

THE WORLD OF AMAR CHITRA KATHA

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The Indian comic book industry is large and growing, with comic books in English an especially popular product. Comics based on traditional Hindu mythological tales and historical figures seem to sell particularly well; they find markets not only in India, but in the West as well, among Indian immigrants. The purchasers tend to be adult, well-off and educated--the kind of people who want their children to read in English, and also want to assure them access to a cultural tradition that otherwise may seem increasingly remote. For the second-generation Indian-American students I teach here at Columbia, such "Classics Illustrated" comics have replaced grandmothers as the primary source of stories about India. While these comics are normally bought and presented by adults, our students remember reading them eagerly and with real enjoyment.

This flourishing genre has been dominated since the end of the 1960s by a single series, *Amar Chitra Katha* ("immortal illustrated story"), originally conceived and still edited by Anant Pai of IBH (India Book House) in Bombay. According to Anant Pai, however, the series had its real origin not in Bombay but in Delhi. There, in 1967, Pai had his first chance to watch television. As a government enterprise, television started in Delhi and only later came to the rest of the country. What fascinated Pai most was a quiz show for children. It fascinated him, that is, until a young boy was asked a question that turned Pai's delight to consternation:

They could answer every question about Greek mythology. . . . But in Delhi, mind you, where every year they enact the *Ramlila*--for ten long days they enact scenes from the *Ramayana*--the youngster could not answer the question, "Who is the mother of Ram?"¹

On Pai's return to Bombay, where he was on the editorial staff of IBH, other children commanded his attention. Since he and his wife have none of their own, these were nephews and nieces whom he encouraged, during their summer vacation, to try their hands at a monthly magazine. The children who produced "Family News" had never seen much of the world beyond Bombay; nonetheless they produced a story about a boy named Robert who lived in Warrington, a small English village near Birmingham. Robert wanted to be someone, and managed to get himself out of his village and off to London. Pai recalls thinking that something was wrong somewhere. "Their libraries were filled with books that came from England. I thought I must do something about it."

And so he did. The publisher at IBH, H. G. Mirchandani, had tried the year before to float Hindi translations of "Classics Illustrated" comics, but the effort had failed. Pai had predicted as much. He had once worked on the comic strip "The Phantom" at the *Times of India*, and knew that the real sales for such a product were in the English-language market. Now Mirchandani was ready to let Pai try out his own suggestion: not Western classics in Indian languages, but Indian classics in English. Thus, in 1967, *Amar Chitra Katha* began publication.

IBH was a book-publishing firm that showed little initiative in this new kind of marketing, so Pai remembers doing a good bit of stumping for Amar Chitra Katha. On one occasion he violated numerous taboos by putting up a display rack in a restaurant with his own hands--an amazing action for a white-collar worker and a Kerala Brahmin (Gangadhar 1988:139). Later he demonstrated the value of Amar Chitra Katha as a learning tool by giving free copies to schools and arranging for students to be tested on what they read. The results were spectacular, and many school libraries became subscribers. The emphasis on annual subscriptions, so that the comics were received regularly through the mail like magazines, was another innovative part of Amar Chitra Katha's vision.

Success came slowly. The first volume in the series, "Krishna," which by the late 1980's had sold over half a million copies, was printed in an edition of only 10,000, and in the first two or three years even those took a long time to sell.² In its earliest days, the series endeavored to bring out one new comic a month.³ The earliest titles were to be produced in "English, Hindi, Kannada, Gujarati, Telugu and Marathi,"⁴ but so demanding a program was obviously hard to sustain. For the first few years the series lost money, but then its popularity began steadily increasing. Now sales are very satisfactory, especially for the English versions, which sell out and must constantly be reprinted. Moreover, sales of the English versions abroad are growing rapidly.⁵ In 1986 IBH claimed to have sold a total of fifty million copies since the series began (India Book House 1986). In October 1988 the claim was raised to "over 75 million copies sold" (406:front cover); by 1993, "over 78 million copies sold" (563:inside front cover). For the recent Festival of India based in France, sixteen issues were translated into French. A recent cover (1992) claims that some translations have been made into "38 languages of the world." By the 1980's, the series was bringing out a new comic not once a month but once a fortnight, with much fanfare and extensive internal advertisement in other Amar Chitra Katha issues.

Every issue is first produced in English and is then translated into various regional languages as sales potential seems to warrant. Pai and his staff have claimed (to Hawley) that the languages regularly represented include Hindi, Marathi, Assamese, Kannada, Bengali, Malayalam, and Gujarati, with occasional translations into Tamil, Telugu, Panjabi, Urdu, and Sanskrit. This may be true, in principle. But K. T. Mirchandani told me that English is the primary language of distribution, with Hindi the only regular and really numerically significant Indian language. Observation in the North tends to bear him out. Not only individual issues and annual subscriptions are available, but also various collections of issues, bound into books; most of these are in English, with Hindi running second. In the late 1980s the emphasis was on planned "mini-series" groupings; these will be considered at greater length below.

In part because of such innovative marketing techniques, Amar Chitra Katha was going strong by the mid-1970s. In 1975, notice was taken of it in a UNESCO publication. In 1976, it attracted a very different sort of attention. The issue "Valmiki" (46), published in that year, repeated the traditional story of the Brahman Valmiki's early career as a thief, before he composed his *Ramayana*. This deeply offended the Valmiki Sabha, a group in the Punjab seeking to change their caste identity from sweeper to "Balmik": maintaining that Valmiki was neither a Brahman nor a thief, they actually attempted to sue Pai for libel. Though the legal case never got off the ground, Pai was burned in effigy in Jalandhar and Patiala. He showed a great desire for conciliation, and the controversy eventually died down. But Pai soon removed the issue on Valmiki from circulation--first the Hindi version, then the English. He waited quite some time before attempting another issue that raised the question of untouchability; when

“Chokhamela” (292) came out in 1983 and “Ravidas” (350) in 1986, Pai and his staff took extreme care not to offend the sensibilities of lower-caste readers.

Since the mid-1970s, and in some cases even before, great caution has been shown in preparing issues about characters from other minority communities as well. Pai and his staff point out that whenever an issue involving Sikh characters is drafted, an expert consultant on beards is employed. To show respect for Sikh feelings, the issue “Guru Nanak” (47), for example, depicts the holy man with a halo around his head from infancy, a distinction not accorded to Kabir or even Krishna. The treatment of Muslim characters will be discussed below. The complex problems of trying to satisfy conflicting demands from different groups will be studied in detail in John S. Hawley’s discussion (next chapter) of the six comics dealing with the great figures of the North Indian *bhakti* tradition: “Guru Nanak” (47), “Kabir” (55), “Tulsidas” (62), “Soordas” (137), “Guru Ravidas” (350)--and above all “Mirabai” (36).

Many titles in the series display the following pledge: “Amar Chitra Katha are brought out by people --who care for children; --who screen each word and each picture as they have a lasting impact on impressionable minds; --for whom Chitra Katha is more a vehicle of education than a business” (140:32). Pai obviously takes his role as an educator seriously. No doubt inspired by the success of Amar Chitra Katha, he now also runs a wholesome fortnightly “all-comics” magazine for young children called *Tinkle* (apparently started in November 1980, with monthly “digests” from it now available in bookstalls), and a magazine for older children called *Partha* (apparently started in September 1986). Both are frequently advertised in Amar Chitra Katha issues. *Partha* in particular is designed “to awaken the winner in you” (369:inside back cover). It is touted as “the self development

magazine,” “devised and edited by your own Uncle Pai.” Subscribers are promised a free copy of Pai’s book *The PARTHA Way to Success*, and long-term subscribers receive a cassette that accompanies the book (361:33). The book interprets the word “Partha” as an acronym for the real secrets of success: “Positive thinking; Aim; Restraints; Training; Hard work; Abiding interest” (Pai 1986:5).⁶ Amar Chitra Katha issues also advertise the Partha Institute of Personality Development, in which “responsible parents” are urged to enroll their twelve- to sixteen-year-old children (333:inside back cover). Amar Chitra Katha is thus part of a loosely integrated entertainment and self-improvement empire that has been come to span a number of media: comics, children’s books, audio cassettes, magazines, correspondence courses, and recently even a videotape.

Pai’s sustained, much-imitated, twenty-five-year-long oeuvre now includes well over five hundred comic books, with no end in sight. No doubt because this immense body of work presents itself as a lastingly valuable “vehicle of education,” the series maintains the firm official position that all of its constantly expanding repertoire of titles are truly **amar**, “undying.” K. T. Mirchandani told me that all the (English) titles are periodically reprinted, so that the whole series is (in principle) kept constantly in print.⁷ This is also the assumption of catalogues for the series, which list issues going back to the earliest.

Yet in practice sales do matter. Pai has said that an issue must sustain annual sales of at least 8,000 to 10,000 copies to be kept in print. One hundred eight regular issues that meet this criterion are listed in his “Editor’s Choice” catalogue. The catalogue claims that “the Editor has selected the following 108 as the best ones in the series”--not, it should be noted, the best-selling--and the number 108, which Hindus consider auspicious, already suggests that something more elevated than sales figures is involved. (In the 1990s ads often extol “Deluxe Editions”--with heavier cardboard covers and thicker paper--of “the best 50” titles.) With the three-title

“Bumper Issues,” a more conspicuous sleight of hand is practiced: when one such issue is allowed to go out of print because of poor sales, another with the same number replaces it, so that the impression of a continuous series is maintained.

But if sales matter, it is still possible for other considerations to outweigh them. Pai has often been urged to do an issue on the relatively new and very popular goddess Santoshi Mata; such an issue would surely sell well, for much of her constituency is drawn from the urban literate middle-class world to which Pai has the best access. Yet he steadfastly refuses, for he does not approve of her. He considers the theology of Santoshi Mata retrograde and undesirable: she punishes her most faithful worshiper cruelly for a flaw in her food offerings (sour food substituted for sweet)--a flaw for which the devotee could hardly be blamed, since she was unaware of it. This is not, in Pai’s view, an edifying way for a deity to behave. As he put it, a “punitive god” such as this would “hurt the sentiments of any intelligent Hindu.” The tension between financial and educational values is thus a powerful one; it amounts to a constant tug-of-war between competing goals. This tension was also reflected in the increasing presence of advertisements in the comic books in the late 1980’s--a presence apparently acceptable to Pai, though some of his staff had serious reservations about it. (The new Deluxe Editions advertise only IBH publications.)

Moreover, in the years since the incident with the Valmiki Sabha, Pai has become increasingly sensitive to the responsibilities imposed by Amar Chitra Katha’s emerging canonicity. When he reflects on the problem, he is apt to highlight its scholarly aspect, recalling especially a moment when on a trip to Delhi in 1975 he overheard a disagreement between two highly placed government officials about a point having to do with the *Ramayana*. To settle the argument, they turned to an Amar Chitra Katha comic book. Pai was taken aback, and resolved thereafter to be as exact in his scholarship as possible. However, this goal often conflicts with one of Pai’s general maxims, the Sanskrit phrase **satyam brūyāt priyam brūyāt mā brūyāt satyam apriyam**, which he quotes with approval. His translation: “You must tell the truth; you must tell what is pleasant. And that which is unpleasant--just because it is true, you need not say it.”

Pai and his staff thus create each issue in a field of tensions: sales versus educational values; scholarly accuracy versus the need to appease particular interest groups; a commitment to Indian history versus a commitment to national integration. And Pai addresses all these complexities in the comic-book medium--a medium with its own potent qualities, its own effects, its own opportunities and constraints. The result is a fascinating phenomenon, the product of a complex series of choices.

A TAXONOMY OF THE “GLORIOUS HERITAGE OF INDIA”

Amar Chitra Katha prides itself especially on its completeness and scope. Parents are urged again and again to use the series to acquaint their children with “the cultural heritage of India.” The series boasts of its power: “Amar Chitra Katha bring to life personages and events from the musty pages of Indian history” (171:back cover). The claim of universality, addressed not to children but to parents, is sweeping and explicit: “You want your children to know all about the culture of India. Amar Chitra Katha takes you on a trip right down to the roots of your heritage” (188:inside back cover). In December 1987, “Amar Chitra Katha--the Route to your Roots,” was used on an advertising flyer inserted into at least one issue (395). A 1988 “Editor’s Choice” catalogue offered “the quintessence of Indian culture and folklore.” In March 1988, the claim became even more ambitious: “Amar Chitra Katha...5000 years of

India's mythology, history, legend--the very soul of Indian culture--packed in volumes of 32 colourful pages" (399:inside back cover).

Such claims make it especially interesting to look at the ways in which the series organizes and presents itself. By now, after over two decades of increasingly successful publication, Amar Chitra Katha consists of well over 500 titles. Since many of the earlier issues are constantly being reprinted, the claims of the series to unity and universal scope are dinned into the reader's brain. Thirteen thousand pages are surely enough to define a universe. What does the series include--and, perhaps even more to the point, what does it exclude? How does Amar Chitra Katha define "the very soul of Indian culture"?

In its catalogues, Amar Chitra Katha analyzes itself into a number of seemingly arbitrary (and often overlapping) categories--which nevertheless appear to remain stable over time. The most recent full catalogue that I have been able to obtain (India Book House 1986) uses the following taxonomy: "Mythology" (90 titles); "Sanskrit Classics" (12 titles); "Regional Classics" (13 titles); "Teachers and Saints" (27 titles); "Poets and Musicians" (7 titles); "Folk Tales and Legends" (56 titles); "Buddhist Tales" (24 titles); "Jaina Tales" (6 titles); "Tales from Ancient Indian History" (14 titles); "Tales from Medieval Indian History" (5 titles); "The Mughals and their Adversaries" (10 titles); "The Rajputs" (7 titles); "The Marathas" (6 titles); "The Sikhs" (8 titles); "Heroes who Fought the British" (2 titles); "The Indian Revolutionaries" (5 titles); "Glimpses of 1857" (4 titles); "Monuments and Battles" (3 titles); "Great Women of India" (13 titles); "Makers of Modern India" (13 titles); "Scientists and Doctors" (4 titles).⁸

If the taxonomic divisions are worthy of attention, the issue numbers themselves are also suggestive. In a series like this, conceived from the beginning in ambitious and idealistic terms, the lowest-numbered titles must surely lie at the heart of things. The first ten titles are: "Krishna" (11), "Shakuntala" (12), "The Pandava Princes"⁹ (13), "Savitri" (14), "Rama" (15), "Nala Damayanti" (16), "Harishchandra" (17), "The Sons of Rama" (18), "Hanuman" (19), and "The Mahabharata"¹⁰ (20). Some of these titles are apparently now being reissued under new numbers as well, starting with "Krishna" (501) and "Hanuman" (502) (563:back cover).

But readers need not buy according to catalogue headings or issue number alone, for the series practices much more concrete forms of self-classification. Amar Chitra Katha titles are not only sold individually and by annual subscription, but are also grouped by IBH into larger, more book-like units. One can order a series of deluxe hardbound volumes containing the whole series bound sequentially in sets of ten. Or one can choose from a group of 40 "Bumper Issues," each containing three related titles bound together. Or one can buy any of 10 hardbound, nicely produced "Navaratna Deluxe" volumes, numbered 1-10, each containing nine related titles.

An especially interesting example of such after-the-fact groupings is Navaratna #2, "Stories from the Ramayana."

"STORIES FROM THE RAMAYANA"

Three of the first ten Amar Chitra Katha issues were stories from the *Ramayana* tradition. In the course of time the number of such free-standing tales continued to increase, until the series included: "Rama" (15); "The Sons of Rama" (18); "Hanuman" (19); "The Lord of Lanka" (67); "Vali" (101); "Dasharatha" (105); "Ancestors of Rama" (122); "Mahiravana" (207); "Kumbhakarna" (220); "Hanuman to the Rescue" (254); "Ravana Humbled" (305). Nine of these stories have been amalgamated into "Navaratna No. 2," called "Stories from the Ramayana." Each of the ten Navaratna volumes costs Rs. 45, and is nicely bound in a handsome

hardcover format: a bright red cover seemingly tied both front and back with a green ribbon and bow, excellently suggesting the idea of a gift for a favorite child. The cover is further adorned with miniature reproductions of all the nine colorful covers of the titles bound inside. In short, the volume has the general air of a real book, and is probably as close as many children will come to the *Ramayana*. For some of its readers, this book--an amalgam of Kalidasa, Valmiki, Tulsidas, Krittivasa, and Bhavabhuti, in proportions fixed by Anant Pai--may actually *be* the *Ramayana*. It has joined the "many *Ramayanas*" read and told in South Asia (Richman 1991).

The nine stories inside are arranged in proper narrative order. First comes "Ancestors of Rama" (122). Its introductory note begins, "Tradition has it that Rama was the ideal king. Gandhiji was only reinforcing it when he named his ideal state 'Rama-Rajya.'" Rama's predecessors were "as valiant and as benign" as Rama himself--but not perfect. "The heroes of epics have their tragic flaws because epics always tell the whole truth. Like Rama, his ancestors also had flawed characters despite the glory of their personalities." But we are given no insight into Rama's "flawed character." Instead, the note goes on to identify the source of the story as Kalidasa's *Raghuvamsa*. The story itself recounts the lives of the three Ikshvaku kings Dilipa, his son Raghu, and Raghu's son Aja, father of Dasharatha.

Next comes "Dasharatha" (105), described as "drawn mainly from Valmiki's famous epic poem." It is devoted to Dasharatha's whole adult life, from the time he incurs the well-known curse until his death.

The introduction to "Rama" (15) tells the story of the krauncha bird, and emphasizes unity in diversity: "The *Ramayanas* of Kamban, Tulsidas or Tunchan, are all, but variations, on the same theme. This lofty theme, embodies in the characters of Rama and Sita, the highest ideals of 'man' and 'woman'." The story is said to be derived from Tulsidas's medieval eastern Hindi version, the *Ramcaritmanas*. Being a very early, stand-alone issue, "Rama" retells the entire story in compressed form, from the birth of Rama through the death of Ravana, ending with Rama and Sita enthroned in splendor.

"Vali" (101) is attributed to the Valmiki *Ramayana*, and describes the combat between Vali and Sugriva, Rama's intervention, Vali's repentance and death.

"Hanuman" (19) is also drawn from Valmiki. Its hero, we are told, "was born a monkey and yet attained a prominent place among the Hindu Gods, by his sterling character." He was "the greatest of the Bhaktas (Devotees) ever known"--never "narrow minded, or supercilious," but always "compassionate." And the note concludes, "Whether Hanuman was a monkey or not is beside the point for those who can see the noble spirit in this ape-like form." Actually, his form is not at all "ape-like," but almost entirely human; this is a point to which we will return. The issue itself, no doubt because it is so early in the Amar Chitra Katha cycle, once again recapitulates the whole story, from Hanuman's meeting with Rama to the death of Ravana and Rama's triumphant enthronement, emphasizing Hanuman's heroic role in these events.

"The Lord of Lanka" (67) is attributed to Valmiki's "Uttara kanda." "Unlike the Mahabharata," the introductory note informs us, "the story of Rama has no historical foundation," yet it has become "an intrinsic part of Hindu life." The issue recounts Ravana's antecedents and earlier life, then in the final seven pages depicts his encounter, "disguised as a monk," with Sita, and the abduction, leading rapidly to his fatal battle with Rama; the story ends as Vibhishana is crowned king of Lanka.

By contrast, "Kumbhakarna" (220) is retold from the Bengali version of the *Ramayana* by Krittivasa, who is described in the introductory note as a "poet of the people" who used "simple language" and "metaphors that are easily understood." Kumbhakarna is

frighteningly gigantic, but he is depicted as potbellied, clumsy, and a bit ludicrous; his whole life is narrated, right up to his death on the last page--a last page which also reports that Ravana was killed by Rama, and ends with Vibhishana being crowned.

“Hanuman to the Rescue” (254) is also derived from Krittivasa’s version. It records Hanuman’s adventures as he fetches Mount Gandhamadana, with its herb that will restore the wounded Lakshmana to life. It ends as Lakshmana recovers and Hanuman releases the Sun God, whom he had imprisoned under his arm.

Finally, “The Sons of Rama” (18) is based on Bhavabhuti’s *Uttararamacarita*. It starts with the washerman’s taunt to his wife, and ends with Sita’s return to the earth and Rama’s reconciliation with Lav and Kush.

These nine originally separate comics indeed tell the story of Rama, after a fashion: they don’t contradict one another, and the narrative does proceed from earlier to later stages. Yet it’s clear even from this brief summary that the fit is not ideal. It could not be, for it was created after the fact. “Rama” (15) and “Hanuman” (19) in particular go over much of the same ground, with many additional repetitions in other volumes as well. The separate identity of the parts remains paramount. The volume they make up when bound together is only a loose and casual collection; it does not really become a coherent version of the *Ramayana*.

In contrast to this after-the-fact approach, Amar Chitra Katha began in the mid-1980s to develop pre-planned “mini-series” sets. By far the more ambitious of the two published so far is a mini-series that attempts to render the whole *Mahabharata*.

“THE MAHABHARATA IN 60 VOLUMES”

It is clear that Amar Chitra Katha has had a strong commitment to the *Mahabharata* from the start. Even a partial listing of titles is impressively long: “The Pandava Princes” (13); “Nala Damayanti” (16); “Mahabharata” (20); “Karna” (26); “Bheeshma” (34); “Abhimanyu” (35); “Drona” (57); “Ghatotkacha” (61); “Draupadi” (72); “Parikshit” (115); “The Gita” (127); “Krishna and Jarasandha” (147); “Tales of Yudhishtira” (174); “Tales of Arjuna” (198); “Gandhari” (209); “Bhima and Hanuman” (214); “Friends and Foes--Animal Tales from the Mahabharata” (238), etc. Four triple “Bumper Issues” have been created out of such *Mahabharata* stories, and one nine-issue “Navaratna Deluxe” (#3) as well.

All these titles are based on particular, independent episodes; even publishing them all in a single immense volume would not have created a *Mahabharata* in any real sense. In March 1985, therefore, a new project began, “in response to a persistent demand from our readers for a comprehensive account of the epic.” The whole “immortal epic of Vyasa as narrated by Vaishampayana” was to be told in sixty “volumes.” This ambitious new mini-series was officially introduced in an advertisement in early 1985: “Amar Chitra Katha brings you THE MAHABHARATA in 60 Volumes” (Figure 1).¹¹ The ad was quite explicit, promising “60 volumes of 1920 illustrated pages in colour.” These “volumes”--or issues--were to come out at a rapid pace: “One volume a month beginning from March 1, 1985.” Every second Amar Chitra Katha issue would thus be from the *Mahabharata* series; readers were even offered the chance to subscribe only to the 12 *Mahabharata* issues a year (Rs. 48) rather than the whole Amar Chitra Katha set of 24.

These pledges have since been modified. The pace has been a bit slower than an issue every fortnight; in 1988 Amar Chitra Katha issued only one issue a month, so that *Mahabharata* numbers came out only every two months. But the most striking change has been in the number of issues. The most recent issue I have seen, “Yudhishtira’s Coronation” (408),

is identified within the mini-series as “Mahabharata--40.” And this issue, with characteristic self-referentiality, advertises “Amar Chitra Katha’s Mahabharata,” which is “[a]cknowledged as an authentic source,” and which is “the complete Mahabharata in 42 lucid, highly readable issues” (408,32) (Figure 2). The ad ends with the exhortation, “Read it to enjoy your Sunday viewing!”; it thus seems possible that the mini-series was hastened to a close to take advantage of the extremely popular *Mahabharata* series then (1989) being shown on Indian television.

The first issue of the mini-series, “Veda Vyasa” (329), introduces the *Mahabharata* as “shrouded in mystery”: “Can the levels of Painted Grey Ware and Northern Black Polished Ware, or the names of present-day cities and plains, or the radiocarbon tests of excavated materials, vouch for its historicity?” Though there is no “conclusive answer,” the core of the story, the war, “must have had its roots in some real event.” This preface is followed by a bibliography naming four *Mahabharata* versions said to have been used for in preparing the series: a Sanskrit text with Hindi translation by Pt. Ramnarayandutt Shastri Pandey (Geeta Press, Gorakhpur); a Malayalam verse version by Kunjikuttan Tampuran (S.P.C.S., Kottayam), Pratap Chandra Roy’s venerable English prose version (Munshiram Manoharlal, New Delhi), and the modern Pune critical edition published by the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute (329:inside front cover).

As a part of its efforts to achieve scholarly legitimacy, the mini-series attempts to preserve the layers of emboxed narration. The first issue begins with Vyasa acquiring Ganesha as his scribe and starting the dictation; it then soon moves on to Vaishampayana narrating to Janamejaya. (This latter pair persist throughout the mini-series, appearing from time to time in panels colored a uniform bright gold to remind us of their privileged status.) At the end of the last page appears, “And thus ends the first session of our rendering of Vaishampayana’s recital (during the intervals in the rites of Janamejaya’s sarpa satra) of Vyasa’s immortal itihasa, The Mahabharata” (329:31). This elaborate closing statement is simplified a bit in later issues, but is never abandoned.

But how is the young reader to know, for example, what a “sarpa satra” is? In this case, “sarpa” is defined in a one-word footnote at the bottom of the page as “snake,” and “satra” as a “12-year-long yagna”--which would leave many readers still bewildered. Page 32 of this first issue also consists of a “Pronunciation Guide and Glossary,” with names and terms first given in Devanagari script, and then--in some but by no means all cases--explained. Such last-page glossaries are provided for the first six *Mahabharata* issues; after that, they disappear.

Amar Chitra Katha boasts that its mini-series “faithfully follows the original Sanskrit text even as it is condensed” (359:inside front cover); and while that paradoxical claim cannot be taken at face value, the resulting diction is certainly--for the most part--lofty and decorous. Yudhishtira says to Bhishma, “O Grandsire, this ocean of kings is agitated with ire” (361:19). An ordinary bystander in Hastinapura observes to his friend, “This is the restoration of Yudhishtira who with unerring justice takes care of us as if we were his kin!” To which his friend replies, “It is as if Pandu himself has returned from the forest for our general weal!” (353:20). At one wonderful point Sanjaya tells Dhritarashtra, “Cussedness on the part of you and your children will be the cause of the destruction of the Kauravas” (383:3).

Although many passages respond to modern didactic concerns, a number of others emphatically do not. Though Anant Pai is normally acutely sensitive to caste politics, in this series the Ekalavya story is told with hardly a hint of disapproval at its aggressive casteism: Drona is described as “aware of the rules of right conduct” when he refuses to take the low-caste Ekalavya as his pupil; and even though Drona says “cruel words” to Ekalavya, the latter is

apparently acting properly (“steadfast in the path of truth”) when he obeys them and hacks off his thumb, while Drona’s action evokes not a further word or hint of narrative criticism (337:17-22).¹² Later Yudhishtira tells Sanjaya that every “varna” (defined in a footnote as “caste”) “should strictly adhere to its own dharma.” If a man “takes recourse to the dharma of another caste” without strong need, “his conduct is thoroughly reprehensible” (381:28). Nothing in the treatment of the episode calls this judgment even slightly into question.

Moreover, the graphically depicted burning of the huge Khandava forest, including the deliberate burning alive of all the creatures in it (357:9-14), calls forth not a quiver of humanitarian or environmental uneasiness. As for women, Krishna advises Arjuna at some length: “In matters of marriage, abduction by a bold Kshatriya is also approved by the learned. Therefore, Arjuna, carry away my sister by force. Who knows what her choice will be at a swayamvara?” (355:15). In this mini-series *Amar Chitra Katha* seems to be claiming exemption from its usual concerns--including its oft-repeated promise to take seriously its “lasting impact on impressionable minds”--by digging in behind the carefully reinforced bulwark of textual fidelity.

“THE EPIC OF MODERN INDIA”

Another mini-series was even more recently introduced (January 1986) than the *Mahabharata* one, and with at least as much fanfare: “*Amar Chitra Katha Presents the Epic of New India: The March to Freedom in 6 Volumes*” (348:32) (Figure 3). The titles of the six issues were announced in advance, as a planned group: “The Birth of the Indian National Congress” (348); “A Nation Awakes” (356); “The Saga of Indian Revolutionaries” (360); “The Call for Swaraj” (364); “The Salt Satyagraha” (368); “The Tryst with Destiny” (372). Lacking any traditional source, this *March to Freedom* mini-series is much more arbitrarily defined than the *Mahabharata* one.

The first issue of the mini-series, “The Birth of the Indian National Congress” (348), introduces itself as bringing to life the “epic story of our freedom struggle,” an epic that “cuts across barriers of caste, community, region, language, haves and have-nots.” Epics are “eternal,” and we must preserve this new one as well as the old ones: “We must know what our parents, grandparents and their grandparents suffered under the British rule. We must know why they fought and what they fought for” (348:inside front cover).

The scholarly ambitions of this mini-series are even more conspicuous than those of the *Mahabharata* one. The bibliography provided for the first issue alone consists of seven academically-oriented volumes; six are by Indians, and the seventh is Joseph Schwartzberg’s *Historical Atlas of South Asia*. The bibliography for the second issue, “A Nation Awakes” (356), consists of eleven scholarly volumes, ten by Indians; for the third issue, “The Saga of Indian Revolutionaries” (360), nine volumes, all by Indians, are cited. The scholarly emphasis continues within the stories themselves. The ratio of narrative prose and static panels to vivid pictures and action panels, which is high in the *Mahabharata* mini-series, is even higher here. Excerpts from proclamations, letters, speeches, newspaper articles, and other such historical source materials frequently appear.

Even more strikingly, whole pages of documentary-style abstract prose are sometimes inserted into the midst of the stories. In the first issue, we find four prose pages in a row: a centerfold called “India Under the British Yoke” is subdivided into “The Wealth Drain,” “Torture to Exact Land Revenue,” and “Famine Deaths”; it is immediately followed by “Lest we forget,” a compendium of anti-British remarks by eight Englishmen who were “much ahead of

their time” (348:16-19). A few pages later we encounter a full-page map and chronology called “1857, The Great Revolt” (348:23). The second issue in the mini-series offers three concluding pages of prose: a two-page spread on “The Swadeshi Enterprise,” followed by the one-page “Vivekananda taught Self-Esteem” (356:30-32).

The narrative voice in this mini-series has also changed: it now speaks at great length, and chiefly in the first person plural. This nationalist narrative is consistent, passionately defended, and based on a clear sense of economic as well as political grievance. Such a nationalism is present not only in this mini-series, but less explicitly in many other Amar Chitra Katha titles as well. It is a nationalism that generates a force field with two crucial poles: the rejection of the negative “them,” and the close mutual bonding of the positive “us.” This is a point worth examining at some length.

Understandably, the British are “them,” and are depicted as negatively as possible. The cartoon drawing in these issues is often caricatural, with the British arrogant and ugly, the ordinary Indians abject and stereotypically oppressed-looking, the anti-British Indians resolute in battle and saintly on the gallows. Indians who are part of the colonial administrative system are hardly even acknowledged; if they are briefly depicted, they are unattractive--unless they are doing something with anti-British implications. This narrowed perspective naturally leads, despite all the trappings of historicity, to inadequate understandings of the past.

To take one important example, 1857 is portrayed as a completely united national struggle: “Our farmers, traders, professionals, rajas, nawabs all, all joined the struggle against the British” (348:24). But if anything like “all, all” the Indians had ever united in this way, the British would simply have been pushed into the sea. In fact, in 1857 Indians were divided: some actively supported the rebels, some actively supported the British, and a great many simply lay low and waited for things to settle down again. Because the Amar Chitra Katha version does not acknowledge this situation, it ends up making the British sound like supermen, with vague but irresistible powers: “Though the British suffered heavy losses in the beginning, they were able to regroup, deploy forces and regain lost positions” (348:24). Later on, *The March to Freedom* gives brief but very favorable treatment to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, who “fought valiantly” with the Japanese-backed Azad Hind Fauj. “However, the Allies emerged victorious in the war” (360:29-30), the narrator says, without comment.

If “they,” the British, are so clearly outside the pale, “we” must obviously be all inside it together. “We” emphatically includes the Scheduled Castes, to whom Amar Chitra Katha devotes several titles--“Babasaheb Ambedkar” (188), “Guru Ravidas” (350), “Narayana Guru” (403), etc.--and whose interests are generally defended in other titles when the opportunity offers. “We” also includes all the religious groups of modern India, so that Hindus and (above all) Muslims must be shown acting in mutual loyalty and solidarity. At the very least, they should not be shown as hostile to one another. Given the checkered course of modern Indian history, this result is not always easy to achieve.

Yet *The March to Freedom* makes quite a thoroughgoing job of it. The participation of both Hindus and Muslims in the rebellion of 1857 is made very clear (348:24). The cover design of “A Nation Awakes” shows a poor Hindu girl happily tying a **rākhi** on the wrist of a poor Muslim man. The role of Muslims in opening national schools is mentioned (356:11), communal harmony among ordinary Bengalis is repeatedly emphasized (356:1-2, 23-24), riots are attributed to economic rather than religious causes (356:24) and to British divide-and-rule tactics (354:3, 24-25). The heroic revolutionary Ashfaqulla is asked by the police superintendent Tasadruk [sic] Khan, “Why should Muslims fight for Hindu India?” He replies, “Khan Saheb, I

am quite sure Hindu India will be much better than British India.” To make sure we have taken the point correctly, the narrator hastens to reassure us, “Of course Ashfaulla, Bismil and others were fighting for all our countrymen” (360:23).

“US” VERSUS “THEM”: TOWARD NATIONAL INTEGRATION

Not only in *The March to Freedom*, but in other related titles as well, all communal conflict has been airbrushed out of history. Bankim Chandra Chatterji’s famous Bengali novel *Anand math* is full of anti-Muslim sentiment. One hero delivers the solemn warning, “Unless we drive these tipsy long-beards away, a Hindu can no longer hope to save his religion.” The revolutionaries look forward with longing to the day when they will be able “to break the mosque to raise the temple of Radha-Madhava in its place” (Chatterji 1929:35, 146). Yet this novel is featured quite early in the Amar Chitra Katha series. In the Amar Chitra Katha “Ananda Math” (86), the heroic Bengali Hindu freedom fighters do battle with evil British officers--who indeed command highly stylized but Muslim-looking troops. In the first, full-page panel the narrator denounces British oppression, then adds, “The Muslim king, who ruled, was a puppet in British hands” (86:1). This glancing, exculpatory aside is the only reference to Muslims in the whole issue. No doubt this is the most tactful way to treat *Anand math*--if it is necessary to treat it at all. The Amar Chitra Katha introduction praises the novel for promoting the nationalist movement in Bengal, and of course for generating the famous song “Vande mataram” (86:inside front cover).

Even more conspicuously retouched is an issue on the life of Vinayak Damodar Savarkar, the patriarch of the Hindu Mahasabha, famous for his concept of “hindutva” as the basis of Indian nationality. According to Savarkar, “in Hindusthan the Hindus are a nation,” while other groups are “communities” relegated to a marginal status (Purohit 1965:140). Here, one would think, is a personality who cannot fail to be divisive. But the Amar Chitra Katha version of his life, while it is called “Veer Savarkar” (309), is carefully subtitled “In the Andamans.” As the introductory note explains, it depicts the lives of the exiled revolutionaries imprisoned in the Andaman Islands--the hardships and sacrifices they endured for their country. Savarkar is shown involved with his comrades in bomb-making and speech-making, then is arrested on page 9. He attempts to escape, and is recaptured on page 11. By page 15 he is en route to the Andamans. Pages 16 and 17 are devoted to an illustrated factual insert called “Kala Pani (Andaman and Nicobar Islands),” page 18 to a commercial for Amar Chitra Katha, pages 19 to 32 to his sufferings and heroic resistance in prison. The very last panel informs us that he was set free in 1937 and “took an active part in the struggle for freedom” (309:32). No doubt this is the most tactful way to treat V. D. Savarkar--if it is necessary to treat him at all. Since other, less communally-tainted nationalist leaders are available for the series to depict, why make a point of depicting a communal one--and then trying to airbrush him into blandness?

But the Amar Chitra Katha vision of the freedom struggle, and indeed of modern Indian history in general, is in fact far more invidiously selective than the above examples suggest. In the 1986 catalogue “The Indian Revolutionaries” command excellent coverage, with five issues: “Bagha Jatin” (156), “Bhagat Singh” (234), “Chandra Shekhar Azad” (142), “Rash Behari Bose” (262), as well as “Veer Savarkar” (309). Netaji himself is not of their number, but figures in the “Makers of Modern India” series. According to Amar Chitra Katha, the “Makers of Modern India” are the persons enshrined in the following issues: “Babasaheb Ambedkar” (188), “C. R. Das” (344), “Dayananda” (120), “Jayaprakash Narayan” (206), “Lokamanya Tilak” (219), “Lal Bahadur Shastri” (271), “Rabindranath Tagore” (136), “Senapati Bapat” (303),

“Subhas Chandra Bose” (77), “Subramania Bharati” (286), “Thanedar Hasan Askari” (286), “Vidyasagar” (108), and “Vivekananda” (146).

Netaji thus had his own issue as long ago as #77, followed by other important militants and revolutionaries; V. D. Savarkar has his own issue; the industrialist G. D. Birla (382) now has his own issue--how totally inconceivable it is that Mahatma Gandhi has not had an issue! A delay of well over twenty years is, in Gandhi's case, inexplicable. Nor does either Motilal or Jawaharlal Nehru have an issue, nor Sardar Patel, nor Rajagopalachari, nor Krishna Menon, nor so many others who were irrefutably among the principal makers of modern India--while the list contains a couple of names that would hardly appear on anyone's roster of major modern figures.

Compared to these central and altogether glaring omissions, other omissions appear almost unsurprising. There are as yet no women on the “Makers of Modern India” list--no Sarojini Naidu (surely the obvious first choice), no Kasturba Gandhi, no Kamala Nehru, no Durgabai Deshmukh, no Anasuyabehn Sarabhai, no Vijayalakshmi Pandit. Moreover, even outside the “Makers of Modern India” category, there are no educated, urban, twentieth-century women in the Amar Chitra Katha series at all--no women who have lived in the kind of world for which Pai is preparing his young readers. In fact “Scientists and Doctors” seems to be the only post-Independence category of honored activity, the only one actually open to readers of Amar Chitra Katha. There are four people in it: three male Hindus, and Albert Einstein.

On the “Makers of Modern India” list there are no Muslims to speak of either--no Dr. Zakir Husain, no Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, no Hakim Ajmal Khan, no Asif Ali, no Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan. There is only “Thanedar Hasan Askari” (286), an issue devoted to an idiosyncratic, apolitical police inspector in Uttar Pradesh in the 1930s. This is the whole of what the introduction to the issue has to say about him:

Sayyad Hasan Askari was born in an affluent and renowned family of Uttar Pradesh.

After a brilliant record at the Police Training College, he became an instructor at the same institute.

Fourteen years later he was transferred to Kanpur as a police officer.

Askari distinguished himself as a man of principle. This Amar Chitra Katha brings you a few episodes in the life of this extraordinary policeman (286:inside front cover).

Thanedar Hasan Askari catches dacoits (the cover shows him leaping out at them from a palanquin in which he has been posing as a woman), and embarrasses his British superiors with his independence of mind. Once, to make an obscure point, he rides a horse into a courtroom. Later, he successfully practices homeopathy. He is loved by the people. Being too honest to curry favor, he retires as a lowly thanedar. Apart from his name, there is nothing Muslim about him.

The staff of Amar Chitra Katha claim that they are worried about Muslim “iconophobia,” and have thus refrained from dealing with the Prophet and other Muslim religious figures. But this anxiety, though plausible in some contexts, cannot apply to modern and secular personalities. Yet Muslim readers are offered issues devoted only to a few early figures: they have “Shershah” (56) and “Sultana Razia” (110); they have the Mughals, who are portrayed on the whole rather favorably; and they have virtually no one since. There are no Sikh “Makers of Modern India” either. But the Sikhs get, in proportion to their numbers, far better coverage for their major historical and religious figures than the Muslims do. In fact Amar

Chitra Katha's uniquely explicit ads for its coverage of "Sikh history and legend" name a dozen titles, one of which is a Bumper Issue called "The Three Gurus" (96:inside back cover) (Figure 4). Interestingly, such communally focused advertising treatment is accorded only to the Sikhs--not to the Hindus, certainly not to the Muslims, nor to any other religious group.

THE VISION: TOWARD COSMIC INTEGRATION

Compared to other popular pamphlet genres like the traditional **kissā** (Pritchett 1985), Amar Chitra Katha is a remarkable feat of centralized control and consistency, over vast reaches of time and space. It has little in common with **kissā** and related genres. It is addressed to a different public: to Westernized children, rather than to traditional adults. It uses a different medium: comic book format rather than plain unillustrated prose. It is far more highly organized, since it is deliberately designed by one editor, rather than haphazardly brought out by a large number of publishers. It has a different purpose: to educate and influence, rather than to delight and entertain. Invented, developed, and controlled by one editor, Amar Chitra Katha has ultimately a single vision behind it--a vision of the cosmos, of the human place in it, of India as a certain kind of nation.

Religiously speaking, the chosen deity of Amar Chitra Katha is unquestionably Krishna--particularly, it seems to me, in his cosmos-embodiment form. National integration can thus become a special case of what might be called cosmic integration. The very first issue in the series was "Krishna" (11)." The issue has been reprinted so often that it now has a flashy new cover (a "butter thief" one, like the original), and a (retrospectively added) introduction that begins with a flat statement: "Krishna is the most endearing and ennobling character in Indian mythology." All of the first twelve issues of the *Mahabharata* mini-series open with illustrations of the *Bhagavad Gita* setting, with Arjuna kneeling before Krishna on the battlefield. Elsewhere in this mini-series too, the glorification of Krishna is emphasized (361:11-20), including his revenge on Shishupala (361:27-32).

A prominent feature of this glorification is the depiction of Krishna in his cosmic **puruṣa**-like form (361:17), with animals adhering to his legs, men and gods located higher on his gigantic body; this image is repeated on the front cover of the issue, and elsewhere at crucial points in the mini-series.¹³ Most suggestively, in the early "The Geeta" (127), the awesome epiphany of Krishna as **kālānala**, the fire of time, with beings rushing into his gaping jaws and sticking between his teeth, is passed over entirely in favor of still another benevolent cosmic Krishna, a full-page rendering suffused with radiant beams of light (127:27) (Figure 5). This latter is, as far as I know, the only illustration anywhere in the whole Amar Chitra Katha series that breaks out of its frame: the crest of Krishna's headdress sweeps right on upward beyond the ruled border at the top of the page.

If the cosmos is assimilated into Krishna, all other living creatures are more or less assimilated into the human species. Hanuman, as we have seen, theoretically has an "ape-like" form, yet not only he but the other chief monkeys as well are, visually speaking, human beings with statuesque limbs, tall fair Caucasian-flesh-colored hairless bodies, slightly convex faces, and tails that stick out at unobtrusive angles from the waistbands of their dhotis (101:12); sometimes the tails themselves are omitted (101:25). Female monkeys look even more human, for they seem to wear their tails under their skirts (101:7-8). A particularly interesting example occurs in "Tales of Arjuna" (198), when Arjuna meets in the forest a small, brown, unclothed, furry, monkey-like monkey, who challenges him to a test of bridge-building skill. Later on, however, the monkey assumes a large and tall size, clothing, gold jewelry, hair on his head, and

an upright stance, to reveal himself as Hanuman (198:1-8). Looking like a real monkey turned out to be Hanuman's disguise--and a very effective one.

It is not only monkeys who are basically human, but the demonic Rakshasas as well: they tend to be large, stout, crude-looking, hairy, ugly humans, often potbellied, sometimes with small fangs, who wear fur loincloths (345:3). The Rakshasis are similar, except that they frequently transmute themselves into beautiful and entirely human-looking women. Even nature gods like "Ocean" are humanoid: Ocean turns out to have, protruding from the waves, the head of a white-haired gentlemen with a curly moustache (101:1) (Figure 6). Ravana, by contrast, with his ten heads so firmly established in tradition, presents a special case--he is no gift to the cartoonist, and it turns out to be extremely difficult to portray him satisfactorily in action (254:15), or even asleep (19:11) (Figure 7).

When it comes to the Nagas, it seems visually that all the important ones are completely human, while some of the minor ones, such as those who attack Bhima, are completely snake-like small snakes (335:19-21). Yet the human ones (the only ones who speak) speak as snakes. "He woke up when we bit him," says a nice-looking, ornamented, fully human Naga about the attack on Bhima (335:21) (Figure 8). When the Nagas realize that the Pandavas are their blood relatives, they treat Bhima with generous hospitality and give him a lavish boon (335:22-23). A footnote observes: "According to many scholars the Nagas were a race of people with whom the Aryans freely mixed" (335:19). A glossary entry in the same 'Mahabharata' issue will surely complete the confusion of any young reader: "Literally the serpents--Also refers to the race of snake-worshippers or a race which has the snake for its totem. Perhaps the ancestors of the modern inhabitants of India's north-eastern state Nagaland" (335:32). Later Arjuna is seduced by the Naga princess Ulupi, who is portrayed as a beautiful, lovable, fully human girl, and who gives him a boon after their enjoyable night together (355:2-4). But then in the very next issue a whole clan of Nagas are among the inhabitants deliberately burned alive in the Khandava Forest by Agni--with the active, unquestioning, even enthusiastic help of Krishna and Arjuna (357:15). The rationalistic "humanization" practiced by Amar Chitra Katha on all other species thus creates new problems of its own.

Moreover, the human species itself is assimilated as much as possible into a uniform, fair-skinned, blank-faced physical type. With very few exceptions, men have a generic classically-proportioned male body, and women a generic full-breasted slim-waisted female one; they have the same regular features and extremely fair skin color. They all live in almost identical palaces and dress themselves in the same limited range of "classic" styles. They tend to speak the same lofty "Sanskritic" language. In issues set in the modern world, these pressures are sometimes resisted; but they are still often operative, especially for the depiction of heroes and heroines.

AMAR CHITRA KATHA: AN EVOLVING TRADITION

Many of the changes in the series over the last twenty-five years are minor and unsurprising. A number involve an increase in publishing sophistication. Pages used to have nothing on them except picture panels. By now, however, they are equipped not only with page numbers, but also with headers naming alternately the title and the series. Moreover, the inside front cover now offers the date of publication and full bibliographic information. Spellings of proper names are now somewhat more scholarly, though not perfectly so. Footnotes also now occur from time to time, usually defining problematical words or citing related stories.

One trend to which I have called attention, that of publishing Amar Chitra Katha

issues in book form, bids fair to increase. The “Editor’s Choice” catalogue, published in 1988, contains only bound volumes. This trend, like Amar Chitra Katha itself, is a considerable innovation. In traditional genres, many separate, related pamphlets may occasionally be bound and sold as a unit. For example, in the case of the North Indian folk epic *Alha khand* the individual episodes--which usually center on a battle and/or a wedding--are most often sold separately; sometimes a few giant fat books are made by binding many of the pamphlets together to create some (never definitive) approximation of the whole cycle. But this is an uncommon practice, confined in any case to the assembling of various segments of pre-existing long cycles. It is due chiefly to the demands of buyers who want large amounts of material in portable form.

In the case of Amar Chitra Katha, collecting the comics into book form makes sense for the sellers. By now, since well over 500 titles are (at least theoretically) in print, not even the most zealous bookseller has the space to display them properly. If they are gathered into hardbound books, they can be displayed much more conveniently, standing upright on shelves, with their binding revealing their titles. Yet entirely independent stories don’t always harmonize well; it may not be possible to put them together into units attractive enough to induce customers to pay the higher prices involved. One result, naturally, is the pre-planned mini-series. This means that Amar Chitra Katha is gradually tending to produce, in effect, book-sized narratives of varying format (containing comics, prose, maps, advertisements, and even bibliographies) in serialized installments, rather than the 32-page free-standing comic books of tradition. It is not for nothing that both the originally planned length of the *Mahabharata* mini-series (60 issues) and its actual length (42 issues) divide perfectly into six-issue volumes--as of course does the six-issue *March to Freedom* mini-series.

Amar Chitra Katha promises parents to “screen each word and each picture as they have a lasting impact on impressionable minds,” to be “more a vehicle of education than a business.” As the series has progressed, it has become obvious that this “vehicle of education” offers much better transport to some of its readers than to others. Readers who happen to be of the wrong gender, the wrong religion, or the wrong politics will find themselves only scantily represented in what is ultimately a vision of the future as well as the past. Amar Chitra should be paid the compliment of being held to its own oft-professed high standards: it can and should do better.

Despite such reservations and criticisms, however, there is much to commend in Amar Chitra Katha. All things considered, the influence of the series is undoubtedly constructive. Amar Chitra Katha readers may indeed be led to hate the British, who are no longer there to object; but they’ll 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 at least some non-Hindus. And they will never, in any issue that I’ve seen, be led to feel hostility toward one another. They’ll have a positive sense of India as a multicultural nation in which they can all work together.

N O T E S

¹Anant Pai, interview by John S. Hawley, Bombay, January 9, 1989. All quotations, direct or indirect, attributed to Pai are drawn from this interview. Jack Hawley's work has contributed greatly to this paper, and I very much appreciate his assistance. In addition, I want to thank the editors, Alan Babb and Sue Wadley, for the careful, thoughtful work they have done in helping this paper to attain its present form. Sue Wadley has also provided more recent material from the 1990's, to supplement my own work done in the late 1980's.

²Anant Pai, interview by Hawley.

³See for example the inside back cover of issue "Harischandra" (17). Parenthesized numbers after titles will refer throughout the discussion to the issue's ordinal number within the series, a number assigned and used for reference by the series itself. Where relevant, the issue number will be followed by a colon and the appropriate page number(s) within the issue.

⁴At least, they were so advertised inside the front cover of "Rama" (15).

⁵K. T. Mirchandani, head of the IBH branch in Delhi, interview by F.W.P., August 20, 1986.

⁶The word is also more conventionally explained as referring to the Pandavas, sons of Pritha (Pai 1986:29).

⁷K. T. Mirchandani, interview by F.W.P., August 20, 1986.

⁸Only 327 titles are included in this taxonomic list, making it a bit out of date even for 1986; but the titles published since the catalogue came out are generally advertised within the same categories. As late as mid-1989, this catalogue was still the one sent out by the U.S. distributor.

⁹Their lives are described from childhood till the triumphant conclusion of Yudhishtira's **rājasūya yajña**.

¹⁰Originally advertised as "The Battle of Kurukshetra" (17:inside back cover).

¹¹This advertisement appears on the back cover of the reprinted version of "Vali" (101) included in the Bumper Issue "Stories from the Ramanaya" (#2).

¹²The Ekalavya story, carefully stripped of its macabre conclusion, is actually used as an example in *The PARTHA Way to Success*: the statue of Drona, it seems, "helped Ekalavya to think positively"--which "does demonstrate the power of positive thinking" (Pai 1986:21).

¹³For example, when Sanjaya describes Krishna's grandeur (383:25), and when Krishna seeks to overawe Duryodhana into seeking peace (385:17).

FIGURES

FIGURE ONE: At the beginning of the *Mahabharata* mini-series, early 1985 (101:back cover, as included in Bumper Issue #2).

FIGURE TWO: At the end of the *Mahabharata* mini-series, December 1, 1988 (408:32).

FIGURE THREE: "The Epic of New India," January 1, 1986 (348:32).

FIGURE FOUR: "Sikh History and Legend," March 1982 (96:inside back cover, reprint edition).

FIGURE FIVE: The cosmic Krishna breaking out of his full-page frame (127:27).

FIGURE SIX: Humanoid monkeys, humanoid Dundubhi, humanoid Ocean (101:1).

FIGURE SEVEN: Ravana awake (254:15) and asleep (19:11).

FIGURE EIGHT: Nagas: fully snake or fully human (335:21).

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The comics, titled Amar Chitra Katha (also known as ACK, or Immortal Illustrated Stories), slowly became a massive hit. While schools and shopkeepers initially hesitated to stock the issues, ACK was a household name in India by the late 1970s. Today, the series has sold 100 million-plus copies of more than 400 comics in upwards of 20 languages, primarily English and Hindi. * * * ACK defines Indian identity via stories which naturally appealed to a bookish child like me who constantly escaped into the worlds of Philip Pullman, Garth Nix, and C.S. Lewis. Most histories in the comics feature virtuous Hindus who fight against evil rulers, an encroaching Muslim horde, or arrogant British imperialists. They will be joined by Amar Chitra Katha Commissioning Editor Neel Paul and Group Art Director Savio Mascarenhas, and will be telling stories drawn from Tinkle's fascinating folktale collection featuring folklore from around the world. The Amar Chitra Katha Studio. 23 hrs . Amar Chitra Katha is proud to present 'Millennia of Sea Travels', the first in our three book series 'The Naval Journey of India', created in association with the Indian Navy. Join us for an insightful conversation about life in the Indian Navy where our CEO and President, Preeti Vyas, and Commissi At the ACK (Amar Chitra Katha) Media headquarters in a crowded part of Mumbai's Andheri suburb, there is a wall dedicated to Uncle Pai's life. And it is fitting that it is chronicled through a series of comic book panels from Vol. 834 of Amar Chitra Katha, which is dedicated to Anant Pai himself. The worlds he created were populated with magnificent goddesses, lion-hearted freedom fighters, bumbling villains, accidental detectives, anthropomorphic animals, and each of these real and imaginary characters was embroidered on to India's larger cultural fabric, giving its young readers a context they understood. Since its inception in 1967, Amar Chitra Katha has sold more than 100 million copies in 20 Indian languages.