

Many authors and artists in India are conscious of or even directly engaged with international comics, especially from the USA, Japan, and Europe. Yet, Indian comics remain relatively obscure in those same countries. When they are recognized, readers and reviewers tend to either focus on transnational publishers or frame comics on the subcontinent as novelties. This not only distracts from the vibrant comics world in India, but also holds the works created therein to outsiders' standards, which have tended to celebrate educational content or corporate publishers. The result is often a lack of appreciation for Indian comics communities in this context and an over-emphasis on works that reach readers within external, more well-established industries. This chapter counters such tendencies by highlighting the important people, titles, publishers, and moments that have shaped the tapestry of India's comics culture.

A Heritage of Visual Storytelling

One of the central terms in India has been *chitrakatha*, or picture stories, with a recent documentary titled *Chitrakatha: Indian Comics beyond Balloons & Panels*. Yet, this term mainly originates with Anant Pai, Uncle Pai to his fans, who was the editor and founder of the *Amar Chitra Katha* (Immortal Picture Stories) comics series in the late 1960s. With stories on mythology, history, and folklore, Pai focused on the medium's ability to "inculcate cultural values" and introduce children to "the world of words" (1995:110). By labeling comics *chitrakatha*, he brought comics' educational power to the fore and established the medium as cultural heritage, with the weight of UNESCO's 1967 endorsement of the medium (Chandra 2008). Pai's use of this term allowed the *Amar Chitra Katha* (ACK) series to become an essential part of school curricula even as it established a national readership.

While Pai's use of the term *chitrakatha* remains popular among educational or edutainment publishers, the medium in India has deeper roots. Pre-existing traditions of visual narratives are an important influence, for creative practice and for providing a common ground with readers. Furthermore, John Lent identifies the roots of Indian comics in the caricature aspects of temple sculptures, the satire of 19th century *Kalighat* paintings, and the visual narratives of *patachitra* picture scrolls and the 16th century illustrated *Daastan-E-Amir Haamza* manuscript (Lent 2015). Many creators have done fieldwork on such visual storytelling traditions and their general emergence around 400 years ago, including interviews, surveys, ethnographic work, and other forms of research. For instance, Vidyun Sabhaney and Shohei Emura have traveled throughout India, interviewing practitioners and doing archival research on Rajasthani *kaavads*, shadow puppets of Karnataka, and Bengali painted *pata* scrolls (Sabhaney 2014). Through their research, presentations, and workshops, such creators and researchers have highlighted the longer history of visual narratives in Indian culture.

Yet the first identifiable comics in India are generally seen as the *Avadh* or *Oudh Punch* of 1877 to 1956 or the 1850 to 1857 run of *Delhi Sketch Book* (Hasan 2009). By 1900, many such satirical magazines had developed in response to the colonial British *Punch* with cartoons, essays, and poetry, such that around 70 were being published in more than a dozen cities in Northwest India (Hasan 2009). In so doing, such magazines laid the foundation for a critically aware and regionally diverse comics world in India. They specifically provided a strong precedent for linguistic diversity that would support publication in multiple dialects by companies like ACK and enable regional comics publishing in Tamil, Bangla, Malayalam, and other languages beyond the often dominant Hindi and English.

In the decades that followed, British magazines that included comics proliferated alongside local ones. One pioneer was modern poet C. Subramania Bharati (1882–1921), who published Tamil language comics in the weekly *India* magazine and elsewhere (Venkatachalapathy 2006). Another was early modern artist Gaganendranath Tagore (1867–1938), who published cartoons in *The Modern Review* in 1917 and in later portfolios and lithographs (Mitter 1997). While World War I brought a pause, publications proliferated afterwards, including the growth of cartoons and cartoonists in Tamil Nadu. With increasing British and Indian magazine publication, including the broadly circulated *kalana pathirikai* of the 1920s, many cartoonists had become celebrated artists by the 1930s (Venkatachalapathy 2006). During this period, the medium became increasingly popular through creators like Tamil artist Mali, who published his work in *Indian Express* and *Ananda Vikatan*, one of the state's first popular periodicals, and so inspired younger cartoonists like S. Gopalan. (Venkatachalapathy 2006)

In the process, such early creators set the stage for new kinds of comics and creators. One of the most successful publications was the family-owned monthly children's magazine *Chandamama* founded by film producers B. Nagi Reddy and Chakrapani in 1947 (McLain 2009). Its compelling illustrations and oral storytelling style, alongside translation into regional languages and digital platforms, have helped *Chandamama* remain popular to this day. At the same time, the figure of the eminent cartoonist arose with the arrival of Rasipuram Krishnaswamy Laxman (1921–2015) of Mysore and Mario de Miranda (1926–2011) of Goa. While Miranda became more well known for his murals and illustrated books like *Goa with Love*, both worked as cartoonists for *The Times of India* (Ramakrishnan 2009). Laxman, in particular, set a strong precedent for powerful political cartooning with his Common Man

character and “You Said It” strip starting in 1951 (Byatnal 2011). Miranda would travel to Portugal, England, and, eventually, the USA in 1974, where he would meet Charles M. Schulz. Both Miranda and Laxman were awarded the second highest civilian award in India, namely the *Padma Vibhushan*, as socially significant cartoonists.

The period during and after independence in 1947 was tumultuous and violent due to the mass migration and genocide of Partition, as well as the emphasis on secular education and urban life that followed. Even as creators like Laxman and Miranda engaged with such events in their work, the stage had been set for Uncle Pai to unite the nation into a readership.

A National Readership

In some ways, India’s comics culture was greatly transformed by the *Amar Chitra Katha* series, but these changes grew out of the larger social context of visual culture. In particular, imported comics were entering the market much as imported culture had through British influence. Yet, ACK offered something relatively new: locally-created comic books.

Before the ACK series, Anant Pai and the Times of India Group had worked together on Indrajal Comics, a children-focused imprint started in 1964. Pai would leave only three years after the first issue, as the local comics section he’d pushed for was replaced with educational content (McLain 2009; Chandra 2008). Before departing, he’d managed to persuade the Times of India Group that Lee Falk’s *Phantom* was a better choice than *Superman*, which, alongside King Features characters, provided popular content for the publisher. Later, Indrajal’s manager A.C. Shukla worked with Aabid Surti, as well as several artists including Govind Brahmunia, to create one of India’s first indigenous superheroes in the form of Bahadur, an adventuring detective in

an orange tunic. With multiple languages and a diversity of characters, Indrajal would reach sales in the hundreds of thousands by the early 1980s (Rao 2001).

After the Times of India Group rejected Pai's ideas, he sold them to India Book House in 1967 and established the *Amar Chitra Katha* series. While the first ten issues were based on Western fairy tales and published in Kannada, the eleventh shifted to English and ACK's characteristic mythological and educational approach (Srinivasaraju 2011). What began with a sales of 20,000 issues in three years following this "Krishna" issue soon exploded into five million per year (Kapada, cited in Rao 2001). Pai's heritage-based approach created a space for comics within Indian culture and established a national readership. However, as scholars and critics have noted, the series showed bias as part of a larger *Hindutva* nationalist movement that called for Hinduism as the national religion and culture. That same inclusion of religious themes and bias set a precedent for other comics, though, with many religious publishers following suit, including the recent *Sufi Comics* of Islamic history and tradition by Bangalore-based brothers Mohammed Ali and Mohammed Arif Vakil. The educational framing of ACK's comics also set a precedent for similar series like the *Indian War Comics* series that debuted around 2008. Furthermore, the ACK series established artists like Ram Waerkar and Pratap Mulick as influential in their own right. The series has since been incorporated into ACK Media and its millions of dollars in comics sales per year, especially in the diaspora (McLain 2009).

Meanwhile, as Holmberg (2013) has demonstrated, regional comics magazines were already established by the 1960s, especially in Bengal, with the children's magazine *Shuktara* having risen to success in the 1950s. In terms of creators, Bengali illustrator Narayan Debnath had by then already created what is likely India's first superhero, Batul the Great, as part of his comic strips and books. Prasad Ray too was telling adventure stories and mystery tales under the

nom de plume of Mayukh Choudhury, while Pratul Chandra Lahiri was creating the daily comic *Sheyal Pandi* or “the Learned Fox,” and Tusharkanti Chatterjee was crafting detective comics (Holmberg 2013). Together, they formed a community that would endure over time, though research about this community remains sparse. The Tamil comics scene also thrived, albeit mainly through Muthu Comics and its sister publication Lion Comics, which imported and translated American and European comics starting in 1971 (Raja 2009).

By the end of this period, both local and imported comics had established a national readership, especially in the relative center of production, Mumbai. It was only a matter of time before more companies mimicked the ACK series and Indrajal’s imported publications.

The Golden Age and Mini-Comics Revolution

The late 1970s through 80s witnessed a shift from ACK’s national readership to diverse regional ones that resembled the earlier and oft-imported magazine culture (Rao 2001). Comics publishing mainly moved from liberal Mumbai to conservative New Delhi, with the rise of Diamond, Raj, and Manoj Comics.

Diamond Comics entered the world of comics in 1978 as a subsidiary of Hindi pulp publisher Diamond Pocket Books and has continued through today. While Diamond initially specialized in stories inspired by kids’ TV shows, including *Shaktiman*, they later focused on humor. Their most prominent publications are “Pran’s Features” created by the inimitable Pran Kumar Sharma. Having begun as a newspaper and magazine cartoonist in the 1960s, Pran’s satirical *Chacha Chaudhary* series about a relate-able grandfather, among others, struck a chord with readers (Talwar 2008). Diamond also published action adventure stories and *Film*

Chitrakatha, later moving into Western reprints as well (Rao 2001). Pran, meanwhile, continued creating comics throughout his life and taught at Pran's Media Institute run by his son.

Children's magazines and adult comic strips also contributed to this Golden Age when comics regularly sold in the hundreds of thousands (Rao 2001). In particular, monthlies like *Champak* and *Target* magazines featured well-known strips, including *Target's* visually-detailed *Detective Moochwala* series by Hyderabad cartoonist Ajit Ninan, which ran from 1979 to 1991. Cartoonists like Ninan, who would go on to contribute to *The Times of India*, and Ekanath Padmanabhan Unny carried on the work of Miranda and Laxman. E.P. Unny specifically worked with *The Hindu* while illustrating literary journals in the 1990s and even a graphic novel in the Malayalam language. In addition, Manjula Padmanabhan became the first prominent female political cartoonist with her innovative *Double Talk* series about a modern, urban woman in Mumbai's *The Sunday Observer* from 1982 to 1986 and then Delhi's *Pioneer* from 1991 to 1997 (Gopalakrishnan 2013). Despite criticism, *Suki* and playwright, writer, and artist Padmanabhan became important figures in Indian comics.

Shortly thereafter, two big names would enter the field among a widespread growth in comics publishing. First came India Book House's monthly *Tinkle* magazine in 1980 with memorable characters like Ram Waerker's *Suppandi*. It quickly became popular with a combination of comics, stories, puzzles, quizzes, and contests for younger readers. Then, in 1986, brothers Sanjay, Manish, and Manoj Gupta came together to form Delhi's Raj Comics via pulp publisher Raja Pocket Books. Influenced by Marvel and DC comics and cartoons, the Guptas hoped to give India its own superheroes with characters like Nagraj, who uses snakes much as Spider-man uses webbing. Raj remains a powerful publisher today, and such publishers fueled the 1980's Golden Age of Comics through the broad explosion of mini-comics. In this

era, publishers rose and fell rather quickly, with many growing out of pulps. As Raja (2009) notes, Chitra Bharti Kathamala of Delhi and Radha Comics of Merath, which boasted a Robo-Cop-inspired character named Shaktipura, would both close due to increased competition from Western comics. Due to a belief that foreign-licensed comics were more cost-effective, companies like Kiran Comics, which imported titles like *Tarzan*, and Rani Comics of Chennai, which featured James Bond, flourished for a time. A few, like Rani, managed to stick around through the following decades, although even this once-stunning and well-distributed publisher closed in 2005 (Raja 2009).

Within this mini-comics boom, publishers tended to give more freedom to creators and focus on accessibility. This stemmed in part from the overlap of readers and creators that infused comics with enthusiasm and experimentation. Accordingly, publishers shifted comics from bookstores to bookstalls, and they moved to short-form comics at a smaller size and lower price, or mini-comics (Rao 2001). In the end, these publishers helped to establish comics as an accessible medium with vast potential, which led to greater interest and the establishment of lending libraries. By 1990, a national comics industry or readership was becoming unsustainable, though, leading publishers like ACK to cease regular publications and Indrajal to close (McLain 2009). Growing regional scenes remained relatively shaky, except in places like Bengal, where creators like Gautam Karmakar drew space operas in the 1980s and 1990s and Sarbajit Sen, a painter, filmmaker and book designer, created *The Adventures of Chimpa* in the 1990s (Holmberg 2013). Even as certain regional industries stayed strong and imports remained popular, though, the Golden Age was entering its twilight.

With the arrival of liberalization in 1991, the Indian economy was integrated into the global one, resulting in an overall shift to consumerism and greater international competition.

Simultaneously, readers and creators had greater access to foreign media, too. In short, the stage was set for comics creators and publishers to do something new.

The Rise of the Graphic Novel

In 1994, Orijit Sen, designer, artist, and co-founder of design shop People Tree, printed what is arguably India's first graphic novel at roughly 60 pages; by this time, the comics world had significantly shrunk. Based on fieldwork in the Narmada River valley and funded by Kalpavriksha, *River of Stories* opened the door for long-form comics work.

In 2004, Sarnath Banerjee, who had met Sen in college, followed in his footsteps with *Corridor*, the first explicitly-labeled graphic novel in India, and established a comics shelf in bookstores in several cities. During and after this gap, comics shifted to small-scale publishing and freelance work. As a result, many creators focused on developing the comics community and supporting new members. Sen, in particular, acted as a mentor for creators like Amruta Patil, India's first female graphic novelist whose ground-breaking *Kari* (2008) set a strong precedent for innovative and queer storytelling. From there, the number of graphic novels grew with the network of creators. Banerjee and writer Anindya Roy collaborated on Phantomville Press publications *The Believers* (2006) and *Kashmir Pending* (2007). He then quickly established himself with *The Barn Owl's Wondrous Capers* (2007) and *The Harappa Files* (2011). Sen and Banerjee also became acquainted with Parismita Singh, a graphic novelist and researcher whose *Hotel at the end of the World* (2009) was based on fieldwork in Assam.

Overall, there was an atmosphere of collaboration. In Bangalore, the Indian Institute of Cartoonists was founded in 2001 to increase awareness of the medium and showcase various creators through the Indian Cartoon Gallery. In Delhi, events organized by the Sarai Center for

the Study of Developing Societies and the French Information Resource Center between 2007 and 2009 led to the formation of the Pao Collective. Made up of Sen, Banerjee, Singh, cartoonist Vishwajyoti Ghosh, and researcher Amitabh Kumar, Pao set out to establish comics as an independent medium through events, publications, and mentoring. While Ghosh published the historically critical *Delhi Calm* (2010) and Kumar *Raj Comics for the Hard-Headed* (2008) and *Tinker.Solder.Tap* (2009) with Bhagwati Prasad, the collective culminated in the collaborative *Pao: The Anthology* (2012). Such work was inspired by international projects like *Lingua Comic* (2007), *Ctrl.Alt.Shift Unmasks Corruption* (2009), and *When Kulbushan Met Stockli* (2009). Meanwhile, book publishers pursued collaborations with traditional artists, such as *L.I.E.: A Traditional Tale of Modern India* (2010), *Bhimayana: Experiences of Untouchability* (2011), *Sita's Ramayana* (2011), and *I See the Promised Land* (2013). By 2010, comics researcher, anthology manager, and COMICA organizer Paul Gravett would observe that Indian comics was in a renaissance (Gravett 2010).

Publications grew, with the dystopian *Moonward* (2009) by George Mathen, who publishes under the pen name Appupen, and Aniruddha Sen Gupta and Priya Kuriyan's guide to urban pollution, *Our Toxic World* (2010) receiving a warm welcome. Yet, US-based company Gotham Comics received more international attention. Founded by media entrepreneurs in 1997, Gotham reprinted titles from Marvel and other Western publishers but, in 2006, re-launched as Virgin Comics, only to become Liquid Comics in 2008. With titles like *Devi*, *Snake Woman*, *The Sadhu*, and *Ramayana 3392 AD*, and celebrity names like Nicholas Cage, Grant Morrison, and Stan Lee, Liquid remains a prominent if troubled publisher as it transitions to digital with Graphic India. Mumbai's growing scene also saw companies like Vimanika Comics test out similar models in the late 2000s. Although kids comics also maintained a presence, especially

through Tapas Guha and Subhadra Sengupta's *Feluda Mysteries* series and the legacy of efforts like the folkloric *Vivalok Comics*, readerships were changing. *Comics Jump* thus focused on a younger demographic of adult males with its superhero, zombie, and fantasy stories. At the same time, creators Bharath Murthy and Kailash Iyer co-founded the first print-on-demand, self-published magazine for the comics community, *Comix.India*. Over five volumes, the series' profit-sharing model challenged consumer-oriented efforts.

In other regions, the medium took on other uses and meanings. Thus, publishers like Kolkata-based Kriyetic Comics quickly went from graphic novel venture to diverse media platforms. Scholars, too, began to pay more attention to comics, with some, like Kolkata-based Rimi B. Chatterjee, starting publications, in this case the indie magazine *Project C* (Holmberg 2013). Chatterjee was also involved in the socially-minded *Drighangchoo* (2009) anthology by students at Jadavpur University, which was inspired by the work of Abhijit Gupta, director of The Comic Book Project for archiving vernacular periodicals (Holmberg 2013). In contrast to such indie approaches, cartoonist and activist Sharad Sharma looked to the form as a tool for development communication through 'grassroots comics' that are produced by disenfranchised people to address social problems. World Comics India was founded in 1997 as part of the World Comics Network, and Sharma to this day uses workshops and social campaigns to bring comics to rural areas as four-panel broadsheets. More prominently, Campfire Comics, founded in 2008, approaches comics as 'illustrated books' for young readers. With many awards and over 80 titles in categories such as Classics, Mythology, Biographies, and History, Campfire has an increasingly international reach, albeit with a Western emphasis in adaptations and a reputation for under-appreciating local artists.

By 2011, the comics world in India had grown a great deal. Beyond the continuing superhero and mythological publications of Liquid, Raj, and Diamond, additional changes laid just beneath the surface. In particular, the rapid growth of Comic Con India and related efforts quickly brought creators to the fore.

Communities and Conventions

So it was that a group of enthusiasts and creators in Delhi came together to plan a national event to rival Comic Con International in San Diego. In so doing, they drew on familiarity with events like the New Delhi World Book Fair and Raj Comics' Comics Fest India, originally Nagraj Janmotsar, which celebrated Nagraj's birthday from 2008-2012. In the process, they ensured the eventual spread of Comic Con India throughout the nation.

The first Comic Con India (CCI) was hosted in New Delhi in 2011 by Twenty Onwards Media, a company which was founded by Jatin Varma in 2007 after ending his comics magazine *Random*. Most stalls were occupied by larger publishers like Diamond Comics or recently established ones like Level 10, with some individual creators and animators. Over two days, around 15,000 attendees engaged in India's first cosplay events, participated in workshops, and, at the end, witnessed Pran presenting a Lifetime Achievement Award to Anant Pai. From there, it expanded into Comic Con Express in Bangalore and Mumbai in 2012, before establishing annual cons elsewhere. Guests have included R. Crumb and Aline Kominsky Crumb (2012) and Fabio Moon and Gabriel Ba (2014), as well as celebrities like *Game of Thrones* stars Natalia Tena and Daniel Portman (2015). Further, CCI branched out with Pop Culture Publishing, the Comic Con India Awards, and Free Comic Book Weekend, which started in 2013. Despite widespread

acclaim and growth, many creators criticize the event's emphasis on larger publishers and comics-related merchandise over independent artists and authors.

As such, creators like comics editor and writer Akshay Dhar and magazine editor, animator, and comics writer Adhiraj Singh have helped establish alternatives. Along with comics creator Sumit Kumar, among others, Singh originally helped organize the first Comic Con India. With works including *Uud Bilaw Manus*, with Abhijeet Kini, he has since been the driving force behind the Delhi Comics Kala Samagam, which has grown from a mailing list to a Facebook group and a forum for creators to share their work and post opportunities for collaboration (Mani Jha 2014). Dhar, meanwhile, established Meta Desi Comics in 2013 to help create comics like the *Ground Zero* anthology and the acclaimed collaboration with BookMaker Comics, *Love Me Like a Psycho Robot* (2015).

Altogether, these creators and the presence of Comic Con India, alongside the longer history of visual narratives, have helped establish an ever-expanding comics culture. In particular, Mumbai-based illustrator Abhijeet Kini has exhibited at Comic Cons and worked with *Tinkle*, Varma, Dhar, and Singh, while maintaining an animation career. Sumit Kumar, meanwhile, started by writing for *Savita Bhabhi*, India's first pornographic comic, but moved on to the cult graphic novel *The Itch You Can't Scratch* (2011), the webcomic *Aapki Poojita* with Adhiraj Singh, and online comics with *Newslaundry.com*. In addition, publishing houses like Holy Cow Entertainment of Mumbai, Chariot Comics of Delhi, and Revolt Entertainment continue to rise up to meet the growing comics community. Meanwhile, comics creator and designer Kailash Iyer founded the platform *Pulpocracy* in 2013, with the *Pulp Quarterly* journal of Indian comics, including strips, interviews, articles, and reviews, as its primary publication.

Both *Pulp Quarterly* and the similar *Indian Comics Fandom*, which started in 2012, reflect the larger community of readers who are often creators themselves.

At the same time, the independent side of Indian comics remains strong and growing, especially with the appearance of Western indie publishers like Fantagraphics at Comic Con India. Anthologies and events remain popular; thus, *Pao: The Anthology* not only involved long-term collaboration and mentoring, but also launched at an interactive event in 2012. This project, in particular, supported younger creators like Vidyun Sabhaney and Shohei Emura, who have gone on to organize workshops on traditional visual storytelling and publications like Captain Bijli Comics' *Mice Will Be Mice* (2012) and *DOGS!: A Collection of Comics on Our Canine Companions* (2014). Similarly, small publishers like Yoda Press and Blaft! have followed suit with anthologies like *This Side That Side: Restorying Partition*, curated by Vishwajyoti Ghosh, and *The Obliterary Journal* Volumes 1 and 2. Yoda and its editor and founder, Arpita Das, have also provided support for comics creators and events, especially with the late Yodakin bookshop. From anthologies to events and publications, these efforts show a broad value for accessibility and community in independent comics.

Perhaps most successful on this account are Pratheek and Tina Thomas, co-founders of former indie publisher Manta Ray Comics. While its first publication, the wordless graphic novella *Hush* (2010), illustrated by Rajiv Eipe, received much acclaim on its premiere at the first CCI, Manta Ray would split by 2014. While co-founder Dileep Cherian continues *The Small Picture* series in financial newspaper *Mint*, Pratheek and Tina have since co-founded Studio Kokaachi in Cochin. They also continue to work with many of the same creators, including researcher and cartoonist Gokul Gopalakrishnan and the prolific Prabha Mallya, who formerly served as Art Director at Manta Ray. Kokaachi, as a small, independent storytelling and

publishing house, values the comics community and relies on interactive events like cons and gallery and café nights. While Kokaachi continues Manta Ray's tradition of digital editions and has expanded into animation, they remain firmly grounded in print with the continuing *Mixtape* anthology, *Twelve* series, and tiny *Matchbox Comix*. Fundamentally, they rely upon a thriving, informed, and design-oriented readership in pulling indie comics from niche to center.

Through exceptional work, several creators have attained a strong reputation and standing within the current comics world. Abhishek Singh is perhaps the most well-known outside of India, having exhibited widely, attended Comic Con International, and published *Krishna: A Journey Within* (2012) with Image Comics. While Singh is highly regarded for his vivid sci-fi renditions of mythological figures, Amruta Patil, creator of *Kari* (2008), is renowned for her powerful storytelling and painted work. She has specifically published the highly acclaimed *Adi Parva*, the first volume in her visionary re-telling of *the Mahabharata*, and shorter stories in a variety of media, including her “Book of Hours” series for *National Geographic Traveller India*. Prashant Miranda, meanwhile, has made a name for himself through evocative water colors and playful travel journals. His recent show, *Bombay Gold*, showcased his illustration work on the architecture, nature, and people of that city, while he continues work on the children's series “The World of Anahi and Vir” and other venues. Still other figures that I have already mentioned, including Appupen and Priya Kuriyan, have become well-known, with the latter especially recognized for her ever-growing repertoire of visual storytelling.

In short, comics is flourishing with a diversity of forms, authors, publishers, and otherwise – from art galleries to online venues. New web series, in particular, crop up each day – including the astute but anonymous *Crocodile in Water, Tiger on Land* and Aarthi Parthasarthy's

series in the style of Mughal miniature paintings, *Royal Existentials*. It is a wide, wide world and one that merits more exploration.

Conclusion:

While it is impossible to list every writer, illustrator, letterer, editor, fan organization, or otherwise here, understanding the medium's history and culture is essential to appreciating comics in India. For instance, in 2015, two books were published in response to growing public awareness of violence against women in Indian society. While *Priya's Shakti* gained international attention with its story of a young woman who learns to champion women's rights, *Drawing the Line: Indian Women Fight Back* had a more local impact. In contrast to *Priya's* focus, the latter anthology was designed to help women hone their comics-making abilities through a week-long workshop guided by German comics editors and creator Priya Kuriyan. Furthermore, while *Priya's Shakti* was created by American illustrator Dan Goldman and Indian American filmmaker Ram Devineni for international audiences, *Drawing the Line* was created for Indian readers. In particular, through a diversity of stories and styles, this anthology looks to engage women in storytelling and making a home in India and in the Indian comics world.

That *Drawing the Line* received less attention than the transnational *Priya's Shakti* demonstrates the central power and problem for comics in India. In particular, each of these projects involved international collaboration made possible by the historical precedent of this comics world. Yet, that same entanglement of Indian and international comics cultures can make it challenging for creators to move beyond a niche readership. Unlike transnational publishers, most independent creators and organizations face an uphill battle in cultivating a creative practice or community, much less a livelihood. Yet, this is a comics culture on the verge – with

so many readers, creators, editors, and otherwise striving to establish a comics world that can sustain itself. Even the long list of individuals, titles, and publications provided here is thus merely the broadest of strokes for a much more complex reality.

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Further Reading:

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(An account of the rise of graphic novels, comics publishers, and Comic Con India)