

Drawing (on) Politics: Aubrey Collette in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Political Cartooning or Graphic Satire does not have a long history and its unique position between art history and newsprint allows it advantages and forces compromises. The use of caricature and the comic makes it more difficult to read such a genre. Moreover, it involves a clear tussle between the 'text' and the 'image' and its 'popularity' can at best be suspect. In such a scenario analysing Collette's work in Sri Lanka as a socio-political critique is both urgent and worthwhile. Sri Lanka's history of continuing conflict has prompted many responses, Collette's being one such response. The question then becomes: Is graphic satire a viable means of critique? Is it always already contained? Why/not? What if the cartoonist himself belongs to a community that is 'marginalized' in national discourses? Does this impact the production and reception of his work? It is possible to answer these questions locating Collette in a lineage of theoretical interventions on the comic and the visual, followed by a close reading of his cartoons. Cartoons have only recently acquired attention in the academia as popular visual culture or culture studies and it will repay to ask where the genre can go under the scrutiny of these critical terms.

Keywords: Cartoon, Visuality, South Asia, Cultural Studies, Caricature

Aubrey Collette's cartoons speculate on the organization of a relationship between comedy and violence in Sri Lanka before and after nineteen forty eight. If we assume political cartooning to be a practice of cultural communication, then it becomes imperative to query the 'way of seeing' we encounter in the production and reception of political cartooning (Berger, 1972). This in turn leads to other questions. Given the particularity of the medium, is it 'dissent' and can dissent identify, perhaps gratify the viewer, as Walter Coupe (1969) contends? This paper attempts to explore if the use of the comic and caricature in the context of print journalism emphasize the satiric social corrective that cartooning may offer. The paper also asks if the use of the comic in political cartooning can stem from an internalized sense of self-censorship, which may dilute the potential of the pocket panel. Lastly, pictorial satire in the newspaper foregrounds a hybrid nature poised between image as text and image versus the text, challenging permutations of visuality and textuality. Does this impact its 'reading'? The paper will try to seek answers to these questions. It is divided into two sections. The first titled 'Theory Hitherto' charts prior theoretical attempts to

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come to terms with the way of seeing caricature and cartooning and the second 'Collette Drawing' focuses its attention to particular instances of Collette's work.

Theory Hitherto

Collette is born in nineteen hundred twenty, dies in nineteen hundred ninety two and is thought to be a pioneer cartoonist of Sri Lanka. Throughout the forties to the fifties his daily pocket panels castigate Sri Lankan governance. He emigrates to Australia after the Bandranaike government comes to power and makes for himself a prolific career as a cartoonist. His work that is accessible to me is published in *The Daily News*, *The Ceylon Observer*, and *Times Ceylon* between nineteen fifty two and nineteen fifty nine. His panel is called 'Summing Up', and this naming, we shall see, becomes significant.

A brief enumeration of some of the theoretical positions on comedy, caricature and graphic satire is in order. Ernst Kris and Ernst Gombrich in "The Principles of Caricature" establish a line of continuity beginning with the Renaissance and the use of the 'grotesque', ending with contemporary use of visual satire. They theorize the need for grotesque by thinking it through the titillation of the ego. They are able to provide a succinct account of the shifts occurring around the use of caricature especially the critical intervention by Bernini and the Carracci brothers. The implication is that the grotesque can be understood as a response to 'realism'. What complicates this understanding is the intimate relationship between pictorial satire and visual appeal. It seems this appeal is always bound in a rhetoric of proportion. If distortion is a technique in a method of caricature then it possibly reinstates proportion as it exploits a subversion from the norm for satiric effect. Indeed Kris and Gombrich locate this tendency to reinstate proportion in the Carracci project itself. For them the Carracci brothers search for the 'perfect deformity'. This 'perfect' deformity is thought to be a more accurate apprehension of the real, of the idea or essence of the subject so distorted, and in fact, as we shall see, paves the way for the celebration of the subject, as opposed to assuming caricature to be condemnation. The 'perfect deformity' is a road to the 'real' nobility of the subject.

The conclusions drawn from Gombrich and Kris's study may account for Coupe's discomfort with caricature (1969). He wonders if contemporary caricature is a debasement of the Carracci project,

...and it is via the young dandies who during their Grand Tour in Italy paid the English artist, Thomas Patch, to caricature them that the technique was imported into England, where as we have seen it was *misapplied* in order to enliven the satirical political print with negative insights into the personal characteristics of political opponents. (p. 86) [Italics mine]

Coupe's comments also evince a movement away from an unthinking celebration of popular visual culture. It is possible to speculate on a link between satire or caricature and realism, and through this link to think about a similarity between the project of both modes of representation. This will allow us to counter Coupe's discomfort. Coupe ignores this similarity. For him the exaggeration that the reader/ viewer encounters in contemporary visual satire is solely meant to denigrate the subject: "simply as the paradoxical culmination of the realistic portraiture of the Renaissance which, because of the amusement produced by the distortion, was debased from the high purpose envisaged by its originators." (p. 87) But the impulse to exaggerate could also be the impulse to normalize. Exaggeration could be a recourse meant to reinforce the norm- a celebration of proportion- which is the fantasy of realism (Lyotard, 1979). In other words, if the

visual satire of Bernini and Carracci seeks the ‘perfect’ deformity for a better apprehension of the real, then contemporary visual satire does the same. There has been no transformation of purpose and hence no opportunity for debasement. Moreover, satire or caricature is not disparate from realism in purpose.

Another tendency is a, perhaps inadvertent, celebration of the caricatured. Given the tentative sway of individuals in a ‘public culture’, cartoons of politicians ensure their viability for journalistic discussion. The ‘celebration’ one associates with contemporary caricature is in terms of public figures desiring to be caricatured, and perhaps framing the resultant art for prominent display. It seems the abuse in caricature may be fond camaraderie. In terms of research this surprises as cartoons that may be expected to have been banished from the posthumous archives of a politician are found reposing in the same archive. Does this mean these politicians have found a belated sense of humour, or that graphic satire loses its immediacy in retrospect, or even that the comic blunts the violent (and so these cartoons may not be offensive)- all are questions worth asking. The fragile condition of public caricature in South Asia complicates such a reading, however. On the one hand is the relationship between Nehru and Shankar and the spate of cartoon anthologies, and on the other, is the example of Aseem Trivedi.

Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud propose the display of incongruity for laughter, comment or criticism. Bergson imagines the comic to pave the way for an essential principle of life while Freud imagines laughter to be physiological, a response to the shock of the incongruous. Both understand the comic as a tool of social cohesion. For Bergson, the comic is a palliative for alienation owing to mechanization-“You would hardly appreciate the comic if you felt yourself isolated from others” (Bergson, 1924, n pag.), and Freud concludes the comic and laughter to confirm social positions. Laughter therefore becomes a social statement. The dramatization of incongruity may be a social corrective, and being so, may interact with viewership in terms of socialization. As a corollary this would mean that the cartoonist is perpetually aware of his/her audience and carries on a dialogue with them. This assumption of a social responsibility by cartoonists may partly explain the diverse responses to cartooning in South Asia.

Lyotard’s comments on Realism, if extended, can provide a valid ground for a theory of caricature. Lyotard asserts a fantasy of Realism and is skeptical of its contiguity to the real.

...(of the the objective of Realism) to stabilize the referent, to arrange it according to a point of view which endows it with a recognizable meaning, to reproduce the syntax and vocabulary which enable the addressee to decipher images and sequences quickly, and so to arrive easily at the consciousness of his own identity as well as the approval which he thereby receives from others- since such structures of images and sequences constitute a communication code among all of them. (1979, p. 333-334)

For Lyotard, the construction of detailed artifice in realism appeases the viewer of her location in context. Political cartoons ‘stabilize the referent’ precisely in this particular play between proportion and exaggeration. Wartoons are a convenient example of this tendency where reducing the enemy or cutting the enemy down to size assures viewers of their nation’s victory (Caswell, 2004). If one excuses wartime cartoons as political expedience and asks if the same process is repeated when war does not threaten, one finds a similarity in principle. Wartoons celebrate the nation by reducing the enemy. When not under war conditions, cartooning assures the reader of a comic reductive treatment of icons thereby comforting the reader that since the icon is amenable to reduction, the subject being represented through the icon is amenable to apprehension. This is further complicated by a fond treatment- or a public treatment thereby increasing visibility and so perhaps increasing ‘popularity’- of the subject, making us question the

challenge to politics, if any, offered by cartooning. Devadawson examines political cartooning in post 1947 India to arrive at this dichotomy of the expected (radical) impact of a political cartoon and its actual (compromised) reception.

In such cases, (of graphic satire) it is likely to direct its focus either through already known leaders, or through a combination of caption and tagline. Laxman's representations of the Naxal movement, or Vijayan's work on the Naga agitation, exemplify this kind of mixed solution. As we assess the radical potential of the genre, therefore, we need to ask if the voices we hear are only those that belong to the faces we see (2014, p. 251)

In the succeeding lines Devadawson is skeptical of taking this attitude to its logical extreme- she chooses not to understand political cartooning as "any state-sponsored project"- and concludes her critical survey of graphic satire in India by according a measure of dissent to cartooning. She enumerates the techniques developed by the genre to combat its "mixed solutions" including the "creation of fictitious characters" as mouthpieces or foils and the use of text against image. It seems she makes too generous a case for cartoonists, especially when Collette is considered. If cartoonists display a certain self-awareness of their contexts and resort to self-censorship (in creating characters or using verbal against the visual), the space for dissent, I argue, is marginal.

In contrast, Gairola Khanduri begins with the same premise, finds cartoons to be purveyors of 'situated knowledges' and contingent on context. However, Khanduri is more optimistic about the political intervention cartoons evolve

"Cartoonists in India are ethnographers, historians and artists- they represent people and places. In employing characters and symbols to plot their narratives, they caricature culture and produce knowledge. The play of recognition and misrecognition is key to these crafts." (2014, p. 302)

Khanduri's optimism is also evident as she concludes cartoonists to be 'collaborators' and not 'informants'. It is significant that Khanduri, like Devadawson, acknowledges the potential in cartooning to side with the exercise of state power. It shows this anxiety has troubled theorists and still does as they grapple with a "multi sided" (Khanduri, 2014, p., 298) genre. She rejects this stance however by identifying the cartooning critique of this state power as adequately critical. Devadawson on the contrary stringently locates graphic satire in the particular medium of print journalism. This allows her to demythify cartooning as news, but also as a corollary understand news itself as a narrative response to cultural imperatives.

At this point, it would be useful to spend some time on the concept 'ways of seeing'. John Berger and his colleagues are credited with the idea for which they acknowledge a debt to Walter Benjamin. Benjamin begins the conversation about art through technology. Berger calls for a departure in 'Ways of Seeing', by pointing out 'ways of seeing' or established rules of visual comprehension. For instance, they argue that painting, especially nude painting organizes itself around a stylized vision of the female body Renaissance onwards. Their analysis of oil painting as a medium that draws attention to objects, wealth and property and through the medium of oil puts it on tangible display is mirrored in their analysis of the grammar of advertising. Advertising glamorizes and approximates this enviable wealth and objects through colour photography. Berger is indispensable as he systematically attempts to obliterate aura about art and explain politics through strategies of visual representation. But more importantly Berger pointedly discusses the viewer: "it is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world" (1972, p. 7). He tries to ask and answer how the viewer is managed by representation. This is significant as

it relates visual cognition to the political reception of art. I will explore this further as I discuss Collette's works.

Collette Drawing

Collette's work is text heavy and the visual component stands in an uneasy relationship with the textual. It is worthwhile to chart this relationship to ask if the visual is at liberty to pull away from the textual. The visual in his repertoire is dynamic sometimes and sometimes depends heavily on the printed text to communicate layers of meaning. The *Swabhasha* (N. d.) cartoon exemplifies such a fraught relationship (Fig. 1). *Swabhasha*, as a policy change, is fiercely contested in Sri Lanka across media and many of Collette's pieces argue against it. *Swabhasha* is a move to the native language, which at this point in Sri Lankan history becomes a move away from English. It is tempting to read *Swabhasha*, therefore, as a reconstitution of national identity in the wake of self rule, but it is in time understood to be an exclusive reconstitution as *Swabhasha* is turned into Sinhala Only, thus alienating the Tamil speakers.

Collette here advocates English as a convenient site for Sinhalese and Tamil to accommodate themselves. English is imagined as an indispensable component of primary education. That is why the monkey becomes a visual shorthand for Collette to think about the deleterious effects of jettisoning English. He makes the monkey a recurring character to represent the student or the politician who refuses to move up the linguistic or the evolutionary ladder. The monkey is made a specimen of and emphasized through the description 'Ideal man Ideal stoop' meant to imitate museum descriptions of Early Man who stoops in museums. A move to Sinhala is visually called 'atavistic' by delegating the monkey to the position of a museum relic. The stoop in both the boy and his teacher is notable as a dramatic rendition of the pedagogic atavism. However, without the text filtering the meaning, the image is that of a fat lipped fat man bugging a haplessly burdened school boy. Without the quote and the tagline, the message is loud and clear: the government is screwing the education of Sri Lanka. The text blunts this. This is an instance of printed text managing and organizing the visual.

The quotation by M D Banda on the extreme left is almost not part of the scenario but a reading of the text tells us the scenario is a response to the text. Most of Collette's cartoon panels are constructed as responses to text as either excerpts of newspaper reports or headlines. The cartoon on the MEP alliance (N. d) for instance forces attention on the way media interact (Fig. 2). If the *Swabhasha* cartoon is about text shaping the meaning of image, this is about text-as-newspaper-reportage intruding in on pictorial satire. The quote here is cut out to look like a newspaper report or the excerpt of a report. The cartoonist here self-consciously tells his readers that this piece is a comment on said quotation and through form, tells his readers that the source of this illustration is a news item. The excerpt cements the ineluctable connection between cartooning and print. Political cartooning in pocket panels becomes a practice with the explosion of print- it always appears beside printed news.

The cartoon depicts an angel whitewashing the devil thus visualizing a vague conspiracy between moral opposites. But the text complements the depiction, adds context to imagine a relationship between Buddhism, fanaticism and violence in cahoots. The *Swabhasha* and the MEP piece generate comedy using incongruity. The juxtaposition of the classroom and the museum, or the interchangeability of the dark and light angels, by collating progress with regress or showing politics to be a play of morals. In Collette's case it is not inaccurate to read self-awareness into his graphic oeuvre. His choice of titling his panel 'Summing Up' and his self representation both in

cartooning and painting gives evidence of his ideas about arrangement in his art. I will come back to this later.

It is clear by now that the 'visuality' graphic satire can call forth must be understood in a matrix of journalistic conventions, editorial contravention and the exigencies of the 'text'. This does not imply that a cartoon that relies on symbols only is somehow pure and unmediated but that cartoon analysis must emphasize the intimate relationship between text and image. If so then the validity of asking if the visual in cartooning has an independent pull is nullified- for it seems the visual loses out to the system of understanding stamped upon the image by the rubric of the words. This is why Gomrich and Kris can only serve as point of entry into the field. Graphic Satire is multi media and multi disciplinary.

The assumption of economy of space, budget and time around cartooning allows us an insight into one way of seeing cartoons. The newspaper budget allows a sparing use of colour. In fact, it is the magazines that are glossy and colourful. This means the cartoonist must work with black and white and in Collette's case using a pencil or a pen. In contrast, cartoons that tread Cyberspace can be coloured in and edited using sophisticated applications. Neelabh's work (N.d.) is symptomatic of the inclusion of color owing to the technological transformation in the studio (Fig. 3). His use of colour and lack of text are able to communicate the message sharply. As he experiments with no text, he makes heavy use of symbol. In a medium understood to be primarily about instant communication through easy identification and given the 'space' accorded to cartoons within newsprint, there is a demand for careful scaling of image and symbol. Given that cartoonists are employed on a contractual basis and are required to produce a cartoon as and when required, usually everyday, they must work through daily deadlines. This means they cannot afford to luxuriate on a cartoon for more than a few hours. So their technique usually involves a few meaningful strokes. This justifies the heavy dependence on symbol, for its ability to represent much despite its size. Also, the cartoon is not to be privately enjoyed, it is part of print, a mass medium. It is discussed, debated, criticized in various social circles in various spaces and doing so identifies its audience. The short digression on production technologies is to help the discussion along two questions- how do cartoonists respond (reduce) to pressures of economy and what do readers make of this response.

Like the sensual appeal of oil painting to objectify wealth and property subsuming them under social aspiration, the affective appeal of simplified cartoon gratifies the viewer of an ability to understand and make sense of complex politics. A stable sense of self is facilitated. The speculation of the abuse of power as a display of incongruity becomes the way for the 'mass' to apprehend power. We will see that this translates into the use of a literalized metaphor, and if such a treatment of the subject appeals then it is possible it is embedded in a dangerous pleasure, because on the one hand it ensures access and on the other it is liable to be understood literally and therefore be liable to be offensive or worse to be taken as the only way to understand a complex issue. This explains Coupe's miserly attitude towards caricature. Collette gestures to this understanding when he titles his work 'Summing Up'. It seems he knows he is reducing the meaning of people and policy, and by extension obtruding brevity on to complexity. The artist owing to demands of resource and consumption patterns must condense the meaning into easy identification. Collette is possibly aware that he must sum up and as a corollary must always reduce.

Back to the Arena (N. d.) is a rare instance of a cartoon that is not heavily dependent on text. But it is of interest also because it is one of the two cartoons I could find of Collette's stance on the Tamil question (Fig. 4). This could mean one of two things- either Collette is hesitant in

drawing the Tamil conflict or the archive that is accessible to me has made a conscious selection. Both possibilities mean censorship- self censorship or censorship contingent on controversy. Be it the former or the latter, it is interesting that this piece has escaped either censor and made its way into the archive. In fact the survival of the cartoon might find itself justified in the content.

It is a devastating comment on violence in Sri Lanka. The marginalization of the Tamils and missionaries becomes a spectacle enjoyed, approved and managed by the politicians. It maybe obvious to understand this as an anticipation of the ethnic cleansing that is only months away from the appearance of this cartoon. But a response like that is blinded by hindsight, and awards the genius of prophecy to cartoonists, which is not a cross they can be forced to bear. Analysing cartoons is a post facto exercise, and is mediated by systems of retrieval. The contradiction is this- it would be impossible to evaluate a cartoonist's contemporary output because the oeuvre is incomplete. Moreover, if cartooning is a part of popular culture, then the definition of 'popularity' will remain hazy in a contemporary analysis. Yet if the analysis is retrospective then the immediacy of the output is lost and anthologies of cartoons evince rules of selection that are worth analysis themselves. How do we justify an analysis of Collette's work in such a scenario? If cartoonists are not prophets then are they barometers of popular anxieties? Even attaching this function to their work is fraught with problems. I think asking questions of Collette's work published in mid twentieth century is relevant because these questions are relevant to a twenty first century South Asian readership. This will become clear as we go back to the cartoon.

The sheer horror of a national symbol being controlled is invoked here. And here too, as in the MEP cartoon, there is the overt suggestion of a conspiracy. As with other cartoons, Collette works with the literalization of the metaphor. A careful review however, interrogates the peculiar arrangement of the tableau. Where could the missionary be looking? Why is he not looking at his perpetrator? Why is the missionary not as obviously petrified as the Tamil Man? Collette choose to write 'Tamil Man' and 'Missionary' when there is no need to do so. The untucked shirt becomes one of the markers of Tamil identity by this time. Similarly the costume of the missionary explicitly identifies his person.

It is important to explain Collette's investment in costume because his other work, especially his work on well heeled Sri Lankan Men and Women can be understood as a comedy of manners where identity is ascertained by sartorial choices. Collette is usually cognizant of the relationship between costume and identity. The pointed toes and the exaggerated posture are different for each costume in *Cloths Makyth the Man* (N. d.) and *Deadlier Than The Male* (1953) (Fig.5, Fig. 6) which demonstrates his awareness of the tools of his art. The caption "Clothes Makyth The Man" pokes fun at such an identification by misspelling "makyth" and at the same time gives to the reader an array of characteristic postures concomitant with each costume. A similar posturing is clarified in "Deadlier Than the Male" which represents a victory for the Women's Golf Team.

In that case, to return to the Sinhala Only piece, he must pointedly gesture to the semantic function performed by these bodies in order to make clear the persecution meted to the missionary as a consequence of the educational policy of the government. The missionary regards the spectacle of the politicians with chilling unconcern about his own decimation. The lion is positioned to squash the Tamil Man's genitals, and the Lion's sword pierces the missionary. The visual semantics gestures to the consequences of an interested exclusive policy. The obvious question is: does the 'text' curtail the visual meaning- connoting a conspiracy of Buddhism and Sinhalese majoritarianism emasculating the minority- if at all? I think the text does not control the

meaning here but it emphasizes it. 'Back to the Arena', the tagline used here, by referring to the Roman Colosseum brings attention to the blithe cruelty that organizes such violence.

Collette, a Dutch Burgher himself, is trying to punish the governance for their lack of tolerance. Reading the cartoon as an expression of his own community's insecurity regarding polity precludes the understanding of the practice of cartooning as a barometer of popular anxieties. The Swabhasha cartoon is amenable to the same analysis. Collette seems to register protest on behalf of a community which has been invisibilized in debates negotiating Tamil and Sinhala. The Dutch Burghers have been ignored in public discussions of the policy. A move away from English, which is their native tongue, will lead to an enforcement of a language- Sinhala- that cannot command a similar affective investment which the native language can. It must be noted that numerically the Burghers are less than the Tamils. To assume that the artist is recording 'popular' (if popular must be conflated with majoritarian) discomfort would be inadequate. Collette takes a firm stand here against an increasingly repressive regime, while confirming his belonging to community. The reduction we have attributed to graphic satire is compounded here. Collette berates his readers for subscribing to said invisibilization by dramatizing the missionary in the chilling unconcern. It demonstrates the *reductio ad absurdum*. Yet the comic also reduces the possibility of empathy that readers may reward his cartoon with. If laughter is indeed a restabilization of cohesion, then it is at the expense of the clown whose body is the site of the comic. The relationship between comedy and violence will be a perpetual problem for the political cartoon.

It is clear that a cartoonist cannot be expected to dissociate himself (rarely herself) from his own community position. This also allows us to elaborate on the self awareness mentioned before. Could the artist be aware of his particular approach- at best communal, at worst parochial- to cultural communication? The clearest method of answering this would be review the self presentation across media that Collette engages in. Self portraiture in painting becomes significant as a cultural signifier of a play with gaze and vision-ary power after Foucault's discussion of *Las Meninas*. For him the insertion of the painter is really an insertion of the gaze of the painter which captures the viewer, and so the viewer is consciously imagined as part of the painting. Collette however, is careful to obliterate his face in the cartoon (Fig. 7), thereby abnegating his choice to dramatically engage with the viewer's gaze and so incorporate the viewer. This inability to navigate the seeing of the viewer may be an inability to caricature himself. This could be because he is intensely aware of his communal investment in the politics of the time. Since caricature involves reduction, perhaps trivialization, he chooses to cover his face.

Foucault's comments on *Las Meninas* are meant to be merely a point of departure for our comments on Collette. A painting Collette draws of himself (Fig. 8) is fascinating as it forces comparison with self representation in graphic satire. It is meant to be a reminder of the 43 group, a group of Modernist artists that Collette is deeply involved with. Collette's own position on the canvas is thought provoking. It is conveniently on the right corner, slight and distant, affording to himself a view of everyone. The contrast between points of view is noticeable. The person on bottom left is largest and everyone else successively diminishes in size ending with Collette who is the tiniest. If the reader reads this painting left to right, then Collette's own view contrasts with the reader's. The reader can barely distinguish him, but Collette can always distinguish the reader. Collette seems to be cognizant of the aesthetic distance between himself and his audience. He can paint himself as oil on canvas which cannot demand a 'popular' newspaper readership. He imposes a self censorship when it comes to cartooning the self.

It is possible that self censorship coerces him to arrogate the use of text to manage the image. Hitherto we have mentioned the use of self-censorship as a refusal to engage with party politics (the paucity of his work on the Tamil question), to insert his community at the cost of another and as a turning away from the viewer. These are some of the compromises that force hand of the cartoonist. Our response to this question of self censorship should be nuanced and must take into account our own understanding of the 'potency' of cartooning and how the cartoonist understands his own position within media reception. If we include cartooning under the broad rubric of popular culture studies, we cannot ignore the fact of leisure and pleasure in the reception of this practice. Leisure in that the reader must be literate and must have the time to appreciate the cartoon and the pleasure that accrues in reduction, in the conveniently neat and recognizable appropriation of symbol. The entombment of this practice in pleasure and leisure carries the potential to blunt any subversion that it may display through symbolic manipulation. The tussle with the governance and a reading public that regards cartooning with amusement contains any radical potential. A self aware artist is a self censored artist.

Dollimore concedes to the 'containment' and appropriation of popular cultural subversion. " Subversiveness may for example be apparent only, the dominant order not only containing it, but paradoxical as it may seem, actually producing it for its own ends" (1994, p. 11). This does not mean the state machinery that approves majoritarianism commissions such literary productions but that it makes it possible to produce these texts. Not only allowing it, but later, as Collette is forced to deport, explicitly identifying this practice as dissent, subversion or as a threat. Without this identification from the dominant, the subversion accorded easily to cartooning is void. As has been pointed out before, the anthologizing of these cartoons as part of an interested archive seals them as pleasurable, faintly naughty memorials. This appropriates the critique apparent in the cartoons, and fashions it into a justification for the status quo of the past but also of the present. Hence the danger in the pleasure of reduction. For instance, the ease with which a representation about emasculating a minority can be turned into majoritarian propaganda, despite Collette's best efforts is dangerous. If Collette uses text to curtail image in the Swabhasha cartoon it's because there's a real threat of him being held guilty of libel or obscenity. If he can publish the Tamil cartoon with impunity, it is not only because these are perhaps intentionally ambiguous but also because their reception is absorbed by pleasure. Collette also publishes social- the comedy of manners- as opposed to political cartoons and cushions the readerly jolt.

The distance between Collette's Christmas cartoon of himself and his biting representation of the politicians is noteworthy for this reason. The cartoonist is in a bubble of his own making. It also imitates the way comics' show characters 'thinking' about people and objects. It undoubtedly prefigures the advent of the comic. But more significant is the illustration of the distance between the art and the artist. Collette seems to realize his distance from 'realpolitik', which ironically gives him the vantage point to illustrate, to use cartoon as social weapon, responsible albeit blunted.

In conclusion, the genre demands a 'way of seeing' of its own. Its ineluctable relationship to print allows the text to intervene in the image and thus impact its reception. As discussed the reception is mediated also by the self of the artist and the readership that he imagines himself addressing. The reduction inherent in the practice is both a source of fond, satisfying pleasure and pain but whom does it affect how is organized by the comic in the caricature. To assume graphic satire to be dissent is to thoroughly ignore the compromises it situates itself in. Even when representing himself Collette finds it impossible to fully engage the viewer, ask for the viewer's empathy in earnest- which tells us he is perhaps more aware than others about these

compromises. If this seems like too pessimistic a reading then we must understand that a study of popular cultural texts, whether as "ideology or utopia" (Pawling, 1984) cannot be expected to be a vibrant celebration of democracy.

Images

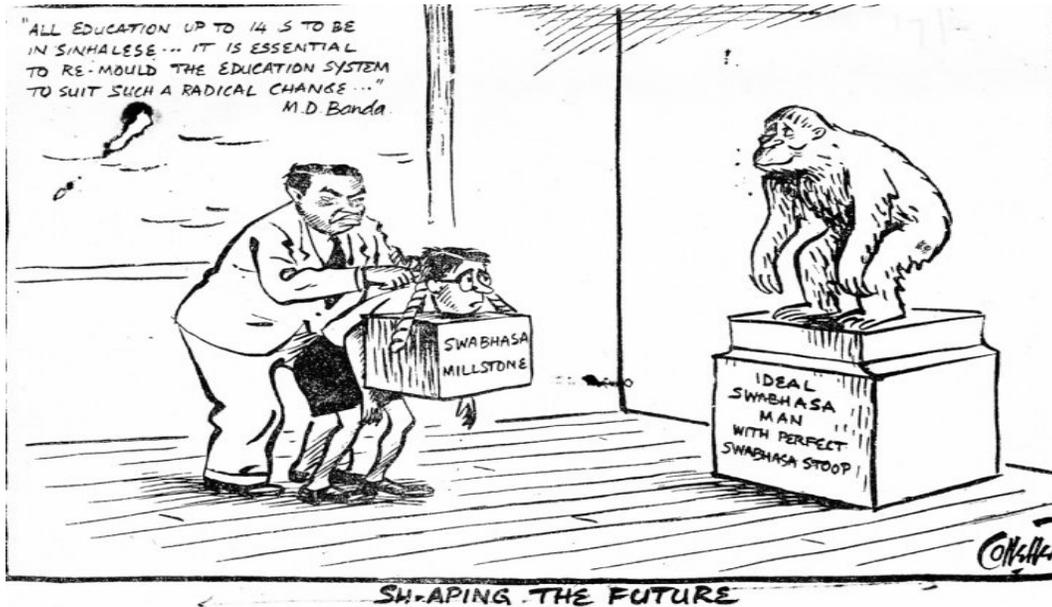


Fig. 1 "Shaping The Future" N.d. Ink on Paper



Fig. 2 "A Few Deft Touches and You'll Look Like One of Us" N.d. Ink on Paper



Fig. 3 Untitled N.d. Digital



Fig. 4 "Back to the Arena" N.d. Ink on Paper



Fig. 5 "Clothes Makyth The Man" N.d. Ink on Paper



Fig. 6 "Deadlier Than the Male" 1953 Crayon on Paper

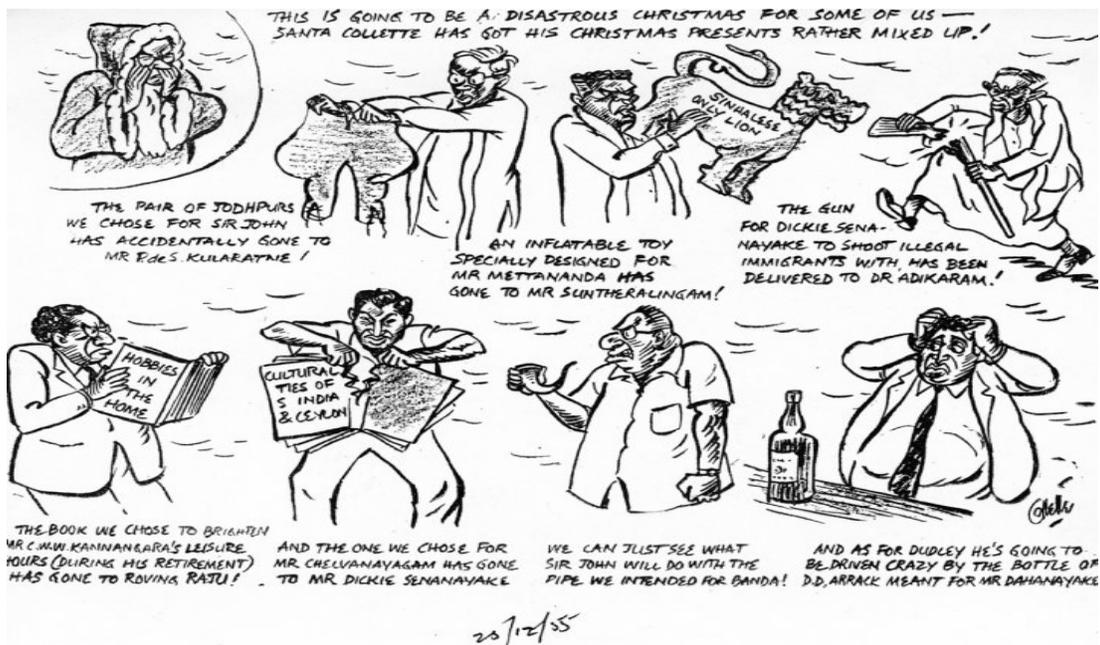


Fig. 7 "This is Going to be a Disastrous Christmas for Some of Us- Santa Collette Has Got His Christmas Presents Rather Mixed Up" N.d. Ink on Paper



Fig. 8 Untitled N.d. Oil on Canvas

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