

Sita and Shrupanakha

Symbols of the Nation in the *Amar Chitra Katha*

Comic Book Ramayana*

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Amar Chitra Katha “Immortal Picture Stories”, the leading Indian comic book series, enjoys a ubiquitous presence among the urban middle-class in India and the South Asian diaspora. These comic books are an important medium of public culture that contributes to the process of identity formation. As part of the zone of debate that is public culture, these comic books entail a range of intended and received messages. However, like other mainstream mediums of public culture, these comic books are greatly influenced by the forces of modernity, globalisation, and nationalism, forces which are apparent in the modern “Indianness,” which is constructed in this medium in opposition to an “otherness.” In this essay I will focus on how Sita and Shrupanakha may be interpreted as symbols of the nation – symbols of “Indianness” and “otherness” – in *Amar Chitra Katha* comic books.

Amar Chitra Katha picturises the Ramayana epic. Three of the first ten issues published by *Amar Chitra Katha* were stories from the Ramayana tradition, and numerous Ramayana-related issues are regularly reprinted, including¹: *Rama* (no. 504), *Ancestors of Rama* (no. 572), *Hanuman to the Rescue* (no. 254), *Ravana Humbled* (no. 305), *Hanuman* (no. 502), *The Sons of Rama* (no. 503), *The Lord of Lanka* (no. 541), *Vali* (no.

546), *Valmiki* (no. 579), and *Valmiki’s Ramayana* (bumper issue no. 10001).

The *Ramayana* has occupied a privileged position throughout the development of contemporary Indian culture. It has been employed in special ways by many of the most prominent leaders of the national movement, and in recent years, especially by Hindutva nationalists. Many examples abound of the use of the Ramayana and its characters for political mobilisation – one of which resulted in the demolition of the Babri Masjid mosque in Ayodhya by the Sangh Parivar in 1992. They insist that a Ram Mandir be built in its place. In the 1991 election, before this demolition, the political wing of the Parivar, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), participated in the communal agitation for a Ram Mandir with its popular campaign slogan: “*Ram rajya ki aare chale, Bhajpa ke sath chale*” (Let’s go towards Rama Rajya/ Let’s move with the BJP).² V.D. Savarkar, the originator of the modern forms of Hindu nationalism which eventually led to the *Hindutva* ideology as practiced by the Parivar, claimed that India was founded by Rama, and celebrated the Ramayana as a source of national integration.³

I suggest that there are three major reasons for the crucial role this epic has played in Hindutva ideology: its depiction of ideal gender roles, its

golden age setting, and its demonization of the “other.” By looking at the Ramayana comic we can examine how these elements of the epic may be directed towards nationalist ends in this medium of public culture.

The main characters of the Ramayana, Rama and Sita, are upheld in common parlance and within nationalist ideology as the moral exemplars of Indian society. Sally Sutherland has summed up these ideal constructions: “Rama throughout the epic is a man totally devoted to duty, despite personal hardship, and Sita is a woman totally devoted to her lord and master, despite his capriciousness.”⁴ The duties of these ideal role models are divided according to their gender; a man’s primary concern is his *dharma*, while a woman’s is her husband.

Amar Chitra Katha also upholds Rama and Sita as ideal gender constructs in the *Rama* issue (no. 504):

The *Ramayanas* of Kamban, Tulsidas or Tunchan are all but variations on the same theme. This lofty theme, embodied in the characters of Rama and Sita, the highest ideals of ‘man’ and ‘woman’.⁵

In characterising these figures as ideal, *Amar Chitra Katha* has overlooked the various arguments leveled against Rama and Sita as ideal

role models. One such argument holds that the epic as traditionally interpreted, is a text of political domination. For example, E.V. Ramasami, an activist in Tamil Nadu, contested the notion of Rama as the ideal man and instead upheld Ravana as the true hero. Ramasami advocated this reversal because he sought to awaken South Indians to their oppression by North Indians and their true identity as Dravidians.⁶

Women have also frequently contested the idea that Rama and Sita are ideal characters. Narayana Rao and Nabaneeta Dev Sen have discussed how women's oral Ramayana traditions, in Andhra Pradesh and Bangladesh respectively, counter the public Ramayanas' conception of Rama as ideal by questioning his morality, wisdom, honesty, and integrity.⁷ Women have also criticized the male nationalists' notion of Sita as the feminine ideal. One early criticism occurred in the Hindi journal *Stree Darpan* (1918), in which Uma Nehru criticised male nationalists for upholding Sita as the ideal woman and the preserver of Hindu tradition while men were simultaneously aping Western ways.⁸

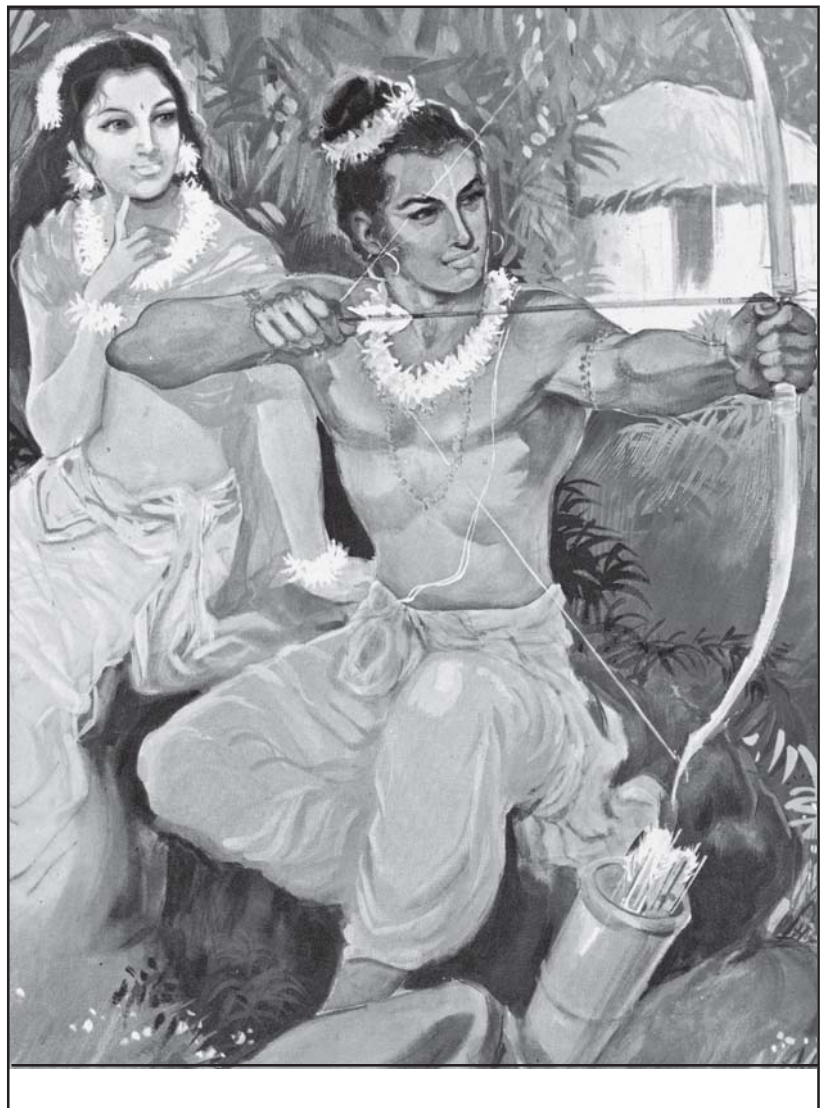
By overlooking these and other criticisms, *Amar Chitra Katha* joins the dominant discourse which reinforces gender roles that contribute to the maintenance of the type of social hierarchy that is crucial to the legitimisation of the Hindutva ideologists' political position. This also contributes to the exclusion of women as active citizens, because when nationalist ideologies are founded on gender difference, women too often become symbolic figures and are denied agency.

The second reason for the use of the Ramayana as a tool of the Sangh Parivar is related to its setting in the ideal past, depicted as the golden age of Hinduism. Their ideology is a modern construction that seeks to

transform society in favor of new identities which are portrayed as in accordance with supposedly traditional cultural values of this mythical golden age. The tradition they promote is actually based primarily on the colonial definition of Hindu tradition, which privileged a small subset of carefully chosen Brahmanic texts that would aid them in dominating the society, and a limited set of practices that were supposedly derived from these texts.⁹

The *Ramayana* epic revolves around the notion of *dharma* (duty, righteousness). It is set in the *treta*

and *dvapara yugas*,¹⁰ a time now often cast as the golden age when *dharma* was said to have functioned more properly than in the current era. In this golden age men and women understood their appropriate roles and, like Rama and Sita, acted accordingly. Hindutva ideologists use the *Ramayana* to critique modern social values and gender constructions by reinscribing their own version of the more "authentic" values of the Hindu golden age, the utopian past uncorrupted by other cultures. One could argue that the comic book *Ramayana* functions similarly in illustrating proper



behavioral guidelines for men and women and in simultaneously critiquing modern social norms.

The third reason for the *Ramayana*'s importance to Hindutva ideology is that it is a text that demonizes the "other." In this epic Rama's wife Sita is abducted by Ravana, king of the rakshasas, which triggers the battle between Rama and the rakshasas. An oft-debated question is what historical group of people the rakshasas represent. Sheldon Pollock suggests that a concrete identification of the rakshasas is irrelevant; what is relevant is that the identity of this "other" group is flexible and can be altered depending on the times.¹¹ This flexibility of the identity of the "other," I believe, is one reason why the *Ramayana* has been employed again and again as a vehicle for the demonization and domination of other groups on the basis of historical shifts in political structures. Contemporary Hindutva nationalism has frequently interpreted the rakshasas as representing the Muslim community, the dangerous "other" within contemporary Indian society.

Despite this flexibility in the identification of the "other" group, the *Ramayana* has historically acted as a hegemonizing influence that has promoted a dominant North Indian Brahmanical, Sanskritic culture over South Indian Dravidian culture. In this context the *rakshasas* of the Valmiki *Ramayana* (and of other Northern renditions) have been interpreted as representing a radicalised depiction of southern Dravidian Indians conquered by the northern Brahmanic crew led by Rama. In this way the current popularity of the *Ramayana* epic may be threatening not only to the Muslim culture in contemporary India, but also the historical plurality of Hindus. Tapan Basu et al. have discussed this in the context of the Vishva Hindu

Parishad (VHP), arguing that the centrality given to their version of Rama worship ruptures traditional devotional patterns in Bengal and other non-Hindi belt regions and legitimises the operations of an authoritarian political formation that defines not only Muslims, but also Hindus solely in its own terms.¹²

Rakshasas, both male and female, as variously interpreted "others" who lie outside the Sanskrit fold are a threat to the existing social order. In the *Amar Chitra Katha Ramayana*, this threat is made apparent through the visual depiction of the rakshasas, which may be seen as indicative of racial differences. In the *Ramayana*-related comic issues all humans are fair-skinned, except for blue-skinned, divine Rama. All men are handsome and well muscled; all women are fair-skinned, voluptuous, and have flowing hair. Even Hanuman and other animal allies of Rama are human-like. The rakshasas are depicted differently: They are dark-skinned, stocky, and grotesque. The men have potbellies and pointy moustaches. Only ten-headed Ravana and his brother Vibhishana, both commonly regarded as heroes, are drawn with well-muscled, fair-skinned bodies. The women rakshasis are also dark-skinned and stocky, with sagging breasts, fangs, and exaggerated noses and lips. Apart from this overtly negative depiction of the dark-skinned rakshasas, their threatening status as "other" is also suggested through the pejorative depictions of less-restrained sexual behaviour by the female rakshasis. This topic will be taken up in the following discussion.

Sita and Shrupanakha

The *Ramayana* is a South Asian epic tradition found in a multiplicity of tellings. The *Ramayana* as told by Valmiki in Sanskrit (circa 2nd c. BCE – 2nd c. CE) is the most extensive early

literary telling of the life of Rama, and it is this version that is widely regarded as the "original" *Ramayana*. *Amar Chitra Katha* has produced issues that are based on other tellings of the *Ramayana*, but their pre-planned bound miniseries version is entitled *Valmiki's Ramayana* (no. 10001). The introduction to this issue states the relation and import of Valmiki's work to the other *Ramayanas*:

"Valmiki's *Ramayana* is believed to be the first poetic work written in Sanskrit; it is, therefore, referred to as the Adikavya. Valmiki's monumental work influenced other great poems on the same theme. Among these are the Hindi, Tamil and Bengali versions of the *Ramayana* written by Tulsidas in the North; Kamban in the South; and Krittivasa in the East."¹³

The reason for the exalted status given to the Valmiki *Ramayana* by the publishers of *Amar Chitra Katha* is that they too think of it as the "original" version of the *Ramayana*. That the original source of this tradition is appealed to, despite the fact that other versions are actually more popular in contemporary India (such as the sixteenth-century A.D. Hindi epic *Ramcaritmanas* of Tulsidas¹⁴), indicates that there is an effort in the production of these comics to seek legitimise of the values found within them via an appeal to the ancientness and authenticity of the tradition.

The Valmiki *Ramayana* presents Sita and Rama as the ideal woman and man. However, this characterisation can pose a dilemma for authors and audiences alike, as several episodes in the epic can be seen as morally ambiguous. I will explore two such episodes – the mutilation of Shrupanakha and Sita's ordeal – to discern how a gendered notion of Indianness is constructed in the Valmiki's *Ramayana* comic book.

In the first episode, Shrupanakha sees Rama and desires him immediately; hence she decides to approach him. She assumes an attractive human female form, introduces herself, and asks Rama to marry her. Rama replies that he is already married and jokingly suggests she ask Lakshmana. Lakshmana also protests, saying that he is unworthy of her. Twice rejected, Shrupanakha asks Rama if he spurns her because of his ugly wife, Sita. Shrupanakha then threatens to devour Sita so that she alone can have Rama. But as Shrupanakha approaches Sita, Rama intervenes and commands Lakshmana to stop her. Lakshmana does stop her from attacking Sita and proceeds to mutilate her, cutting off her ears and nose. Shrupanakha then returns to her true rakshasi form and flees to her brothers.

The comic book faithfully reproduces this episode, including a drawing of Shrupanakha's mutilated face. Anant Pai, editor of *Amar Chitra Katha*, has stated that in consideration for his young audience he minimizes the violence depicted in the comics while still truthfully retelling the story or events. One example of this policy at work is found in the comic book *Akbar* (no. 603), in which Akbar's cruelty as a young king is demonstrated by retelling his beheading of Hemu. The actual beheading is not depicted; rather, it is reported in the text accompanied by a drawing of the gallows, in silhouette, where it occurred.¹⁵ In light of this careful policy, we must conclude that the *Amar Chitra Katha* staff saw no reason to censor Shrupanakha's mutilation because she is so clearly "other" as a *rakshasi* that this standard simply doesn't apply.

Does this depiction of the ideal man and the "other" woman carry any implications for the adolescent audience of these comics? Frequently in male nationalist ideologies in which

women are allowed no agency they are relegated to the symbolic realm, as the boundary marker of a community's honour. This communal honour is ultimately dependent upon control over expressions of their sexuality. Purshottam Agarwal argues that this nationalist construction results in opposing male attitudes directed to different groups of women – "ours" and "others" – and that rhetoric about the dignity of "our" women only complements the aggressiveness such ideologies direct against women from the "other."¹⁶ In this episode of the comic book a message that may be received – whether it is intentional or not – is that it is okay, even morally justified,

of a woman in the specific way described in the epic can symbolically be interpreted as a gendered punishment for sexual transgression. In Indian legal texts disfigurement of a woman is the most common punishment for crimes of a sexual nature.¹⁷ Shrupanakha was mutilated not for her attack on Sita, but for her sexual assertiveness. But Shrupanakha does not suffer this humiliation just because she has been sexually assertive – her status as the "other", also figures in her disfiguration. In communal struggles the humiliation of the "other" woman plays a crucial role:

"In struggles between different



to physically harm an "other" woman. Indeed, the "other" woman often is perceived as deserving punishment because her sexuality is not controlled according to the criteria of the dominant group.

Shrupanakha is a sexually assertive woman. She approaches the two men, informs them bluntly of her sexual desires, and is not just mocked for it, but is punished. The immediate reason for her mutilation might appear to be her threatened attack on Sita, but the actual reason is more intimately connected with her gender, sexuality, and communal identity. Had the idea been just to subdue Shrupanakha, her mutilation would not have been necessary. Mutilation

of a woman in the specific way described in the epic can symbolically be interpreted as a gendered punishment for sexual transgression. In Indian legal texts disfigurement of a woman is the most common punishment for crimes of a sexual nature.¹⁷ Shrupanakha was mutilated not for her attack on Sita, but for her sexual assertiveness. But Shrupanakha does not suffer this humiliation just because she has been sexually assertive – her status as the "other", also figures in her disfiguration. In communal struggles the humiliation of the "other" woman plays a crucial role:

Shrupanakha is mutilated at Rama's order because as a sexually assertive "other" woman she represents a threat to the community, and it is the ideal man's duty to eliminate the threat of the "other" community.

I believe that this episode in the Ramayana is not morally ambiguous

when understood from the standpoint of Hindu nationalism as interpreted by the advocates of Hindutva. Quite the opposite, this is one of the reasons that Rama is often upheld in contemporary contexts as the ideal man – because he defends the honour of his community and proves his masculinity through this humiliating treatment of the “other” woman.

The second episode to be examined is Sita’s ordeal. In the Ramayana Rama’s wife Sita is abducted by Ravana, the rakshasa king, and taken away to Lanka. Rama grieves heartily at this loss and gathers forces in order to battle Ravana. Eventually Rama does defeat and kill Ravana, regaining his wife. But when the two meet again Rama rejects her, saying that no man can take back a wife who has lived in another man’s house. Sita swears her faithfulness to Rama and enters into a fire ordeal to prove it. The god of fire recognises Sita’s purity and refuses to consume her, hence Rama accepts her, stating that he did not doubt her purity, but he being the king, it had to be proved to the people.

There is an important contrast between the sexuality of “our” women in this episode and the sexuality of the “other” woman in the previous episode. “Other” women are lustful, sexually aggressive women who roam the forest alone, not under the control of a husband, father, or brother, and proposition strangers; “our” women are chaste women who become sexually and morally suspect when not under the protection of a male relative. This episode is another window into understanding the construction of ideal gender roles.¹⁹

Audiences often question how Rama, depicted as such a loving husband, could reject his wife and watch her immolate herself. Again, I suggest that this episode is not morally ambiguous, but is consistent

with the reasons the dominant culture sees Rama as the ideal man: Rama is the ideal man not only because he goes to amazing lengths in order to retrieve his woman from the “other” community, but also because he refuses to accept a wife who is tainted merely by the extent and duration of her proximity to the rakshasa chief.

Sita, in turn, is the ideal woman not only because she remained faithful to her husband after she was abducted by an “other” man, but also because she could prove her chastity before her community. A conclusion that can be drawn is that the ideal woman should desire to kill herself before allowing herself or her husband’s reputation to be defiled, however unjustified the accusation of impurity. In this way women’s sexuality is a definitive boundary of communal honour:

“Exclusive control of her sexuality by the legitimate ‘owner’ is the practical honour. That is why it is expected that an ideal woman should end her life, which is incidental anyway, if her chastity has been defiled. While this holds true in the context of honour, where the community is concerned, an ideal woman is expected to offer herself for the supreme sacrifice even if there is merely a probability of defilement.”²⁰

These gender ideals are not just relics of a past era, but have been upheld by many within Hindu nationalist movements. An example of the modern employment of such gender ideals, and the simultaneous demonization of the “other” community, is found in the discourse on the abduction and rape of Indian women during partition. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin discuss how the leaders of the Indian state regulated women’s sexuality at the time of partition in order to preserve the community’s honour, and cite examples of how the Ramayana was

appealed to by those leaders in order to spur men into taking combative action with the “other” community of Pakistani Muslim men:

“We all know our history,” said one MP in Parliament, “of what happened in the time of Shri Ram when Sita was abducted. Here, where thousands of girls are concerned, we cannot forget this. We can forget all the properties, we can forget every other thing but this cannot be forgotten.” And again, “As descendants of Ram we have to bring back every Sita that is alive.”²¹

Some legislators even advocated the humiliation of Pakistani Muslim women by counter-abduction and counter-rape, under the guise of protecting the honour of Indian women. Furthermore, the sexual contrast between “our” women as embodied by Sita and the “other” women as embodied by Shrupanakha was paralleled in this discourse. Hindu women were characterised as mothers and innocent victims, while Muslim women were characterised as dangerous, sexual women representing a threat to the social order.²²

Sita’s Abandonment and Redemption

The above examination of two morally ambiguous episodes from the comic Ramayana illustrates several ways in which *Amar Chitra Katha* – along with other popular culture retellings of the Ramayana epic – may be interpreted as existing in relationship with the Sangh Parivar type of Hindu nationalism, by similarly employing the Ramayana epic tradition to both reinscribe extremely restrictive gender roles and to critique contemporary social behaviour. The interconnected relationship between the Ramayana tradition, Hindutva ideology, and mainstream forms of public culture such as comic books is perhaps best

demonstrated by the way one of the final scenes of the Ramayana epic is handled in the *Valmiki's Ramayana* issue of the comic book series.

In the Uttara Kanda of the Valmiki Ramayana, Rama is informed that rumours are circulating amongst the people about Sita's impurity due to her stay with Ravana. He decides that, as king, he cannot keep a wife whose purity is questionable, even though she has already undergone a fire ordeal to prove her virtue before the community. For the sake of his reputation as king, Rama, the ideal monarch, repudiates Sita, who is pregnant, and abandons her in the forest. In the *Valmiki's Ramayana* comic book this episode is missing. This version of the epic ends just after Rama accepts Sita, following her survival of the fire ordeal. At this point in the comic book the two return to Ayodhya where Rama assumes the throne and they live happily ever after, clearly deviating from the Valmiki tradition:

"Rama ruled his kingdom wisely and strictly followed the path of dharma. People followed his example and carried out their respective duties. Under Rama's rule, there was universal happiness."²³

Amar Chitra Katha comics are advertised as scholastically accurate products that make good educational tools. However, Anant Pai, editor of *Amar Chitra Katha*, also believes that the stories told must be pleasant. As John Stratton Hawley has noted, Anant Pai operates by a Sanskrit maxim that states: "You must tell the truth; you must tell what is pleasant. And that which is unpleasant, just because it is true, you need not say it."²⁴

In the Valmiki's *Ramayana* comic both the mutilation of Shrupanakha and the fire ordeal of Sita are narrated; both of these events may certainly be considered unpleasant. Yet the

unpleasant act of Rama abandoning Sita, then pregnant with twin boys, is not narrated. For what purposes is the "truth," or faithfulness to the original story line sacrificed to present a happily-ever-after scenario in the comic book *Ramayana*? The introduction to Valmiki's *Ramayana* gives a reason for the exclusion of the events of the Uttara Kanda in this comic book:

The *Ramayana* consists of 24,000 verses. There are six sections – The Bala Kanda, the Ayodhya Kanda, the Aranya Kanda, the Kishkindha Kanda, the Sundara Kanda and the Yuddha Kanda. The seventh section, the Uttara Kanda, is probably an interpolation.²⁵

Although the Uttara Kanda is thought to be a later interpolation by many scholars, it remains nonetheless an essential part of the *Ramayana* that is almost always included in both scholarly and popular versions of the epic. Certainly, as Sally Sutherland notes, the Uttara Kanda resolution is essential to the *Ramayana* epic as

understood today:

That the epic has survived for so long in its present form is testimony, in part, to the fact that the relationship [between Rama and Sita] is felt to be resolved, and in a manner that is understandable and acceptable to its vast audience.²⁶

Although the events of the Uttara Kanda were left out of the comic book retelling of the Ramayana out of a sense of scholarly exactitude, and not out of an explicit identification with Sangh Parivar ideology, nonetheless this recasting of the *Ramayana* tradition may still lend itself to a Hindutva reading, as does much of public culture with its inherent emphasis on the *Ramayana* epic. I suggest that a secondary reason for the elimination of the final abandonment of Sita from the comic Ramayana is because this episode and the events following it call into question Rama's status as the ideal man.

In the Valmiki *Ramayana* when



Sita's abduction by Ravana

Rama abandons Sita in the forest after hearing of the scandalous rumours spreading amongst the common people, he is fulfilling his *dharma* as the king of Ayodhya. Throughout the whole of this *Ramayana*, Rama is repeatedly characterised as the ideal king, whose concerns are first and foremost those of his subjects. He is a ruler always willing to put duty before his own or his wife's happiness. In the *Valmiki Ramayana*, Rama is the ideal king, not the ideal husband.

When this episode is eliminated from the *Valmiki's Ramayana* comic, Rama is preserved as both the ideal monarch and the ideal man/husband. The happily-ever-after ending both emphasizes Sita's idealness as a wife, and absolves Rama of all blame. Interestingly, the televised version of the *Ramayana* by Ramanand Sagar also drastically altered the ending of the epic by portraying Sita as insisting on going into exile – rather than Rama banishing her – in order to again portray Sita as the ideal, self-sacrificing, long-suffering wife and Rama as the ideal king who is beyond reproach.²⁷ These altered endings leave little space for their respective audiences to criticise Rama's treatment of Sita, and attempt to convey the impression that universal happiness will be achieved if the rule of *Ram Rajya* can be attained.

In many respects *Amar Chitra Katha* has attempted to promote national integration and to recognise and appreciate diversity. However, in several other respects these comic books – like other mainstream public culture media – overlap with Hindutva nationalist ideology. This overlap is most apparent in terms of the resolution of the “woman question,” the place and role of women in society. The comic book retelling of the *Ramayana* uses women as symbolic boundary markers in two ways: The “traditional” Hindu wife/mother, represented by Sita, who stands in the centre of society; and the sexually corrupt “other” woman,

represented by Shrupanakha, who stands at the margins of society, marking and clarifying its boundaries. This is an example of masculinist nationalist ideology that depends upon a binary, oppositional categorization of women into “ours” and “others.” Though oppositional, these categories are similar in that both women are objectified and relegated to the symbolic realm, restricted from active citizenship. The so-called notion of “universal happiness” under *Ram Rajya* that the comic book closes with, is based upon violence and exclusion towards women and cultural others.

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References

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3. V.D.Savarkar, *Hindutva: Who is a Hindu?* (Bombay: Veer Savarkar Prakashan, [1923], reprint 1969), 11-12.
4. Sally Sutherland, “Sita and Draupadi: Aggressive Behavior and Female Role-Models in the Sanskrit Epics,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 109.1 (Jan.-Mar. 1989), 77.
5. *Rama*, *Amar Chitra Katha* no. 504, (Bombay: India Book House, [1970], reprint May 1998), inside front cover.
6. Paula Richman, “E.V. Ramasami's Reading of the *Ramayana*” in Richman (ed.), *Many Ramayanas: The Diversity of a Narrative Tradition in South Asia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 176. Another Rama/Ravana reversal is found in C. Subrahmaniya Bharati's retelling entitled *The Horns of the Horse*. See Paula Richman, “Ram as Abductor: Subrahmaniya Bharathi's *Ramayana*” in *Manushi* 116 (Jan.-Feb. 2000), 15-18.
7. Velcheru Narayana Rao, “A *Ramayana* of Their Own: Women's Oral Tradition in Telegu” in P. Richman (ed.), op. cit., 129; and Nabaneeta Dev Sen, “When Women Retell the *Ramayana*,” *Manushi* 108 (Sept.-Oct. 1998), 18-27.
8. Quoted in Vir Bharat Talwar, “Feminist Consciousness in Women's Journals in Hindi, 1910-20” in K. Sangari and S. Vaid (eds.), *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, [1989], reprint 1997), 228.
9. On the modern definition of tradition, see Lata Mani, “Contentious Traditions: The Debate on *Sati* in Colonial India” in K. Sangari and S. Vaid (eds.), *ibid.*, 88-126; and Rosalind O'Hanlon, “Issues of Widowhood: Gender and Resistance in Colonial Western India” in D. Haynes and G. Prakash (eds.), *Contesting Power: Resistance and Everyday Social Relations in South Asia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 62-108.
10. Although the time of the Veda, the *krita yuga*, is the time when *dharma* is the purest, nonetheless the epic era is commonly regarded as a golden age in contrast with the modern era.
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12. Tapan Basu et al., op. cit., 57
13. *Valmiki's Ramayana*, *Amar Chitra Katha* no. 10001, (Bombay: India Book House, 1992), inside front cover.
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16. Purshottam Agarwal, “Savarkar, Surat and Draupadi: Legitimising Rape as a

Political Weapon," in T. Sarkar and U. Butalia (eds.), *Women and the Hindu Right*, (Delhi: Kali Press, 1995), 30.

17. See Kathleen Erndl, "The Mutilation of Shurpanakha," in Richman, (ed.), op. cit., 82.
18. Agarwal, op. cit., 38-9, parenthetics original. Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin also discuss the range of sexual violence which was acted out on "other" women in the communal violence of partition, including mutilation, disfigurement, tattooing or branding of breasts and genitalia, amputating breasts, knifing open the womb, and raping, among other acts of violence. See their book *Borders and Boundaries: Women in India's Partition*, (New Delhi: Kali for Women, 1998), 43.
19. This nationalist construction of the pure, sexually controlled Hindu woman and the impure, lustful Muslim woman has been reproduced in many different mediums. An interesting example is found in the 19th century play by Pandit Gauri Datta, "A Mime of Hindi and Urdu," in the Hindi-Urdu language controversy. In this play Urdu is depicted as a Muslim prostitute, while Hindi is represented as a Hindu matron modestly clothed in a sari. See Christopher R. King, "Images of Virtue and Vice: The Hindi-Urdu Controversy in Two Nineteenth-century Hindi plays" in K. Jones (ed.), *Religious Controversy in British India*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 123-148.
20. Agarwal, op. cit., 38.
21. Constituent Assembly of India (Legislative) Debates, December 1949, cited by Ritu Menon and Kamla Bhasin, "Abducted Women, the State and Questions of Honour," in K. Jayawardena and M. De Alwis, (eds.), *Embodied violence*, (Delhi: Kali Press, 1996), 6. See also Menon and Bhasin, *Borders and Boundaries*, op. cit., esp. pp. 68 and 114.
22. See Urvashi Butalia, "Muslims and Hindus, Men and Women," in T. Sarkar and U. Butalia (eds.), op. cit., esp p. 70.
23. Valmiki's *Ramayana*, op. cit., 95.
24. Hawley, op. cit., 109. The original Sanskrit quote is "satyam bruyat priyam bruyat ma bruyat satyam apriyam."
25. Valmiki's *Ramayana*, op. cit., inside front cover.
26. Sutherland, op. cit., 78.
27. Purnima Mankekar, *Screening Culture, Viewing Politics*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 213.

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