

**A Comparative Study of Indian Superheroine Comic *Priya and the Twirling Wind* with
Zambian Superheroine Comic *The Fifth Element***

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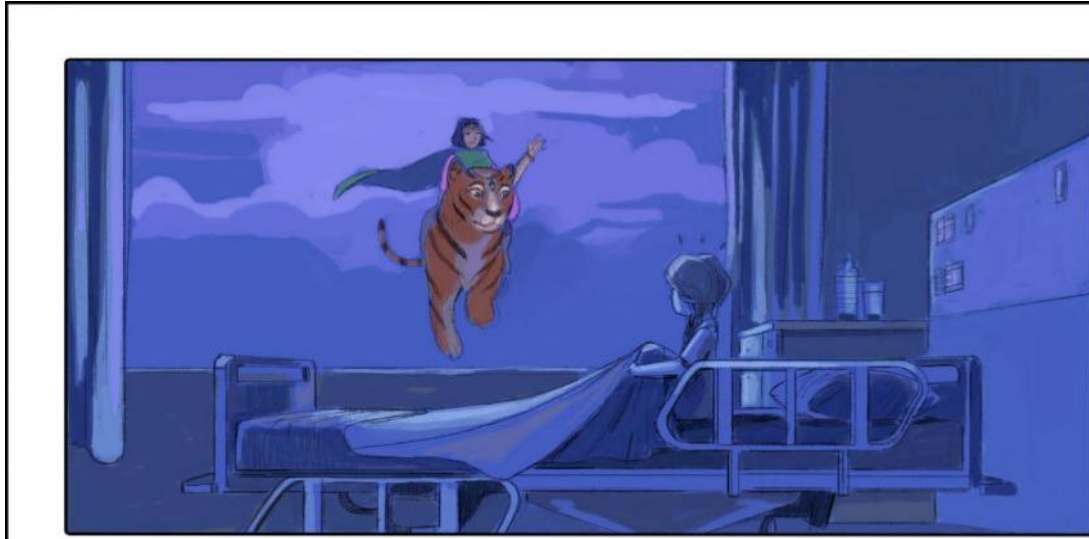
Abstract

Priya and the Twirling Wind, is an Indian Superheroine Environmental comic and first of its kind to have female superhero in the comic of India. *The Fifth Element* is a Zambian Superheroine Environmental comic, which is the first to have female superhero for the comic in Zambia. Writers of both the comics have understood that environmental issues could be addressed by young girls. So girls of 14 to 15 years of age have been chosen as the superheroines. Men of any society believe in deforestation for the economic upliftment of the country. Matriarch of any country has to become the savior of that country. Comparative study of these two comics proves this point to the core.

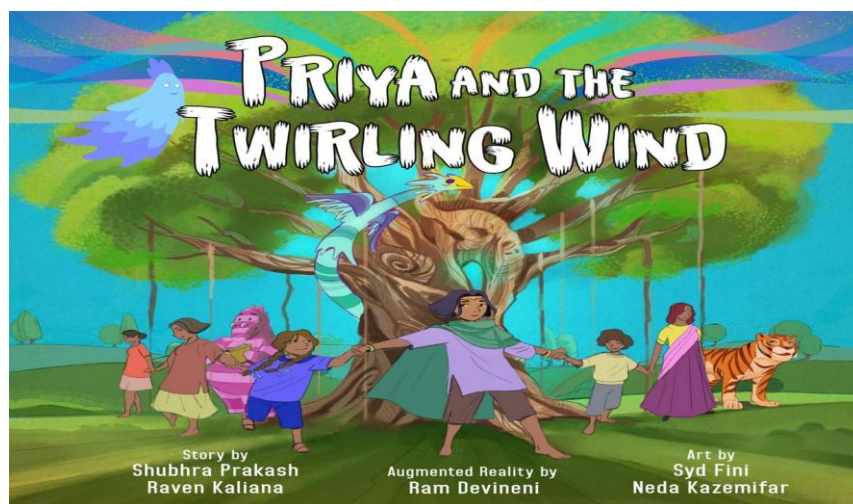
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Ram Devineni, in 2014, introduced *Priya*- India's first superheroine-through his comic book series *Priya's Shakti* in 2014. *Priya and the Twirling Wind* was co-written by visual artist Shubhra Prakash. The Indian comic *Priya and the Twirling Wind* starts with a mother carrying her daughter in her arms and going to hospital as her daughter's asthma is getting worse. After leaving her daughter in the hospital, she goes to work. The little girl is very scared to be alone in the hospital. *Priya*, the Superheroine, on her tiger *Sahas*, crosses the hospital and finds this little girl *Somya*. She takes *Somya* on her tiger *Sahas* for a ride.



Sahas and Priya tell Somya about the bad air in her city that makes her ill. While flying, they find cars emitting smoke and factories making smoke. They take Somya to a place where she could breathe fresh air which doesn't hurt her lungs. Looking at the fresh land, she wants her city to be clean as well. In the meantime, men in the new land were ready to cut the forests and dig the ground. They were informed that there is a treasure of jewels and gems under the land. They don't understand that they will lose their forest, the animals, the birds, and their homes. Birds in the land want to stop the greedy men before they get to the ancient tree, Vrikshu. Vimala, a lady in the land tells her men of the clouds forming and the possibilities of rain. She warns them not to cut down trees which will result in flood in their village. She tells them that the trees keep the soil from collapsing into the river. Those men reply that the money they make by cutting trees will help them to buy stronger homes. Priya comes to the rescue of the village. She tries to stop the bulldozer with her magical powers. But she couldn't. Somya stops the bulldozer from harming Vrikshu, the ancient tree. All the ladies of the village join hands with Somya to save Vrikshu.



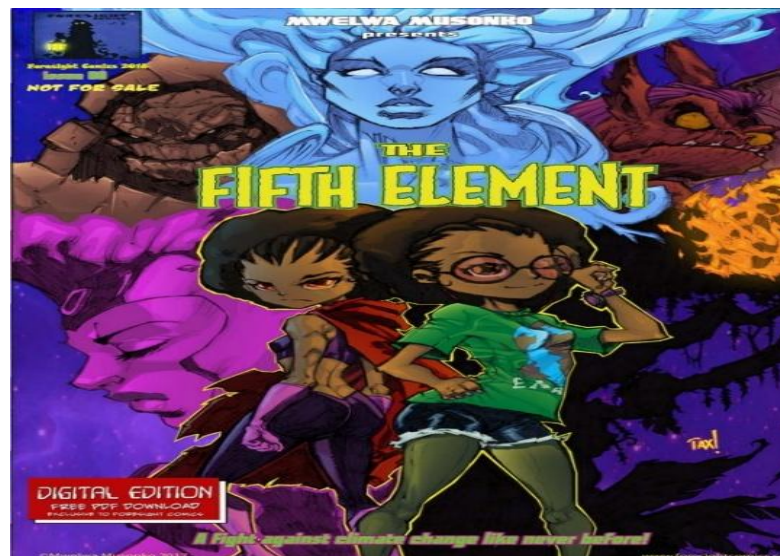
Priya leaves Somya in the hospital and goes away. Somya's mother comes and she wakes up. To her mom, she says that she is back. But her mom says that she might have been dreaming.

The next day, Somya goes to school and talks to her friends of making a difference in their city by planting trees. Everyone said yes to her. With this positive note, the comic ends.

The Zambian comic *The Fifth Element*- Issue # 00 starts with the heroine of the comic launching a new social club One Earth. This is the first of its kind of Superhero Comics created by Mwelwa Musonko. Aim of this club is to serve as the earth's last hope in the battle against climate changes. Quintessence, the superheroine of the comic, takes the initiative step towards saving the earth. She presides over her social club and speaks, "...A rise in Global temperature, warming oceans, shrinking ice sheets, glacial retreat, decreased snow cover, sea levels rising, declining arctic ice, ocean acidification, and increasing numbers of extreme events (such as intense rainfall) all point to one phenomenon; climate change..." In the meantime, there appears a storm on the shores of East Africa. Quintessence thinks that it is not too late to make a difference.

That night when Quintessence sleeps, she dreams of an old tree which exists even before the era of Gods. Even Heaven and Hell adheres to its judgement. All the trees under that old tree conduct the dreadful council called the Makula Council. The Makula Council has the responsibility to preserve order and balance in the universe. In this council, all the trees discuss about mankind and how the humans have harmed the entire ecosystem. They expel their refuse to the environment. They maim other inhabitants of the earth without care. This council calls mankind a plague and an epidemic that must be cleansed. Unomus of the earth, Udina, the Spirit of the waters, Vulkanus, the Inferno, Sylph of the air – all these elementals were sent to the earth to punish mankind for their atrocities.

The fifth element is Quintessence that is lost to the Universe, forever. A child will possess this lost power which cannot be equaled to immortal elementals. Quintessence wakes up to find this to be a dream. Before her appears Ether to guide her to stimulate her inner power. Quintessence thinks of the Ether as the Superhero. But the Ether denies this and says that she is there to show her the path. She narrates the story of creation of this world to Quintessence. God has employed all the four elementals Gnomus, Sylph, Udina and Vulcanus to form his world. His most prized creation is mankind. Mukula Council wants to cleanse from the earth all humanity.



Man's only hope relies on the fifth element Quintessence. It is considered to be the embodiment of all the elements. Ether continues to tell the story of the humanization of the most

powerful elemental Quintessence. She says that humans are composed of an elemental body, a sidereal spirit and an immortal divine soul. An immortal divine soul is lacking in Elementals. When an Elemental marries a human, its offspring gains a soul. The most powerful Elemental is Quintessence. She gave up her immortality after marrying a human being. Her essence is passed on from generation to generation, to Quin Ence, to Tess Ence. Tess Ence gets a name which is an anagram of Quintessence. Ether asks for the Talisman given to Tess Ence by her mother Quin Ence. Ether asks Tess Ence to press on the Talisman to reveal her power so that she can become one with the Ether. The next day in the middle of her One Earth speech in her newly found social club, Quintessence leaves the place in haste as she is needed somewhere. She taps on the amulet she wears on her wrist. She becomes a super-heroine and flies towards East African Coast to mitigate storm.

This comic *The Fifth Element* issue 00, digital edition 1, ends with the description of Quintessence as a weirdo as well as the super-heroine:

By day she is a 10th grader; the founder of One Earth, a social club that strives to educate the world about climate change, its effects and how to fight it...and her alter ego, the superhero, is the embodiment of the Ether. Her name is Quintessence...and the world will come to know her as Quintessa...The Fifth Element! and so the adventure begins!

Anshika Ravi writes in her review, “*Priya: The Brown-Skinned Supergirl to the Rescue*”:

The teenage girl in salwar-kameez looks right out of a mythological chestnut. She sports a diadem and rides a flying tiger. On the streets of the national capital-where a deadly cocktail of smog and smoke leaves people gasping for breath every year-she is out to implore action on one of the most pressing issues rankling our worlds: pollution and climate change.

The Fifth Element issue # 01 starts with exploring what Zambia is and what the real Africa is. Umutomboko the traditional ceremony of the Lunda speaking people, Likumbi Lya Mize ceremony of the Luvale people, N’cwala ceremony of the Ngoni people, Kuomboka ceremony of the Lozi people, Mosi-O-Tunya waterfall, translated “The Smoke that Thunders”, which is one of the seven natural wonders of the world. It is about 1708 meters wide and 108 metres high. It is UNESCO world heritage site and it is known as the greatest curtain of falling water in the world. It is also known as the Victoria falls – all these denote what Zambia is. From here comes the superheroine extraordinaire Quintessa, Zambia’s first superhero, the earth’s champion against climate change. Story, art and letters for the comic is done by Mwelwa Musonko and proofreader for the comic is Masai Kaluwa Kapambwe.

The efforts taken by the little girl to save the world, when she gets superpower are ineffectual. Quintessa thought it is facile to be the saviour of this earth. She thought that people will consider her to be a gift from heaven as she brings sunshine in the place of storms. Usually superheroes are like her: She spoke to the earth and it listened; she calmed the tremors and saved the lives. In real life, she goes to everyone and tries to talk about climate change. But people are not ready to listen to her. One vegetable vendor says that the discussion about climate change will not help her to sell her vegetables and provide for her little ones. When Quintessa says that there is greater than 95% probability that Global Warming as a result of human activity, a grand old man gets angry and says that he has 15 children, 35 grand children and 70 goats. He is furious to know that a child assumes to educate him. When she goes and asks a drunkard whether he worries about the rate of carbon dioxide accumulation in the atmosphere, he says that his problems are more bigger than the atmosphere. One merchant in the market asks her to go away from there as he thought that she is chasing away his customers with that climate change talk.

First day of Quin Ence as climate change activist was a great frustration for her. People were telling her that climate change is a western problem not a problem of Africa. She tries to convince them saying that the earth's climate is changing throughout history. The end of the ice age 7000 years ago marked the beginning of the modern climate era. Climate change rapidly depleting Africa's water resources means that Africa suffers an energy crisis. But people are not ready to accept that. As they show no response to her, trees will be cut down and burnt continuously. She tells them that Zambia relies on rainfall to generate electricity. Quin understands that being a superhero alone won't help her to safeguard the world from climate change. Educating people alone will help her to save the world. But people are not willing to listen to her. Becoming hopeless, she dashed on a man. That man asked her to define climate change. He tries to explain her, climate change will never affect Africa. She could not convince even a single person who was listening to her words. He blames her of belonging to some political party. Quin felt that she failed again not being able to convince the only person who listened to her. She wanted to cry in a lonely place. She went to a dark, empty back alley. She sat there with heavy eyes. Three men surrounded her and took away the talisman from her. At that time, her teacher Zulu saves her from those people and gets back the talisman from them. He advises her not to visit dark alleys and explains her of girl child abuse and asks her to meet him the next day after her classes. She could not sleep that night. Next day, she talks to her friend Xat about the incident. At that time, he notices her omnitrix glowing and tells her that she has to go as a hero. She tells him that the fate of the world depends on it and asks him to keep it as a secret. Then she answers the call of the Ether.

In this comic, reason for the climate change is explained and how it is very difficult to avert the problem. Quin Ence considers herself as the agent of that change. She has been thinking that the world could be saved from itself. Unless people are offered alternative sources of energy, the charcoal business will thrive. Zambians depend on rain sustained agriculture for food. Ether woke up Quin Ence from her sleep and told her that celestial beings have descended to the earth. They are sure to accelerate climate change and its effects. As a penance for man's crimes against environment, mankind has been sentenced to death by extinction. It is the sole task of the elementals to see to mankind's end. Ether has told Quin Ence that she has the power to stop the elementals. She has to master that power with haste. She was told that the power resides within her body. As a superhero, she hears the cries from Luapula province. There she goes and finds deforestation.



She meets charcoal burners and tries to stop them from doing it. Looking at her as Quintessa, all the people ran away from that place. That charred trader is not ready to listen to her warnings. He slapped her and said that banning charcoal burning can not be done unless an alternative to it is found for the people. His slap made her fall down. She understood that all her efforts to save earth and mankind such as leading a social club against climate change and giving talks to people about climate change and stopping people from cutting trees have been a failure. Mwelwa Musonko ends this issue # 01 of *The Fifth Element* with the following note:

I rushed into going Hero hoping that with these super powers, I could make a real difference....I But I was wrong...And I've failed even as a superhero. It gets harder to breathe...Every thing grows darker... I...die...

The Zambian Superheroine Comic *The Fifth Element* ends with a negative note and tries to explain even for the super-heroine , it is very difficult to stop deforestation. It is in the hands of the mankind to realize and take steps to save the world for future generations. Whereas Indian Superheroine Comic, *Priya and the Twirling Wind* tries to prove even with simple acts of a simple girl that with great determination they can help us to mitigate the problems and stop cutting trees and plant more trees for the future generations to survive . The comparative study of these two comics prove that they both are effective in dealing with the issues like deforestation and climate change. Both the comics, *Priya and the Twirling Wind* and *The Fifth Element* tries to reach the mass in real time scenario.



Dyuti Roy, While talking about *Priya and the Twirling Wind*, says that the 18-page comic book gives an account of Priya who saves her magical forest from greedy industrialists threatening to fell trees in the area, with the help of Soumya, a young girl who suffers from asthma. The storyline will remind the reader of the 1970s Chipko Movement, one of the first non-violent environmental protests led by women who dissuaded loggers in the rural Himalayan region of Uttarakhand by hugging trees in an attempt to conserve forests.

To make Priya's stories more engaging and interactive, these comics are Augmented Reality-enabled, allowing the reader to witness the characters come to life on screen. '*Priya and the Twirling Wind*' also features an animated film with puppets created by UK-based puppeteer Raven Kaliana. "Puppets have historically represented 'the voice of the people'. The accessibility of puppetry means that storytelling can come from the people," shares Kaliana.

Rosa Medea, while talking about The Fifth Element Comic Book series, says that these comic books help engage with the complex issue of Climate Change:



When Mwelwa Musonko launched *The Fifth Element* series, he visited schools across Zambia using comic books as an entry point to talk about climate change, accompanied by a partner dressed up as Quintessa. Many of the comic books were distributed for free and readers were encouraged to plant trees to win prizes associated with the comic book.

Both Superheroines, Quintessa as well as Priya are dark-skinned girls. Quintessa represents Zambians in her appearance, attitude and dressing whereas Priya represents Indians in her appearance, attitude, dressing and the way of thinking. Devineni says, “We intentionally made Priya dark-skinned and associated her with a village because such characters do not exist in popular culture or in comics. Superheroes are over-sexualised and removed from reality. We wanted people to identify with Priya. Both Priya and Sahas are universal symbols that can be interpreted in many different cultures”, says Devineni. But Quintessa is a replica of western Superheroines except her skin tone.

Indian Environmental Comic, *Priya and the Twirling Wind* prefers a teenage girl as its superhero. The same way, Zambian Environmental Comic *The Fifth Element* takes a teenage girl as its superhero. Priya with her tiger Sahas represents Indian Culture. Quintessa with her communication with Ether represents Zambian Culture. Both Superheroines are allowed to represent their culture, even in their costumes. Priya sporting a diadem and flying on a tiger gives her the super-heroine appearance and Quintessa possessing a talisman received from her ancestors and her change of appearance with the call of Ether makes her the super-heroine. Superheroines reach the mass with their environmental awareness ideas where superheroes would have failed in doing so. Nature is always given feminine qualities. Thus, a female superhero is best suited to represent Nature and its exploitation. Both Priya and Quintessa try to find out the ways to save Mother Earth. In doing so, Priya succeeds by educating a girl to fight against exploitation of Mother Earth whereas Quintessa fails as she tries to educate men against exploitation of Mother Earth. Both the comics show that culture is different, attire is different, attitude is different, yet still lives-threatening environmental problems are the same. Writers of both the comics have felt the need for comics to address the environmental issues which affect the whole of mankind. The teen female lead in the place of male Superheroes provide them the right choice to express the exploitation of Mother Earth.

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