

## **An Analysis of Devi in the Graphic Novels of India: A Feminist Case Study.**

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**Abstract** – This paper proposes to examine an existential pastiche ‘Devi’ in India as a point of departure, and construct a continuum which interfaces with the lived lives of Indian women. The Devi is a popular and venerated motif in literature. She is the space upon which the contestations of woman’s empowerment and identities are reconfigured in the present day India. However constructed upon binaries which make her central and essential in all her discourses also fragments her into an open unrestrictive discursive field, which remains a simulacrum. Furthermore, the all-pervading popular rhetoric of ‘Devi’ is a part of the male hegemonic discourse, and the modern day paradox lies in the desirability of a Devi, *aka* ‘superwoman’, in terms of recognizable roles, images and models. Not only is an attractive and desired self-image of women constructed, it also provides a normative model of citizenship for the gendered female.

**Key words** – Graphic novels, popular culture, feminism, deconstruction, representation, women, digitalization.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Recent development in social thoughts have heightened our awareness of how theories of emancipation can be blind to their own dominating, exclusive and restrictive tendencies and how feminism is not innocent of such tendencies (Foucault, 1984; Grimshaw, 1993). For instance, in India, the discourses which featured strong women also taught them to maintain self-discipline necessary to maintain their femininity while pursuing individual wish fulfillment in a predominantly masculine world. The paper proposes to explore the representation of the Indian superwoman Devi in the graphic novel series *Devi* produced in the year 2006-2008 by Virgin Comics. Located within the framework of recent developments in the social, economic and political areas in India, the Devi embodies the idea of “perfectness” within changing hegemonic assumptions and power centers of India. The framework of the research paper is approached by its foci on difference, deconstruction and decentering as its theoretical framework.

As resistances occurred within the feminist discourse of emancipation, it also created new power centers that politicized the domains of gender formations, gender roles and gender expectations. The millennium year which heralded a digitalized, internet savvy India, several confrontations and negotiations occurred simultaneously. This was the time in which a new morality was in the process of being negotiated, women were beginning to try on new social roles, gender boundaries were getting permeable and within various forms of literature, young, fearless, unmarried women were attaining prominence gradually. This narrative created pronounced and untenable schism for women who were unable to negotiate the structures that maintained the status quo.

The plot of the graphic novel *Devi* produced by Virgin comics in the year 2006-2006. This series is produced by Shekhar Kapoor, the noted film and documentary maker. The plot is based on a fictional character Tara Mehta, a young Indian girl, who transforms into a Devi through certain circumstances. The background of the story situates Devi, a goddess, created by the gods to fight a renegade god Bala in the second century of man. The Devi on the instruction of the supreme lord Bodha captures, blinds and imprisons Bala in volcanic craters for eternity. However, Bala escapes in a bat like form and enters the earth in the present day. With the return of Bala in the present day universe as a criminal bat like form, the Devi is recalled again. This time she takes the form of Tara Mehta, a young, single woman living in Sitapur, India. The evil lord Bala in the quest of a ‘source’ which is a sacred power channel through which the prayers of the humanity on earth is channelized to ‘Aakashik’ or the story’s representation of heaven. This replenishes the power of the gods and makes them even more powerful and purer.

The present day Devi, who is Tara Mehta, lives with her boyfriend. The boyfriend Iyam is the agent of the evil lord Bala. However as soon as she awakens to her powers as a Devi, Iyam shows Devi his true colors and becomes her opponent. An Apsara named Kratha is hired to kill her. Kratha is a mercenary and carries her

own burden of a troubled past. An alcoholic policeman named Rahul helps the Devi in her battles, and a double agent Amara works for both the sides, as situations suit her, however it is the gods for whom she ultimately surrenders. This story is loosely based on the story of a mythic Hindu goddess Durga who killed the Demon Mahisa in a battle, in an episode from the Markendya Purana.

The politics behind selection of women characters from particular myths relied upon marching the moral high ground, as it subsumed within itself women from the ‘other’- religions, castes and statuses.’ The elite Hindu woman gained visibility, as the subject of such discourses who maintained a distance from the ‘other’. The ‘other’ consisted of heroines from folk stories, oral narratives, or women from the margins; women who did not belong to high castes and were never princesses or queens etc. Sudesh Vaid and Kumkum Sangari write in the introduction to their seminal work *Recasting Women: Essays in colonial History* that

“A new kind of segregation is imposed on women, whose identity is now to be defined in opposition to women from the lower economic strata....Popular cultural forms are virtually construed as sexual threats which will lure women into adultery. What is at issue here is both women themselves and the language in which they will speak, think, read and write.”(Sangari and Vaid 1989)

“Indian Womanhood has been thus ‘invented’, ‘imagined’ and ‘defined’, and a complex process of myth formation has constructed gender in the Indian society, especially in its history of the last two hundred and fifty year”.( Bagchi 1995 ).

The inadequacies in the representation of the women of India however shows a shift in the graphic novels. The woman are reproduced in the various texts in their transitioning roles. These texts grounded their discourse on the changing social, economic, and political conditions of India. A niche segment in the graphic novels grounded the representation of the “New Woman” based on the ancient motif of Devi. The interpolation of Devi is not a new phenomenon as Devi has been maneuvered, transitioned and reproduced as a motif in the various forms of literature and literary transmission from time immemorial in India.

However, the graphic novel universe is a hyper real world, which extrapolates on representations of “perfect” gendered bodies adhering to the practice of reaffirming gendered boundaries. The hyperbolic representation of Devi as the super woman shows a transformation in her representations as well as her roles. Located within the framework of recent developments in the social, economic and political areas, the Devi embodies the idea of “perfectness” within changing hegemonic assumptions and power centers of India.

The selected text Devi moves back in time to trace and reestablish dominant culture which was stereotypical in its treatment of a perfect Indian woman in the genre of graphic novels of India. Tropes either produced the chaste *pativrata* stereotype or a *virangana* stereotype, who was restricted only to the patriarchal limits of functioning in the story, and was located in the Hindu golden age ( McClain 84). However, the brand new Super woman Devi oscillates between many worlds in the graphic novels now. Devi co-exists in a digitalized graphic multiverse of the present and also among the gods in heaven in the past. She embraces a duality in her representations which strives towards perfectness in both the worlds, simultaneously. Both the perspectives combine to personify a duality which signifies her contemporariness and recasts her anew as the superwoman of India.

Devi’s locomotion from past to present to future is facilitated by the gutter spaces between the panels which is an unlimited space for a fantastic closure. The Devi pioneers the use of spandex and leather in her clothing that “equips her with perfect killer charisma”, power over the cyber world, communication technology, and abundance of capital and labour that enables her to optimize her resources, her vocabulary is enriched with “coolest catch phrases”, and is produced to garner “perfect TRP’s”. She is equally ephemeral, obedient, docile and virgin like in the past among gods and heavenly creatures. She balances her work, her home and family, boyfriends, gods, warfare’s, drug lords, double agents, children, and also saves the world in a day’s work. Thereafter, she transits to the past where she folds her hands and reports everything to her creators in veneration.

The challenging part of the discourse lies in the oscillation that the Devi makes in order to maintain an equilibrium with the present which also shares a focus with the past. The collective pattern of superwomanlike traits that emerge out of this movement are: the conquering heroine is an invincible source of power and seemingly can do anything. She is morally superior to the rest and is beyond temptation. She is also beyond fatigue who works during the day for a living and dispenses vigilante justice during the night. All golden, beautiful and innocent she is the epitome of beauty who is also maternal, sacrificial, and obedient. The duality of representation of the Devi in the graphic novels of India is an ideal of perfectness in the past, present, and the future world, a signifier of her superwoman self, that does not correspond to anything signified, which is a pure simulacrum.

The multiple tropes that identify the superwoman Devi, and associate her with magical acts of heroism also bear the trope of an “other”, of a dark figure who stands outside the mainstream, and sublimates the burden of her unique status, and her irreducible strangeness, into the service and protection of the society the Devi represents. The politics of downplaying the difference between women results in the death/defeat/invisibility of the other. Therefore insistence on difference, one that finds homogeneity as a key to represent the Devi,

becomes arguably the master motif of the superwoman. This discourse becomes a foundational premise of the superwoman myth.

The framework of the paper lies in the deconstruction of an 'essentialist' vision of a woman projected as the Devi. The common threads running through the discourse of the Devi as the Superwoman of India is approached by its foci on difference, deconstruction and decentering as its theoretical framework. The dualistic thinking in the representation of the Devi affirms to binaries that merely reproduces dominant discourses and regulatory power. However, viewing the Devi's identity as multiple, fluid and fragmented, the conceptualization of power derived from her too becomes ephemeral and ubiquitous. A deconstructive reading breaks from this oppositional structures to assert a total difference.

The new generation of graphic novels internalizes "difference" in order to create a homogenous metanarrative and in doing so ultimately robs women of their individual agency. The plot of the primary texts are mainly located in their two functions. The male heroes in the graphic novels interact with a schematic order which is set in advance. In recasting the Devi from an ordinary woman, the plot centers around either purging or domesticating the Devi by transforming her as the new superwoman. The production of the superwoman is located at a time when India was easing into a commercial world of digitalization. The transformations of the ancient motif of Devi in the graphic novels betray acts that are "light on issues and heavy on vanity" (Baumgardner and Richards, 1997, 164-165). The texts engage with acts like vigilante justice, body shaming, mystification of sexual violence etc. to reproduce a superwoman Devi. The texts are an encounter with the burgeoning media savvy generation which initiates and also produces popular culture, and which has also produced the Devi as the superwoman of India.

Thus by tracking/problematising a single figure from Indian mythology that Indian writers, artists, performers have repeatedly appropriated: Devi, the goddess, the savior, the superwoman one can gauge the contours of a continuing transformation with more clarity, and continuity. Devi's trajectory and revision through visual narratives over several years, from goddess to a feminist superhero, from a dutiful wife to a combative warrior, from a dutiful daughter to a single working girl, mirrors her changing status. Moreover, the continuous hybridization with contemporary tropes, comic superheroines of the west, and the popular culture is a striking example of Devi's transformation as the superwoman of India.

Transformations are effected through social, economic, cultural and attitudinal reforms. In spite of productions centered on lofty discourses, reflecting transformation of an ancient motif Devi to an empowered superwoman, the texts hardly shifts the traditional markers that associate Devi to her divinity. The markers engage in a culture of persuasion by manipulating representations that encourage a regressive order. In reading the graphic novels, it appears that the ideas, values and representations that make up the discourse of Devi are woven like a tapestry that associate her with threads of caste, class, status and religion. The restrictive discourse that acts counter to freedom and downplays the importance of individual and small scale collective actions, as well as indirect and covert acts exemplifies how theories of emancipation can become blind to their own dominating, exclusive and restrictive tendencies and how feminism is not innocent of such tendencies.

The markers are used to construct binaries, and replays them in the reemergence of the Indian superwoman Devi. In an interplay of binaries, one binary assumes a role of importance over the other. The myth centered graphic novel works hand in hand with biased traditions and religious beliefs to valorize and sanctify unequal behavior patterns between men and women. The acceptance and internalization of inequality gives rise to a culture of 'difference'. Problematising the motif of the Devi, one can examine the process by which women have also internalized the 'difference'. The hierarchized oppression or the treatment of one form more fundamental than the other fails to conceptualize multiple acts, multiple identities and multiple oppressions as simultaneous, inseparable and interlocking

The first section of the research paper makes an analysis of the motif of Devi, within the binaries that create her. The Devi is created by an elite group of men (male gods) in order to restore the world order at some point in the present day universe. Peopled by hyperbolic bodies which reek of sexism, this is the present day of the "man". The decentering lies in the description of the "creation" of the Devi as 'back in time, beyond time', which may mean at no particular time, or perhaps a time which is nonexistent. Or perhaps denotes her presence beyond a point of time. Or her inevitability which of course destabilizes the point of her creation at all. However she is created by a powerful, elite group of men for a battle in between a figurative time, somewhere in the multiverse. The journey of time within panels in the proscenium like frame is contained within graphic multiverses, as yet again, the next context refers to the time of her creation as 'at the present time' in India.

The multiple creations of the Devi's within her fixed creation is perhaps, a reflection of the Hindu belief in multiple births, through multiple times, and multiple selves. In the journey through various births, one comes across binaries like present and the past, man and woman, magical self and an ordinary self, good and bad, hell and heaven, elite and ordinary, creation and destruction etc, where one of the binaries is privileged over the other. For instance, the act of creation by the combined efforts of the male gods associates her with power. However the centrality of power is both vested in and wrested from her in the discourse. When she fights the

'other', she epitomizes power in her actions, whereas when she obediently leaves the consequences of her actions in the hands of her male creators, power is wrested from her.

The Devi is the repository of "authentic" values like chastity, sacrifice, fairness, obedience, youth, beauty etc. in all of her associations. However she is also the face of a bold, young, fearless Indian female who is not reticent to shun her domesticity in favour of an adventurous life. She is set off against the 'other' who is personified by violence, darkness, singlehood, blood lust and intense sexuality. Although the characters are multiple and heterogeneous, they are aligned to create homogeneity and convergence in their associations. The efforts on the part of the comic book writers are attempts to smooth over continuity problems between the past storylines, or to allow for new narrative directions that had been precluded by the earlier established limits in the representations of her character.

Under a homogenizing discourse one finds efforts made to create a universe where all other voices are drowned into one, where there are no variations of accents or shifts in perspectives. The one reproduction of Devi is projected as 'true' or of 'pure blood' which in turn reduces the 'others' into undifferentiated categories. The 'other' categories either become invisible towards the end or find security and assurance from the projected 'ideal' Devi. The motif of the Devi is used to reinforce and sustain social roles, as the pivot who upholds institutions of the state like law and order, justice and prescribed gender roles. However she dismantles them by the use of vigilante justice, which bears her sign of divinity. This paradoxical situation can be seen reflected in the "melting pot" of ethos in the nation where citizens take justice in their hands and by securing them as divine orders/interventions.

Since no relation of power can subsist on coercion alone, she represents the model who not only secures consent from the dominating patriarchy to live up to the 'expectation of the man' but also works tirelessly to enforce it among women in the process of socialization. In the contemporary graphic novels based on the Devi, the different perspectives of a heterogeneous population are not problematized, the one signature it bears is never erased.

As we continue reading we find that the binaries in play are imaginary constructs which work seamlessly to facilitate the patriarchy and establish order in a top-down process. For instance violence, rape or murder of an 'evil' woman in the graphic text is treated as accepted however violence against the 'good' one is condemned. If one is a good compliant woman, she is rewarded within the ambits of patriarchy through marriage and children. However if she is free and independent, either she is punished or made invisible. A "good" woman who is like the Devi sports symbolisms which emanate from her divine presence, whereas the "other" is marked by an absence. The divinity that is projected from the presence of the Devi goes on to create the difference and mark the other as diabolical.

Deconstruction is not simply the reversal of oppositions, and it's not intrinsically favoring one binary opposition over the other. The difference which is created by making an "other" also destabilizes the center by accumulating values attributed to the other. In the graphic novels the valorization of one binary over the other becomes a rhetoric that provides some kind of justification to the patriarchal order and to keep woman 'in her place'. However, the opposition is created deliberately to justify acts of oppression and dominance. The interface of both the divine and the diabolic creates a space, an order, from which the center operates and fragments again. The fragmented, fluid, indeterminate configuration of the Devi remains open to the challenges of being contained in a structure. Her transformations within the various selves dismantles the idea of a perfect fit into determinate structures.

Deconstruction perhaps assumes that all binary oppositions need to be analyzed in their manifestations that provide meaning and value to and beyond structures, in an indeterminate universe. "To be effective, and simply as its mode of practice, deconstruction creates new notions or concepts, not to synthesize the terms in oppositions but to mark their difference, undecidability, and eternal interplay" (Derrida. pp 41-43) The basic argumentation lies in an analysis which attempts to show that no one is able to separate irreplaceable singularity and machine like repeatability (or "iterability" as Derrida frequently says). Machine like repeatability of the binaries and singularity both, for Derrida, are like two opposing forces that attract one another across a limit that is indeterminate and divisible.

In the graphic novels, the Devi and the Daanvi/Dayan are the competing signs, the latter being drawn as a stereotypical evil. The motif of Daanvi/Dayan reveals her evil origins through a vicious blood lust. What follows is inevitable, the Daanvi/Dayan seeks to kill the Devi. The creation of Dayan is associated with a dark, violent, brooding, sensual, representation of a woman who always pays a price for her liberated defiance. The Dayan/ Daanvi is the diabolical woman who stands opposed to the Devi in the graphic novels. She represents the cursed 'other' who is punished by the gods by voicing her dissent over forced sex. She sports a fitted spandex black costume, has long talon like hands and gives an overall impression of a black crow. Her crow like ability is highlighted by her ability to fly, and in her disposition to tear and rip out her victims flesh. Her hands allude to a mythical character in the Ramayana named <sup>1</sup>*Soorpnakha* who was a princess in her own right but had 'fallen' from grace by voicing her desire, in a gesture of liberated defiance.

The Dayan is introduced in the texts as a fallen Apsara, and visual associations with talons as her hands foreshadow things to come. She is a hired assassin, and takes pleasure in killing her victims. She is always full of rage, which is reflected in her face, although her body is that of a beautiful woman. The Dayan is exceptional in that “she belongs to the heaven”, and can walk freely and proudly by the light of the day with complete immunity. While still evil, she also represents a feminist avenging super being who is the archetypal rebellious woman. By voicing against abusive relationships between sexes as the driving force of her existence, the Dayan invites the readers to identify with her.

The theme of revenge which associates itself with the idea of ‘rising up’ of an avenging woman is based on the harrowing tales of sexual oppression, male tyranny and violence, of subjugation and use of male power. However, from the self-same grounds of tyranny ‘rises’ the woman beautiful, ephemeral, unreal and fantastic. A far cry from real ordinary bruised oppressed self. Since the aesthetics of trauma is not an attractive option for visualisation in the graphic novels which sells attractive gendered bodies, the woman in pain is marked by her absence. From the absence rises a violent self, which is mythical, magical and dangerous, and most importantly, different from the Devi. A traumatic event or a catastrophe transforms them into women of power, strength and glory. However the Devi is transformed from an ordinary woman to goddess by the male gods to fulfil their mission, whereas the Dayan rises from a violent traumatic event, finding her redemption in the hands of the Devi.

From the glitzy pages of intellectual abstraction emerges a wronged woman, a decorative prop who is pushed into action by a supernatural force or a supernatural entity. The reticence on writing about rape or a physical assault is almost like the issue never happened. Sunder Rajan in her essay on ‘Life after rape’ writes that

‘by replaying the scene of rape, it once again makes it central to the narrative, the climax graph of its central narrative’. ...literary representations of rape have difficulty in avoiding the replication of the act in the very movement of the narrative. The fact that the enactment of rape takes place in private and secret places requires the author to conduct his readers into the innermost recesses of physical space.... The counter movement of novelistic narrative is precisely this emergence into public light. Having probed the private, the narrative then seeks to make public, broadcast the privileged knowledge gained by incursion. The female subject is caught up in this trajectory.... This incarceration is followed by her re-emergence in to the public sphere.... These too are ordeals, trials like Ahalya and Sita, that necessarily absolves the raped subject of the ‘guilt’, and thereby mark her fitness for re-entry into the social and moral domain’.

While the surrounding subtexts of living with two identities, that of an ordinary woman, and that of a vengeful goddess/demi goddesses may have mythic resonance for Indians, this conflict is generic and can be read on many levels. Dayan is deployed almost exclusively for her flinty personality, which makes the Devi’s magnanimity shine out in contrast. Her eye catching appearance, glimmering air brushed physical representation is used to fade out the stories of her marginalization’s, and if anything, she is ‘badder’ than the bad things that had ever happened to her in the past.

Dayan’s embodiment is the perfect example of women designed for the voyeuristic pleasure of the male gaze. While powerful within their narrative mythos, her gestures and postures are subordinate to the desire of a gaze that consumes her. Her body is often in contorted motion, her costumes are hyper sexualized, with a body bathed in blood she fills up the panel with full frontal shots with breasts leaning out to the readers. Nivedita Menon writes in ‘*Seeing Like a Woman*’ that in a misogynist culture like India it is “only the good woman who deserve protection”. She further writes that “every woman knows that positions marked ‘good women’ and ‘bad woman’, *susheel aurat* and *baazaru aurat*, Madonna and whore, are not stable and fixed. Every woman lives in the constant knowledge of how easy it is to fall from the light side into the dark side, and how impossible it is, once fallen, ever to get back again into the light.” (Menon 131)

The entity ‘fallen woman’ is deeply delineated from the one who is entrenched in values like purity and other ‘virtues’, in other words is *Divya* or the Devi. As the binaries interact within the different contexts in the discourse, the ‘other’ is projected as an object that does not deserve the same respect. This construction reflects upon women who have to be careful how they behave or dress, conduct themselves both in private and public spheres because the line between pure and slutty blurs and changes beyond their control and exposes women to abuse and violence.

In this understanding, the transgressors of the sanctified value systems that is the ‘other’ type of women ‘deserve’ violence as they bypasses the understanding of honor or *lajja*. The opposing force that marks the reading of the Devi is also signified by the reading of the Dayan. While the Dayan mostly serves as a background master antagonist, she remains a motivation for Devi’s actions and character evolutions.

The iron system that created identification of women perpetuated by the idea of “pure blood”, “pure gods” “pure woman” in the graphic narratives is a reflection of the mechanism that was used to sustain and maintain the differences among women. A divisive mechanism that maintained and culled women and their identities systematically for an elite patriarchy. The reader surrounded by collating and conflicting images and

ideas in the postmodern age responded naturally to the primal stimulation of fear based on disturbing, violent and undefined representations. The particular hold of images provided a political appeal and 'an external pressure to differentiate between images' of good and bad, between the Devi and the Dayan.

The hegemonic structures that are manipulated to maintain a status quo between the binaries leave out multiple voices in their representations. What the structures shun is repressive, and elitist in nature. Beyond the simple desire to develop a more egalitarian, less patriarchal world, the development of a less obsessively embodied graphic novel would go a long way to make it more inclusive. Efforts to bolster a positive body image and self-confidence among women in India by relooking at the associations of the Devi may bring about a desired change. Both men and women, but mostly women in India, experience dissatisfaction with their body shapes and sizes, and their overall appearances and compare themselves to an ideal of perfection, something like the Devi personified in the graphic novels. While increased power and agency in the representation of women has corresponded to an increased objectification of women through embodiment, it also holds true whether this power is real, can be used, and stands for the emancipatory roles for women.

The above argument brings us to the positioning of the motif Devi, who epitomizes the loftiest ideals for the women of India. The chapter problematizes the foundation of the plots in the various texts, wherein Devi and the Dayan both are projected as created of, created by, and created for men, hence their representation associate them with the secondariness. This results in a flat discourse which has preset meanings, and results in engendering flatter characters. The Devi therefore becomes a pre assigned and fixed signifier and the signified results in a site (representation) where meanings are not to be contested, where everything is forever settled. Her ultimate mission is to work in service of the man, while retaining her obedient secondary position to the man. Even as the epitome of knowledge or power or strength, she is reproduced over again as returning to the same coterie of divine men with servility. This reproduction directly affects the lived realities in the lives of women in India, where they are considered to be inferior to men and not usually allowed in active domains of social political and economic affairs of the nation due to their secondariness.

Although Devi is the one who battles the demons, she fulfills only delegatory functions. Similarly, the alter egos are also represented in menial roles like that of a secretary and a bar maid and never in leadership roles. The 'fallen' Apsara who is featured as a free agent in the graphic novels and is a hired assassin is an evil stereotype. However she too remains under the pay roll of a man, and all the women characters in one way or the other are maneuvered in such a way that they remain under the control of the man. After the assigned tasks are over, they dutifully return to the respective men in almost all the stories.

The chapter therefore analyses the deliberate departures that are artificially inserted from the static location of secondariness. As a gesture of tokenism in order to embrace an egalitarian stance in face of a transforming India this is a cleverly executed strategy. One finds that the woman characters in the graphic novels are now "allowed" restrictive outings from the strict boundaries of home. However such forays are 'allowed' only to further and fulfill the interest of the man. In a deeply consumeristic world, she ventures out to augment income of the family. Such a reality is reflected in the present times in cases of women who have to work incessantly at home, manage children and a job to supplement the ever demanding households. She is deployed in careers that are not only expendable, but are never in leadership positions. The careers are made expendable as the Devi has to work on missions chalked out in advance for her. She remains in the passive domain compared to the superior man.

The language usage is discriminatory and is exploitative. Phrases like "mere woman", "weak woman", "slut", "strumpet", "bed warmer", "wench" are juxtaposed with visuals of women in passive positions like cowering down in fear, standing with folded hands and bowed heads, tied down hands in bondage which spill from the panels into bleeds. The secondariness is an implied position not only vis a vis the man, but within her many selves, and with other woman characters, one of which is always in a dominant position compared to the other.

Although the chapter shares a focus on difference, which finds resonance in an identity politics that has undermined the active agency of woman from ages, it also hints on the lack of freedom in its resistance to identity. Apart from the simultaneous discriminations the woman characters in the graphic novels undergo, the chapter also questions freedom as resistance to categorization or identity. The association of secondariness with the Devi or the Dyan highlights not only the external forms of oppressions, but also forms of discrimination which the characters themselves signify/stand for which have in turn been internalized by the women of the nation since ages.

Yet, a connection built on difference is a complex process. Given the multiplicity and diversity in the representation of the Devi/Dayan it is difficult to lump the binaries into exclusive secondariness. The Derridean concept finds group categories as essentialist, as the groups are made of people who have heterogeneous experiences (Grant, 1993,94). The central idea that identity/secondary identity is simply a construct of language, discourse and cultural practice, and if one dismantles these fictions thereby also undermines hegemonic regimes of discourse.

Therefore, if reverting the order of structuring hierarchies and finding dressing up more powerful and liberating, then the Devi/Dayan takes precedence over her male counterpart where she becomes the center of the discourse. Discarding the disciplinary and regulatory practices which have become agents of social control, one finds the positioning of the secondariness in her representations as unstable, fluid and unfixed.

The representation of the Devi and Dayan also directs one to move towards a new reproduction of a woman who epitomizes vigilante justice against violence and trauma. She Devi is a product of the creation of a new and unprecedented discipline directed against the body. Through subtle disciplinary, regulatory practices, such as self-policing, the body of the woman transforms into a site of contestation where hegemonic ideologies engender. In the patriarchal perspective, rape is an act of violence worse than death and there can be no life after rape. Therefore the real, ordinary woman is killed, or disappears from the pages of the graphic novels, and the traumatized woman arises from the same space, all glittering and new dripping with vengeance. The graphic novels play upon this sentiment shaping one sided uni-dimensional characters that now possess impossible, fantastical mechanisms of defense. The Damini can fly, spout snakes and fire from her body, ride tigers, melt iron rods with their body heat etc. They are the projected means of retaliation, which play upon fantasy and hyper reality of the graphic world.

The narrators take an easy way out by dissolving the 'body in pain' and by creating an alter ego from the bodies of a woman subjected to violence. The visual depiction of a bruised, bloodied, wounded woman in her real state is not an aesthetically pleasing option for the graphic visualisers. Therefore the option of an alter ego with a change of name, change in physical characteristics, location, work place introduce a new improved super woman self. This woman then battles her demons with magical unrealistic weapons in the graphic novels. The entire discourse is built to cater to a society who lay their trust on the power of man and weakness of women. Her powers, if any is granted by the man, are mostly fictitious or nonexistent. Either she is killed, or she has to die out towards the end.

Such representations of "dark and violent" women are consumed by a society by what Adorno calls the "monopoly of mass culture". The graphic narrative draws parallels with the supremacist narratives, where one group overwhelmingly has all the power yet feels that there is some cabal of minorities and the marginalized who are in actual control and have the power to oppress, coerce or threaten them. And since the narrative starts out with the story board of the powerful being oppressed, actions like violence, killing, maiming and taming the marginalized is justified as self-defense. This further consolidates power for that powerful majority, and further goes on to deprive others.

Within the framework of such an account of discursively mediated dominance and inequality, this chapter focuses on an important dimension of such a dominance, that is, how social power is exercised by the medium of popular culture over the minds and actions of its members, thereby limiting the freedom of action of others, or influencing their knowledge, attitudes or ideologies.

Adorno and Horkheimer ( Adorno Horkheimer 1972) have written it in their essay " The culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception " that " even the aesthetic activities of political opposites are one in their enthusiastic obedience to the rhythm of the iron system' ..... The striking unity of the microcosm and the macrocosm presents men with the model of their culture : the false identity of the general and the particular. Under monopoly all mass culture is identical, and the lines of its artificial framework begin to show. The people at the top are no longer so interested in concealing monopoly; as its violence becomes more open, so its power grows."

As Adorno and Horkheimer write, mass culture enacts power abuse through reproduction and legitimization of cultural forms which are internalized by the society as normal. Dominance as a form of social abuse is perpetuated by the interjection of power into the cultural, social, legal and moral institutions of the society, which are created to allow more effective control, and to enable routine forms of power reproductions. The use of such a power is manipulative and persuasive which affects the minds of people. That is, through special access to, and control over the means of public discourse and communication, dominant groups or institutions may influence the structure of texts in a way that knowledge produced indirectly affects the interest of the dominant groups.

Concludingly, the paper opens up to multiple possibilities of interpretation and not just reconstruct Devi in her gender roles and expectations. The genre of graphic novels are very popular and important medium to bring about a revolution in terms of thinking in popular culture. Since the Devi is an omni present motif, who is found as a stone or an anthill in temples, as a divine woman in songs, performances, paintings, literature, an elitist depiction of the Devi becomes politically wrought. The onus lies on the popular culture to accept a multivocality in her representations over synthesis, and action over theoretical justification. Of course there are no predetermined answers and no guarantees of success, just a desire to negotiate with the "lived messiness" of the contemporary times.

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<sup>i</sup>Soorpanakha is alluded as a princess from the kingdom of Lanka, a sister of Ravan and a mythical character with sharp talon like fingers. She was cursed and faced disfigurement in the hands of Lakshmana in the epic Ramayana as she wanted to seduce the brothers Rama and Lakshmana in exile. This is an episode from Valmiki Ramayana.

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