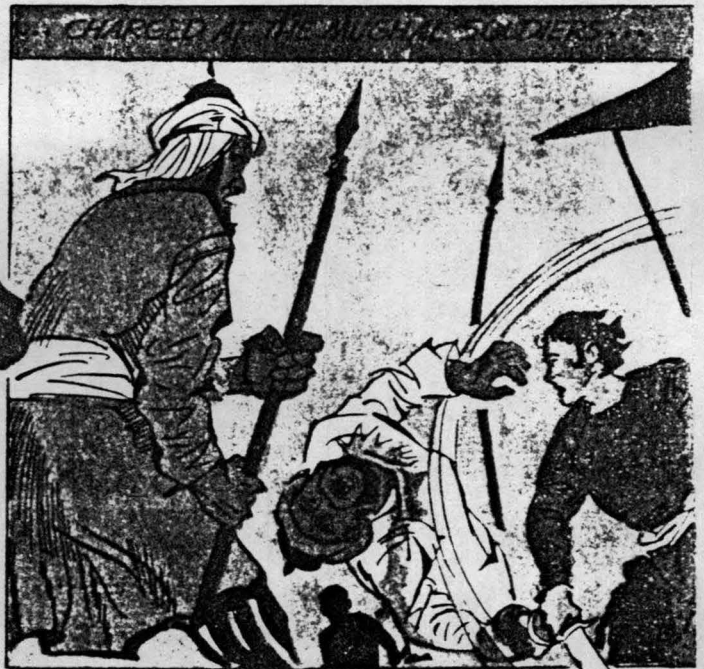


FIG.18: DARA SHUKOH AND AURANGZEB (p.5)

ON THE WAY, HE SAW TWO MURKHA SOLDIERS HARASSING DEVOTEES OUTSIDE A TEMPLE.



...AND KILLED BOTH OF THEM.



FIG.19: CHHATRASAL (p.4)

MOVED BY HIS FLIGHT, MIZAN, A WATER-CARRIER, SWAM TO THE EMPEROR AND OFFERED HIM HIS BLOWN-UP LEATHER BAG TO USE AS A FLOAT TO ESCAPE ACROSS THE RIVER.



I HAVE NOTHING TO GIVE YOU NOW. BUT COME TO ME IN AGRA, AND IF I LIVE YOU SHALL SIT ON MY THRONE FOR A WHOLE DAY.



WHILE A HUMBLE WATER-CARRIER DISPLAYED SUCH LOVING LOYALTY TO HIS EMPEROR...

...HUMAYUN'S OWN KITH AND KIN HAD TURNED TRAITORS. WHEN HE RETURNED TO AGRA —



THANK GOD YOU'VE ARRIVED SAFELY AND IN TIME, JAHANPANAH! KAMRAN AND HINDAL HAVE DESIGNS ON YOUR THRONE.

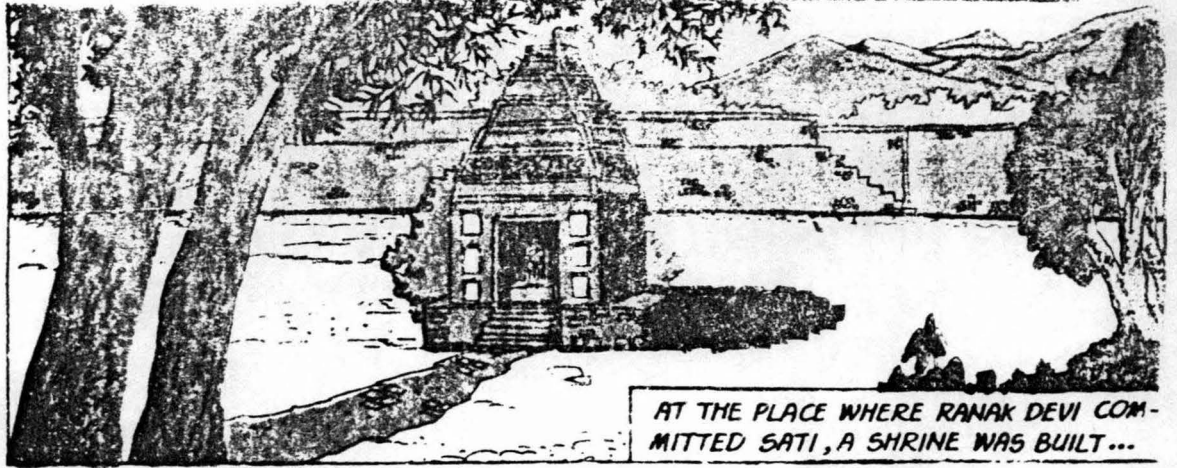
TO THINK THAT MY OWN BROTHERS SHOULD BE MY GREATEST ENEMIES. BUT I PROMISED FATHER I WOULD BE KIND TO THEM.

WITH THIS IN MIND, HUMAYUN HAD A LONG TALK WITH HIS ERRING BROTHERS.



PLEASE FORGIVE US, DEAR BROTHER.

FIG.20: HUMAYUN (p.16)



WHERE, TO THIS DAY, PEOPLE COME FROM FAR AND NEAR TO PAY HOMAGE TO HER MEMORY.



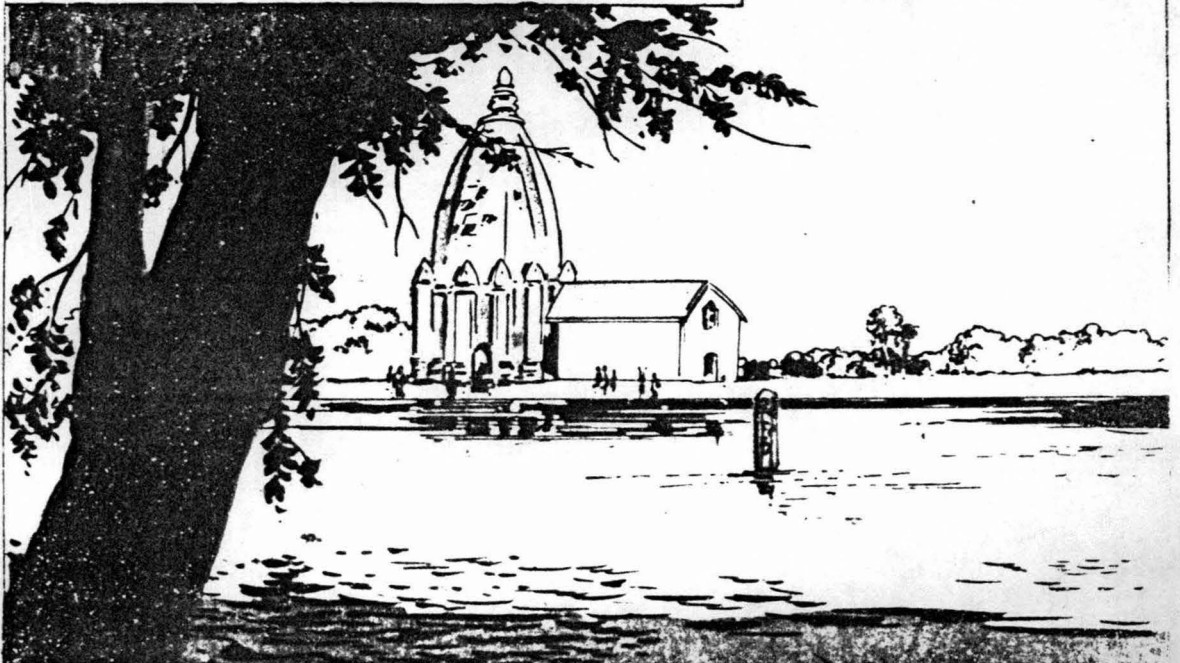
FIG.21: RANAK DEVI (p.31)

YEARS LATER, TEMPLES WERE BUILT TO HONOUR THE DIVINITY OF KANNAGI. EVEN TO THIS DAY PEOPLE WORSHIP HER.



FIG.22: KANNAGI (p.32)

GADAPANI COULD NOT ACHIEVE THIS IN HIS LIFETIME AS HE WAS BUSY FIGHTING WARS DURING HIS BRIEF RULE. HOWEVER RUDRA SINGH, HIS SON, WHO SUCCEEDED HIM, CARRIED OUT HIS WISH.



JAISAGAR. THE LAKE, AND THE TEMPLE ON ITS SHORE THAT WAS BUILT BY RUDRA SINGH IN MEMORY OF HIS MOTHER, JOYMATI, CONTINUE TO EXIST TO THIS DAY. A WOODEN POST IN THE CENTRE OF THE LAKE MARKS THE PEEPUL TREE TO WHICH JOYMATI WAS TIED WHEN SHE BREATHED HER LAST.

FIG.23: JOYMATI (p.31)

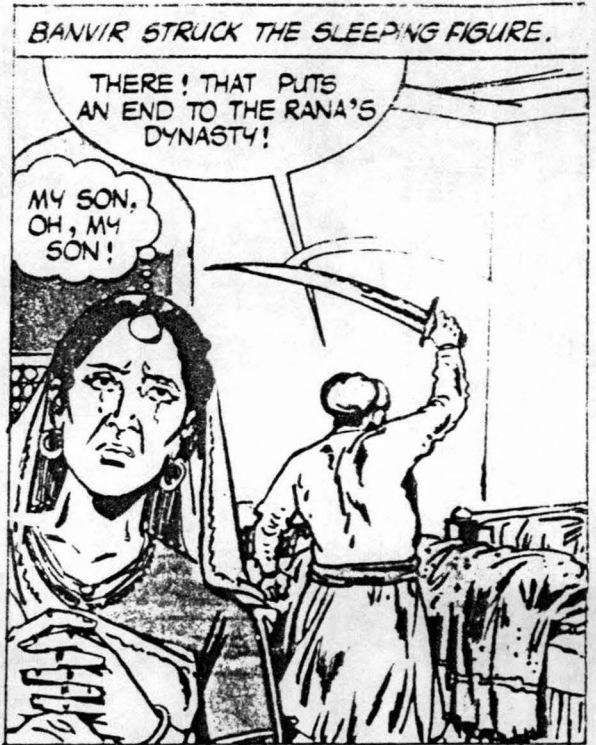


FIG.24: PANNA & HADI RAM (p.16)

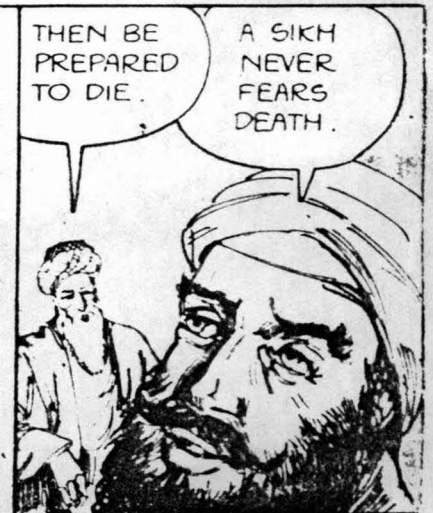
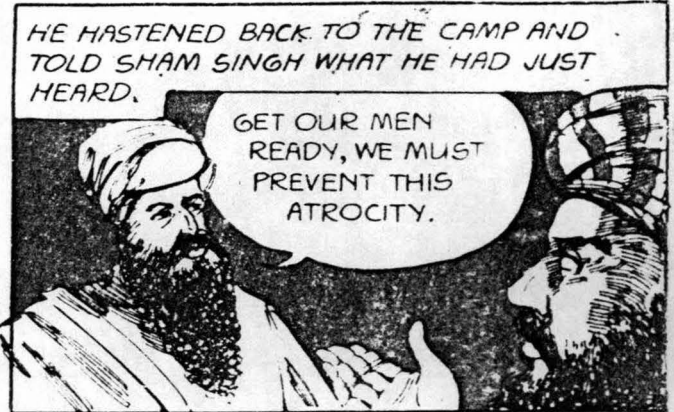
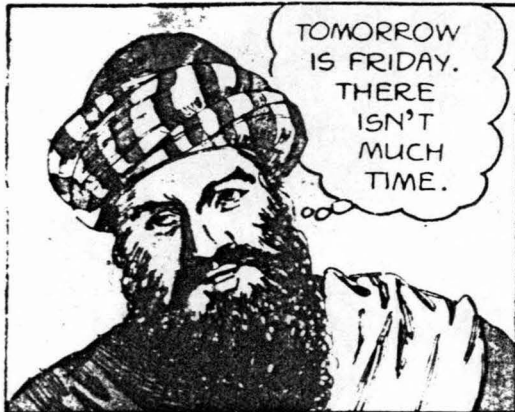
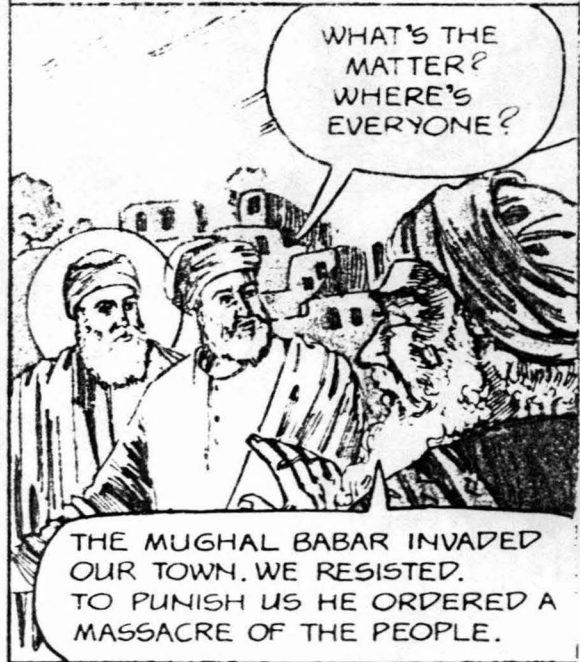


FIG.25: SUNDARI (p.15)

FROM MECCA GURU NANAK AND MARDANA VISITED BAGHDAD, TURKEY AND AFGHANISTAN AND THEN RETURNED TO INDIA, IN 1521.



BUT ALAS A SCENE OF DESTRUCTION MET THEM.



JUST THEN A FEW MUGHAL SOLDIERS MARCHED UP.



THUS GURU NANAK AND MARDANA WERE TAKEN PRISONERS.

THEY WERE THROWN INTO A CELL WHERE A NUMBER OF MEN AND WOMEN WERE MADE TO GRIND CORN ON HEAVY STONES.



FIG.26: GURU NANAK (p.27)



FIG.27: BIDHI CHAND (p.5)



Tales of exemplary
courage, valour, friendship
and sacrifice from

THE LAND OF THE FIVE RIVERS

- | | |
|--------------------|----------------------|
| 179 - Paurava | 49 - Ranjit Singh |
| 47 - Guru Nanak ✓ | 175 - Hari Singh |
| - Guru Arjan Dev | Nalwa |
| 181 - Guru Har | 96 - Sharan Kaur |
| Gobind Singh | 248 - Bidhichand ✓ |
| 114 - Guru Tegh | 124 - Satwant |
| Bahadur | Kaur |
| 32 - Guru | 76 - Sundari ✓ |
| Gobind Singh | 234 - Bhagat Singh ✓ |
| 43 - Banda Bahadur | IN |



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FIG.28: BHAGAT SINGH (back cover)

WHEN THEY REACHED THE GATES OF THE TEMPLE COURTYARD, SHE STEPPED OUT OF HER CHARIOT.



AS SHE WALKED TO THE TEMPLE, A MYRIAD EYES FOLLOWED HER EVERY MOVEMENT, DRINKING IN HER BEAUTY.



* LAJMI

FIG.29: KRISHNA AND RUKMINI (p.18)



FIG.30: KRISHNA AND RUKMINI (p.19)



FIG.31: MAHABHARATA - 3
THE ADVENT OF THE KURU PRINCES (p.29)

THE BIRTH OF GHATOTKACHA

MIDIMBAR TOOK BHEEMA ON HER
K. ROSE UP...



"...AND SPED THROUGH THE SKIES.



THEY SPORDED WITH HIM ON MOUNTAIN SLOPES WHERE
CELESTIALS ROAM AND WHERE THE BIRDS SING AND WHERE
EVERY SIGHT IS STIMULATING.



"SHE DESCENDED WITH HIM ON LAKES
COVERED WITH LOTUSES...



"...AND WALKED WITH HIM THROUGH
WILD FORESTS OF STRANGE TREES AND
DELICATE CREEPERS.



FIG.32: THE BIRTH OF GHATOTKACHA (p.25)



FIG.33: SAVITRI (p.7)



सावित्री



FIG.34: SAVITRI (p.9)



इस प्रकार मालविका और अग्निमित्र का सदा के लिए मिलन हो गया।



FIG.35: MALAVIKA (p.32)



FIG 36: BIMBISARA (p.28)



FIG.37: MALATI AND MADHAV (p.17)

... AND FROM IT EMERGED A FORMIDABLE FEMALE,
WITH FLAMES OF FIRE LEAPING OUT OF HER HAIR.



**FIG.38: KRISHNA AND THE
FALSE VASUDEVA (p.23)**



FIG.39: MALATI & MADHAVA (p.17)



FIG.40: GANGA (p.23)

WOMEN WERE ENLISTED AS TROOPERS AND CANNERS AND TAUGHT TO MARCH, SHOOT AND FENCE. THEY TOOK ON WATCH DUTIES AND CARED FOR THE WOUNDED.



FIG.41: RANI OF JHANSI (p.17)

LATER, THE BODY OF THE MISSING SCULPTOR WAS FOUND BURIED. NOT FAR FROM VASAVADATTA'S HOUSE. SHE WAS CHARGED WITH THE MURDER OF THE SCULPTOR.



VASAVADATTA HAD NOTHING TO SAY.



AS VASAVADATTA WAS TURNED OUT OF HER HOUSE, AN ANGRY MOB JEERED AT HER AND PELTED HER WITH STONES.



FIG.42: AMARAPALI AND VASAVDATTA (p.28)

WITH THE IMPACT OF SHARAN'S KICK, THE PATHAN LOST HIS BALANCE.



SHARAN RAN FOR ABOUT HALF A MILE AND THEN SAT DOWN TO REST.



IT WAS MORNING WHEN SHARAN TRUDGED WEARILY INTO FORT JAMROD.


SARDAR NALWA WILL BE HERE ANY MOMENT.



FIG.43: SHARAN KAUR (p.27)


THE BIRTHDAY PRESENT





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- for whom Chitra Katha is more a vehicle of education than a business.



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FIG.44

DURING HIS WIDE TRAVELS, HE ENLIGHTENED AND REFORMED MANY SOULS. AMONG THEM WERE SAJJAN, THE THUG; KAUDA, THE CANNIBAL; AND NURSHAH.



FIG.45: GURU NANAK (p.25)



IOB/3/80



MEENA'S FATHER DID A WISE THING HE OPENED A MINORS ACCOUNT IN HER NAME AT IOB. AND PUT ALL HER LITTLE EXTRA MONEY IN IT. SINCE MEENA IS OVER 12 YEARS OLD- SHE OPERATES THE ACCOUNT HERSELF AND HER SAVINGS EARN INTEREST.

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FIG.46

The Maltova Gang springs a surprise...

Yash had a very special birthday. The day when he would be 10 years old. He was with the other children of his class and they were all excited. What a splendid occasion! They had all had a party the previous year. Minnie had such lovely presents. So many too! But the little birthday girl said,

"What's the matter, Minnie?"

Daboo remembered Dhiru from the orphanage. Minnie had invited him yesterday. Do you know that he had never been to a birthday party before? They never celebrate birthdays at the orphanage and his is on Saturday! And his big tears rolled down Minnie's cheeks. Everyone was silent. They all knew and liked Dhiru, the little boy who never smiled.

Salim has an idea...

Salim sat up with a mysterious smile. Suppose they had a surprise party for Dhiru. Everyone thought it was a great idea! Daboo had saved some pocket

money and they had bought a cake. They had also bought some presents. Dhiru was very nervous and it was their first surprise party.

A surprise for Dhiru!

That Saturday, Dhiru was invited to Salim's house. No one had wished him and so he looked very sad. He knocked on the door and found it open. "Hello, where's everyone?" The house was dark. Suddenly the lights came on and there was everyone singing "Happy Birthday" — all of Dhiru's friends from the orphanage and the Maltova Gang. A big pink and white cake sat on the table.

There were also gifts for Dhiru. Dhiru was very happy. He had never had a birthday party like this before. He had never had so many presents. He had never had a birthday party like this before. He had never had so many presents.

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FIG.47

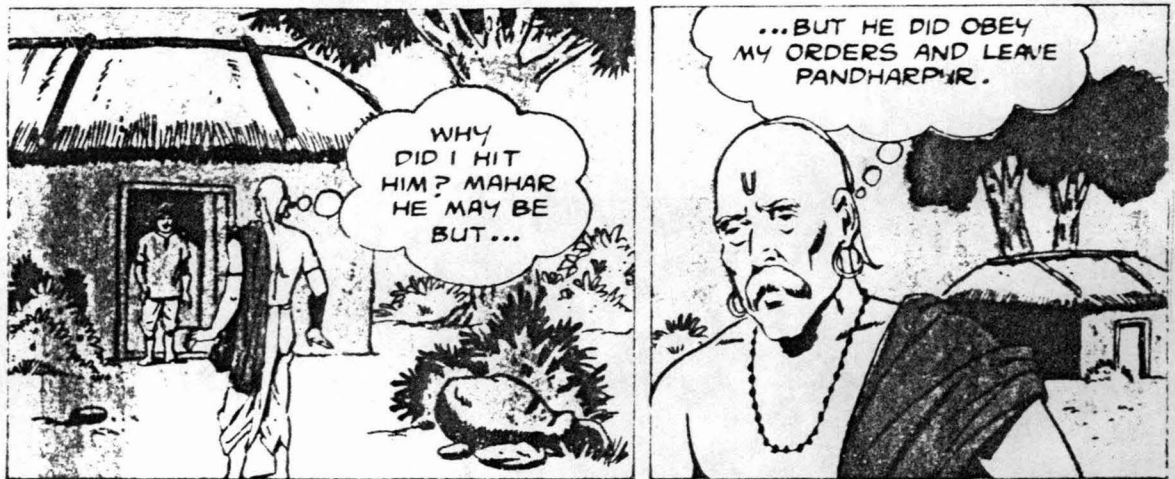


FIG.48: CHOKHA MELA (p.25)

HE ENTERED THE SANCTUM SANCTORUM AND CLOSED HIS EYES.



THEN HE OPENED HIS EYES AND GAZED UPON THE FACE OF THE IDOL. FOR THE FIRST TIME HE REALLY SAW THE DEITY.



THEN HIS GAZE FELL ON A CHEEK OF THE IDOL. WAS HE IMAGINING THINGS?



HE RUBBED HIS EYES... AND LOOKED AGAIN.

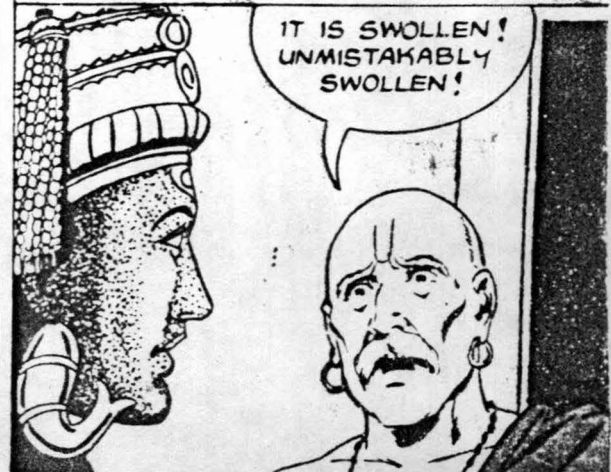


FIG.49: CHOKHA MELA (p.26)

AS HE WHIZZED PAST THEM ARJUNA LEANED FORWARD, SWEEPED HER INTO THE CHARIOT...

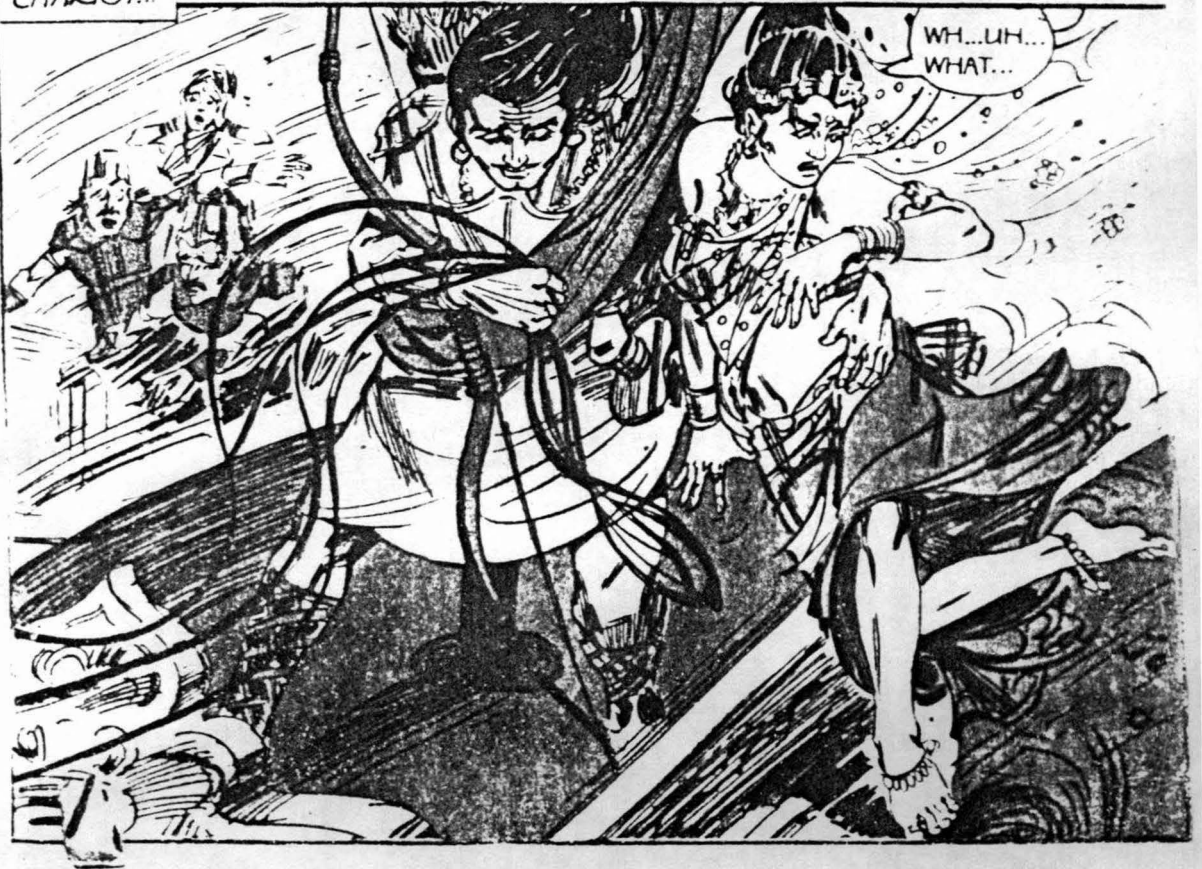


FIG.50: SUBHADRA (p.19)

सुन्दर वस्त्रों तथा आभूषणों का त्याग करके पार्वती अपने पिता के बताये हुए कुंज में जा बैठी।



कुंज के मृग उसे प्यार करते थे।



वह ठण्डी, और तर धरती पर सोती थी और वाम मात्र को ही मोजन करती थी।



तुमने क्या मेरे प्रेम को जाना नहीं? यह मैं नहीं मान सकती। शायद तुम मुझे और परखना चाहते हो?

वह पूजा-आराधना में लगी रहती। आस-पास के ऋषि-मुनि आ कर देखते—



— और आश्चर्य करते।

FIG.51: SHIVA PARVATI (p.18)

धरत धरत उसने, जो थाड़ा-बहुत स्थानी थी,
उस भी बिल्कुल छोड़ दिया।



इस
सातही से
इसने
कुछ नहीं
स्वाया।

यह तो
अपणा है

* अखण्ड उपवास करनेवाली स्त्री।



अपने आँठों पर
केवल तुम्हारा नाम
धारण करके
मैं जीवित
रहूँगी।

उसने बर्फ जैसे ठण्डे जल-कुण्ड
में प्रवेश किया। उसके आँठ
कांप रहे थे और ध्यान
अपने देवता में लगा था।

यह तो सचमुच
तपस्वियों की
सिरमौर है।

मेरे हृदय में
बसी हुई तुम्हारी
छवि मुझे
उष्णता प्रदान
करेगी।



कई वर्ष बीत गये परन्तु पार्वती ने आह्ला नहीं त्यागी।

एक दिन वह जल-कुण्ड में प्रवेश करने से
पहले पूजा-अर्चना की तैयारी कर रही थी कि
एक युवक ऋषि उससे मिलने आया। पार्वती ने
उसे प्रणाम किया।



तुम्हारा यह सुकुम
शरीर कैसे ये
कठिन कर्म करता है
जो तुम्हारी आत्मा
उससे
करवा रही
है?

FIG.52: SHIVA PARVATI (p.19)



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