

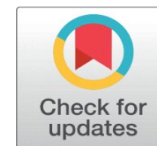


A VISUAL REPRESENTATION OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF KERALAM THROUGH CARTOONS



Basil Thomas ¹  

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of English, Christian College, Chengannur, Kerala, India



ABSTRACT

The surplus number of comic magazines that existed in Keralam even before the official formation of the state in 1956 reinstates the affinity of the Malayalam speaking people towards cartoons. The social situations and the functioning of various institutions like education and employment were a source of inspiration for the cartoonists from Keralam. The high literacy rate of Keralam is not the product of a single day. The foundation work of this had started even before the formation of the state. This paper tries to analyse the education system of Keralam portrayed in the cartoons of cartoonists Toms, Aravindan, and Thomas. The cartoons of Toms, Aravindan and Thomas portray the day-to-day life of Keralam in their social cartoons, including the school life and college life of the period of the second half of the twentieth century. There are two phases in the development of the education sector in Keralam: the first phase focusing mass education where the major capital investor was the state itself and private investment was not encouraged. The second phase witnessed a fast-paced growth and urbanization after the 1970s because of the large-scale migrant remittance. The changing faces of the education system of Keralam can be seen in the cartoons of these select cartoonists.

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Corresponding Author

Basil Thomas,
basilthomasccc@gmail.com

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1. INTRODUCTION

The rich heritage of cartoons in the history of Keralam springs from the first Malayalam cartoon titled 'Mahakshamadevatha' that appeared in the year 1918 in the magazine, Vidooshakan. The surplus number of comic magazines that existed in the state even before its official formation in 1956 reinstates the affinity of the Malayalam speaking people towards this art form. Scored a century and still playing in the attacking mode, the cartoonists of Keralam stand high among the reputed world cartoonists. The Indian cartoon and caricature industry flourished with the advent of Sankar, the tycoon of Malayalam cartoons from Keralam. Through decades, Keralam flourished in the field of cartoons with the cartoonists like O. V. Vijayan, Abu Abraham, Ravi Shankar, Toms, Yesudasan, Aravindan, Thomas, Nathan, Gopikrishnan, P. K. Manthri, Malayatoor Ramakrishnan, E. P. Unni, V. H. Unnikrishnan et. al. Keralam hatched and delivered so many cartoonists nationally and internationally. From the readers' end, this popularity for the genre can be explained from the view that the intellectual majority welcomed this art and made it a part of their reading habit, both seriously and for fun. Yet, the more logical reason for how the cartoonists of Keralam were appreciated because they found the raw material for their work in the daily social scenario of the state. While other regional cartoons were in the infant stage, the cartoons and



cartoonists from Keralam proved to be more mature and professional. When the cartoonists from other states looked forward to the national scenario for their inspiration, the social situations, and the functioning of various institutions like education and employment became the resources for the cartoonists from Malayalam. The high literacy rate of Keralam is not the product of a single day. The foundation work of this started years before the official formation of the state. Regarding the educational influence of the state, Robert L. Hardgrave, Jr. made a significant comment that “Kerala is a land of contradictions in a nation of contrasts. It has the highest literacy rate and the highest rate of unemployment” (Hardgrave 120). The cartoons published in second half of the twentieth century quite sharply portray a clear picture of the education system that prevailed in Keralam. ‘Teaching and learning’ are portrayed in the cartoons of early Malayalam magazines by the cartoonists. This paper tries to analyse the education system portrayed in the cartoons of select cartoonists Toms, Aravindan, and Thomas.

Cartoonist Toms (1929-2016), hailing from Kottayam, Keralam, is the cartoonist behind the cartoon series, *Bobanum Moliyum*. The series features the eponymous characters as two mischievous children and their adventures. The series was published in *Manorama* weekly and later published as a collection in two volumes by the cartoonist himself. Aravindan (1935-1991), also hailing from Kottayam, is the cartoonist behind the cartoon series, *Cheriyā Manushyarum Valiya Lokavum*. The series was of an episodic nature, portraying the life of an educated but unemployed youngster named Ramu. It was published in *Mathrubhumi* weekly. Cartoonist Thomas (1938-2009) maintained his social commentary through the cartoon series, *Veekshanavishesham* which was a collection of cartoons originally published in *Mathrubhumi* weekly. The cartoons of Toms, Aravindan and Thomas portray the day-to-day life of Keralam in their social cartoons including the school life and college life during the period of the second half of the twentieth century. Toms’ cartoons covered around five decades from 1950s to 2000s whereas Aravindan’s cartoons appeared in the 1960s and 1970s and Thomas made his literary output in the 1970s. An analysis of the cartoons of the three cartoonists shows that all of them comprehensively incorporated the activities in the educational sector in the state during their respective periods of creative output.

1.1. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The princely provinces of Travancore, Cochin and Malabar of the pre-Indian independence times ensured to render their own system of education to make the subjects literate. However, it was not altogether free from the clutches of casteism and untouchability. The students belonging to the marginalized groups were further marginalized from the schools run by the teachers of high caste. The children belonging to the lower castes got better accommodated in the education system with the advent of British rule when schools were launched by the Christian Missionaries. It can be seen that the foundation for the educational progress of Keralam was laid by the then government and missionaries.

The progress of Keralam towards the ‘Kerala Model’ of development is worth mentioning in this respect because the case of education, especially female literacy, was and still is a role model for all the other states of the country. Atul Kulkarni, in his blog titled “Kerala Model of development”, traces some reasons for the development of Keralam to reach the level of ‘Kerala Model’. According to him, the factors that resulted in this progress are the matrilineal system prevalent in the early Malayalam speaking provinces; the early steps taken in the sector of education; reform movements including caste movements, agrarian movements,

and land reforms; and finally, the role of left parties and the initiatives taken by the governments. Kulkarni attests that the supportive social matrilineal system made possible the advancement of women in terms of education and health sectors. As he comments: “in the case of Kerala, a set of historical and sociological conditions – including systems of marriage and matrilineal inheritance that were specific to the region – contributed to the establishment of such attitudes” [Kulkarni \(2015\)](#).

1.2. TWO PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT

There are two phases in the development of the education sector in Kerala: the first phase focusing mass education where the major capital investor was the state itself and private investment was not encouraged. The second phase witnessed a fast-paced growth and rapid urbanization after the 1970s because of the large-scale migrant remittance (especially from the Middle East, popularly called as Gulf by the people in Kerala). Another index of the social development for a model state is that of the literacy rate. The statewide establishment of schools and non-formal teaching paved the way for mass education and the growth of literacy brought the state above the national average. The launch of Kerala Sasthra Sahithya Parishad (KSSP) in 1962 resulted in creating and nurturing a scientific orientation in learning and education even in rural localities. This mass movement in education resulted in mass literacy, motivating people to read newspapers and use public libraries and also exporting educated candidates to other states in India and abroad. As Satheese Chandra Bose and Shiju Sam Varughese observes: “... the library movement and the literacy campaign along with the spread of scientific temper through the rationalist movement (Yukthivadi Prasthanam) and the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP) are usually suggested to be catalysts of the unique developmental achievements of Kerala” [Bose and Shiju \(2015\)](#).

The village libraries and youth movements in the twentieth century Kerala also had their own roles in moulding the social temperament of the society. According to J. Devika, “the communists did work actively to set up institutions that offered alternate, modern social values and cultural forms that challenged traditional forms - especially village libraries and youth associations, in which mostly young men developed critical skills that could be deployed against the feudal order, the newly independent liberal state, and capitalism, and that fostered class solidarities that exceeded the narrow, immediate local.” [Devika \(2010\)](#).

In spite of all the above-mentioned factors, the Kerala Model of development failed with the economic stagnation, the fatal symptom of failed economic development. According to Veron Rene, the fall happened in the management of Gulf remittance as the money was spent for consumption rather than investment, and also the “inappropriate curricula of higher education” necessary to make educated youth employable in the changing scenario of the world. [Rene \(2001\)](#).

The post-Indian independence period urged the need for free and compulsory education for the people of Kerala. The government invested money for this purpose and public education was encouraged. The scene got changed with the Gulf boom of the 1970s which resulted in a drastic change in the social, economic, and cultural aspects of the society of Kerala. The demand for new courses for aspirants hoping for Gulf migration and overseas jobs resulted in the establishment of private institutions along with government education institutions.

This education policy, to some extent, reduced the gender gap in terms of literacy and higher education, but aggravated the class gap and the caste gap,

affecting the social and economic imbalance of the society. The sector of education became centred on money, which had a direct effect in the brand of 'Kerala Model' as stated by M. A. Oommen: "affordability and accessibility which were the hall-mark of the Kerala model seem to be jettisoned under the new dispensation" [Oommen \(2008\)](#). The orientation of the general public to participate in the electoral polling and engaged in environmental and cultural activities has its roots in the literacy movement of the state. According to Govind Parayil: "... the well-organised citizens movement may be a direct indication of the dialectical relationship between improved literacy (which again is a result of the active participation of social movements like the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad or KSSP (about which more later) and other NGOs engaged in literacy promotion, environmental protection and rural development campaigns among the population), and the deepening of democratic traditions and values in the civil society of Kerala." [Parayil \(1996\)](#) High standards of education create expectations in the minds of citizens. "Poverty and literacy form an explosive mixture, and one of the main ingredients in Kerala's political instability is the fact that western education has created expectations which the present economic system in this tightly overcrowded region cannot possibly fulfil" [Woodcock \(1967\)](#).

1.3. EDUCATION SYSTEM AND CARTOON

The cartoons that appeared in Toms' Bobanum Moliyum in the 1950s and 1960s illustrated the disciplined classrooms under the direct dictatorial control of aged male teacher, found to be always holding a cane. The cane is equated with class discipline and the students are shown frightened in the presence of the teacher.



Figure 1 [Thomas \(2007\)](#)

The cartoons of the same period portray the bold initiatives and agitations led by the students against the education policies of the government.



Figure 2 Thomas (2007)

The students' strike is portrayed as a regular phenomenon in which the students are aware of their rights and have the nerve to act against the authority. In the cartoon series, as years pass by, the higher education system of Keralam is demonstrated in the cartoon columns of Toms, where the college students are portrayed as leading a carefree life. The starting of new vocational courses as part of the demand of overseas jobs resulted in the establishment of Tutorial colleges and parallel colleges, run by private parties. The gradual shift of education system as a money-making business and a subsequent decline in the quality of education is portrayed in these cartoons. This practice of running educational institutions as a business venture was reinstated with the emergence of institutions run by minority communities. The cartoonist vividly portrays the figures of priests and nuns who are making demand for capitation fees for admissions and appointments. The religious association in the cartoons is also indirectly indicative of the prerogatives enjoyed by the minority religious institutions of the state in order to establish educational institutions of their own management.



Figure 3 Thomas (2007)

When it comes to the creative strokes of cartoonist Aravindan, the education system is portrayed through the viewpoint of the protagonist, Ramu. Ramu, the protagonist of the cartoon series, *Cheriy Manushyarum Valiya Lokavum* is a graduate and unemployed youth. The struggle of a graduate to find a job in Keralam during the time of 1960s is portrayed in the series. The protagonist takes the job of a contract teacher in a school and the classroom atmosphere is portrayed in the cartoon series.

The struggles of the teacher to maintain class discipline and his rapport with the students is portrayed in the cartoon. The budding teacher, Ramu, is continually monitored by the headmaster and the district education officer. The general trend of surveillance of the teachers by the higher authority in the sector of education during the 1960s is portrayed here.



Figure 4 Aravindan (1996)

As the cartoon series progresses, the protagonist accidentally becomes the teacher at a vocational college, which happened to be a regular picture in Keralam during the period under the names: 'Tutorial College' and 'Parallel college'. The high demand of vocational courses emerged as part of overseas migration is exploited by the private parties as a medium of business. The onset of the decadence of quality of education sector is portrayed in the cartoon series where the graduate, Ramu, is introduced as 'Prof. Ramu M. A.' Aravindan (1996). The lack of discipline in classrooms and the priority of the manager in monetary terms, considering education as a business venture, are portrayed in the cartoon.



Figure 5 Aravindan (1996)

The inefficiency of higher education in helping graduates to secure jobs is manifested in the character of the protagonist himself. Type writing and stenography is mentioned as courses with high demand at the time. This shows the shift of the economic condition from the agrarian and industrial sector to that of service sector which soon became the backbone of the Kerala economy in its progress to the 'Kerala Model'. Literacy among women is also highlighted in the cartoon series through the character of Leela. Leela, who was once the student of Ramu in the tutorial college, gains a job and advances in her career while Ramu still remains jobless. The advancement of female folk backed by education is exemplified through the character of Leela.

Thomas' cartoon series *Veekshanavishesham* covered the period of 1970s of Keralam where the changed face of the state is portrayed as a result of overseas migration and Gulf remittance. The college campus is portrayed in the cartoon series of Thomas in a colourful portrait full of fashion and style. The clothing style of the youth shows a reduced gender gap as the girls are shown wearing the boyish costumes.



Figure 6 Thomas. (2008)

The activities of the students outside the classroom are portrayed in the cartoon, thus showing the real picture of the general set up of educational institutions. The westernization in the clothing style is evident in the cartoon.

In another cartoon, a youngster is shown waiting outside the women's college hostel. He tells the postman that this is his new address. The culture of eve teasing in Kerala is brought to the cartoon frames to show the changing ambience of education.



Figure 7 Thomas. (2008)

2. CONCLUSION

A general trend of the cartoons of 1970s was to show the campus life of an undergraduate student in a college to be a celebration of her/his youth. Subsequently, the topic of discipline is never touched upon in these cartoons, like the previous cartoons showing the aged male teacher with a cane in his hand. Instead, the students are shown preoccupied with their own activities, not monitored by teachers. The changing face of free and compulsory education can be interpreted from these cartoons. Village libraries and youth associations are a constant presence in the cartoons. Libraries are shown as the dwelling place for educated youngsters to engage in debates and discussions, moulding the temperament of the literate with intellectual resources. The parallel influence of non-formal and informal education can be seen with the presence of the libraries and reading rooms.

In a nutshell, the changing faces of the education system of Kerala can be seen in the cartoons of these select cartoonists across the fifty years. The education system completely sponsored and monitored by the state got changed with the arrival of the private education system owned by private parties. Money became the criterion for the choice of education. Cartoons show the demand for the new courses as part of overseas job opportunities is cashed by private institutions. The campus and the premise became a venue for the youngsters to roam around and real teaching learning scenes are not shown in the cartoons of the later cartoonists. The absence of teacher figure is noteworthy in the cartoons. An analysis of these cartoons by three cartoonists namely Toms, Aravindan and Thomas reveals the changing pattern of the education system of Kerala across a time span of fifty years

from the official formation of the state. The strict education by the public sector shown in the early cartoons of Toms is replaced by the self-financing private education system of English medium schools run by the religious minority communities. Aravindan portrays another area of education which covers the emergence of vocational courses provided by tutorial colleges and parallel colleges run by private persons. The motto of these education institutions is that of money making. The quality of education in these institutions is shown deteriorating. When the cartoons of Thomas come to the space for discussion, a bohemian lifestyle and other countercultural elements are incorporated in his cartoon frames. The changing attitude of the youngsters and the liberalist influence of Hippy culture is evident in the portrayal. A study based on the select cartoonists makes it clear that the cartoonists themselves support the traditional pattern of teaching- learning process which is of strict and disciplined nature.

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