Conclusion

Comics and animated cartoons have almost always been primarily an entertainment medium. Their appeal to people in general and children in particular have always been associated with a recreational setting, with only the occasional foray into the didactic. As has been mapped out in the present study, most comics and animated cartoons try to infuse in the reader/viewer the ideological ferment of the dominant group. The American superhero comics, whose life stretches from the thirties to today, offered an area of pure escapism to the American people from the haunting memories of the two World Wars, the Great Depression and the Nazi atrocities against the Jews, only to name a few instances. In fact, most comics, of all genres, throughout the world are clearly indicative of a medium whose main aims are humour, adventure, fantasy, and entertainment (Horn, *World Encyclopedia* 127). As a result, comics within the pedagogical contexts have always been relegated to the affective domain, most often used as attention grabbing elements -- as *signposts* to more symbolically encoded instruction.
Comics and animated cartoons mirrored the not-so-pleasant life experiences of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century proletariat, serving their aspirations and denouncements (Kunzle, *History* 9). A glance into comics and animated cartoons reveals that the world of contemporary comics and animated cartoons in general, deals not with the traditional escapist themes but with issues such as the clash between cultures in history, the burden of guilt and suffering, and the trials and small triumphs of the daily work-a-day world, as is evident from the modern “graphic novels.” Even before that, the work of predecessors of the comics form such as Rowlandson and Hogarth, spelled out a society that reeked of corruption and the sleazier side of social and political humanity (Perry 67). Comics and animated cartoons like *T&J* and *ACK* adopt the process of strategic abridgment and inclusion repeatedly, to construct a larger ideological notion of the nation so as to construct an ideological order that tries to legitimise the norms and manners of the dominant group and exclude the subaltern and thus maintain the status quo. The revolutionary strength of the subaltern usually goes unnoticed in comics and animated cartoons, as they rely on visually codified representations which, in “cultural terms, taps into moral and political rationales” through which the producers and transmitters of the text (who also own and control the means of production) propagate the ideologies of the dominant group (Gabilliet, *Cultural and Mythical* 203). They articulate or rather justify the position of
the dominant group on subjects like nation and race by reducing real
people, here the subaltern, to abstractions.

The ACK series bills itself as representing “the glorious heritage of
India,” an India that is carefully constructed so that instances of Hindu
fundamentalism are diligently avoided. The western animated cartoons
including T&J in their turn achieve this by the subtle use of
anthropomorphised animals, thereby excluding the Afican Americans or
the blacks from the mainstream of American society. Thus the sanitised,
nationalist “pride” becomes ideologically safe and accessible to the young
readers/viewers by camouflaging issues such as race, caste, and color
through the use of stereotypical characters. This opens a door of debate to
the fundamentalism of which we now witness such an increase.

Comics and animated cartoons are devised by adults, who work to
determine and justify their idea of what a child is or should be like
(Dorfman 52). The comics show the child as a miniature adult, enjoying
an idealised, gilded infancy which is really nothing but an adult
projection of some magic era beyond the reach of the harsh discord of
daily life. When reading/viewing comics and cartoons the child “admires
himself in the mirror thinking it to be a window. . . . But the child playing
in the garden is the purified adult looking back at himself” (Dorfman 30).
So it is the adult who produces the comics and animated cartoons, and the
child who consumes them. For instance Gifford, talking about Great Britain, insists that:

When the first comic paper was created by James Henderson [in 1874] children were nowhere in sight [bulk of their readership consisting of the industrial working classes]. *Funny Folks* cost one old penny for its eight packed pages of Funny Pictures, Funny Notes, Funny Jokes, Funny Stories, but even that humble brown coin was beyond the pocket of the Victorian child. So Henderson designed his comic for adults: the cartoons were political, the Comic Fancy Page topical and the stories satirical. *(Encyclopedia of Comics 6)*

It may seem unusual to think of comic and animated cartoons as lessons in historical education or as transmitters of ideology. Their significance as a popular cultural medium cannot be easily dismissed. In the Indian context, Pai’s *ACK* takes its place among other forms of mass culture and entertainment which are significant to the visual culture of religion and nation. Visually, the series’ artwork draws upon styles popularised in Hindu poster art and Bollywood films, says Krishnamurti (114). The ease of mass production and the simplicity of the visual and textual narratives in comics provide the possibility of a homogeneous representation which is difficult to achieve in a country of one billion
people. Though Hobsbawm, Anderson, and Benjamin differ in their approaches to the notion of “nation” itself, they would agree that the print and visual media powerfully project a singular image of the “nation” onto a heterogenous people, by assoicating the nation with symbols like flag, military uniform and struggle for independence (in the case of ACK). The creators of cultural artifacts, including comics, attempt to reconcile complex social relations in terms of simple discursive relations, as we have seen in the case of ACK and T&J.

The graphic humour, possible because of the visual-verbal nature of the genre, attracts the young, and comics and animated cartoons have changed over the years to accommodate children of younger age groups. The humour, adventure, and fantasy in the comics and animated cartoons on both sides of the Atlantic claim more and more youngsters each year. In their early stages the humour was often at the expense of the blacks as in T&J and other animated cartoons of the day. But it did attract millions to the comics format, with as many as one billion units of comic books being sold a year, in the United States alone (Goulart, Over 50 Years 5). It was only recently that serious outcry and protest began to be raised against such stereotypical depictions. It also instilled in the readers a unique language that was made of sequential storytelling that was primarily visual, but elaborated on by the textual dimension. An interesting by-product of the nature of the genre is that, though it was complex and elaborate, comics
visual literacy seemed to be more easily acquired by the young than the
symbolic literacy of morphemic syntax.

Often cartooned in style and following the economy-of-line
technique, comics successfully created “the illusion of life which can do
without any illusion of reality” (Gombrich 284). This quality was
introduced at the very inception of the genre at the hands of Rodolphe
Töpffer. At the same time the pictures made sense “largely on the basis of
their reproduction of real-world informational cues” and they instantly
appealed to the young (Messaris 166).

_T&J_ and _ACK_ reject the clumsy overdrawn schematism of the
adventure and horror cartoons of the same period. The ideological
backgrounds of _ACK_ and _T&J_ cartoons are similar to that of the other
cartoons produced during the same era. It is interesting to note that _ACK_
emerged as a popular phenomenon at a time when some of the major
resolutions of post-Independence India came in for question in the
Nehurvian era. _T&J_ emerged at a historical juncture when the hopes that
marked the Rooseveltian era were over-shadowed by the Second World
War, the attack on Pearl Harbor, and the Nazi atrocities against Jews. Both
these popular cultural artifacts were created with a “hidden agenda” to
consolidate the position of the dominant group. However, _T&J_ does not
reveal the repressive forces openly but put forth their views subtly through
the seemingly innocent anthropomorphic characters artfully propagating material and messages to bolster public confidence and thus to maintain the status quo. As a cultural project, ACK’s ambition was the rewriting of Nehruvian India. ACK has not only shaped dominant contemporary ideas about Indian history and tradition, brahminism and masculinity, it has also made a critical contribution in molding many other present-day hegemonic articulations about merit, self-respect, self-improvement and hard work.

I have tried to demonstrate through this study of ACK and T&J, that children’s literature has an important place at the very forefront of cultural politics. Over the decades comics like T&J and ACK have sought to train middle class children to grow up as “ideal” citizens. We know that it was a well-thought out initiative by Anant Pai (ACK) and William Hanna and Joseph Barbera at a historical moment when the “singularity” of the nation was being challenged by various marginalised sections in these two societies. ACK addressed a disgruntled younger generation that was losing its faith in “tradition.” It also endeavoured to re-invigorate the westernised middle class youth that was disinterested in its cultural “roots” and thus was in danger of losing its (future) claim to the moral-political leadership of the nation.

Both these popular cultural artifacts have contributed in a major way to the formation of the notions of “Indianness” and “Americanness”
respectively that hold sway over the dominant cultural imaginary today. It has also lent ethical conviction to the values of a globalizing middle class that places a premium on the “individual” as against the welfarist commitments of the state.

ACK and T&J show that popular culture is the crucial site where the contest for hegemony takes place, and draws our attention to the pedagogic effectiveness of history as popular culture. The notion of hegemony has directed our attention to popular culture as a major site of political intervention. As Tony Bennett puts it:

In Gramsci’s conspectus, popular culture is viewed neither as the site of people’s cultural deformation nor as that of their self-affirmation . . . but is viewed as a force-field of relations shaped, precisely, by those contradictory pressures and tendencies— a perspective which enables a significant reformulation of both the theoretical and political issues at stake in the study of popular culture. (Popular Culture xiii)

Cultural institutions and practices are not simply rearrangements of an existing pattern. In this framework, popular culture addresses the concerns and contradictions of the society even as it manages and articulates the position of the dominant group to secure consent for the moral-cultural leadership of a particular social bloc. This acceptance is however not total
as there are opposing pressures and alternative receptions of cultural practices in civil society. Yet the role of popular culture as a powerful tool of hegemony cannot be denied.

It may look comical in retrospect but most teenagers in India could read the books of James Hadley Chase and Harold Robbins only on the sly as most parents in India thought that those books would “corrupt” children at an “impressionable” age. But ironically, when we closely examine the dynamics of texts like ACK and T&J, designed specially for children, we perceive how ideologically charged its “innocence” is.