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Topic – A Study of the Emergence of Superhero in India

Findings

If we look at the Indian superhero from an academic perspective, we will find a glaring absence. The exceptions are a few studies on *Amar Chitra Katha*, mostly focused on representation of mythology in comic-books, reading of the mythical as superheroes and creation of identity markers via comic-books. Karline McLain and Nandini Chandra's works are of relevance in this regard. The potential of these works alone portray that comics-books are an important cultural space, and superheroes important cultural icons that ought to be studied. The present thesis is an attempt to create a narrative around the creation and consumption of Indian superheroes in comic-books and beyond, in the Indian popular culture.

Influenced by the American superhero culture, India made an attempt to create its own superhero culture. With the intention of disseminating knowledge about Indian traditional culture, heroes, legends and myths, Anant Pai indigenized the duo of comic-books and superhero in his *Amar Chitra Katha*. And, thus, were born the first ever Indian comic-books. In 1980's Anupam Sinha introduced to us Super Commando Dhruv, Nagraj and Doga as Indian superheroes.

Given this background, the present study has made an attempt to trace the evolution and growth of the Indian comic-books and the emergence of the superhero, with respect to various cultural and political influences. In the **Introduction**, I have mapped the concept of superhero in existing literary traditions, thereby highlighting its cultural and social significance.

The first Chapter, titled “**Birth of the Superhero: A Western Perspective**”, studies the emergence of the very first superhero, Superman, while looking at the cultural and socio-political environment within which he came to be. The chapter analyzes the different ages of

the comic-books and superheroes in America, the significant superheroes of the specific ages and their reflection of the society at the time. It was deemed important to construct a chapter detailing the American superhero culture so as to become well informed of the source that influenced the need and desire for Indian superhero culture, and also to provide a comparative analysis on the ideologies represented by the superheroes of both the cultures.

The second chapter, titled “**Superheroes Made in India: The Evolution of Indian comic-books industry and Creation of Indian Superheroes**” traces the genesis of the Indian comic-books industry and studies different kinds of ‘superheroes’ that came to be before the establishment of the popular *Raj Comics*. Against the back drop of cultural identity and mythical dominance, the chapter traces the struggle of the Indian comic-book readers and makers as they try to chart out the ‘Indian’ in their superhero.

The third chapter, titled “**Superheroes on Screen**” looks at the superhero genre beyond the realms of comic-books in the Indian popular culture. It studies the superheroes that emerged on the Indian television and on the big screen (Bollywood). Beginning with the examination of the Indian television superhero Shaktimaan, the chapter analyzes different movies featuring different kinds of superheroes.

“**Conclusions**” brings together cultural and social perspectives that were found relevant in study of the evolution of the superhero culture in India, and highlights three main aspects of it, namely – construction of the category of ‘nation’, representation of women, and interaction between the categories of the ‘mythical’ and the ‘superhero’.

The present study was undertaken with the intention of rooting the Indian superhero as an important cultural icon that represents various aspects of the Indian society. It is hoped that it will provide a strong groundwork for prospective researches in the area.