

# THAT INKING FEELING



A few decades ago, the Indian comics scene was burgeoning. The art may have been simple, and most stories and characters lifted straight from American comics, but lending libraries were important social hubs in cities and small towns. Regional comics and Indian superheroes made reading entertaining for kids across the country. Eventually, comic books lost out to TV and movies, going underground and retreating from the metros. But for the last couple of years – fuelled in part by a crop of animation grads and social media marketing – there’s a new breed of comics creators emerging. It’s not all great yet, but it’s all happening: independent artists, boutique studios, international tie-ups, and rumours of DC entering the fray. And this time around, comics aren’t just for kids. In the next few pages, we get nostalgic about the old legends, look out for promising new publishers (most of whom will be at the second Comic Con India) and meet the fans. Indian comics are taking off.

Cosplay at Comic Con India.  
Photograph by **Sushant Jain**

# THE PANELLISTS

From the originals to the veterans to the new wave of creators, this is the Indian comics universe.

## FALLEN HEROES

### Indrajal Comics

One of India's big comic houses, Indrajal had the advantage of owner Bennett Coleman's widespread *Times of India* distribution network. Founded in 1964, Indrajal started with syndicated Phantom comics on a monthly basis, then moved on to other superhero series including Mandrake, Flash Gordon and, in 1976, artist Aabid Surti's Bahadur – India's very own comic superhero.

Indrajal's titles were translated into regional languages, including Bengali, Telugu, Tamil, Hindi and Marathi, which ensured a large fan base. Still, with the dwindling popularity of comics in general,

Bennett Coleman decided to finally call it quits on the company in 1991. Today, Indrajal fans range from government servants to housewives to businessmen; a 2010 online campaign to reprint Indrajal saw over 400 aficionados sign a petition. While there is no sign of the publishers giving in to such demands, *ToI* reported in December that Bahadur may be immortalised on the silver screen in actor-filmmaker Kabir Sadanand's *Bahadur vs Bahadur*. **Gayathri Sreedharan**

### Manoj Comics

In its heyday, Manoj Comics was a regular producer of ten to 15 comic books a month. Founded in the early '80s, it was originally called Manoj Chitrakatha and was published by Rama Kant Sahay. MC specialised in stories of kings and queens, detectives, demons, ghosts and the like. Some of their most popular original characters include Ram-Rahim, a Hindu-Muslim crime fighting duo, and Hawaldar Bahadur, a native version of Enid Blyton's Mr Goon.

Other characters were tributes to rival figures. So suave James Bond inspired the comical Crookbond, while Diamond Comics' beloved Chacha Chaudhary inspired Chatur Chaudhary. MC had over 50 such characters and a successful run, publishing 300 or



more books a year until the mid '90s. With dwindling popularity, MC finally shut shop in 2000. Nevertheless, its covers and illustrations live on in cyberspace, where true faithfuls continue to share, buy and sell. **GS**

### Tulsi Comics

Though it was one of the big guns back in the '80s and '90s, Tulsi, which was spearheaded by pulp author Ved Prakash Sharma, threw in the towel in 2004. Tulsi's original characters included Jambou, Mr India, Angara and others. There isn't much to distinguish Tulsi from its Hindi and regional contemporaries (Fort, Nutan, and dozens of others), but the division of Tulsi Paper Books did manage to hold on slightly longer and created a large body of comics. Eventually, Tulsi failed to compete with television and other distractions, and died a natural death.

**Vritti Bansal**





# THE OLD GUARD

## Diamond Comics

The exploits of Chacha Chaudhary and his well-muscled sidekick Sabu, and the antics of Pinki and Billoo have delighted generations of kids.

“Our characters are similar to those you find in your own family, so parents buy these for their children,” explained Gulshant Rai, Diamond’s managing director. Rai ventured into comics in 1974, though parent company Punjabi Pustak Bhandar was founded in 1950. The publishing house began compiling anthologies of characters that initially appeared as short features in magazines such as *Lotpot*. Pran, the legendary cartoonist behind this lovable cast, joined Diamond in 1978 and still churns out new stories every other month.

Diamond has also brought out anthologies of Amar Chitra Katha’s mythological stories, and, until the 1990s, produced local versions of foreign characters like Phantom, Mandrake, Superman and Batman. But it’s the charm of the Indian characters that has endured and that remains the publishing house’s mainstay, boosted by increasing levels of literacy. Rai pointed out that his comics are more popular in smaller towns. “Our main market is the masses. We are available in the remotest corner of the country – and that is our achievement.” **Sonam Joshi**  
[www.diamondcomic.com](http://www.diamondcomic.com). See *Comic Con in Around Town*.

## Raj Comics

More than two decades ago, when Indian children were in desperate need of a pulp comic tradition they could call their own, a hero was born. Established in 1985, Raj

## ACK Media

In a 1989 interview with John S Hawley, Anant Pai explained how a Doordarshan quiz show inspired him to create Amar Chitra Katha 22 years earlier. “They could answer every question about Greek mythology,” said the man better known as Uncle Pai, “But in Delhi... where every year they enact the Ramliila, the youngster could not answer the question, ‘Who is the mother of Ram?’” Pai left the *Times of India* and started the comic that’s become as immortal as the myths it has serialised.

Pai, who died last year, was rightly revered (ACK is bringing out a tribute comic at Comic Con). But one can’t forget India Book House, which published ACK and Tinkle until 2007, when those titles were acquired by ACK

Media. ACK Media took over India Book House itself in 2010, acquiring a ready fan base and a huge slice of Indian comic history. The company plans to give its books a facelift with film, TV and web spin-offs, and is involved with projects ranging from a Mother Teresa comic to a 3D animated feature on Tinkle’s Suppandi. The popularity of ACK is also the biggest reason that Indian comics are still perceived as

mostly kiddy stuff. **Uday Bhatia**  
[www.ack-media.com](http://www.ack-media.com). See *Comic Con in Around Town*.

## Origin stories

**Alok Sharma**, creator of the forthcoming documentary *Chitrakatha: Indian Comics Beyond Balloons and Panels*, flashes back.

I have grown up amidst comic books. I ran one of the biggest comic book lending libraries in my city, Bhilai, as a teenager. All I wanted to do was draw comics. I had been in touch with a lot of comic book creators since that age. As an individual trying to learn it all in a small town, I was lucky to start my career with Gotham Comics.

When I started collecting, *Indrajal* was one of the most noteworthy publications, thanks to its wide circulation and great translations. Its grand success inspired several publishers and comic book creators to come up with their own titles. DC and Marvel were never competition. They could never compete because they weren’t widely available. The stories were too American for an Indian who wasn’t exposed to American pop culture the way teenagers are today. Instead, Indian comic books faced tough competition from cable TV, Internet and video games.

Some old players have survived. Amar Chitra Katha is the only title that parents don’t mind buying for their children; schools keep them in their libraries. A large chunk is ordered by NRIs who want to introduce Indian culture to their kids. Diamond survives because of its wider reach and translations. Raj is still surviving on their dedicated fan base.

There could be new avenues to publish and sources for funding. But in the end, you need great content. We don’t lack readership or the hunger for good comic books, but we are still lagging behind in terms of content. Comics are still not a profitable business for many.

It took me almost five years to save for *Chitrakatha*. It’s self-funded, so it’s an ongoing cycle: work, earn, save, work. I don’t want it to look amateur. While conducting interviews, what struck me is the humbleness of the Indian comics stalwarts: they have creat-

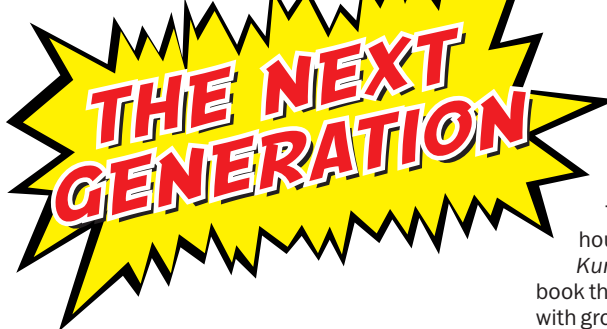
ed hundreds of books, but still have their feet firmly planted on the ground... most of the boisterous new-generation Facebookish creators are yet to prove themselves as artists. And yes, the newer lot is facing tough competition from DC and Marvel. **As told to Gayathri Sreedharan.**  
 Visit [www.chitrakathaonline.com](http://www.chitrakathaonline.com) to preview a rough cut of *Chitrakatha*.



Comics was not the first Hindi publishing house to introduce indigenous superheroes – Indrajal's Bahadur beat them by a decade and a half – but constant reinvention has ensured that RC's Kryptonite is yet to be found.

The Raj comic-verse is populated by vigilantes like Nagraj, the snake-sprouting martial arts expert; Doga, the reformed criminal who hides behind a dog mask; animal-whisperer Super Commando Dhruva; and righteous babe Shakti.

Raj grew out of a love for storytelling. "We grew up on a steady diet of Amar Chitra Katha and Diamond Comics," said CEO Manish Gupta, who started RC with his brothers Sanjay and Manoj. A subsidiary of Raja Pocket Books, RC enjoyed an enviable distribution network. When its idols faltered, it stayed afloat by keeping dialogue current (still Hindi, for a small-town target audience, despite some English titles) and updating plots. For instance, Nagraj did not originally need an alter-ego; now he heads a security agency. RC has also refreshed itself with new media platforms, TV shows, and limited edition comics, e-tailed through their site. But the surest way to win fans is to encourage readers to create their own storylines, Gupta told us. "We even invite Nagraj fans to mix on his birthday in August every year at our Burari office." We wish "Hari Maut" many more. **Karanjeet Kaur** Available at Raja Pocket Books, 112 Dariba Kalan (2325-1109; www.rajacomics.com). ☎ Chandni Chowk. Raj Comics will be at the New Delhi World Book Fair. See Books.



## Arkin Comics

Even if you're not interested in comics, you may have envisioned having super-powers: the ability to fly, outrace bullets, crush enemies with your bare hands... We don't recommend attempting these stunts in real life, but there's nothing stopping you from transforming into a comic book hero and reading about your own brave deeds. That's the impulse Rohan Kapadia, then 19, decided to tap into when he founded Arkin in 2007. Kapadia has released titles *Kriteen* and *IRITH*, but Arkin also offers a personalised service. For a price (₹1,500), get your face on a superhero's body and show off your own book or merch.

**Akshita Nahar**  
Visit Arkin's Facebook page for details.



described herself as a "huge comics fan" and mentioned that they were planning to bring out two more titles in the Kumari series by next year.

**UB**  
www.blaft.com. See Comic Con in Around Town.

**Hard rain** From Arkin Comics's *IRITH*

## The Fandom

The universe of collectors and geeks is expanding, says **Sonal Shah**.



**Comic Addicts** (l-r) Rohan Parti, Akshay Dhar, Mayank Khurana, Nishkarsh Chugh, Anirudh Singh

"I had about 5,000 comics when I stopped counting," said Mayank Khurana. "That was about ten years ago." In his library, Khurana has shelves organised by country and publisher, figurines and framed posters. His glossy DCs and Marvels are in sleeves, but his original collection of Indian comics is stacked up in thick, dusty piles.

"I started with Diamond and it snowballed,"

he recounted. "I got to know that comics abroad are superior – that a lot of Indian comics are directly lifting from there. I kind of got disillusioned and moved towards foreign comics. But it was hard to find them at that time." All that changed with the Internet. "In '96, I had a TCP/IP account... I was massively researching on the net," he said. Social media also made it possible for Khurana to connect with other enthusiasts. His library is headquarters for Comic Addicts, a website and fan club he started last year. The project began as a blog, but soon Khurana started "recruiting" fellow enthusiasts. Most contributors live in Delhi, but Comic Addicts has over 3,000 Facebook fans and about 25 core members from all over India and abroad. Publishers now send them comics to review.

The Delhi members meet about once a month to go over the latest arrivals from the US (Khurana has standing subscriptions), plot events and generally geek out. At their "mini con" at 1 Boulevard in November, about 250 people walked in for screenings, gaming competitions, live sketching and music. The community is growing, and becoming closely linked with the world of comics creation. "Every single fan wants to do one single comic before they die," Khurana said, "even I have that." For now, he's content to collect. He showed us his first original art acquisition – a page of Level 10's *Daksh* drawn by a 19-year-old

fan, freelance artist and Jalpaiguri student, Devmalya Pramanik.

Delhi has at least a couple of serious comic art collectors too. Dipyaman Sanyal and Aparajita Bhattacharjee got hooked with Tintins, ACKs and Bengali comics, but have since amassed a respectable portfolio of original art, including work by Will Eisner, Michael Zulli (*Sandman*), Bob Kane and old newspaper strips. "We know lots of people who would like to [collect], but things are not available here," Sanyal said. "First, we were just looking online. And then we bought one or two," said Bhattacharjee. "The expensive ones we would gift to each other." Sanyal added that he'd like to collect Indian comic art, but there's no market for it. "It's exactly what happened in the US 50, even 30, years ago – people threw them out," he said. "I would love to buy a cartoon by Mario Miranda, but I don't know who I can call. Even Pran – I don't think it's great art, but I would buy it for nostalgic value."

If the fandom keeps growing, he may have a bit of competition. But as Comic Addict Rohan Parti pointed out, fans share only the friendliest of rivalries. "At the Jaipur Literary Fest, if celebrities came, there was controversy; if celebrities didn't come, there was controversy," he pointed out. "But we don't have that kind of shit in Comic Con. Just straight ahead comic love."

Visit [www.comicaddicts.com](http://www.comicaddicts.com).

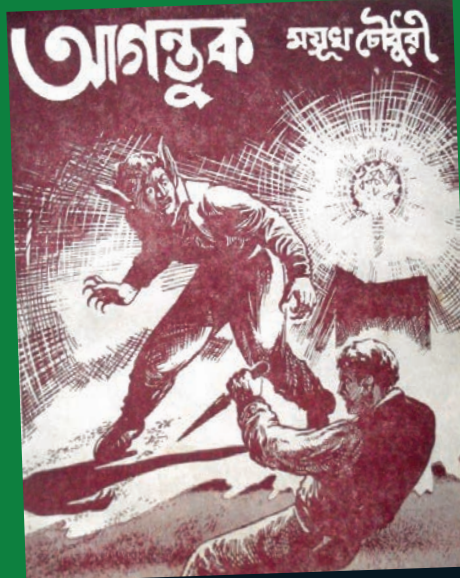
## Strip research

If academics are involved, comics must be serious business, says Kingshuk Niyogy.

Despite recent bursts of creativity in the Indian comics scene, most new readers have little knowledge of the industry's background, mostly because of limited availability and a lack of formal documentation. And except for a couple of studies on Amar Chitra Katha (Nandini Chandra's *The Classic Popular Amar Chitra Katha, 1967-2007*; Karline McLain's *India's Immortal Comic Books: Gods, Kings and Other Heroes*), comics researchers are also few and far between.

When it comes to researching comics beyond ACK, the pioneering study is still artist Amitabh Kumar's 2008 *Raj Comics for the Hard-Headed*. "I grew up reading comics and Raj Comics was part of that diet," Kumar said. "Friends would read it, enact scenes and follow character development." While working as a researcher in the Sarai-CSDS media lab, Kumar archived and indexed all the existing RC titles. He explained that "a part of making comics a sustainable profession is to understand industrial and commercial history of our comic book culture. The commercial success of older comic book houses becomes very relevant, and only Raj Comics is still coming out with fresh content." Despite this, he said, "their drawing style or sense of narration have more or less remained the same. This sense of being static is what attracts me to Raj Comics as a model. The tsunami, terror attacks, IPL and match fixing all feature prominently without disturbing their narrative fabric."

While a trawl through the Internet reveals a large (and chaotic) enough universe of old Hindi comic-book sellers to keep future researchers like Kumar busy archiving for years, the



Agantook Mayukh Chowdhury's hero predates Wolverine

genre's earliest origins in newspaper and magazine strips has been largely forgotten. It has taken a Herculean effort by Abhijit Gupta, professor of English at Kolkata's Jadavpur University, to unearth these neglected comics. Gupta told us that when he started working on The Comic Book Project with support from the British Council in 2010, "The aim was to digitally preserve comic book art in magazines and newspapers, which had never been collected before and was in danger of disappearing." Gupta and his team at JU's School of Cultural Texts and Records have been nosing around in second-hand stalls for strips in Bengali, Tamil, Hindi and English.

"Sequential art in India has its own history and a huge body of work by Indian writers and artists exist that predates the proper graphic novel, especially in Bengali, Tamil and Hindi," Gupta said. "Comic book art in India has been around for at least half a century without being seriously studied."

With a few thousand images already collected, Gupta plans to build a web resource, with strip samples, author bios and interviews. Currently, the oldest entries are Narayan Debnath's Haanda-Bhonda (an Indian Laurel & Hardy) from 1954-55 in the Bengali magazine *Shuktara*. Then there's Mayukh Chowdhury's 1960s *Agantook*, which features an extra-terrestrial being who can grow claws like Wolverine. Narayan Debnath's 1950s *Black Diamond* series about a private eye, and Subrata Gangopadhyay's 1976 Naxal story "Palabar Path Nei" (No Route For Escape), which is being published in an English translation in *The Obliterary Journal* (see p42).

As comic production heats up, more researchers like Gupta and Kumar will surely emerge. "Now, with many other agencies of distraction for urban youth, comics lie forgotten as the original enemy of parents," Kumar pointed out. "What is also due is a nationwide survey of reading habits." As such studies increase, they will help establish the commercial valuation of Indian comics, in turn hopefully driving profitability and creativity. Download Raj Comics for the Hard-Headed from [www.sarai.net/publications](http://www.sarai.net/publications).

## Campfire Graphic Novels

This comic imprint, established in 2008 in Delhi, has a major advantage over other Indian publishers. Campfire has a distribution partnership with several major publishing houses worldwide, including Random House in the US, which explains why they sell most of their books in North America. Campfire's graphic novels fall into four educational categories for a younger audience: classics, biography, mythology and originals. Though the books are drawn and produced in India, Campfire has a global reach. Classics titles include *Robinson Crusoe*, *Kidnapped* and *The Time Machine*. The biographies usually focus on



contemporary stalwarts like Nelson Mandela and boxer Muhammad Ali. The most popular titles to date though have relied on Indian mythology; *Ravana: Roar of the Demon King* and *Sita: Daughter of the Earth* were big sellers. Campfire books stand out because of their artwork, which is of an international standard. Senior editor Aditi Ray told us that Campfire has "largely an in-house pool of very talented artists. The writers are handpicked by the in-house editors after a rigorous process of engagement, discussions, and ideation."



Swashbucklers From Chariot Comics's *Damned* and (left) Campfire's *Sinbad*



**Nice guns** Crimefighter in Fenil Comics' *Black Gold* and (right) *Mastermind*

The company has grown steadily into a team of 36. Along the way, it's released 59 books. Many more are around the corner – including at Comic Con. **Kingshuk**

**Niyogy**  
www.campfire.co.in.  
See Comic Con in  
Around Town.

## Chariot Comics

A little bit of Aniruddho Chakraborty and Katyayan Shivpuri's smart-alecky cheek comes through in the characters they create. In their Comic Con release *Eklavya: Godslayer*, the title character introduces himself as a left-handed mercenary, who offers a special discount to SC/ST/OBCs. Chakraborty and Shivpuri founded Chariot in 2009 with producer Aditya

Dhaliwal and artists Tarun Kumar Sahu and Rohit Bose. The two have superhero-style day jobs too: Chakraborty is the head of branding at a travel start-up, while

Shivpuri is an assistant director in Bollywood. *Eklavya*, along with Chariot's other series – VRICA (wolves) and Damned (sorcery and corporate politics) – may be rooted in Indian, Greek and Norse mythology, but the Charioteers' agenda is to, as Chakraborty says, "read a myth and then say, 'Not happening, boss'". Chariot will release a small print run, but plans to deliver its series online. **KK**  
www.chariotcomics.com. See Comic Con in Around Town.

## Fenil Comics

Fenil was founded in early 2011 as something of a personal project by Surat resident

Fenil Sherdiwala. In addition to creating the characters and stories for his titles, Sherdiwala has a blog where he shares scans of his large Indian comic collection. He says Fenil stands out because "we have original superheroes." The comics are in Hindi, though there is an English iPad app and, in the future, English print editions. Fenil's newest titles: *Mastermind*, starring ordinary guy-turned-hero Faulad, and *Black Gold*, starring Crimefighter. They take on current geopolitical issues, such as terrorism, technol-

ogy theft, and oil cartels. Fenil will debut new superheroes at Comic Con. **Simran Bhalla**  
www.fenilcomics.com. See Comic Con in Around Town.



## Not stacking up

Delhi's bookstores are sadly comic sans, finds **Akshita Nahar**.

Before the Daryaganj book bazaar became a dumping ground for people's old tutorial notes, it used to be a good place to pick up used comics, especially those in Hindi by local publishers. But on a recent Sunday visit, we found just a handful of *Lotpots* and a few Raj and Diamond comics, which underscored the fact that there isn't a single store dedicated to comics in the city.

What we do have is a smattering of shelves within bookstores, where you'll find a couple of the classics, a few of the most mainstream graphic novels, and maybe a couple of international titles. Landmark leads the bunch with its selection, and a good time to build up your collection is during their annual mega sale, when prices are slashed by up to 70 per cent. However, while they do have a relatively impressive selection, the graphic novel shelf space seems to be experiencing a slight downsizing. "Comics and graphic novels cater to a very niche audience," explained Rajeev V, a category manager at Landmark. "And while the children's comic sector does well, adult graphic novel section experiences a decline, as the same content is available for download".

Though the new Bahri Sons Kids bookstore is explicitly for children, it does attempt to cater

to slightly older comic lovers as well. It stocks three-set complete editions of Amar Chitra Katha (₹4,750 each) and smaller sets (₹500). Store manager Vinay Kumar claims that if it's available in the market, they'll have it. He told us he'd gone to great lengths to offer the complete set of Tintin hardbacks. You'll also find Archies, Calvin and Hobbes,



**Shelf life** At Bahri Sons Kids in Khan Market

Asterix, Batman, Superman, Lucky Luke, Agatha Christie mysteries, and graphic novel versions of Artemis Fowl, Percy Jackson and the Twilight saga. A similar collection is available at the Midlands bookstore in South Extension.

If funds are limited though, try rummaging at the bookstalls at PVR Anupam Community Centre in Saket for international comics as cheap as ₹50, based on your bargaining skills. Currently, Delhi doesn't have a dedicated comic lending library, like Mumbai's Leaping Windows, which is opening a new café and hopes to set up shop in the capital next year. But the Anupam stall owners will readily exchange old comics for newer ones, keeping your collection current.

**Bahri Sons Kids** 6 Khan Market, First Floor (2469-4611). ☎ Khan Market. Visit [www.booksatbahri.com](http://www.booksatbahri.com) for a complete list of stores.

**Crossword** Visit [www.crossword.in](http://www.crossword.in) for a complete list of stores.

**Landmark** Visit [www.landmarkonthenet.com](http://www.landmarkonthenet.com) for a complete list of stores.

**Midland Book Shop** Visit [www.midlandbookshop.com](http://www.midlandbookshop.com) for a complete list of stores.

**Teksons** Visit [www.teksonsbooks.com](http://www.teksonsbooks.com) for a complete list of stores.



**Cosmic strips** Liquid Comics' *18 Days*, about the Mahabharata; (right) Level 10's Daksh; (inset) Holy Cow Entertainment's *Ravanayan*

## Holy Cow Entertainment

According to founder Vivek Goel, Holy Cow is India's first comic publisher to be started by an artist. Goel worked in the industry for several years, but felt he could better execute his ideas under his own banner. Holy Cow was born in May 2011 and has since published two titles. HCE's first release was *Warehouse*, a horror anthology. The *Ravanayan* series, a narrative of the life of Ravana, followed with four issues out and the fifth launching at Comic Con. *The Skull Rosary*, a 100-page graphic novel about the dark side of Shiva, is due this July. Besides Hindu mythology, the brand has some distinct titles lined up: *Serengeti Stripes* is a series about two tiger cubs in Africa, and *That Man Solomon* is a six-issue crime series

set in the 1980s.

"Indian comics is an endangered industry," Goel told us, "we need people who can keep it alive." To this end, he hires apprentices to help with production. His philosophy is quality over quantity; HCE plans to publish no more than six comics and one graphic novel a year. **VB** [www.holycow.in](http://www.holycow.in). See *Comic Con in Around Town*.

## Libera Artisti

Libera Artisti is the brainchild of three self-taught artists in Trivandrum: Kishore Mohan, Roshan and Sinu Chan-

drasanan. They haven't published anything yet since they banded together in 2008

with sketching sessions, but are now putting out their first book.

*Auto-Pilot* follows Suku, an autorickshaw driver, who gets Yamaraj, the god of death, as a passenger. The Artists are also working on a 2D animated television series, expected out in 2013. **VB**

[www.liberaartisti.com](http://www.liberaartisti.com). See *Comic Con in Around Town*.



## Liquid Comics

Gods and goddesses hold such a sway over our popular imagination that Amar Chitra Katha has built a cottage industry around this Indian fascination. But it took a surprisingly long time for English comics creators to create superheroes (rather than deities) based on our mythology. In 2006, Virgin Comics, a partnership between Richard Branson's Virgin group and Bangalore's Gotham Studios, began mining India's vast mythological tradition for its slick books. The flagship superhero for the imprint was Devi (created by film director Shekhar Kapur), a celestial warrior goddess who battles renegade god Bala. In 2009, Virgin pulled out and Liquid Comics emerged after a management buyout. It's only the name that has changed – the prime movers behind the enterprise are still Sharad Devarajan, Gotham (Gautam) Chopra and Suresh Seetharaman. Liquid's other popular series include *Ramayan 3392 AD*, *The Sadhu* and *Snake Woman*. With offices in New York and Bangalore, Liquid Comics has an enviable group of celebrity creative partners, including Kapur, John Woo, Guy Ritchie, Deepak Chopra (Gotham's dad) and

## Tintin in India

Calcuttans who grew up in the late 1980s may remember Timpa, a 14-year-old crime-solver with a sidekick

and a suspiciously Snowy-like dog named Rexy. Timpa was modeled by Jhangir Kerawala on Hergé's Tintin – though unlike his globe-trotting inspiration, his adventures are all set in Kolkata. Timpa was picked up by Indrajal Comics, but after just three adventures were published,



Indrajal folded in 1990, and the Bengali boy wonder seemed lost to the great Indian comic dust-pile. However, in October 2011, almost 20 years after Timpa last appeared, Pop Culture Publishing decided to take a first stab at acquiring outside material and reprinted

*Operation Rescue*. Two more reprints, *The Red-Hooded Gang* and *Legacy of the Gods*, will be released at Comic Con. Later this year, PCP will launch two unpublished Timpa stories,

before starting to develop fresh material with Kerawala. **Uday Bhatia** *Operation Rescue* is available at [www.dialabook.in](http://www.dialabook.in), ₹150. Visit [www.popculturepublishing.com](http://www.popculturepublishing.com).

Wes Craven.

Liquid recently launched Graphic India, a digital platform to promote comics, young writers and artists in the country. In late December 2011, Liquid announced that the legendary Stan Lee (the creator of Spider-Man, X-Men and The Incredible Hulk) will work with Indian artists to release Chakra – The Invincible, an original superhero for the Indian market. **KN**

A free digital version of Stan Lee's Chakra will be out in April 2012 on [www.graphicindia.com](http://www.graphicindia.com).

## Level 10 Comics

In 2009, Suhas Sundar and Shreyas Srinivas left their comfortable corporate and tech careers to found Level 10 Comics. The Indian comic market was saturated by retellings of classical myths, and Sundar and Srinivas saw the potential for comics that reflected the interests of urban, English-speaking comic book readers. "Shreyas and I are lifelong comic buffs," said Sundar. "People quickly realised that we were a comic company started by comic fans, for comic fans, and this resonated well with our target audience." Level 10's flagship anthology is *Jump*, which contains popular comics such as manga cricket epic *Batu Gaiden*; *Daksh*, about the gatekeeper of hell; *The Rabhas Incident*, about a zombie-creating virus in Bangalore; and *Old School*, about a Bengali private eye.

"Our unusual line up explores hitherto

untouched genres in Indian comics, like zombies, fantasy and sci-fi, and R-rated action adventures," Sundar told us. Untouched or not, Level 10's visual variety will appeal to many kinds of enthusiasts. Srinivas and Sundar take reader feedback very seriously to ensure that content stays exciting, and far away from revamped Ramas and Ravana. As Sundar said, "We hope to break down pre-conceived notions of what comics should or shouldn't be." Level 10 will release graphic novels *Odayan* and *Daksh* at Comic Con. **SB**



Visit [www.level10comics.com](http://www.level10comics.com). See Comic Con in Around Town.

## Manta Ray

Aspiring storyteller Pratheek Thomas and his friend Dileep Cherian founded Manta Ray in 2010 in Bangalore. Their first graphic novel, *Hush*, is a daring work of art that tells the story of a girl who has been sexually abused by her father. The limited edition book, meant to be a collector's item, focuses on silence and uses no words. Manta Ray's black-and-white series *The Small Picture* appears in the *Mint* newspaper every Wednesday. *The Year of the Snake*, Manta Ray's first full-colour comic about Charles Sobhraj's escape from Tihar, came out recently in *Motherland* magazine. Up next is a series called *Twelve*. **VB**  
[www.mantaraycomics.com](http://www.mantaraycomics.com). See Comic Con in Around Town.

## Pop Culture Publishing

In comic book terms, Pop Culture Publishing was inked in 2011, but the preliminary sketches began four years earlier. *Random*, an uproarious local take on *MAD*, hit stands in 2008. Founder Jatin Varma then established the Golden Kela Awards, India's answer to the Razzies and, in 2011, launched Pop Culture

## To the app mobile!

Reading comics in the Sunday papers is an antiquated notion now that everything from funny pages to graphic novels is on iPads, Playstations and other screens. Though books are accessible to those who can't afford devices, digital platforms allows companies to produce new content faster and cheaper. It also allows them to tap into an urban English-speaking audience for specific titles. So while Fenil Comics prints in Hindi, it's first English edition was launched as an iPad app.

Australian digital publisher Cloud9 Comix offers many Indian titles. Level 10, Campfire, Vimanika and Fenil all have iPad versions of their series available on Cloud9. A single issue costs between about ₹45 to ₹100. Of course, you have to own an iPad or iPhone (for some comics, a Kindle e-reader or Android phone will suffice). Comix-on-the-go allows BlackBerry



users to read both older comics such as *Amar Chitra Katha* and *Akbar and Birbal*, as well as new or international titles (*Archies*, *Disney*, *Cartoon Network*, etc). The app and some content is free; comics cost ₹3-₹20. Tata Docomo has comics and animated strips on its Docomix app (not available in Delhi). Most publishers offer their digital comics on their sites. Liquid, which also offers comics on Sony Playstation, recently went a step further and launched Graphic India in December. The site will be a national platform for talent and fans (see Liquid Comics). Besides hosting exciting titles, it offers fans the opportunity to submit their own work. There's only one downside: no one can claim bragging rights over digital first editions. **Simran Bhalla**  
Visit [www.cloud9comix.com](http://www.cloud9comix.com) and [www.graphicindia.com](http://www.graphicindia.com). Tata Docomo customers can download Docomix from the 3G life portal on their mobiles. BlackBerry users can download Comix-on-the-go from app store.



Publishing along with the country's first Comic Con. PCP's initial titles were provocative and proudly desi: Adhiraj Singh and Abhijeet Kini's *Udd Bilaw Manus*, featuring a Bhojpuri-speaking super-otter, and *The Itch You Can't Scratch*, a ribald comic autobiography by Sumit Kumar. The trend continued with the release of *Munkeeman* (conceptualised by Tere Bin Laden director Abhishek Sharma), *Retrograde* and the irresistibly titled *Widhwa Ma Andhi Behen*.

Pop Culture Publishing will release three books at this year's Comic Con: two Timpa adventures (see "Tintin in India", p38) and a satire on Indian Communism called *Chairman*

## Anime munda

**Karanjeet Kaur** catches up with Delhi's small but thriving otaku community.

By day, Vijay Sinha is a game designer at start-up Apra Infotech. By night (and on weekends), he's the force behind Genshiken: Delhi Chapter, a community of anime and manga fanboys and girls. Sinha and fellow "otakus" (geeks) Vibhav Raina and Lehri Malik started Genshiken in June 2011, as a breakaway from the Delhi Anime Club.

In the last nine months, Genshiken's Facebook member tally has reached 111. Their meet-ups, usually at a someone's house, typically begin with an anime film and discussion. "We always buy our DVDs, instead of downloading them off the net," chipped in Malik, a third-year B.Tech student. Sinha added, "On occasion, we discuss other topics, such as gaming, or even *Time Out Delhi's* story on animated films." Sometimes, discussions veer towards cosplay competitions, such as the one at last November's

Anime Convention, where Sinha turned up as Bumblebee from *Transformers*.

At Comic Con India, game artist Rashi Chandra will play Toph from *Avatar: The Last Airbender*. "Toph is very tomboyish and mirrors my personality," she said. Chandra was introduced to

*Avatar* relatively recently. She grew up, like the others, on a steady diet of *Dragon Ball Z*, which began airing on Animax India in 2000. "The series aired at 11pm, and I had to beg my father, who thought I should be in bed, to let me watch it," Malik said. The channel would show 93 episodes and start again at the beginning. That spurred Malik to find others who shared his frustration – and judging by the numbers, the otakus are well on their way to creating a subculture.

Join Genshiken: Delhi Chapter or Delhi Anime Club on Facebook. This fortnight, anime director Maya Yonesho leads a workshop; see *Around Town*.

Meow, by Kini and Anant Singh. Varma said the plan was to come up with titles that fit their offbeat image, but were also financially viable. "If we create properties that have some value beyond the book, we can look at merchandising, gaming, animation," he said. PCP's material may be a shade risqué for the majority of Indian comic book readers – a younger demographic compared to other countries – but Varma isn't worried. "Last year, there were lots of kids at our Comic Con," Varma said. "We want to encourage that. If we have a lot of kids reading comic books, maybe they'll move on to reading Pop Culture Publishing titles in a few years." **UB**

[www.popculturepublishing.com](http://www.popculturepublishing.com). See *Comic Con in Around Town*.



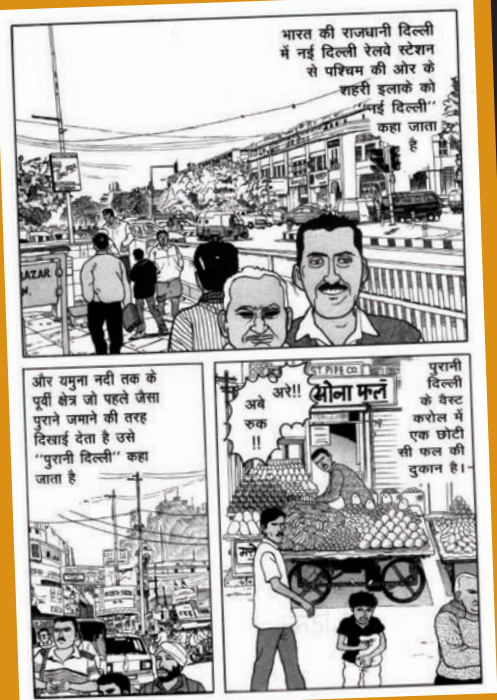
## Rovolt

For a publisher yet to release their first venture, Rovolt is already in a different league. For starters, one of its backers, Vikrant Bhargava, was on the *Forbes India's* 40 Richest list in 2005. Bhargava and IIT Delhi classmate Manish Sinha formed Viman Media, which will provide print, animation and gaming content for children and young adults: four of the print titles will be previewed at Comic Con India. Sinha and Bhargava, who later studied at IIM Calcutta

together, had undertaken a research project in 1996 to find out what sort of stories Indian children wanted to read. "When Vikrant and I reconnected in 2007, we found the same lacuna we'd seen 11 years earlier," said Sinha. Rovolt is Sinha and Bhargava's answer, and their collaborators include Indian and international artists. Titles include *The Legends of Aveon 9*, a "fantasy, sci-fi and Indian classics" narrative, written and edited by Shamik and Ron Marz, writer of *Green Lantern* and the young adults series *MetaFreakz*. On the cards is also a new superhero line with Super Commando Dhruva creator Anupam Sinha. **KK** Visit Rovolt's Facebook page. See *Comic Con in Around Town*.

## Yeh dil manga more

In 2004, Japanese mangaka Yukiichi Yamamatsu arrived in Delhi armed with minimal skills in English – forget Hindi – and the quixotic notion of translating and publishing classic manga in the local language. Incredibly, Yamamatsu not only got a Hindi version of the 1962 manga *Chidaruma Kenpou* published, he also wrote his own Old Delhi-set Hindi manga *Cycle Rickshaw Waale Ki Dukaan* (pictured; not in print, though some Googling will find you an online version). Back in Japan, Yamamatsu published *Stupid Guy Goes to India*, detailing his attempts to spread the gospel of manga in the streets of Delhi while selling udon noodles off a cart in Vikas Puri to pay the rent. *Stupid Guy* will be released in English by Blaft Publications at Comic Con India. No word yet on whether anyone's taking up the translation for *Stupid Guy Goes Back to India*, a further account of Yamamatsu's Delhi adventures. **UB** Yukiichi Yamamatsu will release his book at Comic Con. See *Around Town*.



ADITAILANG

Indigo child Anima Rai plays Konan from *Naruto*

## Readers' digests

Comic magazines pack more than punches, finds **Sonam Joshi**.

Until a few years ago, comic magazines were almost synonymous with the wholesome, clean humour of *Lotpot*, digests brought out by Diamond Comics and, if you were old enough, the now-extinct *Madhu Muskan*. *Lotpot*, started by Delhi's Mayapuri Group in 1969, is best-known for Motu-Patlu, local versions of Laurel & Hardy. Chacha Chaudhary also made his first appearance in this magazine. In 1997, Diamond

started publishing *Comics World*, devoted to foreign comics, *Comics Pitara*, Diamond's own characters, and a combination of the two in *Comics Digest*.

With the recent boom in graphic novels, there has been a parallel surge in comic anthologies. Each of these caters to a different niche, but all of them signal a clear shift away from the child-centric titles of the earlier generation. As Jatin Varma, founder of Pop Culture Publishing, explained, "Whatever growth is taking place in Indian comics is through independent publishers, who are dedicated to a market that is completely mature and not for children at all." In 2008, Varma was inspired by legendary American humour magazine *MAD* to found *Random*, which takes on everything from politics to Bollywood to cricket.

Comic mags allow writers, artists and publishers to try out varied styles, genres

and storylines; the more successful attempts are later brought out in anthologies. Level 10 Comics' *Comic Jump* dabbles in fantasy, science fiction and action, and has collected editions of those stories that do well online. This fortnight, Blaft will bring out *The Obliterary Journal*, a combination of comics, illustrated stories and street art that includes an English version of a 1970s Bengali noir comic. Inspired by Japanese manga, indie magazine *Comix India* follows a slightly different model. Five broadly-themed volumes have been released since 2010.



To keep costs low, each issue is brought out in black-and-white and follows a print-on-demand model, with proceeds distributed amongst all the contributors.

To map this changing scene, the Comic Con India organisers are inaugurating a quarterly, *The Indian*

*Comics Journal*. Varma, who also founded this event, explained: "We want to cover stuff that's contemporary and discover new artists." The first issue includes articles on Mario Miranda and Anant Pai, and interviews with Chris Oliveros and Gary Groth. For comics newbies, mags and anthologies can be a good introduction.

*Comix India* is available on [www.pothi.com](http://www.pothi.com) and [www.flipkart.com](http://www.flipkart.com). See *Comic Con in Around Town*.

## Comic belief

Comics aren't all fun and games – they can be a serious business for some. Like Sharad Sharma, a former political cartoonist who founded World Comics India in 1995 to spread the word on social malaise "in as non-threatening a manner as possible". Referred to as the grassroots comics movement, the use of comics to make statements in conflict zones and rural India has seen a small but steady increase. With local NGOs, Sharma has trained children, journalists, teachers, activists and farmers to use comics to express their concerns in public places, whether on a boundary wall, a rickshaw, a tree. And India has a strong tradition of political cartoonists, like RK Laxman, who will receive a lifetime achievement award this fortnight. **GS**

[www.worldcomics.net](http://www.worldcomics.net). See *Comic Con in Around Town*.



presented in a more appealing manner to the youth." Vimanika was at the forefront of the rise in independent comics a few years ago. Since then, Arora has focused on "keeping our culture intact; there's no vulgarity, violence or obscene language." Vimanika has plans to create a live-action movie based on its modern-day retelling of the story of Karna from the Mahabharata, *The Sixth*. One of the most popular titles is *Moksha*, the story of Hanuman, which begins where the Ramayana ends. *Moksha* #5 premieres at Comic Con. **SB** [www.vimanika.com](http://www.vimanika.com). See *Comic Con in Around Town*. Vimanika will also exhibit comic art this fortnight; see *Progressive Art Gallery in Art*.

## Untitled Creations

At Comic Con India last year, Aakshat Sinha and fellow enthusiasts Bhanu Pratap and Anupam Arunachalam debuted a pilot version of *Damp Book*, an anthology by various writers and artists. Now, Sinha's decided to take the plunge into self-publishing with the Delhi trio's first book, *40 Winks*. *Damp Book* will also be out regularly, as a collaborative platform for young artists and writers. **SJ** [www.untitledcreations.com](http://www.untitledcreations.com). See *Comic Con in Around Town*.



## Vimanika Comics

Vimanika repackages Indian mythology for a modern audience, preaching forgotten morals to younger readers. Former marketing professional Karan Vir Arora started the "edutainment" company in 2008 and, with relatively high quality art and fairly regular releases, has managed to captivate a following in India and the USA. Arora has a fondness for stories on a grand scale and wanted to bring a fantasy sensibility to comics of Indian epics. "The main idea," Arora said, "was that our culture and ideology be



**Watchmen** Liquid's *The Sadhu*; (left) Level 10's *Odayan*