Comics and graphic novels are increasingly regarded as a compelling part of global literature and popular culture. In India, comics in English have been popular since the 1950s. American and Japanese comics styles have an important influence on Indian comics, though some South Asian artistic traditions such as chitrakatha could be described as early local precursors of the subsequent art form, and continue to be an important influence on artists. The burgeoning comics industry in India has recently given rise to a strong fan culture that connects young people with their counterparts around the world.

My research project examines the use of Hindu myth and religious imagery as source material in comics and graphic narratives. The comics and graphic novels in the study range widely in theme and style, from superhero comics and fantasy to histories and abstract graphic narratives. Myth and religion are often a significant theme across characters and contexts. Artists and illustrators often find their source material in Hindu mythology; in some texts, deities are presented as characters, while in others, religious imagery becomes part of the visual landscape.

Comics’ texts drawing on religious themes may serve a variety of desires for readers. Religiously inflected narratives sometimes work didactically to teach readers about religion. An important series that established this function is Amar Chitra Katha, a series of comics published since the late 1960s that presents abridged mythological and historical stories to children in graphic narrative form. More recently, the Virgin/Liquid comics series India Authentic retells myths about Hindu deities using a modern graphic style. These kinds of comics reproduce narratives that generally support a mainstream, hegemonic understanding of Brahmanical Hinduism.
But some comics' texts work to critique hegemonic ideas about religion and about what comics look like in the contemporary world. *Sita’s Ramayana* (Tara Books 2011) is a reimagining of the Ramayana with a feminist perspective, written by Samhita Arni and illustrated by traditional *patua* artist Moyna Chitrakar. Graphic novels have become an important part of social activism in South Asia. *Bhimayana* (Navayana, 2011), tells a story about the life of BR Ambedkar and foregrounds Dalit struggle against Hindu caste-based discrimination; it is illustrated by Gond artists Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam. In a different vein, the web-based comic Priya’s *Shakti* (2014) draws on the visual language of earlier texts like *Amar Chitra Katha* to create a narrative against gender based violence in South Asian communities. These examples show that while comics’ texts have the capacity to reproduce and reinforce normative ways of thinking about identity, they also provide ways to resist or rethink them, particularly in regard to issues around gender and caste.

My research makes use of interdisciplinary methods to study comics’ texts and readers. Close analysis of image and text in these comics and graphic novels illuminates how religious iconography and allusion are at work within them, and studies their style and structure. Interviews with writers and illustrators explore their perceptions about religion in their work. The project also looks at experiences of comics readers in India and around the South Asian diaspora, considering the interactive relationship between producers, texts, and readers in the formation of religious knowledge, perceptions and identity claims.

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