



The Indian War Comics, introduced in 2008, are a tribute to the national war heroes.

# BEYOND speech bubbles & fiction

As kids, we have fed on them; as teenagers, secretly tucked them under our pillows for a bedtime read and as adults, waited eagerly for them to enthrall us on celluloid and the big screen. But now, explore the ‘other’, more profound side of the world of comics

Namrata Gulati, GT Network

## Face to face with reality

Comic book characters are loved by us all, primarily because they seem to have stepped straight out of an innocent, almost childlike planet of fiction; in the unreal world of comics, justice is always granted, the morally upright always triumphs and there is always a quick fix to the biggest predicaments. The story, more often than not, ends with glowing faces. It may be safely concluded then, that this genre of literature has nothing do with the real world. Time for a reality check!

### Influence over reality- testing times:

Back in the 1950s, when Superman Comics were a growing rage in the American society, Psychiatrist Fredrick Wertham meted out a fatal blow to the comic book industry by accusing it of the rise in juvenile delinquency. In his publication, *Seduction of the Innocent*, one of Wertham’s charges against Batman comics was the distortion of Law of Physics since Superman could fly! Sr Lecturer Anusuya Das Gupta, Amity University echoes the psychiatrist’s sentiments partly, “Children have lost the habit of reading. One way of alluring them into reading is the comic, but of a constructive type, for instance, historical or mythological. Some American comic books, such as Superman and Batman have a destructive influence on the psyche since they glorify aggression.”

Cut to the chase, the decade, was an ordeal for the American comic book industry with a Parent’s Committee meticulously rating comics and the U.S. Federal Government going a step ahead by interlinking the pattern of crime among kids with crime comics.

**Reality & fantasy- The blurring lines:** That the fans ardently worship and identify with every movement in a comic book to the extent that they discover a slice of social reality in it, is most evident in the series of controversies over Tintin comics. To begin with, the comic was charged with sexism (absence of women characters), slammed for being anti-imperialist (*The Blue Lotus*) and condemned for stereotyping the Jewish community (*Land of Black Gold*). A Congolese citizen accused *Tintin in the Congo* of racism, following which, it was exiled to the adult bookshelf. Another time that revealed just how much citizens associate a sense of pride and be-

longingness with comic characters soon came to the fore when Superman threatened to renounce his U.S. Citizenship in *The Man of Steel*; the ‘news’ not only created an uproar among the fans, but also made headlines in leading American newspapers, with journalists dissecting the issue at length.

**In-sync- Impressions of reality:** To say that comics are merely a work of fiction would be an ignorant judgment to make; one would find generous traces of reality in comic books. In Raj Comics, for instance, superhero Nagraj declares assertively, “*Humein Lokpal ki nahin, thokpal ki zaroorat hai.*” The War Comic is not a new genre of reality-inspired comic either. In 2008, Indian War Comics immortalized the unsung military heroes of the

Kargil War and 26/11 in their comic book series.

Right from John F. Kennedy to Obama, US Presidents have made more than a dozen appearances in American comics, with the undisputable leader of political sarcasm being Richard Nixon of the infamous Watergate scandal. As soon as the scandal broke, comic authors instantly envisioned a super villain in the President, who was a preoccupation with the twelve-issue comic book, *Watchmen*.

## The story of the storytellers

Most bookstores in Delhi-NCR seem to have taken comics off the shelves. “Some 7 years

ago, Hindi comics sold like hot cakes. But in the last few years, no new comics have reached us. The industry may be experiencing a slump as the demand has gone down,” says the staff at a Delhi bookstore. But Mr Gulshan Rai, Chairman, Diamond Comics, consoles comic addicts, “You’ll find comics

on book stalls. Ask your newspaperman, and he shall deliver them to you everyday. As for ‘the slump’, I can tell you that Diamond Comics has been growing. We have penetrated into the remote areas and reached a wider audience with regional comics. The comics are also high on international demand.” He rewinds to the years 1990 to 2003, “With the electronic media, video cassettes, and video games becoming increasingly popular among the masses and advertisers, the comic book industry suffered a huge setback. The sales witnessed a spurt after 2003 with more cities coming up and the growing number of educated masses.”

Mr Rai reflects on the current Indian market for comics, but lets us draw our own conclusions, “Comics still pull kids, the heart of the industry, but they read them on the internet now.”

Imaging:  
Ravinder Gussain



## Comics Craze

Think you’re a know-it-all when it comes to comics? Let’s see!

Jayant Kumar Baloch

Amity School of Engineering & Technology

- Q1. What is the full name of Indian Superhero Shaktimaan’s Alter Ego?
- Q2. From which planet did Sabu (Chacha Chaudhary’s sidekick) come from?
- Q3. Doga is trained and brought up under the care of 4 chachas. Name them.
- Q4. What is the name of the alter ego of the Indian Spiderman?
- Q5. Nagraj is currently on a world tour in a series of comics. What is this series called and what is the name Nagraj is given?

Answers: 1) Pandit Gangadhar Vidyadhar Mayadhar 2) Omkar Naath Shastri Jupiter 3) Adrak chacha, Dhanu Khan, Haldi Khan, Kalimchi Khan 4) Pavitr Prabhakar 5) World Terroristism Series and Atankharta Nagraj.

## Kyunki har ek reader zaroori hota hai...

**Magicians:** Chacha Chaudhary, Billu, Pinki (Diamond Comics) & Jasoo Topichand (Raj Comics)  
**The Enchanted:** Kids  
**Magic Spell:** Simplicity in dialogues, storyline & language; short and sweet; no detailing in artwork & design, hence visually appealing characters  
**Psychology Mantra:** Readers’ identification with kid characters (eg Billu); affinity and respect for a grandfather-like witty figure (Chacha Chaudhary)

**Magicians:** Rama, Krishna, Hanuman (Amar Chitra Katha)  
**The Enchanted:** Kids, teens & youth

**Magic Spell:** Conversion of complicated mythological episodes into a pictorial, easy-to-grasp story form; higher recall value with the magnified actions, emotions, expressions of characters  
**Psychology Mantra:** The readers relate to ‘cooler’, more contemporary characters; transformation of Super Gods into Superheroes

**Magicians:** Nagayan, Nagraj, Doga, Dhruva (Raj Comics)  
**The Enchanted:** Teens, youth and adults  
**Magic Spell:** Physical appearance- lean, well-built through gymming and perfect abs; action at its best

with detailed movements; power-packed dialogues with great punches  
**Psychology Mantra:** Flaunting realistic, youthful accessories- Dhruva’s supercool bikes

**Magicians:** Bankelal, Gamraj (Raj Comics)  
**The Enchanted:** All & sundry  
**Magic Spell:** Humorous dialogues and funny situations; characters ooze unintended innocence

With inputs from  
Jayant Kumar Baloch,

Amity School of Engineering & Technology