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ANANT PAI - THE MAN BEHIND AMAR CHITRA KATHA

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In 1967, Anant Pai and his wife, who were visiting New Delhi, were at a bookstore in the city. The TV at the store was playing a quiz featuring some students from St Stephen's College and

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Pai was disappointed when the participants couldn't name the mother of Hindu god Ram. His disappointment only increased when one of them answered a toughie about a Greek god. And that was the moment Amar Chitra Katha (ACK) was born.

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Pai thought it was a shame that the youth of the time had little knowledge of Indian stories and tales. He mulled over the idea of using comic books to teach what he deemed "Indian values and themes", and took the idea to H.G. Mirchandani, then the publishing director at

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publishing firm India Book House (IBH).

Pai was hired as the editor of this new series, which he called "Amar Chitra Katha". The idea was simple. "Bharat ke bachche agar sapne dekhein to Bharat ke sapne dekhein (If the children of India dream, let them dream of India)

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Every month, Uncle Pai & his team would take up a certain theme or character from Indian epics and go through hundreds of relevant material including ancient scriptures, palm leaf manuscripts, poetry, folk-tales, etc, to collect as much genuine information as possible, and

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finally collate them into highly engaging stories narrated in the form of colorful comics which were painstakingly hand-drawn, with great attention to details.

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Despite such brilliant & exemplary comics, the initial sales were way below expectations, as centuries of oppression & brainwashing had set deep prejudice among Indians against their own culture due to which most parents were hesitant to buy such cultural books for their kids

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That's when Uncle Pai started personally carrying his comics in large suitcases to schools & showcasing/marketing them at events like annual day, sports day, cultural fest, etc.

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By directly reaching out to kids through such school events, Uncle Pai was able to make significant impact, as those kids would then persuade their parents to buy the comics.

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Once they got into the habit of reading about Indian cultural characters, they would become fans of Amar Chitra Katha, eagerly waiting for its next book launch, month after month, year after year, thereby helping it attain cult-status.

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In the process, Uncle Pai not only managed to make them aware about Indian epics & historical characters, but also inculcated Indian values and made them proud of their own cultural roots.

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There was no looking back after that. Amar Chitra Katha released titles by the hundreds and sold books by the millions (it reportedly still sells 3 million copies annually, with its 440 titles having sold more than 100 million copies till date)

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