Introduction

The present attempt is to study a comic book series published between 1967 and 1991, and less regularly since then, by the India Book House (IBH hereafter), Mumbai, called Amar Chitra Katha (literally translated as ‘Immortal Picture-Stories’ or Immortal Pictorial Tales’, and ACK hereafter). ACK draws upon three major reserves: mythology, history and folktales. Till date, a total of 439 titles have been published. The mythologicals stand as confirmed favorites, followed by folktales. For two decades, ACK comic books enjoyed immense popularity – quite a phenomenon in history of post-independence book publishing. ACK has stopped publishing new issues on a regular basis and are now either re-printed or packaged in different combinations. It enjoys a wide popularity among the NRIs. Apart from print, they used to be available on audiocassettes (called ‘Amarnad’), and are now available on prime-time television, cellphones and internet. Discussions of animation films based on ACK issues are under way, as are video games – technically known as ‘Massively-multiplayer online role-playing games’ (MMORPG) – where users can assume the role of a certain fictional character.

There was perceptible prejudice against comics among parents and teachers when the first ACK was published and it took about eight years to break even. The sales rose sharply till the late seventies when it again started dipping a bit. In 1980, IBH launched a children’s magazine called ‘Tinkle’. Anant Pai, the brain behind ACK and also its chief

1 The ownership of ACK and the magazine ‘Tinkle’ has changed hands recently – they are now owned by new company called ACK Media. IBH is now its distributing arm.
2 Nad, a Sanskrit word, means ‘sound’.
3 ACK Media has also launched an ‘Amar Chitra Katha Scholarship’ for 5th to 10th standard students of government-recognized schools.
editor, designed an ingenious strategy for the purpose. A massive storytelling contest in several Indian cities was organized. The winner, a certain 8-year old girl called Eileen Dalima, was called upon the stage to release the first issue of the magazine. It was an instant success. The initial 40,000 copies were sold out in no time with demands for another 12000\(^4\). With these two products, IBH became the undisputed leader in the children’s book publishing market.

Although the stated focus of my study is ACK, it remains incomplete without Tinkle, a magazine that relies upon the comics-form to tell its stories. Together, these two brands paved the way for the comics medium to earn a permanent, even prestigious, place in the publishing industry and consequently, among the general reading public\(^5\). Their phenomenal popularity calls for a reappraisal of the nature and extent of influence that popular literature can bear over generations and the ways in which printing technology can capture mass imagination. In other words, this is an enquiry into the formation of 'taste' of a reading public at a given historical juncture. It is thus not only a set of literary-stylistic analyses of certain popular texts to arrive at certain touchstones of judgment on their literary merit and formal properties, but a critical investigation of how such parameters come to be what they are. One might say it is the genealogy of this popular taste that I try to document, going back once more to the history of a particular brand of literature, mechanically reproduced and lowbrow, and attempt to gauge the socio-political factors that conditioned its reception.

\(^4\) Interview with Mr. Pai, in August-September 1999.

\(^5\) Possibly no other comics series in history other than ACK can boast of roping in public figures, among them senior dignitaries, ministers and the President of a country, to endorse the brand.
To that end, I look at some ACK issues closely as well as the product as a whole, more specifically as a children’s literature item in market, and try to relate the findings to the then socio-political context. Thus, although the stated topic of this research is a particular comic book series, I look at documents of other kinds: legal and educational records, framed picture artifacts, popular children’s films and so on. Treating the different subjectivities borne out by different cultural documents as complementing each other, I propose to delineate certain predilections of the Indian middle class as regards entertainment and pedagogy, culture and its representation, upbringing and citizenship – all of which might help us to arrive at a map of post-independence Indian identity of the 1970s and ’80s. Not that the nature of this identity remained unchanged over this period, if ever. The would-be citizen model of child subject (if one can at all talk of a ‘subject’ in this case) remains the crucial index here. The site of popular culture offers a fresh insight, by dint of its informal nature, into the making of this identity in a rather uneasy nation-state.

The choice of Amar Chitra Katha as research material is not accidental. Quite a few serious academic works have been devoted to study this material since two articles were published in a volume called Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia in 1995 by Pennsylvania University Press (eds. L. A. Babb & S.Wadley, Indian edition by Motilal Banarsidas, 1997). There are at least two academic publications on ACK. Nandini Chandra’s The Classic Popular: Amar Chitra Katha: 1967 – 2007 was published from Yoda Press, New Delhi, in 2008. Another book by Karline McLain, based on her Ph.D. dissertation, has been published from Indiana University Press. I am aware of two

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6 The title of this book is India’s Immortal Comic Books: Gods, Kings and other Heroes (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009).
other doctoral works that have already been submitted. Apart from these, one can find numerous references to ACK in academic works on Indian popular visual culture, religion, television and film studies.

The brand was named by the founder-editor (the late) Mr. Anant Pai. Consciously or not, it was a very shrewd move. Because as we shall see, ACK does not fit the standard description and look of Comics, certainly not the way we are familiar with in its European (the *bande dessinée*, e.g. Tintin, Asterix) or American (DC or Marvel publications) exemplars. It was a very *sanskritized* name for a medium that came from foreign shores. And it afforded two things for Pai/IBH. First, ‘comics’ as a form had to avoid the ill association of being a decadent, pulp literature and hence a taboo among parents. Second, in a country that had freed itself recently from the clutches of colonialism and was trying to rebuild itself, any cultural form of ‘western’ origin would not have found approval. This was especially true for the then parents’ generation who had lived through the last years of colonial rule. Just by translating the two basic components of the ‘comics’ form, Pai could call upon the *swadeshi* impulse – that it was the ‘Indian answer’ to comics – while keeping the basic format unchanged. The nomenclature agreed well with the visuals (calendar art-type illustrations complete with

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7 Pai wrote the script for the first ACK and served as the chief editor of the team till his death in February 2011. He was largely responsible for devising marketing strategies, some of them quite innovative, that made ACK a household name.

8 I am leaving out the Japanese ‘Manga’ form which, although it has a long history inside Japan and might have been known to individual scholars or artists practicing outside Japan, has been discovered by the international audience rather recently. Not many were aware of the existence of *anime or manga* before 1990s.

9 Although I intend to draw attention to an innovative move in linguistic terms, the naming might also serve as an example of what is referred to ‘*sanskritization*’ in anthropology and sociology. ‘Sanskritization’, originally used to describe certain practices of mobilization by people belonging to a lower caste, is now an oft-used nomenclature. The particular significance in this case pertains to a similar process in terms of social prestige (or lack of it) of a traditionally lowbrow genre of literature (comics).
drapery, jewelry and architecture) and the kind of stories (the word ‘katha’ insinuates ‘lore’ or ‘legends’, and ACK was drawing upon well-known resources as various Puranas or Jataka) he wanted to (re-)tell. From the very beginning, ACK distanced itself from other similar available comics, especially Indrajal Comics of the Times of India group – the largest print media conglomerate in India. Indrajal Comics syndicated Marvel or King Features characters with generous dosages of violence and skimpily dressed women, much detested by parents and teachers. As against these images, culturally alien and offensive to conservative middle class sentiment, printed illustrations of a (Hindu) goddess or a well-known Rajput hero battling the Mughal army could only have found favor with the general public taste that ACK itself, in part, created. Very soon, ACK earned a ‘national’ identity as a brand.

To talk about a purported ‘Indian’ identity (that ACK cultivated, and if sales figures are anything to go by, it did very well at that) is, of course, to unlock a Pandora’s box and to reiterate a call that is now likely to be seen by academic peers as simplistic, precarious and politically devious. It sounds like the chores of school textbook taught to youngsters and even they are willing to believe in only the proverbial value of the statement (‘unity in diversity’ etc.) at their more vulnerable moments. Yet, we need to remember that hegemony is acted out and maintained by such ‘common-sense’ formations10 while simultaneously derided by the intellectual as being biased and fabricated. The dismissal is labored and easy at the same time because of the vantage point the intellectual occupies11.


11 A large number of available academic works on popular cultural artifacts, including those mentioned on ACK, done from within the ‘cultural studies’ framework follow this orientation on the whole. I am not
I argue that such analyses miss out on a vital point set out by the discipline of ‘popular culture studies’, namely, to understand the purported success of that product as a constituent part of ideological processes: how the product, and the ‘value’ it transmits, works on the register of popular imagination.

Let me clarify. It has been pointed out\(^\text{12}\) that the ‘nation’ or community imagined by ACK propagates a strong Hindu rightist dogma by narrating an Indian tradition that makes no formal division between Hindu mythology and historical events and continues to merge these two fundamentally different orders of discourse. Also that it shows women in a stereotypical patriarchal light by depicting them as always physically desirable and docile to the point of being reduced to a shadow of a patriarchal ideal. Both of these charges, arrived at primarily by means of textual analysis, are serious indeed and the purpose of this thesis is not to deny these charges either. Rather, keeping them in full view, I try to study all these events as part of a distinct ‘conjunction’, after the noted cultural theorist Stuart Hall. In other words, I suggest that it is important to appreciate the social, political, economic and ideological contradictions that come together *in a specific shape* in the ACK phenomenon. It is important to ask new questions about the position, efficacy and cultural valence of ACK than dismiss it as an elaborate ploy to cleverly, and knowingly, seduce the innocent; to point out that such a narration is selective and promotes Hindu majoritarianism.

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I should also say, in the same breath, that the so-called ‘new’ questions do not entirely reject the objections mentioned above, but try to re-arrange them to introduce new problematics. These questions relate to ideas of pedagogic practice, social/sociological ideas of child and childhood, status of literature as representational medium and identity politics in the context of a post-colonial nation-state. Why are certain kinds of images thought of as suitable for narrating the ‘tradition’? What role do the structural parameters of comics-form play as a ‘Western’ form being used for this purpose? Does it fit comfortably within the (so-called) genre of ‘children’s literature’? Why does a particular portrayal of feminine form and virtues remain unchanged? Does it have similarities with other representations in popular media that relay on to popular imagination? These questions are crucial when we think of ACK as a ‘national popular’ in the Gramscian sense. For, as Gramsci says, the popular man-in-the-mass is characterized by “two theoretical consciousnesses (or one contradictory consciousness): one which is implicit in his activity and which in reality unites him with all his fellow-workers in the practical transformation of the real world …“13. The strength of mass cultural stereotype points at something more than cultural banality since “it (i.e. the political development of the concept of hegemony) necessarily supposes an intellectual unity and an ethic in conformity with a conception of reality that has gone beyond common sense and has become, if only within narrow limits, a critical conception (italics added).”14 This critical conception or cultural valence of ACK as mass cultural product, not reducible to its effect or influence, is what this dissertation will try to look into.

13 Gramsci, Selections, 332-33.
14 Ibid.
How are we to approach the question of the ideological power of mass-produced popular cultural artifacts vis-à-vis its reception? A predominant mode, following the Frankfurt School\textsuperscript{15}, has been to think of this industrial mode as effectively regressive because it divests its goods of all conflicts and temporality of practical life. Its audience is led to believe in the banal literality where sameness undermines difference and ‘commodity culture’ replaces the ideals of life or actual experience of living. ‘Culture’ becomes parasitic and self-reflective; the consumers are blissfully unaware of how even this ‘dream industry’ works and are rendered infantile. Things are standardized and valorized for what they appear to be, the shiny comfort of the surface. Commodification of life ensures that actual relations of labor and production remain hidden, and this ‘reification’ ultimately serves as the continuation and reproduction of the condition/s for domination.

One cannot but observe that the rejection of ‘totalitarianism’ in every sphere of life remains as totalizing as the domination against which it is directed. Also that it abjures any faith in the masses, those at the receiving end. There is a circular logic in this scheme of deception and domination. The producers – who should have been infinitely more powerful – are almost as incidental to this game as the recipients. In overestimating the accuracy with which the cycle functions, it effectively undermines the same principle that it seeks to uphold in ‘life’ – the ‘difference’. Perhaps a class-specific nihilism comes from an idealism that is also, and at least as much, class-specific\textsuperscript{16}.

\textsuperscript{15} I am thinking of T. Adorno and M. Horkheimer, especially the essays included in the former’s \textit{The Culture Industry} (London: Routledge, 1991) and the jointly written \textit{Dialectic of Enlightenment} (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). Benjamin, sometimes included within the same school, has a different position. We should not forget that these books were written in the context of a totalitarian, fascistic Germany.

\textsuperscript{16} Adorno’s preference for modernist literature, art and music is too well-known to be recounted once again. That places him at times dangerously close to other self-proclaimed guardians of culture like F. R. Leavis, T. S. Eliot and Matthew Arnold.
I suggest a different route to the same problem. Although I do not subscribe to the view that the artifacts of popular culture either propagate or nullify ideologies in any consistent or systematic way, such articulations are deeply political. Even more – it is precisely through such action how the individual becomes a political subject by responding (and thus participating) in the act of governing. Insofar popular cultural objects as ACK comic books are also acts of representation, their content as well as their modes and terms of representation are to be examined extensively. One should not hurriedly explain away these books as mere vehicles, and hence as sub-category of, some pre-existing ‘social’ value. Drawing on recent academic observations on cultural objects developing within the disciplines like sociology and anthropology\textsuperscript{17}, I take this ‘social value’ to be arising out of their circulation (and exchange) in society. Following this line of argument, the apparently inert objects acquire a life of their own as it were, being animated by the paths they cross. This is how Appadurai summarizes the argument of his book: “Focusing on things that are exchanged, rather than simply on the forms and functions of exchange, makes it possible to argue that what creates the link between exchange and value is politics, construed broadly” (italics original)\textsuperscript{18}.

Let me articulate my argument in more detail. Studying ACK as cultural object in the market means to place it against its specific socio-political background and initiate new questions. The objective is not to offer a historical gloss on the product, which would


\textsuperscript{18} Appadurai, The Social Life, 3.
simply provide a cultural justification (to determine its ‘value’ as an adjunct of its historical reality) in a historicist manner, but to argue that the social career of ACK, that would include its condition of production and reception (that Appadurai terms ‘exchange’), is its own value and its politics. Again, this social career is created through ACK functioning as cultural capital, as much as an object having a price. And importantly, one should also reckon with the custom of ACK given or exchanged as gifts and the implication of a different kind or terms of economy. This practice was very common and probably still is, and given the nature of the product in question it seems permissible to claim that it very often functions as a gift (parents buying for children) and sets forth a complementary model of exchange based on mutual reciprocity (parents presenting these books, often as rewards for good behavior or marks obtained in school examinations), as to bypass its material quality even when bought and sold like any other commodity. This is a notable feature of ACK – how two apparently different kinds of economy co-exist, thrive, and assist each other.

Thus new marketing strategies and promotion aimed at abetting sales always work both ways and exchange becomes as much a ritual. This is in fact a wonderful solution and unique brand equity. Such an approach makes a cultural object closely resemble the Marxian description of a fetish. A fetish commodity, says Marx, screens the material use-value, roughly correspondent to its labor value, and is measured by relations between

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19 The anthropologist Marcel Mauss calls such objects ‘total social phenomena’ that have multiple utilities and address multiple discourses (e.g. legal, anthropological, aesthetic, morphological, religious as well as personal and communal etc.). Although he looks at ‘archaic’ or ‘primitive’ societies, Mauss’s observations pertain to a historically earlier ‘market’ situation whose moral and economic features, he argues, have survived the use of the visible modern form of capital – the currency. The key term used by Mauss is ‘prestation’ – a present, payment or service that has a specific (sometimes only ritual) function – that is mutually, conventionally or socially obligatory.
commodities, thus entering a point when the use-value is completely taken over by its worth in and as exchange. Marx describes the fetish as a commodity that becomes supersensuous or ‘social’ and also notes that fetishism is inseparable from the production of commodities as such. Appadurai takes his cue from this and makes a different move: his wishes to look at “commodities as things in a certain situation, a situation that can characterize many different kinds of things, at different points in their social lives” by “… focusing on its total trajectory from production, through exchange/distribution, to consumption”\(^{20}\). Theoretically, this idea of social life of a commodity remains crucial to my argument. I will try to gauge how ACK generates value and how that fluctuates under diverse exchange situations – what Appadurai describes as ‘regimes of value’. Such different situations are created at different time-periods (over three decades) and for different audiences. The axes of differentiation are many, starting from something as basic as the linguistic community or economic stratum one belongs to more pragmatic, market-specific features such as distribution channels (e.g. the supermarket and small local bookshops). I do not distinguish, just to reiterate a point that I have already noted, between ‘economic’ and ‘cultural’ value (as customary in a purely ‘economistic’ or ‘culturalist’ appraisal of a literary/cultural product) and I consider it inimical to the disciplinary outlook of cultural studies. Value is not ‘price’ or ‘message’ although it is inseparable from both. It is always in process. It starts with production but is renewed differently with different kinds and contexts of consumption and hence the justification for analyzing ACK anew as a cultural phenomenon.

Now for the different larger narratives that set up the context. The first is the political narrative of the Indian nation-state after independence. However, I have not attempted a chronological account. I merely touch upon some of the major events since the 1960’s in relation to ACK. I will draw on available historical analyses of such events and trace their historico-cultural lineage to extrapolate certain trends and contradictions within the Indian democracy – as to provide a framework for understanding ACK as a cultural phenomenon in its context.

This political narrative appears, admittedly, more as a general background or a grand narrative of which micro-narratives of cultural artifacts form individual sub-sets at first glance. Yet the latter is as much instrumental in shaping or constituting the former as a response; and the relation between them is not always one of simple causality. I will talk about two such narratives briefly as I will have occasion to take them up in two different chapters. Both of these, I would claim, present new perspectives on the political narrative that we have talked about above. A preliminary discussion of these two themes will also provide the occasion for discussing the extant scholarly literature on my topic. Although none are completely new (in the sense that I do not claim to be the first one to talk about these), both provide unique vantage points to reconsider the available versions (of different interpretative schools) of the overall narrative of India as a democracy and nation-state.

There are different schools of historians in this field such as the Nationalist, Marxist or ‘Subaltern’ schools. I do not follow any particular line of interpretation nor are their methodological differences in terms of historiography central for my purpose.
The first one concerns the production, distribution and consumption of popular images in ‘high’ and ‘low’ art. Art historians have written accounts of their interrelation as well as a mutual competition during the colonial period over the emergence an authentic ‘Indian’ art. There is a long and fairly established history of various art schools, artistic genres as well as exchanges among major ideologues (like Sister Nivedita and Ananda Coomaraswamy) around the issues of their respective mode of representation and ‘authenticity’ or ‘Indian-ness’. The same mythological and historical figures were drawn by artists as different as Raja Ravi Varma and Abanindranath Tagore, and the competitive claims of ‘authenticity’ rested around various issues, such as the medium and method (‘originals’ vs. new reproducible techniques, e.g. lithograph or oleograph), stylistics (‘realist perspective’ vs. ‘symbolism’) and inheritance (‘western’ vs. ‘Indian’).

But what remains unrecorded is a largely uncharted story (I use this term for the want of a better one) of the ‘influence’ these had and continue to have, on the viewing public. It is an ambitious and perhaps near impossible task to write that history since it takes place in a register that often escapes conscious and formulated articulation. And given the period of ACK, one has to think of a host of such visual material available across different media – printed images, posters, calendars, film, television and the internet – because the ACK-type images are to be found in all the media that we have just mentioned. One can go on adding to this list but it is important for us to note at least two

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23 It makes sense of talk about a viewing public only around mid-nineteenth century. Before that period, art remained either an elite preserve or a localized, ‘folk’ practice.
things here. First, there is an imminent need to recognize the role of popular representational media in shaping the discourse of participatory citizenship as it provides a complementary narrative to the official political history. It reiterates the important link between culture industry and its purported hegemonic potential. It is an index of how the mass, ordinarily taken to be a multitude on whom governance is exercised, form a relation to that very process and emerge as subjects. The philosopher Jacques Ranciere calls attention to the ‘paradoxical’ nature of this process that characterizes politics as a form of action in which the “citizen part-takes in ruling and being ruled”\(^\text{24}\). Mass culture illustrates Ranciere’s theses on politics, more specifically democracy as a (particular) form of politics, in two important ways. First, such cultural action/exchange is articulated by the masses, that he calls “the supplementary part, in relation to any counting of parts of the population that makes it possible to identify ‘the part of those who have no-part’ (italics mine)\(^\text{25}\). Consequently, the ruled population reclaims new grounds as ‘political’, by wresting the power of exercising arché (the authority to begin, initiate or lead from the front) from the ruling authority even as it participates in the ruling process. In other words, they emerge as political ‘subjects’.

The cultural history of ACK as a representational form, and as a continuation of the debates around the representational authority of artistic tradition, also throws light upon India’s encounter with modernity, arguably a legacy of European enlightenment mediated via colonial experience, by introducing new categories. Comic books are primarily visual material; hence any study of these books has to be read back onto the history of circulation of popular visual objects. My chosen methodology follows what is referred to


\(^{25}\) Ranciere, ibid. Ranciere draws on classical Greek writings on politics, especially Plato.
the phrase ‘visual culture’. The rather chequered history of this term (sometimes decried as an offshoot of art history desperately trying to disown the legacy of its mother discipline) need not bother us too much. Summarily put, it combines semiotic analysis of visual with treating artistic representation as a material practice. It allows us to ask the questions about ACK as mass cultural phenomenon that we started with, such as why or how a particular portrayal (visual traits or mode) of events or characters become possible, or to find out the shared history of such configurations across other visual objects at a particular moment. Visual cultural approach regards art as imbued with (and hence being part of) the same political spirit that informs other ‘ordinary’ practices. The significance of this study lies in opening up a history of postcolonial Indian identity by focusing on popular visual objects and predisposition in matters of visualization as an ocular practice, and explore what W. J. T. Mitchell calls “the visual construction of the social field”26 (italics original). Mitchell’s proposition is a radical one: it calls for a re-thinking of (visual) cultural phenomena centering on the faculty of vision that would include everything from optics to critical theory and phenomenology. It is within this orientation or field that the diverse politics of/as visual practice in society would make best sense.

Quite a few books and occasional articles dealing with visual cultures of/in India have appeared over the last one and a half decade. They discuss a varied range of visual-material practices, not only different in kind but also on both sides of the high-low divide. Here it is important to draw a line between such academic assessments as a general index of enquiry into social or historical phenomena such as nationalism or religious attitude

and what we have called visual culture. Let us take an example of what I mean. In a collection of essays on ‘audio-visual media and cultural change in India’ (the subtitle of the book) published in 1999\(^27\), this is what the editors have to say in the very first page of their introduction: “Image journeys are related to the ways of seeing, embedded in a culturally specific scenario … the image then becomes more than a vehicle of information; it is a translation of an individual or collective perception of the world. The viewer brings a particular translation into focus through expectation, the projection of desire, seeking fulfillment or the alleviation of insecurity, for example\(^28\). The first statement demonstrates their theoretical orientation and situates it within a ‘cultural studies’ approach. But the second statement, trying to explain the previous one, betrays a methodological point that I find dissatisfactory. It puts the cart before the horse in making the cultural object a vehicle of ideas and no more. The question of agency is not one-sided, neither it is as obvious as the editors claim. Note further: “Observing the journey of images within a media landscape provides a creative platform from which the complexity of cultural change can be approached and contextualised\(^29\).” Programmatic claims such as these not only play down the complexities in understanding the internal contradictions and stages of cultural dynamics, but also take a process that is simultaneously multi-directional and dialectical to be something that can be almost fixed and observable in its palpability. It tends to give away the ambitious and significant project it takes on or, at best, explains it in terms of structuralist semiotics. A ‘history of


\(^{28}\) Ibid., 1.

\(^{29}\) Ibid, 1.
object/s’ approach forewarns us against any easy materialism – here materiality gains precedence over definite tangibility. The multiple existence and function of an object under different (market) conditions add up to its ‘objecthood’. The ‘market’ spoken of includes various material-ideological exigencies (the accessibility of print technology in case of ACK, or middle-class predilection to certain ideas about child-rearing or ‘children’s literature) as well as non-conventional situations (e.g. ‘bazaar’ economy). This approach emphasizes the dynamics ingrained in cultural practices rather than a steady constructionism at work.\textsuperscript{30}

What does not come across in considering images as receptacles of verbal or some other kind of information is their intrinsic power as images or image-objects.\textsuperscript{31} The editors of the volume discussed above rightly point out that ‘the eye in not innocent’\textsuperscript{32} and also that film or TV audience are not to be thought of as passive homogeneous ‘mass’. They draw our attention, rightly again, to internal differentiations in reception/interpretation occur due to the ‘cultural membership’ they bring into play. But the overbearing theme (perhaps more so because it is written in the 1990s) seems to be a tendency to focus upon, or criticize, the element of militant nationalism in various visual media propagated by the Hindu right through various visual media. Along with a growing sensitivity to images as mediators of cultural change in the face of growing commercialization, there is a certain iconofilia that is evoked in the name of trepid political correctness. Even as Indian image

\textsuperscript{30} Perhaps I am stretching it too far, but such ‘constructionism’ that stresses upon a priori ‘social function’-like quality of media practices seems apparent in the titles of individual essays included in this book, e.g. ‘Transnational Class, Erotic Arcadia and Commercial Utopia in Hindi Films’, ‘Doordarshan: Representing the Nation’s State’, ‘Is This the Real Thing? Packaging Cultural Nationalism’ etc.

\textsuperscript{31} It is important to note that I am, for the moment at least, talking about image-objects rather than images in other registers such as verbal or mental. See W. J. T. Mitchell’s tree of image in his Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 10.

\textsuperscript{32} C. Brosius and M. Butcher eds., Image Journeys, 2. They are quoting a statement by E. H. Gombrich, the famous art historian and theorist.
industry responds to globalization by coming up with local-hybrid formations, it is seen only as a monologic practice resulting in standardization in the name of authenticity. What we get is a variation of the Frankfurt School approach applied to a particular historical context. This ‘standardization’ is described as a ‘usurpation of the ‘Indian’ visual codes’\textsuperscript{33} even though there is hardly any attempt to enquire into the nature and history of that code. As Mitchell reminds us, the object of studying/practicing visual culture is to re-direct our attention to this visual ‘nature’ – the properties of an image as representation – as opposed to ‘culture’ that is likely to be read in terms of covert manipulation.

The book \textit{Pleasure and the Nation}, edited by Christopher Pinney and Rachel Dwyer, adopts a more balanced view. We are told in the introduction that in a manner similar to Euro-American academia (although there is no ostensible reason provided by the editor/s why it should be so), “…the ghost of high cultural disparagement frames the subsequent rediscovery of cultural value in popular culture in a positive manner”\textsuperscript{34}. The ‘high’ culture is represented by a group of outnumbered elites whose voice is operative only within the confines of official fora such as ICCR or Sahitya Akademi. What is important to reckon with, says Pinney, is that the ‘public’ (used after Appadurai and Breckenridge’s definition of the term) or ‘unofficial’ culture rallies around the category of the ‘nation’ – an imaginary formation that the bourgeoisie has failed to identify with and control even after fifty years of independence. Hence a connection between popular cultural expression and ‘subaltern’ consciousness is called for. In a move reminiscent of the

\textsuperscript{33} Brosius and Butcher, ibid., 23.

\textsuperscript{34} Pinney, ‘Introduction’, \textit{Pleasure}, 1. The statements that follow immediately are not mine, but my paraphrase of what the editors of the book have to say.
Subaltern school of historians, the domain of popular culture is positioned as the *counterpoint* of received, ‘statist’ history (represented, in this case, by state-owned or sponsored cultural institutions), and becomes the bearer of an (essentialized) ‘oppositional’ spirit coming from below. However, as the editor is quick to point out, it does not take place in a simple clash of ‘official’ and ‘low’ cultures but often takes the form of parody or mimicry: “…the most challenging … thesis for our purposes is the suggestion that the shared semiotics and gestures of a system ‘inscribe the dominant and dominated within the same epistemological field’”\(^{35}\). But more significantly, in a rare (and commendable) move in an academic work dealing with aspects of consumer culture, it seeks to address the *nature and function/s of pleasure*. Pinney coins a term – he has used it extensively in some of his later writings since then – called ‘corpothetics’. The notion of ‘corpothetics’, by emphasizing the corporeal aspect of an engaged aesthetic\(^{36}\), “would advance our understanding of both the vectors of pleasure, and how it is that people consume mass-produced artifacts so as to make them inalienable through pathways that are as much corporeal as they are intellectual and cognitive”\(^{37}\). Apart from the fact that this volume contains a number of scholarly essays on various visual media over the years and the more recent consumer practices connected with them such as fan clubs and film magazines (film is clearly dominant as choice of medium as 7 out of 10 essays in the volume discuss either specific films or related issues) and also try to think of a possible alliance between as a model of popular visual cultural phenomenon, the idea of

\(^{35}\) Ibid., 16. Pinney quotes Achille Mbembe.

\(^{36}\) Pinney cites Susan Buck-Morss’s archeology of ‘aesthetic’ in her essay ‘Aesthetics and Anesthetics: Benjamin’s Artwork essay Reconsidered’, as an inspiration.

\(^{37}\) Ibid., 21.
‘corpothetics’ is an important addition to the critical vocabulary of Indian (visual) culture studies\textsuperscript{38}. Corpothetics is a central formulation in Pinney’s larger work of Indian visual culture. His book \textit{Photos of the Gods: The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India} uses this concept to explain the phenomenon of ‘calendar art’, a highly popular ‘kitsch art’ genre of framed god posters and printed images. Drawing on decades of archival research, interviews with artists and publishers, and the ethnographic study of the consumers in towns and villages of north and western India, he charts the intimate connections between the production and consumption of these images and the struggle against colonial rule. An important, comprehensive, and oft-cited history of this particular art genre, it combines anthropology with political and cultural history as well as issues of aesthetic theory to describe the years of colonial rule and the journey of the Indian nation-state after independence – adding up to a history of visuals.

‘Calendar art’ occupies an important position in the popular Indian visual repertoire by virtue of its long, though largely uncharted, history and its dubious repute as a form of art – as an art for the ‘masses’. It finds its place in the books of traditional art history as a practice born out of colonial (‘Western’) art education that provided training to artists in techniques of realism and perspective. But allegedly it failed to inspire a new ‘aesthetic’ – a distinct cultural ‘form’ of representation – although markets were, and still are, flooded with such pictures. In recent years, however, quite a few art historians and scholars have emphasized the historical importance of this genre, especially in relation to

\textsuperscript{38} What does remain clear though is why such an understanding, granted as an unconscious critical tool to an untutored audience, works potentially (perhaps also sub-consciously) as an ‘oppositional’ force. I discuss the issue in more detail in chapter 2.
anti-colonial movements. Some of these writings draw attention to the peculiar interpretation of realism by mechanical art-reproduction techniques as litho and chromolithography. Pinney terms it ‘xeno-real’ – a staged realism. As a matter of historical practice, it is born out of imitation of European naturalism/realism on one hand and certain stylized practices in case of court paintings and other naturalistic ‘stereotypes’(such as a village woman or a gypsy) on the other. We will later discuss the importance of this local-hybrid practice providing an iconographic chain (as it were) that leads up to ACK. But we discuss one specific writer for the moment.

Kajri Jain has written a number of articles on the subject of ‘calendar art’, exhaustive in their focus on artistic and sociological-ideological aspects of the genre. I find her approach – the way a ‘low’ artistic practice functions in and as part of informal economy producing its unique ‘value’ -- most illuminating. She is right to point out that calendar art belongs to the same visual idiom as that of film posters, television epics and comic books (she almost certainly has ACK in mind) and observes, partly echoing Pinney, that the “value of (such) images might be located in modes of engagement where visuality and corporeality are not necessarily opposed…” At least equally important is her implied claim that the idea of ‘ocularcentric’ regimes is a product of Western academia where reason and vision are seen as allied in opposition to corporeal response to images,

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39 The prime advocate of this argument is Pinney. Scholars with significant contributions to studying ‘calendar art’ as art form include the likes of Patricia Uberoi, Tapati Guha-Thakurta, Geeta Kapur, Partha Mitter and Kajri Jain.

40 The word is used here not in any pejorative sense but a more technical sense – portrayals born out of European-style ‘study’ of a specific object or person. However, the kind of historical influence such portraits have in terms of ‘making present’ certain settings or traits (which are then treated as definitive from that point onwards) cannot be underestimated.

and that origins of this convention could be traced to mind-body dualism. She discusses the notion of (Marxian) fetish as being a characteristic product of such thought and the *productive body* or ‘gaze’ (operative in case of framed pictures), contra such epistemic framework, as animating the image-object. Thus, an image of Ganesh used for advertising a product initiates a new moral economy in an otherwise commercial market structure – a phenomenon she elsewhere terms as ‘reterritorialisation of the sacred’.

Detailed and sophisticated as her analysis is, it throws up two important questions for us. First, whether or to what extent the engaged relationship with the image as in the case of calendar art is possible in case of comic books. Second, and Jain herself raises this point, whether this *overdetermination of sacrality* secretly allows orientalist tendencies to creep in.

My submission is that both these points are partially valid. The appeal of ACK, apart from their clear pedagogic service, is contingent on the imbrication of moral economy within the commercial market. The value arises from the shared visual regime, i.e. the orientation that the viewer of calendar art-type images brings in. This iconographic continuity is informed and reinforced by a popular nationalist aesthetic. The images are doubly fetishized as it were, and are appreciated not only for their material but allegorical value. To use the language of Piercean semiotics, the indexical aspect collapses on to iconic. But in case of ACK, this process does not take place wholly in the visual-experiential register. It is as much hammered through various advertisements for the product often appearing on their back covers, thus causing the ‘absorptive’ relation to disrupt. And it is also where the charge of orientalism, being a mirror-image of old-style nationalism, arises. After all, a slogan like “the route to your roots” is bound to raise a
few eyebrows. To continue the argument made above, if ACK does not invoke a ritualistic or devotional relationship, it cannot be * emblematically* orientalist or not in the same way as god posters/prints are. Do the cheeky advertising slogans actually increase or decrease the orientalist potential of ACK by clearly calling out to the readers? The crucial question, it seems, is how or to what extent a community of devotees and citizens could share a common ground, based on the modality of subliminal ‘calling’.

A word or two is due about the scholarly articles on ACK that have appeared over the years. One of the earliest articles, titled ‘The World of Amar Chitra Katha’ by Frances W. Pritchett, a folklorist by training, attempts a general taxonomy of this comic book series and divides it into several sub-themes. The ‘themes’ often closely echo ACK’s own slogans, such as “Glorious Heritage of India”, “The Epic of New India” (referring to the struggle for independence) etc., though these are treated somewhat ironically. Pritchett takes an ambiguous stand: though she finds ACK to be insensitive or neglectful of issues of gender and ‘untouchability’, there is much to commend. The readers, she concludes, “will have a strong, positive sense of India as a multicultural nation in which they can all work together.” The next article in the same volume, titled ‘The Saints Subdued: Domestic Virtue and National Integration in Amar Chitra Katha’, is by John S. Hawley, a renowned scholar of Hindu religious studies. He examines six ACK issues on bhakti poet/singers and shows how the textual politics – issues of editing in rendering religious stories in comic book format – is reflective of a larger ideological stand of promoting national integration by considering Indianess as a logical extension of VHP-style

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aggressive Hinduvta. A similar critique is forwarded by Sailaja Krishnamurthy\(^43\), who takes Marx’s argument on ideology and simply applies it in the Indian context without any hesitation. Two articles by Karline McLain, who has finished her doctoral thesis on ACK from University of Texas at Austin, are available. The earlier one, published in the journal *Manushi*\(^44\), discusses portrayal of women in ACK. Using illustrations from ACK issues on Ramayan, she identifies two characters, Sita and Surpanakha, as representing the patriarchal polarity of idealized, virtuous wife and sexually threatening demonic woman. Another article by her, titled ‘Who Shot the Mahatma?’\(^45\), traces the portrayal of Mahatma Gandhi in various ACK issues, especially the two-part volume on Gandhi. A more rigorously worked out analysis than the earlier one, this article discusses the editorial problems and ideological issues surrounding the portrayal of Gandhi as a champion of non-violence as a hotly debated policy in nationalist struggle. She plays off depictions of Gandhi from various ACK issues and his popular status as the eponymous ‘father of the nation’ against academic writings on colonial history that consider Gandhi as occupying a space *outside* the main thrust of populist vision of free India\(^46\). Another article takes up a very interesting issue – the color of skin as a racialized index of power – but is too quick to conclude and calls it rather fashionably, though unsatisfactorily, as ‘epidermal politics’\(^47\).

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\(^44\) Issue no. 122 (Jan – Feb 2001), found on http://www.manushi-india.org/issues/issue_cover122.html.
\(^45\) Published in *South Asia Research* 27.1 (2007) accessed via the web on Nov. 21, 2007.
\(^46\) McLain draws on Ashis Nandy and Partha Chatterjee’s writings on Gandhi.
The second area of my investigation pertains to the socio-historical idea of child/childhood in post-independence India. I should, at this point, offer a clarification as to the relevance or scope of this theme in the main body of the work that follows. A considerable part, especially in the third and fourth chapter, of my dissertation tries to look at ACK in the light of this idea- evolution of the discourse of childhood. A detailed discussion of the latter was needed to create a comprehensive context for understanding ACK as cultural phenomenon. If the official discourse of education, legal discourse surrounding rights and duties of child as member of society/state, or representation of children in other popular media occupies a greater portion of the latter part of my dissertation, these were needed in order to understand the cultural implications and notions surrounding the discourse of childhood and child-rearing in India of which ACK is an important part and index. Put simply, the dissemination of ACK as children’s literature and its popularity as consumer item – its ‘value’ – call for elaboration and discussions of the issues mentioned above.

I begin by reiterating a point made by sociologists and historians (usually with reference to Europe or North America) – that the idea of childhood is a historically evolved construct.48 Here I examine a particular phase in Indian history, starting around 1965 – as a sort of case study that is marked with similar sociological import – but throwing up a distinct economy of the ‘social’. The ‘social’ sector49 is understood as a system of relations between institutions or social apparatus and their regulatory function. The point is to rethink a discursive field that historically links the familial and pedagogic practices

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in India, a cultural history of the then existing genres of literature available to children, and a market that allows for a wide and dissimilar readership. I attempt to ‘recover’ or imagine a child-reader-subject that, although not unitary and exactly mirroring the period under discussion, might direct us to the field of knowledge practices and attendant forms of power that produce the subject.

I am aware of the theoretical fallacies entailed in this approach. Both psychoanalysis and philosophy have impressed upon us the impossibility (even unethicality) of ‘recovering’ such a subject since it is by default an adult construct, hence ontologically inappropriate and/or false. My answer to that charge is sociological. I do not think of this child-subject as either originary or determined as a sum total arrived at from close textual readings, but as a configuration. Although it is quite impossible to take account of whims, surprises and idiosyncrasies that a child-reader experiences (‘childlike’ quality in common parlance) when exposed to a riot of color and images in print, we can still think of a structure, a network of possible conditions of reading, to address the issues of reading. This network is not to be seen as a closed formation but contingent at different locations (class, gender, religion).

The evolution of the idea of welfare state dispensing its care and governance through various organs (such as state hospitals, elementary schools, public sector units in a ‘mixed’ economy model) had reached a crucial stage around 1960, symbolized by the persona of Jawaharlal Nehru -- fondly known as ‘chacha’ Nehru for his special fondness for children. The eponymous leader, caught between a liberal ideal and urgent task of nation-building, is also the most famous public pedagogue of the post-colonial years. He is an important figure in my narrative, not solely for what he did as a political leader and
prime minister in a burgeoning democracy but as representing a nationalist vision at work.

Two publication houses aimed at bringing out books for children, the National Book Trust and Children’s Book Trust, started their operation from 1965, the year of Nehru’s demise. The Children’s Film Society began its journey ten years earlier. The first legal document relating to children in post-independence India, called The Children’s Act, became effective in 1960. Child as a subject of social policy is perceived from a juridical standpoint (of the Indian state) although, incidentally, it has not reached a consensus in ‘determining’ an official age for a child. A parallel and overlapping child rights discourse has entered with various NGOs and international bodies like UNICEF in the latter half of 20th century. Some of the issues raised by these new civil society institutions, although expressed in a different and timely language, were not entirely new. A considerable amount of ink was spilled in various journals, usually targeted towards a female audience, over the ideal method of child-rearing during the nineteenth century on various topics, starting from dietary regime and daily routine to future membership of a glorious nation.

The earliest among these, existing since ancient India, is the discourse of education. I would propose that there is an active interest to invent the child-citizen on the part of

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50 The last one before that was put into practice by the then British government, offering protection to premature girl children against ‘enforced’ marriage in 1929. The existing Ministry of Women and Child Development started functioning under the Ministry of Human Resource and Development in 1985 and has become a separate ministry only in 2005.

51 Age of a ‘child’ varies as regards civil (e.g. marriage and ‘consent age’), labor or criminal laws and across gender.

52 That mothers held the key to preservation of family and proper upbringing of children was a matter of unanimous agreement, among the male writers. In Bengal, some of these journals were Bamabodhini, Mahila, Anta(h)pur etc. Family was an important institution which was thought to be relatively unharmed by the onslaught of colonialism and held very close to ideals of nationalism.
Indian state around 1960, a history which has not received proper attention. The project is important because it also tells us a history of generations. What did it take to be a child (belonging to a typical middle-class household) in the 70s and 80s? How are we to see a comics-reading, Parle ‘poppins’ or Kisan jam-eating child as an ideal would-be citizen? If we think of children as social actors along two different axes, as reader/consumer (school textbooks, comics) and as proto-citizens, then how are these two compatible?

Any discussion of a popular cultural representation such as ACK remains incomplete without considering how it adjusts itself to the ‘society’ or community created under the larger discursive formation of nation. As Bhabha reminds us, studying narrative forms or narrative address cannot stop at ‘textual’ level, i.e. its ‘formal’ articulation, but observe how they alter the conceptual object itself. He talks of two broad alternatives usually found in a ‘cultural studies’ approach. The first, and the more restrictive one as we have discussed above, is to see the nation as an ideological apparatus in the service of state power. He does not think of the second line of argument very approvingly either and calls it a ‘utopian inversion’ of the former. But it appears to be more open-ended. The discourse of nation is described as an “emergent expression of the ‘national-popular’ sentiment preserved in a radical memory”. This ‘radical memory’ was articulated, in the case of India, within the anti-colonial movement during the late 19th and early 20th century in the name of ‘Tradition’. The spokespersons varied a lot in terms of their respective foundational myths or political programs they offered for awakening a ‘nation-ness’. From traditional humanists like Tagore and a radical reformist like Gandhi, and strong ideologues of a Hinduized masculinity like Tilak, Savarkar and Swami

54 Ibid., 3.
Vivekananda to nation-builders like Nehru, the inheritance of Tradition in independent India is ambivalent as it is powerful. ACK is an important index to gauge how the 1970’s generation participates in or performs this Tradition. How does it respond to ‘new’ constituencies, such as ethnic or religious minorities, that might come in conflict with a totalitarian ideology of nation-state? How does the representation of social minorities like women or children point to (as a narrative throwback) ideas of citizenship or subject-population?

The nation imagined in the process, I would argue, is like a dream whose chronotope is compressed and displaced – a form and figuration completely different from an actual polity. It is the ‘empty, homogeneous time’ of Benjamin that replaces the contingent calibration of history and becomes immanent. In other words, to imagine a nation is to place the time-space composite within a frame of values, by definition a hierarchical structure. Keeping in spirit with the ‘70’s India, this moral economy appears quite interesting. It resists the idea of consumption as inherently bad because of its symbolic value – it is expressed not so much in the language of sheer gratification but as collective behavior. It is symptomatic of a society opening itself up to capital in a paradoxical way. The upper class consumes for reasons of individuation or conspicuousness and hence criticized, as so many popular films and literature would testify, as being interested only in personal gain – the ‘bad’ remainder of feudal set-up. The middle class, still grappling with social mobility, creates a different norm for consumption that is not to be explained (or expressed) in terms of use value or appropriation but production (and manipulation) of ‘value’.
During a time marked by the rise of coalitional politics, rabid de-ideologization of planning and strategic political rule\(^{55}\), ACK was an attempt to come up with a hegemonic identity, a core ideological formation (however populist and/or selective) to imagine a community in the face of an ever-widening, heterogeneous population. The modernizing dream of the nation state came to be placed here within a strong narrative of reviving a mythic Hindu origin, coupled with that of ‘traditional’ patriarchal order. Indeed, it amounted to a call for identity-formation to young readers. The choice of English language for writing these scripts is interesting for many reasons, whether one thinks of the prolonged debate between vernacularism and the (assumption of) ‘progressive’ outlook associated with the English-educated civil society and bureaucracy, or the violence that ensued around the linguistic division of various Indian state boundaries\(^{56}\).

The choice of English language for ACK stories was a decision to reach the new middle class ‘public’ of post-independence India, and it also contributed to a peculiar ‘idiom’ – a form of ‘Indian English’ later re-created in popular media such as Bollywood films, mythological TV serials or MTV, sometimes also in prose fiction.

One specific contribution of ACK was (and still is, although new kinds of comics/graphic novels are on the rise) to ‘import’ the comic book medium and give it familiarity. The self-conscious disciplining urge to adopt the comics medium to make it useful for its audience was an important task it set out to achieve. As a response to (assumed) parental distrust of the medium (‘low’ culture, idle leisure), and what the producers envisioned,

\(^{55}\) What I mean is a growing instrumentality in matters of allocation of political power and ‘vote bank’ politics. See Sudipta Kaviraj, ‘Indira Gandhi and Indian Politics’, EPW, 21.38-39 (Sep. 1986).

\(^{56}\) Known as Fazal Ali Commission, after the name of the judge appointed by Nehru to head the organization, the States Reorganization Commission was active between 1953 and ’56.
ACK changed the object itself, creating a different language of the comic book. The product might have succeeded for different reasons: nuclear family situation that called for more private entertainment, monolithic school curricula and textbooks, easily digestible realistic narratives rendered in color, characters from forgotten times represented in the thick of action that are otherwise fixed and bounded in printed words, or as (often unconsciously imbibed) tokens of ‘nation’. We are unlikely to have an exhaustive empirical understanding of the different conditions of reading these books, given the wide difference in ethnic origin, regional culture, religion or age-groups. But the narrative of nation operates, like the statistical mean, as a calculable value that establishes a commonality among these disparate situations of reading rather than a necessary component of actual experience of reading. It is the only discernible rational thematic around which the ACK comic books, an ungainly assortment of signs, incidents and characters, make sense to a rational and mature reader. Still, it leaves open the question of appropriation applicable to a child reader.

Speaking in terms of structural exchanges, ACK as commodity (its money-value, position vis-à-vis any other product that can be bought and sold in the same manner) can be seen as entering into another (subjective as well as socio-cultural) scheme of valuation in which a comic book is perceived as an incarnation of nation. Its objecthood under capital

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57 The difference is visible when one looks at other syndicated products available at that time such as Phantom, Mandrake or Flash Gordon comics.

58 I say ‘reading’ as a shorthand to describe the condition, act and possible outcome of the process.

59 One can think of the Vygotskian classifications or stages of understanding, such as ‘heaps’, ‘sequences’, ‘primitive narrative’, ‘focused/unfocused chains’ etc., as discussed by Arthur N. Applebee in *The Child’s Concept of Story* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978).
market conditions undergoes a significant change, is singularized\textsuperscript{60}, and assumes a sacral character. This is not to suggest that this was or is the only kind (described as a movement from the pole of ‘price’ to that ‘value’) of transformation that ACK as a product is intended or has potential for. The money-commodity status of ACK co-exists with this ‘singularized’ mode of use, as does other modes such as informal educative material supplementary to institutionalized education, and ‘Indian’ kitsch. But we should note that readers of ACK constitute the first generation of citizen-consumers of post-independence period. The sacral nature of consumption fitted well with secular, ‘modern’ discourse of state\textsuperscript{61}. It is of some significance that a private enterprise, usually thought of being more ‘capitalist’ than PSUs\textsuperscript{62}, came up with a product perceived as generating a different use-value after being sold and actually increasing this value while in circulation.

We have already mentioned that ACK made history and mythology familiar in a nuclear family context. Apart from the convenience factor, whereby a tailor-made product like this would make life easier for parents\textsuperscript{63}, ACK shored up customary values of family being a microcosm of the nation. For those residing in India, the grand narrative of the nation that was turning into thin electoral rhetoric of uncertain times found a new form of


\textsuperscript{61}In the last respect, it bears similarity with state-sponsored sacral apparatus and spectacles such as the national anthem, republic day parades or notifications/advertisements in various media for new beneficial projects of public consequence.

\textsuperscript{62}Again, it is not entirely novel or exceptional. It was an era of nationalization of banks. The big industrial houses like the Tata or Birla group are known for their charity work and integrated development model of industrialization.

\textsuperscript{63}It is hard to make a statistically substantiated claim, but late 1960s and 1970s were marked by more mothers taking to the job market than ever before even as self-styled guardians of social values would regularly argue for their primary role as mothers/homemakers. In any case, social taboos associated with women taking up public jobs were withering fast.
expression in these books. For those outside, it was about owning or preserving an
insignia of lost origin that was being re-inscribed. My enquiry is ‘genealogical’ in
understanding the phenomenon – how this medium of (private) entertainment or leisure
brings forth a mode of re-organizing social membership – by focusing on the dialectic
between the product and the demands of its historical context that shapes its ‘meaning’.