

# Amar Chitra Katha: The Figure of Ram and Hindu Mass Mobilization

Rajesh Kumar Gupta

## ABSTRACT

*In this paper I tried to explore how the popular comics of Amar Chitra Katha based on Ram and Ramyana influenced the psychology of the comics reader in the late twentieth century. It also shows as to how these comics laid the background of ugra Ram instead of benevolent Ram? This was the time when, ugra Ram became the symbol of Hindu Nationalism, he was utilised as a political figure which was directly or indirectly linked with the Hindu-Muslim conflicts, and it also sharpening the religious identity for the construction of Ram temple in Ayodhya.*

**Keywords:** Amar Chitra Katha, Comics, Identity politics, Hinduism, and Communalism.

## INTRODUCTION

This work explored on the theme of a political and cultural evolution of Ram, who evolved from a popular 'benevolent' avatar to an ugra avatar in the late twentieth century. I have utilized the comic series of Amar Chitra Katha to track the role played by the comics in laying the background for the emergence of the figure of ugra Ram. What was the role played by comics in the construction of the image of ugra Ram which was different from the earlier popular image of 'benevolent' Ram? What was the politics behind it? How did it influence the Hindu mobilization for the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya? These are the questions which I am going to investigate in this paper.

During the colonial period, Baba Ramchandra was a prominent peasant leader in Oudh. He used the verses and stories from Ramyana and appealed to the peasants for their mobilization against the colonial rule. Britishers were seen as the *rakshasas*. Baba Ramchandra roamed around the villages and recited the couplets of Ramyana, to motivate the peasants against the *Zamindars* and Britishers who exploited them.<sup>1</sup> The other prominent figure who relied heavily on the symbols of Ram and Ramyana was Mahatma Gandhi. He brought the concept of *Ram Rajya*. For Gandhi, *Ram Rajya* was an ideal 'republic' where values of justice, equality, idealism, renunciation and sacrifice are practiced. His idea of *Satyagraha* was derived from Ramyana and Geeta. The conceptual root of the application of the concept of Ahimsa also lay in the *Geeta and Ramyan* in which it was reared, to political action.<sup>2</sup> Gandhi's imaginative invention and usage of symbols resonated in the minds and hearts of Indians.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Gyan Pandey, 'Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism: The Peasant Movement in Awadh-1919-22', in Ranjeet Guha (ed.), *Subaltern Studies Volume 1 Writing on South Asia History and Society*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1982, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> Harold A. Gould, 'Baba' and Non-cooperator : Congress co-option of agrarian unrest in north India in the 1920s and 1930s'. Center for South Asian Studies, University of Virginia, 1997.

With the above examples of Baba Ramchandra and Mahatma Gandhi, I wish to emphasize that symbols of Hindu epics and figure of Ram were utilized to critique the colonial rule and the idea of *Ram Rajya* was seen a new possibility after the end of colonial rule.

## II. BRIEF BACKGROUND OF RAM IN POPULAR MEDIA: FROM THE LENS OF RAVI VERMA TO RAMANAND SAGAR

Raja Ravi Verma (b. 1845, d. 1906) was born near Trivandrum in the southern state of Kerala. He impacted the world of Indian art in late nineteenth century. His fascination towards Hindu mythology is well established. He appealed, simultaneously to two very different audiences: early cultural nationalists who saw in his work an inspiring new national imaginary and imperial patron who admired his accomplished mastery of the technical conventions of European portraiture.<sup>4</sup> Ravi Verma's painting which portrayed divine Hindu gods found their way into the pooja rooms of Hindu households immediately. The Coronation of Sri Ram was the second picture to come out of Ravi Verma Press in Pune.<sup>5</sup> His painting became the models for the visual depiction of the divine characters in Phalke's films. The Journey of Ram in Indian electronic media (visual cinema) started in 1917. When Dada Saheb Phalke released *Lanka Dahan* (Lanka Aflame) it was the first film in history to deal with Ram. It was premiered in 1917 and it is said that when Ram appeared in the screen audience prostrated themselves before the screen.<sup>6</sup> The film was shot in Nasik, Nasik was not an ordinary place, but a divine one. Nasik includes Panchavati. Panchvati is a place where Ram, Sita and Lakshman are believed to have stayed during their exile in the forest. So Lanka Dahan was shot in a divine environment.<sup>7</sup> Since 1917 many films about Ram have been produced in the regional centers, and they became popular only in those reasons but unfortunately most of them were lost.<sup>8</sup> According to the Philip Lutgendorf:

Four pictures are considered to be the most important: Phalke's Lanka Dahan, Vijay Bhatt's Ram Rajya (The Rule of Ram) of 1943, Babubhai Mistri's Sampoorana Ramyan (Complete Ramyana) of 1961, and Ramyan, the long serial broadcast on Indian TV from 1987 till 1988, produced by Ramnand Sagar.<sup>9</sup>

Ramnand Sagar's *Ramyana* had been serialized on Doordarshan from January 1987 to July 1988, and directly fed into national sentiment concerning the perceived Muslim occupation of the site of Ram's birthplace. This means that the serial fed into the most important phase of the Ramjanmbhumi campaign when it was transformed from

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Piney, *The Gods the Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*, Reaktion book, London, 2004, pp. 56-60.

<sup>5</sup> Parsram Manghram, *Raja Ravi Verma The Most Celebrated Painter in India 1848-1906*, Parsram Manghram 2007, Bangalore, p. 41.

<sup>6</sup> Freek L. Bakker, *The Challenge of the Silver Screen; An Analysis of Cinematic Portraits of Jesus, Ram, Buddha, and Muhamed*, Brill, Boston, 2009, p.80.

<sup>7</sup> Rachel Dwyer, *Filming the Gods: Religion and Indian Cinema*, Routledge, New York, 2006, pp. 82-83.

<sup>8</sup> Freek L. Bakker, *The Challenge of the Silver Screen; An Analysis of Cinematic Portraits of Jesus, Ram, Buddha, and Muhamed* Brill, Boston, 2009, p. 82-83.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 87.

a relatively obscure religious fixation to the issue that captured the nation's imagination.<sup>10</sup> This campaign and *Ramyan* serial both helps BJP to enhance the parliamentary seat total from two to eighty-eight in the 1989 general elections.<sup>11</sup> Therefore the destruction of the Babri Masjid took place four years after *Ramyan* ceased being screened; there is evidence that the serial's presentation of Ram and Sita as Hindu exemplars of morality and honor, and of Ayodhya as a perfectly governed kingdom, fuelled anti-Muslim feelings and actions.<sup>12</sup> Carole M. Cusack and Arvind Rajagopal argued that serialized version *Ramyan* was the main reason behind the massive upsurge of Ramjanmbhumi in north India. T. V. Serial *Ramyan* reinforces existing religious identities and does not create opportunities for dialogue between members of different faiths. These are the important moves in the popular creation of 'Ram Bhakti'. But we should remember that the film *Sampoorna Ramyana* came in the year 1961, which was a highly popular mythological film depicting the life of Ram. After that audience have to wait till 1987 to see the Ram again on television. But till the 1980s was the time when the technology of cinema screens and the television were not decentralized enough in India, it was limited to some towns only. 'In 1970 there were only 22,000 sets in the country and all are imported for community viewing'.<sup>13</sup> It was important, but not impacted much till 1990. In 1990 it increased to 29.2 million and by 1992, it further increased to 45.6 million.<sup>14</sup> Mythological serials namely, '*Ramyan*' '*Mahabharata*' and '*Sri Krishna*' were the prominent reason for selling T.V. in leaps and bounds.

But before the decentralization of television, print culture (comics) especially ACK comics had already created readership amongst the urban middle class Hindu family. Actually, it was the peak time for Indian comic's world. Hindu religion and its symbols and characters became the central theme of ACK comic books. Simultaneously, the latter half of the twentieth century saw a new political and cultural regeneration of India, which generated new meanings of the bond of the moral community at the national level. In post-independence period ultra-nationalism replaced the 'morality of nationalism'<sup>15</sup>, new signs, symbols and slogans were evolved and invented, which isolated the Muslims from the political space of nation. The chanting of *Jai Shri Ram* became the symbol of terror for minorities. As argued by Gyan Pandey in the colonial period 'the phrase *Sita Ram* became the chief rallying call of the movement used by peasants of all communities, Muslims as well as

<sup>10</sup> Arvind Rajgopala, *Politics after Television Hindu: Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian Public*, Cambridge University Press, United Kingdom, 2001, p. 30.

<sup>11</sup> Statistical Report on General Elections, 1989 to the Ninth Lok Sabha, Volume-I, Election Commission of India, New Delhi, 1990, pp.94-100.

<sup>12</sup> Carole M. Cusack, 'The Gods on Television: Ramnanad Sagar's Ramayan, Politics and Popular Piety in late twentieth century India', cited in Adam Possami (ed.) *Handbook of Hyper-real Religions*, Leiden, Brillz, 2012, pp. 279-280.

<sup>13</sup> Md. Fioraz, *Television in India Values and Concern*, Saad Publications, New Delhi, 2005, p. 1.

<sup>14</sup> P.V. Sharada, *Impacts of Television on political Awareness of Rural Masses*, Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi 1992, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> Here 'morality of nationalism' means that when we fought against the British Empire, then nationalism was the feeling which bound us together (Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and other community). But after independence, the feeling of nationalism still remained with us. But now the extremist groups are using the feeling of nationalism against certain religious communities, in Indian contexts it is used by the Hindu fundamentalist groups against the 'Muslims'. Now nationalism of one community is seen in opposition to another community. It is also loosing the basic humanist and 'political morality' approach. It means we are using and manipulating the nationalism for the benefit of some group of people, not for the benefit of nation.

Hindus, to bring the supporters in the meetings for resistance to the British government and landlord agents'.<sup>16</sup> However, there was a stark departure in the post- colonial period, now *Sita Ram* was replaced by *Jai Sri Ram*. While *Sita Ram* united the communities both Hindus and Muslims against the British, the slogan *Jai Sri Ram* became a monopoly of the Hindus, it divided the community and created fear amongst the Muslims. The new slogan *Jai Sri Ram* is used by the 'ultra-right Hindu' nationalist groups in India, such as the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP), the Rashtriya Swyam Sevak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), Shiv Sena, Bajrang Dal and some new entrants to mobilize Hindus against the Muslims.<sup>17</sup> '*Jai Sri Ram*' word was used in multiple times in the movies and series which were based on *Ramyan*. In the serial *Ramyana*, Hanuman is depicted chanting the slogan *Jai Sri Ram*. It displayed aggression and power against the enemy. In the same way 'Right-wing forces'<sup>18</sup> who became very active in the mid-80s used the image of *Ram* and recited *Jai Sri Ram* in a very aggressive tone, the best example is slogan chanting which the nation witnessed during the demolition of *Babri* mosque. When they were demolishing the *Babri* Mosque, they shouted '*Jai Sri Ram*'<sup>19</sup> again and again, in the same manner, Hanuman did the same thing in movies and serials when he was burning Lanka of Ravana. Gyan Pandey and Anuradha Kapur collect different slogan and pamphlets, which were sold at the site and all over Ayodhya. Such as '*Babar ki santan – jao Pakistan ya Kabristan*' *Saugandh Ram ki khaten hain hum Mandir vahin banayaenge*.<sup>20</sup> These slogans derive a great of their force from the simultaneous appeal to nationalism and to Ram Bhakti.<sup>21</sup> In this way, the right-wing volunteers manipulated, hijacked and turned the images and metaphors into reality and did malicious activity in the name of *Ram* and create a rift between the Muslim and Hindus.

It is quite surprising that Philip Lutgendorf and the other Historian who has worked on Hindi *Ramyana* ignored the ACK comics series like *Ram* and *Valmiki Ramyan*. Several other scholars like Arvind Rajagopal who worked extensively on Ramnand Sagar's serial *Ramyana*. They have argued that this serial enhanced the communal tension amongst the Hindu and Muslim. Even I am not denying their arguments, but in my view, communal mindset did not emerge all of a sudden. It traversed a long journey with several twist and turns. There

<sup>16</sup> Gyan Pandey, 'Peasant Revolt and Indian Nationalism: The Peasant Movement in Awadh-1919-22', in Ranjeet Guha, (ed.) *Subaltern Studies, Volume 1, Writing on South Asia History and Society*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1982, P.169.

<sup>17</sup> Anand Patwardhan made a documentary movie on Babari demolition (1992) incident. '*Ram ke Naam*' (*In the Name of God*). Watch on you tube online accessed on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OO-VaJBHiik>.

[<sup>18</sup>] The religious-cultural components of the BJP and its associates groups for example RSS, Shiv Sena, Shree Ram Sena, Bajrang Dal, Vishva Hindu Parishad etc., are Known as Hindu fascist force. They are the self Proclaimed defender of the Hindu Tradition and culture.

[<sup>19</sup>] *Ram Ke Naam*, (*In the name of God*), is a 1992 documentary by Indian Filmmaker Anand Patwardhan. The film explores the campaign waged by the Hindu Nationalist VHP to build a Ram Temple at the site of Babari Masjid in Ayodhya, the journey triggered in communal riot in many cities <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OO-VaJBHiik>

<sup>20</sup> Anuradha Kapur, 'Deity to Crusader: The Changing Iconography of Ram' cited in Gyanendra Pandey (ed), *Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity in India Today*, Viking, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 102-107.

<sup>21</sup> Gyanendra Pandey, 'The Civilized and The Barbarian: The 'New' Politics of Late Twentieth Century India and The world', In Gyanendra Pandey (ed), *Hindus and Others: The Question of Identity in India Today*, Viking, New Delhi, 1993, pp. 4 -19.

is a huge time gap between *Sampoorna Ramyana* (Cinema) which was released in 1961, and Ramnand Sagar's T. V. Serial *Ramyana* which was telecasted in 1987. The gap is almost of 26 years. This gap was filled by ACK religious comic book series which was established in 1967 and published on themes related to Ram. This chapter objective aims to explore the role of ACK in creating the background for the Hindu mass mobilization in the name of '*Ram Bhakti*' and how the ACK focused on arousing and disseminating the Hindu sentiment which became the national sentiment of the country.

### III. PORTRAYAL OF RAM: IN THE WORLD OF COMICS (ACK)

In 1967 Anant Pai<sup>22</sup> came up with the revolutionary idea of a 'comic strip', with the combination of colored pictures and texts. Pai is also known as Uncle Pai who was a pioneer and creator of the comics called *Amar Chitra Katha* series established in 1967. He had a special inclination towards the Hindu mythology, history and classics of the ancient past. Through ACK, he retold traditional Indian folk tales, mythological stories and biography of historical character. He marketed, mobilized and politicized the Hindu religious sentiments through the medium of comics. Anant Pai was however not the first Indian who used religious symbols as a theme of one's art.

In 1967, Anant Pai started the comic book series based on the vast panorama of Hindu mythological and historical themes. Krishna and Ram were the earliest series in the ACK. In ACK 'Gods that have assumed human form or men that have been deified, like Ram and Krishna, are honored as superheroes and also as Gods. To the Hindu, they are both superheroes as well as Gods, and anyone who does not want to recognize Krishna as a God has nevertheless to acknowledge him as a mythological hero.'<sup>23</sup>

ACK artist was also inspired by the earlier mythological cinema based on *Ramayan*. When Pai began looking for an artist to illustrate on mythological themes, Ram Waeerker<sup>24</sup> was ready to do it, but Pai dismissed him on the ground that he was a cartoon artist and not a comic artist. But, Waeerker proved him wrong he was able to draw in a bold realistic style. Pai was 'bowled over by Waeerker's ostentatious durbar scene based on Vijay Bhatt's *Ramayan*.' Thereafter Pai commissioned him to do the first title of ACK.<sup>25</sup> By the late 1970s, ACK was published in English, Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Assamese, and Malayalam was selling about 3.5 million copies annually. In the 1980s, the ACK circulation rose up to four to five lakh copies per month and, 10,000 copies of ACK were exported every month. With a national distribution across all central book retailers, hundreds of

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<sup>22</sup> Anant Pai was born in 1929 and died in 2011 and the comics series ACK was started in the year 1967. But India Book House was not willing to take the risk of starting the comics with the Indian titles. So they began with 10 western titles from an earlier Classics Illustrated series venture. ACK 's first title, *Krishana* was brought out in 1970.

<sup>23</sup> Wilhelm Von Pochhammer, *India's Road to Nationhood A Political History of The Subcontinent*, Allied Publisher, New Delhi, 1981 p. 436.

<sup>24</sup> Ram Waeerker (1936-2003) was born in Bombay. He was a cartoonist, painter and artist, for the Indian comic book series ACK based on Indian Mythology, History and Folklore. He illustrated the first issue of ACK, *Krishana* in 1969. When he was 12 year old, someone from a Sivakashi press employed him to do a calendar. He painted a favorite theme; Ram and Sita in their sylvan exile, vanvasa and earned Rs 60.

<sup>25</sup> Nandini Chandra, *The Classic Popular; Amar Chitra Katha 1967-2007*, Yoda Press, 2008, New Delhi, p.130.

small bookstores and thousands of vendors, the titles remain immensely popular in the classically illustrated format. Pai admits that the circulation of ACK declined progressively from 1984 onwards, due to the popularity of T.V. and Video.<sup>26</sup> With a huge consumption, ACK team had, of course, the possibility of making a huge deal of money, but it was not the only motive for producing these comic books.

Very soon these comics became the family heirlooms passed down from generation to generation, handed down from father to son and master to disciple. It is more than a mere conventional story. Its story created impressions and the visual creations left an impact in the minds of the comics reader. Pai promoted systematic consciousness among the middle-class Hindus family. The portrayal of Ram as a Hindu icon and savior of religion left a political impact which guaranteed a dramatic intensification of nationalist consciousness. Religious feelings create stronger bonds among the broad masses of the people. ACK is a source that builds a myth about ancient 'Hindu glory' and takes pride in the Hindu identity. ACK comics have served as an important means by which millions of Hindus have encountered the sacrosanct in their daily lives and a medium that has helped Hindus throughout the world in defining and shaping what it means to be a Hindu. ACK's prejudice towards the Hindu identity shows that it is not neutral towards other religious community. ACK issues had a snowballing effect and it influenced the minds of urban middle-class Hindus, which brought identity consciousness along with it. ACK is intimately linked with the present religious faith of millions and has occupied a great place in generating a corpus of knowledge of the ancient and medieval Indian civilization. Our past is not a stable body to retrieve but on the contrary, has been used for diverse purposes; by the state, institutions, religious leaders, nationalist, politician and the other people. Many of us have got the 'wisdom' of history, ancient culture, and mythology through the ACK comics.<sup>27</sup> It contributed significantly towards the construction of a higher level of awareness and self-confidence required for responding to the challenge posed by the Muslims and evangelical missionaries. It also invoked religious sentiments for the Hindu nationalist mobilization in India during the decade of the 1980s and 1990s against the Muslims for the construction of Ram Temple in Ayodhya. In the context of North India, the term 'community identity' inevitably invokes the related concepts of communal identity as it relates particularly to the devotion of avatar Ram, is the single most recalcitrant and dangerous source of social and political conflict in India today.<sup>28</sup>

The popularity of ACK comic book series and the call for the construction of Ram temple at Ayodhya have emerged simultaneously. The aim of the Ramjanambhoomi uprising was 'to demolish the Babri Masque in Ayodhya, claiming that the sixteenth-century structure was erected on the ruins of the temple supposedly built to mark the birthplace of the god-king Ram. Ram was claimed to be a national symbol, and the Hindus were declared to be an oppressed community, a majority denied its rightful status by politicians pandering to minority

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<sup>26</sup> Deepa Sreenivas, *Sculpting a Middle Class History, Masculinity and the Amar Chitra Kattha in India*, Routledge, New Delhi 2010, p.16, By the 1990 ACK had been translated into as many as 38 different Indian language and a few foreign language also.

<sup>27</sup> Karlaine McLain, *India's Immortal comic Books: Gods, King, and Other Heroes*, Indiana University Press, 2009, Bloomington, p. 206.

<sup>28</sup> David N Lorenzen, *Bhakti Religion in North India Community Identity and Political Action*, Manohar, 1996, pp. 3-4

voters, chiefly of the Muslims'.<sup>29</sup> This campaign gained legitimacy, increased in strength and social support amongst the Hindu.

In ACK comic book series Ram first appeared in 1970 Comics entitled *Ram*, Issue No 504, illustrated by 'Pratap Mulick',<sup>30</sup> with a 'muscular, bare-chested, blue-tinged hero on its cover, posed with bow and arrow drawn, aiming at a target in the woods. Behind him, sits a beautiful, fair-skinned woman with dark tresses, who watches with wonder as Ram, the hero takes aim. In this comic Ram establishes himself as a superhero by defeating the demon Taraka and winning the beautiful Sita's hand in marriage through an athletic contest, spent fourteen harsh years in exile in the wilderness to fulfill a vow made by his father king Dasaratha, defeating demon-king Ravana who had kidnapped Sita, in an epic battle'.<sup>31</sup> The question which I want to raise is that there are many issues based on Ramayana in ACK such as *Ram*, *Son of Ram*, *Hanuman*, *Vali*, etc. But there is no separate issue of Sita's struggle it is very surprising that in the issue related to Sita, she appears silent. In ACK's *Valmiki Ramyana*, also she suddenly appears in a marriage ceremony, her childhood days were completely ignored by the script writer Subba Rao. In general, it reflects the upper caste patriarchal mentality towards the women of our society. One should remember that the comics *Valmiki Ramyana* was published in 1978, around this time Ram was gaining importance in right-wing politics for the mobilization for votes in India. If the purpose of ACK was to tell an ideal story which depicted an ideal man then why did not the ACK's team bring the story of 'Shravan Kumar'<sup>32</sup> who was also a part of *Ramayan*? His parent's curse to Dasarath was the main reason for the exile of Ram in the forest. Yet, his story did not get any space in the world of Amar Chitra Katha. In 1971 *Son of Ram* (Issue No 503), 1977 *Ancestor of Ram* (issue No 572), and in 1978 *The Valmiki's Ramyan: The Great Indian Epic* (Issue No. 10001) were released. In ACK series Ram emerged the symbol of Hinduism and used as a mode of Hindu mobilization. In all the other issues of ACK which contains Ram's story, they were presented in political ways. I have tried to analyze the visual message of the cover pages of these comics. While A. K. Ramanujan has talked about *Three Hundred Ramayans* and the diverse interpretation of Ram, but ACK chose to depict Ram as a warrior. In most of the comics, Ram was shown fighting the war with the *Asuras*. The teachings of 'morality' seem to be absent from the comics.

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<sup>29</sup> Arvind Rajagopala, *Politics after Television Religious Nationalism and the Reshaping of the Indian public*, Cambridge University Press, 2001, pp.12-13.

<sup>30</sup> Pratap Mullick, the Maratha illustrator of ACK is a Maharashtrian man, Pai praises Mullick for his bumper hits- Dashavatar and Ramyana, Pratap who not work only for ACK till 1982-83, but he did many issues of Nagraj for Raj comics, apart from that he also work for Manoj and Tulshi comics and made several cover for the Mythological themes.

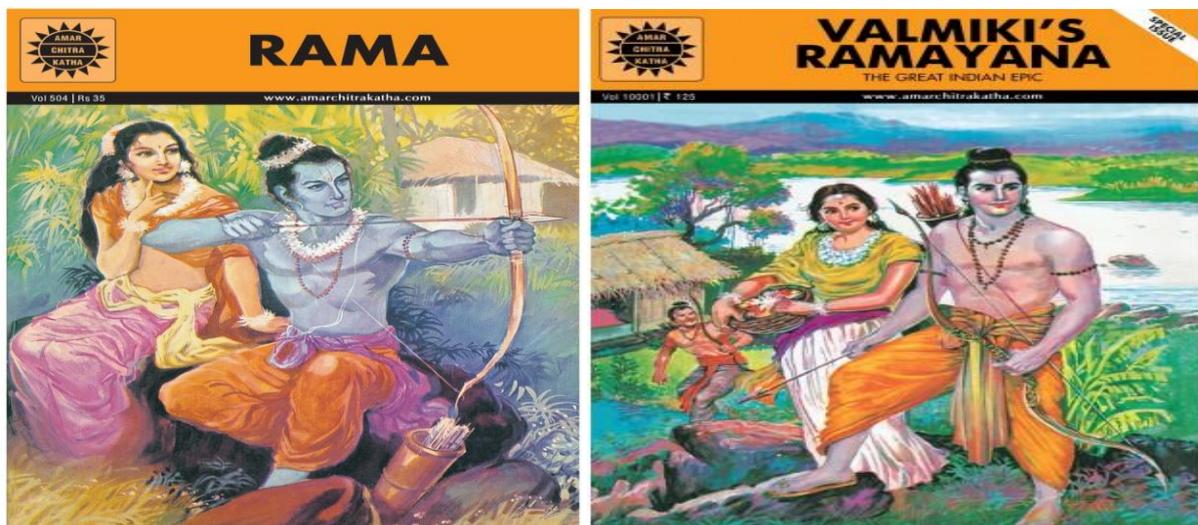
<sup>31</sup> Karlin McLain, *India's Immortal Comic Books: Gods, Kings, and other heroes*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2009, p.1.

<sup>32</sup> Shravan Kumar was a ideal son in Hindu mythology. He was also part of Ramyana. In my view he was far better than Ram because he did not leave his parents alone. But Ram not just leaves his old parents he boycotted her wife also and at last she committed suicide due to her suffering. For Ram his Rajya Dharma was the utmost important. He was completely failure in personal life, *Pita Dharma* and *Pati Dharma* was the dark side of his part. So how we can say that Ram was Ideal man? But for any state Ram could be the ideal because state always need masculine, honest man who is ready to sacrifice their personal interest. For the sake of nation, or especially for the promotion of 'Hindu Nationalism' in the name of 'Indian Nationalism.'

*Rama*, *Valmiki Ramyan* and *Tulsidas Ramayan* came in the year 1971, 1978 and 2007 respectively. All three comics are the most demanded comics in India, and the commonality of these three comics is that Ram is presented with a bow and arrow and as a warrior. 'It was usual for Ram to have a *dhanush* (bow) but unusual for him to be shown using it.'<sup>33</sup> One cover picture (fig. 1.1) of ACK comics show Ram pulling his bowstring, the arrow poised to obliterate. In contemporary times the warrior image of Ram is worshiped by the Hindu extremist group for their political purpose. Even our mind became colonized with the warrior image of Ram.

Figure 1.1 and 1.2 of ACK's comics based on Ram, created a background for *Ugra* image of Ram. Traditional iconography tended to represent Ram, Janaki and Lakshman standing shoulder to shoulder, gazing outward smiling serenely. The figure represents tranquility, compassion, and benevolence the *shanta rasa*.<sup>34</sup> But, ACK comics politically depicted Ram as a *ugra* warrior figure in which he is using the bow and arrow (*dhanushya* and *baan*). 'Bow and arrow is also Shiv Sena's election symbol. Mostly in Maharashtra, the election campaign was conducted on highly communal lines. These entire comic were also published, from Maharashtra. One of the BJP-pamphlets reads: The present election is a holy war (Dharma Yudh)... The BJP Shiv Sena alliance is a bound sweep this election because Sri Krishna is on our side and Lord Ram's *dhanushya* and *baan* (bow and arrow) and Goddess Laxmi's Kamal (Lotus), such sacred and holy articles are our election symbols'.<sup>35</sup>

Figure 1.1 Figure 1.2



Sources: Cover Picture of *Rama*, Vol. 514, 1971 and *Valmiki Ramyan*, Vol. 10001, 1978 respectively, Amar Chitra Katha, Mumbai.

<sup>33</sup> Anuradha Kapur, 'Deity to Crusader: The Changing Iconography Of Ram', in Gayanendra Panday (ed.), *Hindus and Others The question of Identity in India Today*, Penguin Books, 1993, p.74.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Blom Hansen, 'BJP and the Politics of Hindutva in Maharashtra', edited by Thomas Blom Hansen, Christophe Jafferlot, *BJP and the Compulsion of politics in India*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1998, p. 132.

Ram is rooted in India's living culture. Hence, the stature of Ram steadily grew in the right-wing politics this was a time when the image of Ram and Hindu religion was gaining ground as a subject of dispute in the public domain. Ram became the symbol of Hindu nationalism in its most dynamic phase, and it is for the first time that this hero of the epic *Ramayana* appeared prominently in the Indian political discourse. It is necessary to understand how ACK with his special issue on *Valmiki's Ramayan* came in the year of 1978 and occupied a space in public discourse on Ram and Hindu religion. ACK not only dealt with Hinduism in general, but it was the only religious comics, which suddenly gained importance among the youngsters. This was made possible because ACK came with a special issue on *Valmiki's Ramayan* (Issue No. 10001) which had only ninety-five pages with reader-friendly style and colored pictures that attracted the different age group, people. Earlier many versions of *Ramayan* were present in the market, but these texts were very long and Sanskritised, which attracted only those people who had a religious bent of mind and were a specialist in the language. But ACKs readership was religious as well non-religious. Anuradha Kapur has focused on the changing iconography of Ram in the post-independence period. She argued that 'Ram has intervened in our lives in quite unprecedented ways. While the *Ramayan* on television has created a particular version of 'Ram Bhakti'. The Ramjanma bhoomi issue has transformed into a herald for demarcating geographic, territorial, and spiritual boundaries. These politics of space have invented a Ram who is significantly different from the figure represented in the tradition of iconography available until now. The new image of Ram has altered the meanings of 'Ram Bhakti' and as a consequence, of popular Hinduism as well.'<sup>36</sup> Technologies, markets and as a consequence, standardization of images has impacted the new iconographies of Ram. I mean standardization not only in the sense of producing the same images over and over again but also producing the same sort of expectation from these images.<sup>37</sup>

Most inevitably, through "such a visual and cartographic act", "an attempt" is made "to transform Hindu gods into Indian gods".<sup>38</sup> So the changes in the representation and perception of Ram in the Comics, T.V. and in the Calendar depicted 'the recent revivalist iconography from a serene, smiling god into an angry, aggressive warrior holding a bow, arrow, and trident. It appears very symbolic of the new militant spirit.'<sup>39</sup> See the Fig. 1.3. Figure 1.3

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<sup>36</sup> Anuradha Kapur, 'Deity To Crusader: The Changing Iconography of Ram' in edited by Gayanendra Panday, *Hindus and Others The question of Identity in India Today*, (Penguin Books, 1993) p. 74.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, p. 96.

<sup>38</sup> Sumathi Ramswamy, 'Of Gods and Globes the territorialisation of Hindu deities in popular Visual Culture' in Jyotindra Jain (ed), 'India's Popular Culture iconic spaces and fluid images', Marg Publication, Mumbai, 2007, p.30.

<sup>39</sup> K. N. Pannikar, , 'History as a site of Struggle Essay on History, Culture and Politics', Three essay collective, New Delhi, 2013, p. 363.



Source: Anuradha Kapur, 'Deity To Crusader: The Changing Iconography of Ram' in edited by Gyanendra Panday, *Hindus and Others The question of Identity in India Today*, Penguin Books, 1993, pp 76-104, Contemporary poster from During The Ram Janmbhoomi: depicting the *Ugra* Image of Ram.

Figure 1.3 is the contemporary posters were circulated during the Ramjanmbhoomi. In one way the portrayal of *Ugra Ram* in contemporary poster helps to enhance the 'Ram bhakti' amongst the Hindus and in another way, it also increased the antagonisms of Hindus against the Muslims. When I read ACK comic book series and connected it with the current politics, I found that the background of '*Ugra*' portrayal of Ram was earlier present in ACK's *Ram* comics, (See fig.1.1) and later during the 90s the *ugra* image of Ram is used by the rightwing forces for their political purpose.

More importantly, there is a clear distinction between 'bad' and 'Good' Muslims in ACK comic books. The arousing of Hindus was not merely in the protection of Ram but also adjacent to Babur and his clan. The view of history regarding Muslim ruler, especially the figure of Aurangzeb is continually changing in historical discourse, but in popular culture, due to the right-wing politics, we are still seeing Aurangzeb as a villain of our society. The best example of that is, 'The Renaming of Aurangzeb Road after the A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Road in 2015'.<sup>40</sup> Here Aurangzeb represented conservative and orthodox Muslims while *Abdul Kalam* represented progressive broadminded and 'Indianised versions of Muslims'.

Muslim themes and culture are underestimated in the ACK comic series. Out of 440 titles, very few titles has dealt with Muslims. And if they have been depicted, they are 'shown as universal oppressors and prosecutors'.<sup>41</sup> Charu Gupta argues that Hindu pamphleteers and campaigners went all out to keep Hindu women away from Muslim men, and from symbols, customs and culture seen as 'Muslims'.<sup>42</sup> This sentiment is not only about Hindu women and Muslim men, it shows a huge gap between Hindu community against the Muslims and even

<sup>40</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, 'Why the BJP rewrites the history', *The Indian Express*, June 7, 2015, p. 15.

<sup>41</sup> Nandani Chandra, *The Classic Popular; Amar Chitra Katha 1967-2007*, Yoda Press, 2008, New Delhi, p. 215.

<sup>42</sup> Christophe Jaffrelot, 'Why the BJP rewrites the history', *The Indian Express*, June 7, 2015, p. 15.

day-to-day interaction with Muslims was observed as a serious threat to the Hindu patriarchal order and community identity.<sup>43</sup> I am seeing ACK in the same context.

There are many stories in ACK which bring to our mind the fanatical hatred of the Hindus against the Muslim. But in this paper, I have only concentrated on 'Ram bhakti' in ACK comics. Through these comics, we even look back to a mythical ancient past from which the Hindu society derives their highest morals, intellectual and spiritual inspirations from Ram, Krishna, Hanuman and other figures of the distant firmament. These stories of mythological god came into the ACK world in the 1970s and it served as the model for the visual depiction in the serialized versions of the Ramayan and Mahabharata in the late 80s and 90s. These mythological serials 'depended on ACK for information on costumes, jewelry, sets, weaponry, and other forms. It would be ironic if the greater popularity of these serials were to be seen as the real cause behind ACK decline'.<sup>44</sup>

## IV. CONCLUSION

The stories of ACK based on Ram are woven into the art of moral, emotional and intellectual exploitation of the present society and it popularized only one version of Ram's story. Romila Thapar, A.K. Ramnujam, Anuradha Kapur and other historians argued that 'It would be incorrect to say that in our heritage, there is only one kind of Ram images and interpretation is available, there are several, for different texts, as also different modes of representation, have fashioned many different kinds of images, not only at different times but even at one and the same time. Each text might represent its own Ram and the Rams of discrete texts may not add up to a coherent whole'.<sup>45</sup> One can, therefore, say that the post-independence politics of Ram is all about the construction of the nationalist image of Ram and Ramayan, which has crushed all the local and regional versions and perceptions of Ram and Ramayan for the construction of India as a historically Hindu nation, and has identified Christians and Muslims as 'foreigners'. 'It also aims to promote a cultural patriotism, privileges the Hindu mode of life and further aims to make India as a Hindu Rashtra.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

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