

Vishwarakshak

P3 Project Report

Submitted by: Somnath Pal,
Senior, Animation,
IDC, IIT Bombay
Roll No: 08634006

Guide: Prof. Phani Tetali

Declaration:

I declare that this written submission represents my ideas in my own words and where others' ideas or words have been included, I have adequately cited and referenced the original sources. I also declare that I have adhered to all principles of academic honesty and integrity and have not misrepresented or fabricated or falsified any idea/data/fact/source in my submission. I understand that any violation of the above will be cause for disciplinary action by the Institute and can also evoke penal action from the sources which have thus not been properly cited or from whom proper permission has not been taken when needed.

Signature:

Name of the student:

Roll No.

Date:

Approval Sheet

This Animation Project entitled 'Vishwarakshak' under the theme 'Speculative Fiction' is approved in partial fulfillment of the Master's Degree in Animation and Film Design.

Signature:

Date:

Guide:

Internal Examiner:

External Examiner:

Chairman:

Contents

Declaration:.....	1
Approval Sheet	2
Acknowledgement:.....	5
Abstract:	6
Prologue:.....	7
Introduction:.....	8
Aims and objectives:.....	9
Influences:.....	9
Me and my history of comic books:.....	9
Influences on the film: Comic books.....	10
Influences on the film: Animation.....	12
Evolution of the story:.....	12
The story:.....	14
Story Board:.....	15
.....	16
.....	17
.....	18
.....	19
Model Sheet and Character Design:.....	20
Style:	22
Technique:.....	23

Sound:.....	23
Software Used:.....	24
Learning:	24
Conclusion:.....	25
Bibliography	25

Acknowledgement:

The project found its growth and development under the capable guidance of Prof. Phani Tetali. I owe him gratitude for his constant support and sound advice for improving the project at every stage. The project evolved and matured only because of his guidance and suggestion throughout the duration of its development.

I am also deeply thankful to my senior faculty members Prof. Shilpa Ranade, Prof. Nina Sabnani, Prof. Sumant Rao and Mr. C.P. Narayan for their invaluable supervision.

In addition, my juniors Sumeet Kalindi, K. Abhilash, Anindya Biswas and Anindya Kundu helped me considerably at various stages of the film and I owe my heartfelt thanks to them.

And last but not the least, I owe my sincere gratitude to my good friend Rakesh Nanda who has always been by my side and helped me to improve the film with constructive criticism and constant moral support.

Abstract:

'Vishwarakshak' follows the misadventures of a comic book superhero displaced into the real world. While a kid enjoys the comic book's developing plot, the superhero makes valiant attempts to get back inside the comic book before the villain succeeds in his evil schemes.

With subtle references to a few cultures that people of various classes relate to, the film attempts to make allusions to the nature of the hero we idolize in our world, and revels in the simplicity of a child's understanding of the superhero.

The film also commiserates the dilemma of such a superhero who finds himself a misfit in the other cultures.

Prologue:

Comic books have always been an integral part of my life. It was rather early in my life that my parents discovered that comic books were the only way to keep my notorious mind distracted. Since then comic book reading has been one of my more engaging experiences. From lying to thieving money out of my father's wallet for the latest comic- I have indulged in every notoriety for my love of them. As I guttled up the comic books at my local stores, I developed a sort of attachment to superheroes and their world- their morals and dilemmas, their idealistic love for humanity and the deep sense of responsibility.

The next decade, my life entered into phases of various cultural influences- from film stars to 8 bit game characters. And though most of them faded away my love for comic books and superheroes is still the same. Perhaps the idea of saving the world had a more serious appeal than what most of the other cultures offered.

Introduction:

More often the process of writing a story is initiated by personal experiences and one's attachment to it. And comic books have been a part of some of the more engaging experiences in my life. Not only was I fortunate enough to be a part of the glory days of Indrajal but I also saw the birth and evolution of some of the more prominent Indian superheroes created by Raj comics and its contemporary publishers.

There was a certain amount of fanaticism in my love for the superheroes. At some point I believed that some of the characters could actually exist in real life¹. I would dig into maps to find out the often fictitious cities mentioned in these comic books and make notes on how to get to these places, in case I found them.

But beyond this fanaticism, lay a rather simple belief- something that touched the essential question of being a superhero. At the very core, a superhero was merely somebody who fought for justice and saved the innocent. And while super powers were ostentatious attractions and their character a poor single dimensional representation- I agree, I couldn't have cared less. For me the utmost was the importance of a life saved and the evil slammed.

¹ For quite some time, I believed that the character of Phantom (circulated in India by Indrajal comics) did actually exist. One of my cousins narrated elaborately on how Phantom was born and I believed everything for true.

My influences changed as I grew, and so did my idols- but never did anything replace the selfless reasons of loving a superhero. This project subtly chronicles these influences in a more prominent whimsical plot.

Aims and objectives:

After regular discussions with my guide, following were the objectives I came up for my second film. The objectives were key points which I wanted to take away from the project, in addition to making a good film.

1. Learn timing and spacing in animation. Understanding the nature of movement is an aspect I would be focusing on, during this project. The idea is to understand the key frames in a moving body so as to depict motion better.
2. Understand how story is narrated in a visual medium. Editing, composition etc. are important aspects of storytelling in a visual medium. The aim is to understand how to use them better and not rest entirely on them.
3. Effective use of software. There were certain areas in my last film where I couldn't take advantage of softwares like After effects and Premiere. The focus shall be to understand how we could utilize the tool to achieve the visual in the head.
4. Understand how to work on ToonBoomStudio.v

5. Time management was another key issue. The idea was to create a time table to effectively use the available time, so that one is aware at every stage of his situation when compared with his deadline.

Influences:

Me and my history of comic books:

Even before I could read I was surrounded by comic books. My cousins were a huge fan of Indrajal comics and quite often they used to read me the stories from the Bengali regional prints of these comic books.

Though most of the heroes are faint in memory, I could still recall

Phantom, Mandrake and Bahadur being my favorite characters.

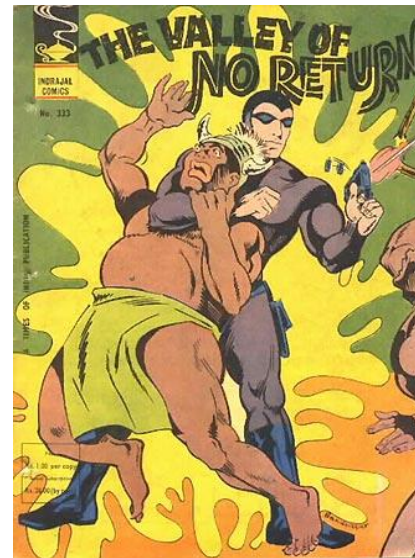


Figure 1: Phantom- one of the most popular heroes of Indrajal

Then came in the culture of Raj comics, and though it was entirely different from that of Indrajal, it still kept me hooked with its intricate plots. The early characters had the strongest impression on me- including Nagraj and Super Commando Dhruv. I particularly liked Dhruv for they were the first ones to have based their characters on various speculative scientific

phenomena, and though they could not qualify as science fictions, the stories definitely had a scientific underpinning. Apart from his combat skills, Dhruva was known for his sharp presence of mind and his ability to use the structural and chemical possibilities of everyday objects at hand to nullify the powers of the villain. In one such combat, when Doga and Bhokal were some of the other popular Raj comics' characters that I enjoyed reading. This was probably, what I can call the 'golden period' in my little history of comic book reading. I devoured every edition of each of the superheroes- drew artworks at the end pages of my classwork copies and often wrote my own stories with these characters. To an extent, I owe my inception of art and drawing to these comic books.

Some of the other publishers including Manoj and Tulsi comics had a couple of pretty interesting characters like Tausi, Angara, Jamboo, Ram Rahim etc. However, these publishers did not survive the test of time. In addition, comic books published by Amar Chitra Katha were also a tremendous influence including their series on stories based on the Indian mythology and the ever likeable, fun filled Tinkle. As a kid I sent numerous stories to Tinkle- none of which ever found a page in print.

My entry into teens saw a huge shift to western comic books and their art style. One of the other reasons for the shift was the realization that most of the Indian characters were rip offs of the western superheroes. Moreover, sparing some most of the Indian artwork was no match to their dense and detailed panels. But back then I was limited by the number of copies, since most of the local stores did not have American comic books, while the remaining stores had limited copies.

Influences on the film: Comic books

Super Commando Dhruva: The son of a trapeze artist (Sinha, Anupam), Dhruva was brought up in the circus by circus artists and animals. Under the tutelage of many circus artists he evolved as a master marksman, an agile gymnast and master of many martial art forms. In addition he developed the special ability to communicate with animals.

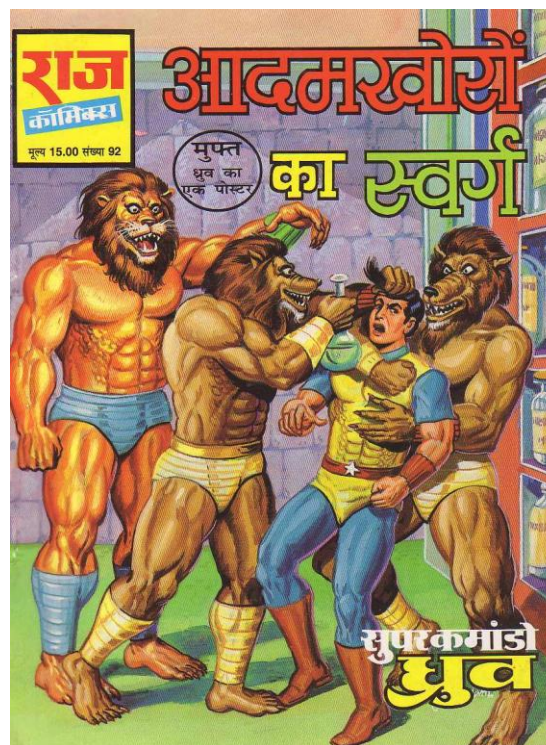


Figure 2: Dhruva in Aadamkhoron ka Swarg (Kadam V.)

The plot of the comic book in my film is derived from one of the most popular narrative structures in Dhruva's comic books.² One of the most popular plot is "Adamkhoron ka swarg" where a scientist in the Lakshwadeep islands conducts a secret research to support Hitler's quest in the World War. His research leads him in creating a gadget which could give superhuman strength to man and morphs him into Minotaur like creatures.

Doga: Doga as a kid for me was the very embodiment of morality and commitment. His stories talked on various social and political issues, and though they were too dim witted and simplistic, yet as a child I thoroughly enjoyed the read- for everything was reduced to a pure right or wrong and Doga was representative of the right.

Suraj, an orphan went through several horrifying experiences as a kid before being adopted by a Gym owner. Together with his three brothers, the Gym owner, Adrak Doga Chacha trains the kid in all forms of martial arts. Soon Suraj having championed all the forms, vows to fight crime as Doga, his masked alter ego (Wahi).

Suryansh derives his attitude from Doga- the committed, self-sacrificing personality for whom life and humanity is above the rest. The inspiration forms an inherent part of the personality and is less evident in the short duration of the film. The attitude was an outcome of the process to understand the personality of the superhero.

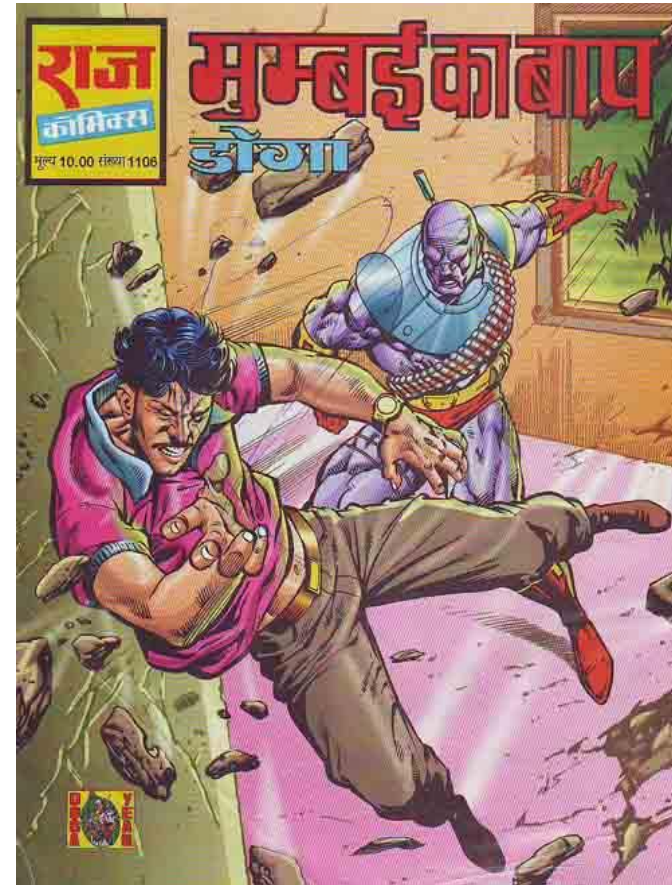


Figure 3: Doga- the epitome of morality (Manu)

² Adamkhoron ka Swarg, Hatyaari Raashiyaan, Suprima are some of the comic books which have a similar main or sub plot.

Bhokal: A legendary warrior prince of a fictional fabled fairy land. He descended on Earth on a private mission and landed in Vikasnagar, becoming a zealous defender of the interests of Vikasnagar.

The character design of Suryansh draws an inspiration from Bhokal- who deviates from the regular masked superheroes and comes closest to be called an Indian design for a superhero.



Figure 4: Bhokal with his legendary sword in Kaal Raat. (Gupta; Kadam D.)

Influences on the film: Animation

The film required me to draw a balance between a muscular form and a simplified form of basic shapes- while in one it would be difficult to achieve fluidity in animation, in the other the notion of a superhero reduces to a cartoon. The Batman animated series was one of the major influences for the animated character of Suryansh since it helped me to achieve the balance. The character designed by Bruce Timm was not only animatable, but also did justice to the comic book style. It lent itself to a style with single highlight and single shadow areas (avoiding both the extremes- flatly rendered characters and those with high amount of value information)- which were easier to deal with in an animation film.

Evolution of the story:

Though I can't claim myself to be a proficient observer of the environment around, I still have a small bank of amusing visuals and incidents. Most of my visual library comprised of little events and scenarios I was part of- be it school life, days of under graduation or those at IIT. My primary motive when I started off with the project was to somehow capture these visuals and moments in my film. With a list of some of these visuals, the attempt then was to inter-relate them to form a coherent narrative. But since some of these visuals were single moment visuals- their magic disappeared when I tried forcing a story

into them. So I imagined a moment of time freeze and brought in a character (who is not a part of this frozen instant) to play along with the moment. The character was a school going kid, and I hoped to make it do notorious activities so as to make the frozen moments more meaningful once time unfroze. The idea was to reveal in the end of how the character himself freezes time with a little watch like gadget. However, I wanted to refrain from making the character an irresponsible nut who takes advantage of this special moment. And even after several trials I failed to come up with a motivation strong enough to justify the established plot of time freeze.



The search for motivation made me try other options of building the character, and my story drifted from time freeze to parallel worlds. Here a character of the kinds of cheap B-grade horror films runs around the town to reach a particular poster before the film starts. The idea of having such a character was partially motivated by my childhood love for such films and partially by their visual appeal. An ugly Dracula looking creature with a moonlit night promised incredible visual action



to me. In addition, it gave me the opportunity to present these characters in a different light allowing me to break the typecast and assure them fresh new characters. However, as pointed out by the jury, in my first presentation, my film lacked a cultural root – it was like a Dracula looking character, which jumped around like Spiderman and ultimately landed into an Indian film poster.

With some further effort on the established concept I realized the Dracula could be replaced by an Indian comic book super hero and the film poster could be replaced by a comic book being read by the child. Here the quintessential motive for the superhero was to get back into the comic book before the kid reaches the page that marks the hero's entry. An alternate view is that the superhero must reach the comic world before the villain succeeds in his evil schemes.

In addition to being true to a single culture, the film gave me an opportunity to re-create the nostalgia of comic reading.

The story:

A strangely clad man (crown, armour and undergarment) lands onto the roof of a house. The man looks at the street through the arrangement of the houses- his eyes following a little kid on his father's shoulders reading a comic book in merriment. As he reads aloud one realizes the plot of the comic book- an evil scientist succeeds in a threatening

experiment to create a creature that'll help him dominate the world. The man gets alarmed, and in a flash starts chasing the kid. The man runs hastily on the rooftops, jumps over building and as he nears them, makes a desperate dive towards them. However, in a twist of luck a cold drink truck comes right in between the two and the man crashes onto the truck.

As the man wakes up he realizes he is a part of the advertisement poster on the truck. In the world of the poster he is surrounded by flying cans and bottles that hover around him slowly. Unable to understand his role in the poster, the man jumps out of it.

His valiant attempt ends in another twist as he lands into a video game handset of a passing kid. Before the man could understand, various creatures start coming towards him. He runs again this time, dodging incoming attacks from the creatures of this other world, and succeeds in jumping on to a spring board that bounces him off into the real world. But then again, he lands not in the comic book but in a film's poster. He realizes a beautiful maiden in his arms and the intimacy seems tempting. But at that very instant the kid reaches to that page of the comic book where the creature invented by the scientist goes about plundering the city. In a state of utter desperation the man looks around and finds electric wires overhead. He leaps and grabs one of them and swings vigorously from one cable to the other. Meanwhile the creature blows up a truck which shoots off into the air and then heads straight towards a mother and her child. Caught unalarmed the mother knows nowhere to run as the truck heads towards her. The man makes a giant leap and heads towards the comic book and quite in the nick of time just before the truck could smash the innocent skulls, grabs the truck halfway.

In a series of angry punches and kicks the man (superhero of the comic book) defeats the creature and sucks the evil into the stone in his armor. The kid overjoyed starts jumping on his father's shoulder- his superhero had saved the world yet again.

The end page flaunts the victorious pose of the superhero. As the superhero stands there basking in the glory of his achievement, the kid starts another comic book. And the hero realizes the world is in danger again, and so jumps out to save the world in the other comic book.

The story's plot through a whimsical chain of events tries to look at various idols in today's pop culture. In a world where every individual seeks his own hero to look up to, an idealistic superhero doesn't seem to fit in people's criteria for heroes. It is only a child's naivety that can appreciate his commitment and efforts. His dive into the comic book is not only representative of his commitment to save the world, but also his return to his own world- his escape from the worlds where he is a misfit.

Story Board:

The story board was an excellent way to understand the visual structure of the film. However, the idea was not to be too rigid to the structure. Consequently, the final film has certain minor changes which suited better the rhythm of the film. The changes were made in during the production process- most of them altering the subplot (i.e the plot in the comic book)

Often new images were put in at various stages to understand the flow. Since most of these images were drawn through a Wacom, one might observe a slight inconsistency in the style of the story board though most of them are rough sketches.



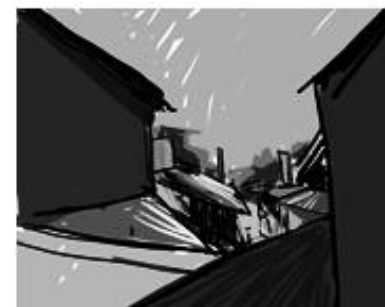
Scene opens up on the roof of one of the houses. A few street noises and sounds



A man in armour and undies comes stumbling into the scene



Close up of the man



Over the shoulder view of what the man sees.



Zoom in a shows a boy reading a comic book



The plot of the comic book is revealed by showing a few pages



The world at jeopardy



The villain's evil laugh proclaiming world domination



The man gets shocked



And then a determined look



He runs... a dramatic music picks up the tempo



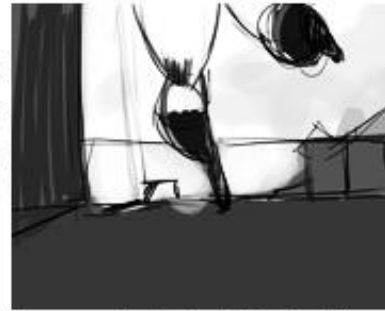
A different angle to the shot.



Reaches the eadge of a roof



Jumps to another roof



Low angle shot of him landing
on th roof



Runs again...



Nears the reading kid.



Jumps towards the kid. Dramatic
music at its peak



Suddenly a truck comes in his
way



... and he crashes on to it!
Music halts



Wakes up in sometime...



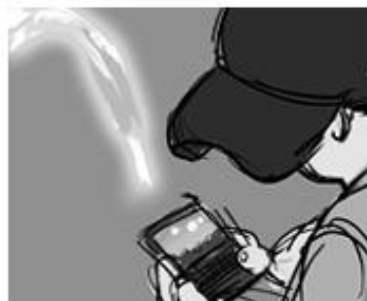
To find himself the part of a
soft drink poster



All the soft drinks are floating
around him in this world



He jumps out of the truck.
Music picks up again with the
dramatic tone.



Lands into the mobile of a kid
this time who is playing a game



Realizes he is a part of the game.
Runs dodging incomic creatures



Runs and finds a spring board...



and jumps out of the game!



And this time he lands in a
film's poster



Shows him romantically engaged
with the heroine



Jumps out of the poster to get a
hold of the electric cables



And swings through the mesh



Meanwhile the kid is about to
reach the page...



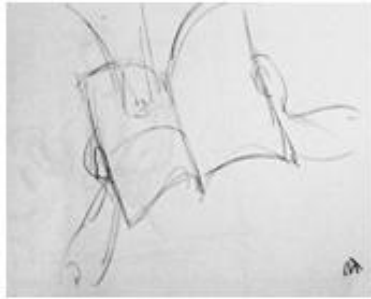
Where the villain ponders the city
killing innovent lives.



The kid is about to turn the page.
He knows the hero is going to
save the world in the next page.



And the hero desperately tries
to get into the comic book.



And just when the kid turns the page, the superhero lands in it.



Lands a kick first on the jaw...



And then a punch...



Then he lifts him up and...



And throws him hard on the floor, knocking him unconscious



The kid rejoices at the victory of the superhero. Fade out...



Fade in... the victorious pose of the superhero



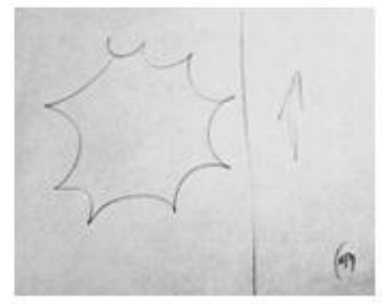
His close up. Credits start to roll



Suddenly, another kid starts reading the plot of another story



He realizes he will have to save the world again!



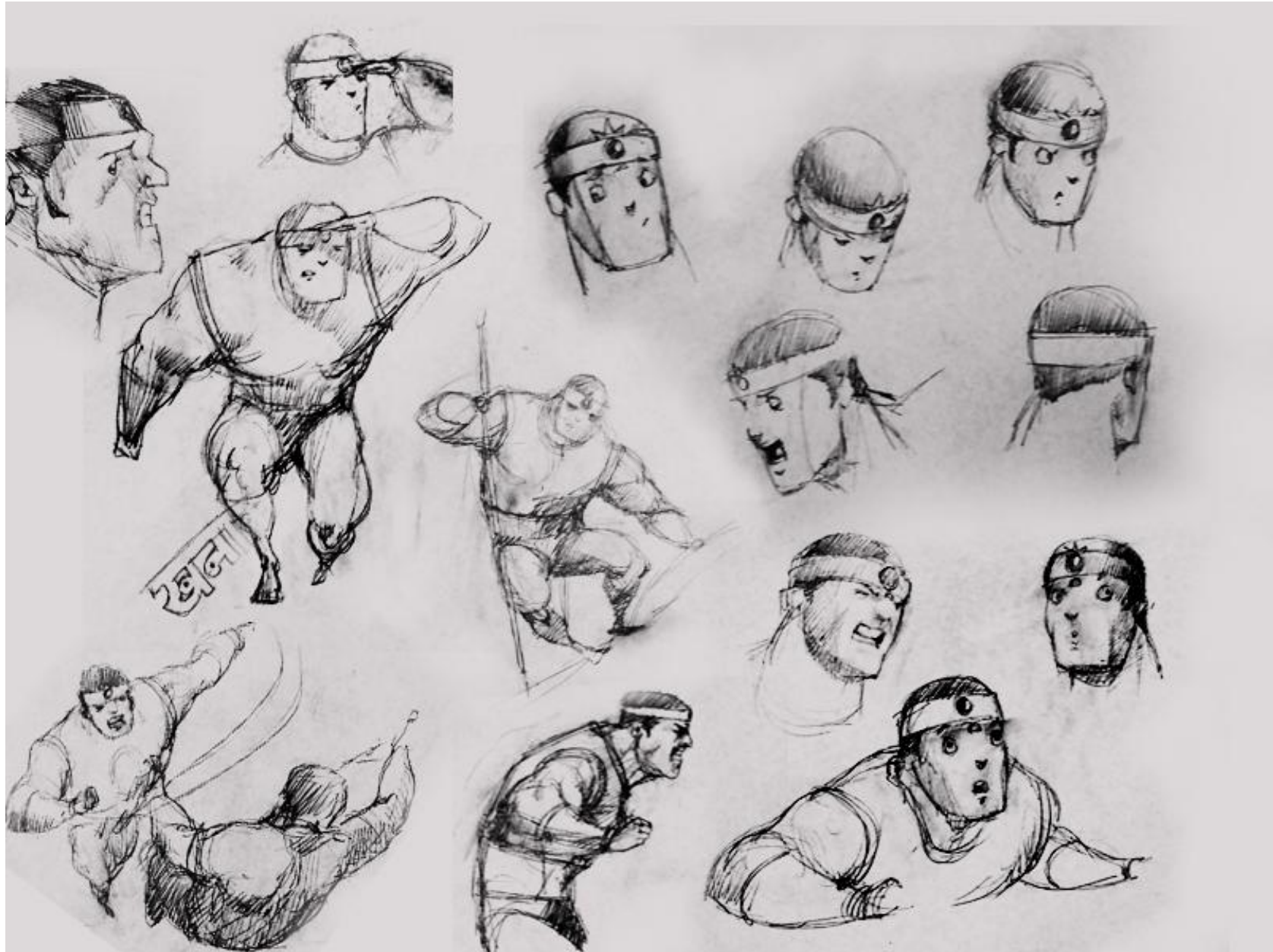
And whoosh... jumps out of the comic book.

Model Sheet and Character Design:

Since the character is a comic book superhero, it required a certain style that was a balance between bulky muscular comic book superheroes and over simplified animation figures. As already mentioned this was achieved after I had a look at the character designs of Batman- The Animated Series. It had a certain feel of stylized comic book and it had shapes which could be easily animated.



Figure 5: Batman by Bruce Timm (Timm)



Style:

I wanted the film to have an old paper texture to recreate the nostalgia of comic books. In addition I needed to demarcate the various worlds through form and style.

The ordinary world is a world of vibrant colors reflective a child's view of the world when he is a kid. The attempt was to create the atmosphere of my native locality in Lucknow- irregularly faced houses with bottles, tyres and other old stuff lying around the roofs of these houses, shoes and chappals hanging by electric wires, tin rooftops etc. The color palette was kept bright and on the warmer side to create the late morning- prior noon time.



For the various worlds that the superhero lands on to, there was an essential need to create a certain visual distinction. Hence various worlds have been rendered in a different style. The world of the cold drink is replicated through 'pop' designs and patterns to give the required feel. The color palette is blue and cyan, to make a visual allusion to one of the popular soft drink brands that has the same color palette.

For the instant where the character enters a video game, there is a considerable shift in style- an 8 bit video game look which was essential for the look of the world there. The animation style changes as well to suit the 8 bit style. The color palette with bright blues, greens and yellows tries to match the moods of popular games such as Super Mario and Islander.



Same is when he lands on to the film poster- the old billboard painting style is replicated to represent the world in this case. The palette is bright red, yellow and purple which is often the color set to create poster with contrasting shadows.

Technique:

The technique follows the CAPS (Computer Animation Production System) methodology of animation.

After the film was broken down into sequences and scenes – it was represented into a story board understand the visual possibilities of the film. Further it was timed into an animatic. The animatic was edited a few times to get the exact timing for the film.

The animation of the characters was then hand drawn and line tested as per the timing in the animatic. Further they were cleaned after the line testing and then inked and colored in one of the modules in Animo called Ink and Paint.

The final timings were adjusted in another module of Animo, called the director.

Background layouts were roughly made during the line tests. These were then used to make the final layouts in Photoshop.

Together, the backgrounds, foreground props and the characters were composited using After Effects. The final editing along with music was done in Premiere.

Sound:

The film needed a dramatic sound track to support the tension in the plot. Hence a fast paced rhythm was chosen with loud percussion beats to enhance the tension. Moreover, since the whole film is a chase sequence where at each twist the tension shoots up for the chase that follows it, the idea was to select a track with a small segment that loops itself but with a slight change in pitch so as to increase the tension after every loop. Another advantage was that such a loop became a representative sound for the character and added a dimension to it.

It was important that the sound support the worlds the superhero becomes a part of at various stages. Therefore, the dramatic sound is replaced by the sounds of 8 bit games when he lands inside the game. Since such games create their own texture with every activity being supported by a characteristic sound along with a background tune, it was therefore important to replicate the same in the sound.

The sound, when the superhero lands into the poster, becomes romantic resembling a popular Bollywood romantic tune to support the moment depicted in the poster. Whenever, we see a Bollywood poster, quite often the more popular music tracks of the film hover at the back

of our minds. The idea was to create such a mood to support this experience.

The moments of dramatic changes are often accompanied loud gong kind of sounds. This helped in creating the impact of the change, as the sudden loud sound directed intuitively the focus of the viewer to the change, and he is able to register the change in the visual.

Software Used:

Image processing, Ink and Color with Initial Compositing: Animo v5

Backgrounds: Adobe Photoshop cs4

Final compositing: Adobe After Effects cs4

Final Editing with Sound: Adobe Premiere cs4

Learning:

At the very offset the report talks about certain aims and objectives that I started the project with. Though I haven't mastered all of them, yet the whole project has considerably added to my experience.

The whole project helped me improve on my timing in animation. For the first time I was able to animate shots with which involved full flow movement of the body.

This project helped to explore the possibilities in After Effects to create a richer visual.

Moreover, I was able to time and edit the film properly. I also realized certain effective means to work better and faster in editing. Such little aspects do essentially contribute to the understanding of software and creates possibilities of optimum use. The edit also helped to considerably make the narration tighter- which makes the films visual more impactful.

Conclusion:

In the immortal words of Robert Altman (Robert Altman), "Filmmaking is a chance to live many lifetimes." Perhaps there is no other quote that could justify my process for making this film better than this. Going through the whole process of making this film was like living the whole childhood back again. Understanding the moments that excited me in a story- living the drama and the climax- and absolutely cherishing the idea of how the superhero will save the world eventually.

It is not only understanding how children think but also riveting in their naïve thoughts. And even though as adults it would be easy for us to discard them as simplistic- we need to acknowledge that their ideals and idols are more selfless than ours. The film is essentially a tribute to such naïf understanding of the world and its goals.

Bibliography

Gupta, S. *Kaal Raat*. New Delhi: Manish Gupta.

Kadam, D. *One of the pages of "Kaal Raat"*. Kadam Studios.

Kadam, V. *Cover page of "Aadamkhoron ka Swarg"*. Kadam Studios.

Manu. *Cover page of "Mumbai ka Baap"*. Raj comics.

Robert Altman, d. o. (n.d.). *Biography of Robert Altman*. Retrieved from International Movie Database:
<http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000265/bio>

Sinha, Anupam. *Pratishodh ki Jwala*. (S. Gupta, Ed.) New Delhi: Raj Comics.

Timm, B. *Character design for Batman- The Animated Series*. Warner Brothers.

Wahi, T. K. *Karfyu*. (S. Gupta, Ed.) New Delhi: Raj Comics.