

Semiotic Analysis of Editorial Cartoons of Satish Acharya

By Vineet Srivastava | 16U130002,
under the guidance of Prof. Nina Sabnani.

Abstract

This study uses tools from semiotics to study the work of Indian cartoonist Satish Acharya. It includes a brief study of the history of editorial cartoons, a study of basic concepts of semiotics and existing work that has been done to apply these concepts to conduct a formal analysis of political cartoons. This study analyses a selection of Acharya's work from 2020 to identify the elements of the visual language he uses to construct his cartoons, and to study the explicit and implicit messages they contain. We find that Acharya uses consistent visual techniques to amplify or ambiguate his critique as needed, and places himself squarely with the people, against the political class.

Introduction

This study intends to study the work of Satish Acharya, a popular Indian cartoonist of the contemporary era. While Acharya makes cartoons on sports and films as well, this study will focus on his editorial cartoons. This paper will draw from existing literature on the communication techniques used in editorial cartoons to analyse how Acharya uses the medium to communicate ideas, engage the reader and criticise those in power.

History of the Cartoon

The word "cartoon" derives from the Italian word "*cartone*", which meant "pasteboard." The word in English initially referred to preparatory drawings made on sturdy paper by artists as a *modello* (design) to be rendered in another medium, such as tapestry or fresco. (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

According to Appelbaum & Kelly (1981), the British magazine "Punch" first used "cartoon" to refer to its political drawings in 1843, when the British Parliament unveiled cartoons (in the earlier sense of preliminary drawings) for a set of murals that

were to be commissioned in the Houses. The popularity of their cartoons led to the term's increased use. In modern usage, cartoons are "drawings, representational or symbolic, that make a satirical, witty or humorous point" (Low & Williams, 2000).

Early Political Applications

The utility of cartoons to convey social messages led to various applications in political causes. Shikes (1969) points to the use of visual protest by Martin Luther during the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, distributing pamphlets that drew a satirical, visual contrast between the actions of the Church and those of Christ. The use of the visual format allowed the pamphlets to reach more people and enjoy higher comprehension. Press (1981) points out that William Hogarth's pictorial satire in the 17th century was a precursor to political cartoons in modern Britain.

Meanwhile in Italy, a style of representation known as *caricatura* (translating roughly to "loaded portrait") is thought to have originated from Leonardo da Vinci's studies of the grotesque, used to better understand the concept of beauty. In this context, the portrait is assumed to be "loaded" with the perception the artist wishes to create, by highlighting and minimising certain features. This is in contrast with an approach that seeks to portray its subject "faithfully". Early examples of *caricatura* were quick, impressionistic drawings that exaggerated or modulated certain physical characteristics to create visual comedy. (Hoffman, 1957).

Germanic visual protest combined with the Italian *caricatura* (caricature), and led to widespread conventions among European cartoonists by the 18th century. A range of cartoonists from across the continent explored cartoons as a means of combining physical caricature of public actors with pointed allusions to social circumstances of the time. (Backer, 1996).

Caricature and its political applications are not a phenomenon unique to Europe. Wright (1875) argues that the earliest examples of caricature are found in Egyptian monuments, where men are portrayed as animals in an attempt to satirise the relationship between men and their rulers. Caricatures of King Tutankhamen's father-in-law, Ikhnaton, date back to Egypt in 1360 BCE, and have been described as the world's first example of political caricature. (Hess & Kaplan, 1968).

However, Lutfi & Marsot (1971) point out that Egyptian satire had to be much more careful and subtle in its critique of power than European political cartoonists did, due to the difference in government censorship policy in either context. As a result,

although the elements of political cartoons have their origins around the world, the European environment was conducive to the institutionalisation of political caricature, due to relatively more liberal censorship laws, access to printing tools, and the cross-border diffusion of art styles that allowed the development of the editorial cartoon in its modern form.

The Modern Editorial Cartoon

By the late 17th century, British printmaker James Gillray had explored the medium of political cartooning for social commentary and caricature. Much of his work targeted King George III and ridiculed the French under Napoleon, and his caricatures generally satirised members across the political spectrum. Together with Hogarth, he is known as one of the most influential early cartoonists. Political cartoons reached the Americas in 1754, when Benjamin Franklin published his famous “Join or Die” cartoon advocating for the union of the colonies against the natives. Editorial cartoons often had an influential role within society, such as when Thomas Nast’s cartoons were used during the Civil War era to defend Abraham Lincoln’s policies. (Low & Williams, 2000).

According to Shaikh, Tariq & Saqlain (2016), editorial cartoons today use humour, satire, irony, exaggeration, labelling and analogy to convey an argument about political events.

Editorial Cartoons in India

Mitter (1994) shows that editorial cartoons were exported to India during the British Raj. The earliest Indian newspapers to carry editorial cartoons were the British-owned *Bengal Hurkaru* and *India Gazette*, in the 1850s. Nationalist papers like *Amrita Bazaar* also began to publish cartoons soon after, though cartoonists had to walk a fine line to avoid the ire of the colonial government. Khanduri (2009) has studied how many eminent Indian cartoonists, such as Kutty, R. K. Laxman, and Bireshwar, cite British publications such as *Punch* as major influences in their process of learning to produce editorial cartoons. This is despite the presence of vernacular editions of *Punch* in Urdu, Hindi and Gujarati. Khanduri describes how the influence of these publications was limited by the Raj, threatened by the potential political impact of the growing body of vernacular visual satire. However, vernacular papers began to develop their own style over time, with Lhost (2011) examining an early example of an indigenous cartoon seeking a political impact, published in *Sulav Samachar* in the 1870s, lampooning the

racial bias in the judicial system at the time that allowed Europeans to commit crimes against Indians with little threat of consequence.

Laxman (1989) argued that sculpture always depicts themes that belong to a society's collective mythos. Laxman described the use of religious iconography by Indian cartoonists in the pre-independence era, associating nationalist parties with the imagery of Rama, while associating the British rulers with images of Ravana. Laxman argued that the use of this culturally understood imagery increased the reach of cartoons and their political messages, especially amongst the uneducated or illiterate populations of the time, much like Martin Luther's woodcuts in the 1500s.

Indian cartooning grew quite significantly post-Independence in 1947. Khanduri (2014) discusses how editorial cartoons became an especially critical mode of communication in independent India, with cartoons engaging in humourous critique of India's governance, secular credentials, and development goals. Devadawson (2014) discusses how several significant cartoonists documented the different eras of India's post-Independence history. She describes how Shankar critiqued the language issue and India's foreign policy, how Laxman used humour to communicate the common man's perspective on economic issues, Abu Abraham's criticism of the political environment during the Emergency, and several other examples. Each cartoonist has a distinct style, focus, and perspective.

Satish Acharya

Satish Acharya is an eminent contemporary Indian cartoonist that works on matters relating to politics, cricket and movies. Trained in finance, Acharya spent 9 years as an advertiser before joining *Mid Day* as a cartoonist. After nearly a decade there, Acharya became a freelance artist, publishing for various newspapers and magazines across the world. A self-taught cartoonist, Acharya describes R. K. Laxman and Mario Miranda as his major influences. (The Logical Indian, 2020). Acharya believes in the importance of humour in editorial cartoons, but considers it secondary to the larger goal of conveying an idea about the subject being discussed.

Acharya views his role as antagonistic to whichever government is in power, and his task as a cartoonist to convey political commentary over humour. He has mentioned being harassed by supporters of the political leaders and groups he targets, and describes it as an occupational hazard. However, he has also expressed the necessity for a *lakshman-rekha* when it comes to free speech in India, arguing that certain speech

can cause public agitation, and “create problems for authorities and regular people”. (The Manipal Journal, 2013). Acharya has also discussed incidents where his cartoons were allegedly dropped from publication due to pressure on the management from political groups (Sabrang, 2018).

Relevance

Despite India’s consistent fall in World Press Freedom Index rankings, from rank 80 in the year 2002, to rank 142 in the year 2020: editorial cartoonists, Acharya included, have managed to, and continue to make strong criticisms of the political establishment. The hypothesis of this study is that the visual and linguistic techniques used by Acharya and cartoonists like him help abstract and ambiguate his criticisms, which helps the cartoonist avoid censorship while being able to make fairly strong, critical statements.

Research Objectives

This research aims to apply existing literature on the visual, linguistic and narrative techniques used in editorial cartoons to the work of Satish Acharya to gain a broader understanding of his work. This analysis will address questions such as:

Issues and their Framing

This covers questions of several different kinds, broadly under the ambit of understanding and describing the relationship between four principal elements of Acharya’s comics, namely: the issues at hand, the people/institution represented, Acharya and his perspective, and the reader.

The analysis will attempt to identify patterns that emerge, in the issues that Acharya’s cartoons raise, their portrayal of particular characters/cultural concepts, in the framing of Acharya himself, and in the role of the reader in the comic. As pointed out by McCloud (1994), closure, or the process by which the reader fills in the blanks of what the visual frame does not explicitly say, is an integral part of reading cartoons.

Visual Language & Image Composition

Editorial cartoons nearly always contain elements of unrealism. As Shaikh, Tariq & Saqlain (2016) point out, editorial cartoons use humour, satire, irony, exaggeration,

labelling and analogy to make their statements. These literary devices are used to draw interesting relationships between the elements portrayed in the comic. Several different visual techniques may be used to depict these literary devices.

The analysis will attempt to identify recurring preferences or signatures of Acharya's visual style, as well as the relationship of visual and linguistic devices he uses.

Narrative Structures & Worldview

Editorial cartoons may be somewhat ambiguous, but they generally take a stand on the issues they discuss. The cartoonist is engaged in what could be described as a dialectic activity with the rest of society: the cartoonist's stand on any given issue is shaped by their reading of the issue through the lens of their interaction with society (the media they consume, the larger political environment, opinions of friends and family etc), and the cartoonist's output, the cartoon, adds to the same collective cultural pool of ideas that members of society build their worldview from.

This analysis will look at the narrative structure of Acharya's cartoons, in the sense of how the images used are to be read, sequentially or simultaneously, to construct the reader's interpretation of the cartoon; and discuss the relationship those narrative structures have with the cartoonist's worldview.

Theoretical Framework

This study involves the analysis of editorial cartoons along three broad axes: theme, visuals, and narrative. However, the interplay between these factors is complex, and not every cartoon will use the same kinds of relationships between them. The analysis therefore requires the use of an appropriate theoretical framework. This study will draw on existing research that deals with the analysis/interpretation of editorial cartoons. As the study of "the life of signs within society" (Saussure, 1916), semiotics offers a useful set of tools to conduct this kind of analysis on complex media such as editorial cartoons. This literature review will therefore focus on some of the structures and tools that have been used for formal analysis of editorial cartoons which show applicability to the research goals of this study.

Narrative Structure of Editorial Cartoons

Medhurst & Desousa (1981) outline a “taxonomy of graphic discourse” to describe political cartoons, which is derived from the 5 rhetorical canons, namely invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. The key argument is that cartoons, being a persuasive medium, ought to be describable by modifications of frameworks used in oral persuasion. Four major kinds of elements are used in the narrative structure of editorial cartoons:

1. Political commonplaces, i.e. socially accepted legitimate political subjects
2. Literary/cultural allusions, i.e. references to existing collective culture
3. Personality character traits and their caricature
4. Situational/transient elements arising from immediate discourse

These *topoi* (dimensions of argument) are used to construct enthymemes, which are statements which may imply unstated premises or conclusions. These are arranged using tools of contrast, commentary, or contradiction. The study also described 6 elements of graphic style: line and form, physiognomic caricature, relative placement, relative size, relation of words and images, and rhythmic montage. This framework was utilised in a semiotic analysis by Fernando (2013) on editorial cartoons in Sri Lanka.

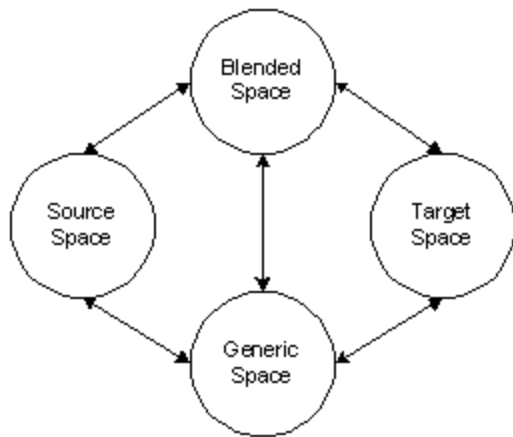
Morris (1993), describes a different kind of rhetorical structure. Attempting to strike a balance between “the logocentric and visual-centric approaches”, he breaks down cartoons into rhetorical imperatives and processes. Morris connects Parsons’ work on social action with that of Greimas and Courtès in semiotics, linking human action to forms of knowledge and social needs. It results in four rhetorical imperatives, based on French verb forms (*savoir, pouvoir, devoir, vouloir*), and rhetorical processes to achieve those imperatives, in form and context.

Semiotic Analysis of Editorial Cartoons

Semiotics is the study of the relationship between signs and meaning. Signs are any objects that refer or have the potential to refer to objects other than themselves. Semiotic frameworks describe how meaning is constructed, transmitted and interpreted from signs in a formal way.

Lee (2003) conducted a semiotic analysis of political cartoons using Saussure’s notion of semiotic systems and conceptual blending. Blending is a technique to map different

sign spaces onto each other, as a kind of semiotic morphism. A semiotic morphism is a kind of translation from one system of signs to another. Blending occurs when similar relationships of signs exist in multiple spaces (contexts or circumstances), and their meanings are blended by exploiting the similarity in the relationships that exist between the elements in each context.



The generic space is loosely analogous to the least common multiple of the source and target space: it must accommodate both spaces with minimum degeneracy. On the other hand, the blended space represents how the elements from the source and target spaces have been combined in the image being studied. This provides a means of classifying relationships of elements in the cartoons.

Jose (2019), conducted a study on editorial cartoons in Malayalam newspapers during the 2016 legislative assembly elections. She used Peirce's triadic model of signs to break down visual and textual elements of cartoons, and attempts to describe the interpretant of each sign in the cartoon. Jose also used Barthes' linguistic model to delineate the denotative and connotative meaning of the images studied: denotative meaning is the literal message conveyed by the image, and connotative meaning attaches the larger context the image exists in.

Intertextuality

A related concept to this is intertextuality. (Kristeva, 1980). It emphasises that a text (or any complex sign) does not exist in a vacuum. Its meaning relates to existing work, and the structures that existing knowledge and cultural conventions create to mediate meaning between the artist and the reader. Intertextual analysis discusses the relationship between the text under consideration with other texts that relate to it.

Metaphor & Metonymy

Jakobson & Halle (1956), identified two poles along which human discourse has developed: metaphor and metonymy (alternatively, condensation and displacement). Metaphor is a technique of drawing similarity (often functionally or relationally) between two systems that are not directly related to each other. Metaphors substitute the circumstances of one system into the functional relationships of another. An example of this would be referring to a people's movement as a "grassroots" movement. Grassroots grow from the bottom up, and this functional idea is transposed to the idea of people organising through self-determination and collective action (bottom-up), as opposed to following the directions of a leader (top-down).

Metonymy is a technique of representing an element through a closely related structural element (commonly cause-effect relationships). Metonyms make use of associations between elements to represent one, while referring to another. An example of this would be referring to "Delhi" or "New Delhi" to reference the Government of India, drawing on the relationship between the two.

Metonymy is related to, but distinct from synecdoche, in which a part of a set is substituted as a reference to the whole. The connotative aspects of the cartoons studied will generally use one of these methods to draw the non-literal connections that the format requires.

Humour & Satire

Humour and satire are two elements that are commonly associated with editorial cartoons, and it is important to distinguish how these concepts are being used in this study, since there are a variety of views on how these concepts function.

Hatch & Erhlich (1993) described humour as a culturally variable response to the recognition of contradiction, incongruity, and incoherence. The culturally variable aspect of this is what particular kinds of contradictions are considered humorous. These contradictions are generally between an expectation of some kind, and a reality that differs from it.

In the context of a joke, the setup creates an expectation, and the punchline subverts that expectation. The contradictory relationship between the expectation created by the setup and the punchline provide the opportunity for humour, although whether a

particular kind of contradiction is found funny or not therefore depends on individual and cultural factors.

Satire, on the other hand, is a label/genre that can be applied to art, literature, or any other cultural product that uses tools such as humour, irony, exaggeration, ridicule and other rhetorical techniques to critique individuals, groups or society, and perhaps shame them into improving themselves (Elliott, 2004). Satire uses these tools to make interesting observations and hold up a mirror to society.

When humour and satire are defined in this sense, satire is almost a primary feature of editorial cartoons. They make use of similar rhetorical devices (Shaikh, Tariq & Saqlain, 2016), and their direct purpose is to make interesting observations about current affairs. The role of editorial cartoons as political satire has been observed by Kumar & Combe (2015).

Humour, on the other hand, is less essential to editorial cartoons, although it is often used. Acharya himself has stated that humour is less of a priority to him in his work than conveying a strong idea about the topic he chooses to address. (The Manipal Journal, 2013)

Research Gap and Relevance

There is relatively little research that uses systematic methods, in semiotics or otherwise, to analyse the construction of Indian editorial cartoons. The bulk of existing scholarship on Indian editorial cartoons deals with the history of these cartoons in changing political circumstances, instead of formal textual analysis.

This study aims to conduct a formal analysis of the methods used by the chosen subject, Satish Acharya, to construct his editorial cartoons; and discuss how these tools allow Acharya to package messages that are strongly critical of the political establishment in a sufficiently abstracted, ambiguated form to survive in a political media environment whose other forms rarely engage in such strident criticism.

There is relatively little research in systematic methods, in semiotics or otherwise, that have been applied to Indian editorial cartoons. The bulk of existing scholarship on Indian editorial cartoons deals with their historical development and circumstances, instead of formal textual analysis. This study intends to provide a broad-based analysis of an eminent, contemporary Indian editorial cartoonist.

Methodology

This study makes use of the theoretical frameworks described above to review a selection of Acharya's cartoons from October to December, 2020. Acharya's cartoons will be sourced from his Twitter page, which is where he first shares his independent work. As mentioned earlier, cartoons pertaining to sports, film, or obituaries will not come under the ambit of this discussion for two reasons:

1. The larger questions of the study relating to the use of cartooning techniques to critique the political establishment do not apply to those kinds of cartoons
2. The frameworks identified, especially with respect to narrative structure of the cartoons, particularly deal with editorial cartoons, which are but a subset of cartoons, or non-realistic representative images.

Acharya's cartoons were analysed along five lines:

1. The incident, idea, or topic referred to, and the literary devices used
2. The visual elements in the frame and their connotation
3. Further implicit connotations of the image
4. The function of text in the cartoons
5. Intertextual analysis: how the cartoons draw from other material pertaining to the same, related, or contrasted issues

The analysis is followed by a discussion of the findings in the context of the research objectives outlined above. The individual cartoons, as well as their analysis, may be found in the appendix.

For the sake of this analysis, it is assumed that the artist's portrayal of elements in the cartoons is the "truth", where ambiguity exists. This presumption simplifies the analysis, as to a reader in the real world, (El Refaie, 2009), existing knowledge and biases have an effect on how the reader perceives the cartoon.

Discussion

Acharya's work primarily focuses on national politics and the developments that occur there. His cartoons occasionally cover state-level issues, but typically only when they become matters of discussion within the national media (Figures 2, 6, 13, 14, 15, and 16, to be found in the appendices).

Acharya's cartoons are essentially always critical of their subject. The exceptions to this general rule are when he discusses the farmers in the context of the 2020 Indian Farmers' Protest (Figures 1, 4, 10), and the struggle of the non-privileged to get justice from the Courts (Figures 17, 20, 22). The common thread here is that those people are not from the political class, which appears to be Acharya's criterion. Police and government servants are also portrayed with some nuance, implying that Acharya considers them to have more in common with the ordinary man than with the political class (Figure 2, 7).

Acharya primarily uses caricature to refer to the agents portrayed in his cartoons. He uses standard techniques such as exaggerating distinctive features, drawing from understood social stereotypes, and exaggerating the relationship of elements with each other. He occasionally makes use of other devices: personification, metonymy, and metaphor. Personification is used especially in context with India (Figures 1, 11). Metonymy is often used in the context of Prime Minister Narendra Modi through his beard or by depicting him as a peacock (Figures 5, 10,). It is also used to refer to the Courts via different associable elements such as robes, the Scales of Justice, and Lady Justice (Figures 3, 17, 22). These metonymic elements may have metaphorical significance (as in the case of PM Modi and the peacock), but metaphoric description can be used on its own terms (Figures 4, 6).

Acharya often makes use of blended spaces in his work (Figures 3, 4, 14). The purpose of these blends is often to use ideas that are well understood in one context to make a point about another, eg. in Figure 3, Acharya makes a statement about the inevitability of questions following the Supreme Court, and the futility of their perceived effort to silence those questions, by drawing a comparison a man telling his shadow to stop following him.

The use of text falls into a few major forms:

1. Character dialogue: these are statements made by diegetic elements within the cartoon. They are typically short quips which attempt to perform a humorous function, often by contrast with the visuals (Figures 2, 3, 6, 25). However, in some cases, this text adds a significant degree of intertextual meaning and context (Figures 8, 11).
2. Labels: this refers to the use of labelling text to explain what particularly ambiguous elements in the cartoon might refer to. In general, these do not

perform a special function, except occasionally also functioning within the conceptual framework of the cartoon (Figure 4).

3. **Headlines:** a common feature of Acharya's style is to include a newspaper headline, typically in the corner of the frame. This is an assistance to readers to contextualise the image, in case of ambiguity. It therefore also functions as a kind of stylistic signature.
4. **Captions, Titles, and Section Headers:** this kind of text is used in cartoons with multiple sections to delineate them.

Even after a functional analysis of each of the basic elements in each cartoon, there tends to be layers of meaning that are derivable from the cartoon beyond that. Acharya's criticism is sometimes direct and strident (Figures 3, 9, 14). However, in many cartoons—particularly those critical of Constitutional institutions such as the Reserve Bank of India or the Supreme Court of India—a deeper layer of harsher criticism is often present underneath the surface. These cartoons also contain an explicit layer of criticism, but elements within them are often either ambiguous or incongruent with the basic conceptual space. These contradictions, when read intertextually, often lead to readings of the cartoons that imply much harsher criticism than perhaps initially apparent (Figures 1, 2, 12). This is primarily used to criticise the political class for the difficulties they cause the common man, and their effort to undermine Constitutional institutions in the country.

Besides this, Acharya tends to take a clear stand on issues, even controversial ones, or those currently within the ambit of political debate (Figures 3, 4 and 24). These stances tend to be primarily anti-establishment.

A recurring theme in Acharya's work is the separation or distance of the government from the people (Figures 5, 7, 9). Acharya makes it clear that he believes that governments are distanced from the issues and concerns of common people, and consistently implies that the government initiates, perpetuates, and works to expand this distance.

As Acharya's work primarily deals with issues in national politics, the most common character in his cartoons is PM Modi. Acharya has also developed a fairly consistent visual language for the PM. There are three main characters:

1. **Caricature Modi (Figures 2, 4, 6, 11):** This refers to caricatures of the PM that are consistent with Acharya's general style of depicting individuals. The PM is often shown in this context along with Home Minister Amit Shah, and Uttar Pradesh

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath. This depiction of the PM is often used as a synecdochal stand-in for his party organisation, the BJP.

2. Big Modi (Figures 10, 19): In this form, the PM is depicted as impossibly large, often shown only through his beard. Acharya often uses size differences between his characters to highlight power imbalances (Figure 14). This visual language structure is extended to the PM, making him larger than anyone else, as the most powerful person in the country. This form of depiction is generally used to refer to the power of the PM and the effect to which he uses it to affect the lives of “smaller people”.
3. Peacock Modi (Figures 5, 7, 9): The peacock is often used to symbolise the public image of the PM, which is glamorous and powerful. This connection came from the PM himself (Figure 5). However, Acharya uses it to satirically contrast the picture-perfect image of the PM with the actions of his government. The PM is shown as using the peacock (his image) as a political shield, or that the peacock symbolises the PM’s disconnect from the people.

Conclusion

In this study, we have explored the work of Indian editorial cartoonist Satish Acharya using tools from semiotics and intertextual analysis to identify how he uses visual language to make critical statements about political developments. Acharya generally places himself with common people, against the political class; and mixes strident and layered criticism using the ambiguity that is often inherently present in visual media.

References

1. Becker, S. D., Goldberg, R. (1959). *Comic art in America: A social history of the funnies, the political cartoons, magazine humor, sporting cartoons, and animated cartoons*. Simon & Schuster.
2. “Evolution of cartoon.” *Merriam-Webster*, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/cartoon-definition-evolution>. Accessed on 25 November 2020.
3. Appelbaum, S., Kelly, R. M. (1981). *Great drawings and illustrations from Punch, 1841–1901: 192 Works by Leech, Keene, Du Maurier, May and 21 Others*. Courier Dover Publications. ISBN 978-0-486-24110-4.
4. Low, D., & Williams, R. E. (2000). Political cartoon. *The American Presidency*. Grolier.

5. Backer, D. H. (1996). Uniting mugwumps and the masses: The role of Puck in gilded age politics, 1880-1884. [Unpublished master's thesis]. University of Virginia.
6. Shikes, R. E. (1969). *The indignant eye: The artist as social critic in prints and drawings from the fifteenth century to Picasso*. Beacon Press. 13-17.
7. Hoffman, W. (1957). *Caricature from Leonardo to Picasso*. Crown Publishers.
8. Press, C. (1981). *The political cartoon*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. ISBN 9780838619018.
9. Shaikh N. Z., Tariq, R., & Saqlain, N. (2016). Cartoon war..... A political dilemma! A semiotic analysis of political cartoons. *Journal of Media Studies*. 31. 74-92.
10. Hill, D. (1965). *Mr. Gillray: The caricaturist, a biography*. Phaidon Publishers Incorporated.
11. Khanduri, R. G. (2009). Vernacular Punches: Cartoons and Politics in Colonial India. *History and Anthropology*, 20(4), 459–486. doi:10.1080/02757200903278643
12. Mitter, P. (1994). *Art and nationalism in colonial India, 1850-1922*. Cambridge University Press.
13. Devadawson, C. R. (2014). *Out of line: Cartoons, caricature and contemporary India*. ISBN 8125055134
14. Athavale, S. (2020, February 29). *Satish Acharya: "Cartoonist must be critical of government in power"*. The Logical Indian.
<https://thelogicalindian.com/exclusive/satish-acharya-cartoonist-19938>
15. Malu, P. (2018, August 13). *R. K. Laxman was lucky he did not have to face this: Satish Acharya*. Sabrang India.
<https://www.sabrangindia.in/interview/exclusive-r-k-laxman-was-lucky-he-did-not-have-face-satish-acharya>
16. Singh, M. (2013, April 5). *If I can draw, anybody can draw: Satish Acharya*. The Manipal Journal.
<https://themanipaljournal.com/2013/04/05/if-i-can-draw-anybody-can-draw-satish-acharya/>
17. Medhurst, M. J., & Desousa, M. A. (1981). Political cartoons as rhetorical form: A taxonomy of graphic discourse. *Communication Monographs*, 48(3), 197–236. doi:10.1080/03637758109376059
18. Morris, R. (1993). Visual Rhetoric in Political Cartoons: A Structuralist Approach. *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity*, 8(3), 195–210. doi:10.1207/s15327868ms0803_5
19. Lee, C. B. (2003). *A Semiotic Analysis of Political Cartoons*. University of California.

20. Fernando, T. A. (2013). The power of cartoons: Depicting the political images of Mahinda Rajapakse and Sarath Fonseka as presidential candidates. *Media Asia*, 40(3), 231–243. doi:10.1080/01296612.2013.11689973
21. Jose, C. M. (2019). A semiotic analysis of political cartoons in Malayalam newspapers during the 2016 assembly election. Christ University.
22. Peirce, C. (1958). *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Harvard University Press.
23. Kristeva, J. (1980). Word, Dialogue and Novel. In Roudiez, L. *Desire in language: A semiotic approach to literature and art*. Columbia University Press.
24. Gajanayake, G. M. S. B. (2014). Semiotics analysis on message delivering in Sri Lankan cartoons. University of Moratuwa.
25. Jakobson, R., & Halle, M. (1956). *Two Aspects of Language and Two Types of Aphasic Disturbances in Fundamentals of Language*. Mouton.
26. El Refaie, E. (2009). Multiliteracies: how readers interpret political cartoons. *Visual Communication*, 8(2), 181–205. doi:10.1177/1470357209102113
27. Saussure, F. (1916) *Course in General Linguistics* (trans. Roy Harris). Duckworth.
28. McCloud, S. (1994). *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. New York: Harper Collins & Kitchen Sink Press.
29. Hess, S. & Kaplan, M. (1968). *The Ungentlemanly Art*. New York: The Macmillan Press
30. Lutfi A. & Marsot, A. S. (1971). The cartoon in Egypt. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 2(5).
31. Wright, T. (1875). *A History of Caricature and Grotesque*. London.
32. Laxman, R.K. (1989). Freedom to the cartoon, freedom to speak. *Daedalus*. Fall:6991.
33. Khanduri, R.G. (2014). *Caricaturing culture in India: Cartoons and history in the modern world*. Cambridge University Press
34. Lhost, E. (2011). *Political cartooning, 1870s-Present (India)*. In J.D. Downing (Ed.), *Encyclopaedia of social movement media*(pp.405-407). Thousand Oaks: SAGE
35. Hatch, M. & Erhlich, S. (1993). Spontaneous Humour as an Indicator of Paradox and Ambiguity in Organizations. *Organization Studies*, 14, p505-526. §.
36. Elliott, R. C. (2004). The nature of satire. *Encyclopædia Britannica*.
37. Kumar, S., & Combe, K. (2015). Political parody and satire as subversive speech in the global digital sphere. *International Communication Gazette*, 77, 211-214. 10.1177/1748048514568756.

Appendices

Figure 1. Date: 5th December, 2020

India cares for farmers!



Note. This cartoon references a protest by the farmers of India, primarily of Punjab and Haryana, that began in September, 2020 and is still ongoing as of December, 2020. The protests are in response to a set of agricultural laws passed by the Parliament of India in September, 2020.

The image shows (denotes) a man holding a sickle, wrapped in the arms of a tearful woman who covers him with her shawl. The sickle connotes the man as a farmer, while his pagri (turban) and beard are likely a reference to the protest's concentration in the aforementioned states, and the stereotypical appearance of the farmers that live there. The woman portrayed is a personification of India, as is connoted from the merging of her shawl with the map of India. A tear falls from the woman's eye. The personification of India as a woman is likely a reference to the concept of Bharat Mata, or Mother India.

What these symbols connote is that a saddened Mother India is shielding the protesting farmers. Denotatively, the image depicts a backdrop (ground) of wind, which refers directly to the biting cold of Delhi in December, and to the many protesting farmers who are sleeping in their trucks and tractors, or out in the open, at the border of Delhi.

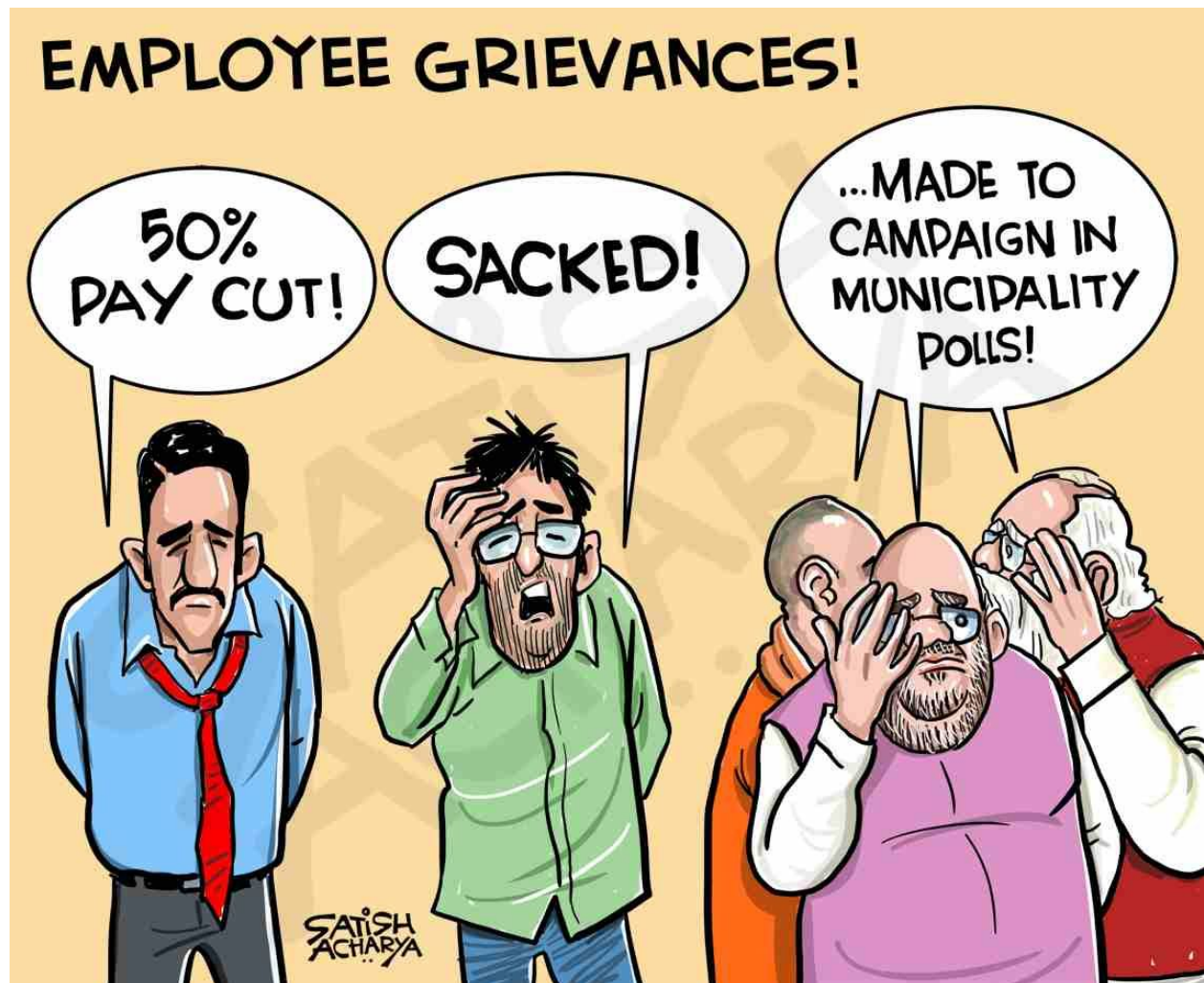
The implication is therefore that Bharat Mata ("who" ultimately reflects the people of India) are saddened at the distress of the protesting farmers, and are reaching out to protect and shield them.

Taking the connotation one step further, one might ask the question of why the farmers have had to protest for so long: answers may vary, but the protest leaders have themselves cited the government's lack of dialogue with them, not to mention that the farmers were tear-gassed, water-cannoned, and lathi-charged when they first showed up at the Delhi borders. If one were to make that next step, the image changes. Instead of the people of India being protective of farmers in their impersonal state of distress, Acharya implies that the people of India are being protective of their farmers in their distress caused by the government: whether due to the new farm laws, lack of dialogue, or the police attacks.

In this image, the criticism of the government is therefore somewhat ambiguous: one may perceive the distress to farmers as either caused by the government, or a more impersonal outcome of their extended protest in the Delhi winter.

Figure 2. Date: 4th December, 2020

Unhappy employees!



Note. This cartoon references three political topics. The first topic is the 2020 Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) elections, whose results were declared the day this cartoon was published. The second is a 50% pay cut implemented by the government of the same state (Telangana) towards its government employees. The third is the layoffs seen in the private sector as a result of the fallout of the COVID pandemic.

The image caption is, "Employee Grievances!" This image depicts five people, in 3 groups marked by their speech bubbles. The speech bubbles contain clues

as to whom the people are. The first person says, “50% pay cut!” In the context of the pay cut implemented by the Telangana State government, the image connotes that the man is a public servant. The second person says, “Sacked!” Private sector employees are sacked, therefore this man is (was) in the private sector. It is interesting to note the differences in caricature used. The public servant wears a shirt and tie (loosened, which often connotes burnout from work), with a belt and trousers, neatly parted hair and a groomed moustache. The private sector worker wears glasses, has messy hair, stubble, a slight paunch, and wears an untucked shirt with jeans. The differences in character between the two types suggest a difference in commitment towards precise or “correct” social conduct. The third group says, “... made to campaign in municipality election polls!” The caricatures recognisably depict Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, and Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath.

Denotatively, the image suggests that each of these groups of “employees” has their own grievances, and the cartoon engages in contrasting these three cases.

By definition, contrasts allow for subjective interpretation, but one may choose to observe that the three people from the political class are not necessarily employees in the sense that the other two are. They are technically employees of the Government of India and of Uttar Pradesh, but they are all in leadership roles that give them much more control of their organisations than the typical worker, and it must also be noted that their governmental responsibilities do not include campaigning for any elections, as those are political prerogatives.

If one were to contrast the situations as above, it would lead to a conclusion that this is somewhat of a false equivalence, and in that point serve to raise a contrast between the life experiences of Indian workers and of its political class.

Figure 3. Date: 3rd December, 2020

Contempt!



Note. This cartoon refers to the ongoing debates about the Supreme Court and the use of contempt of court laws in India.

The image depicts a hand of a person, pointing at their shadow and saying, “Stop following me!” The shadow is in the shape of a question mark. We understand from the person’s attire (black robes and a white shirt) that they are a judge, and this with the title is enough to establish the theme of the piece, for readers that have that information. The lack of a face to the judge likely suggests that the judge here is a synecdoche for the Court (which is made of many judges).

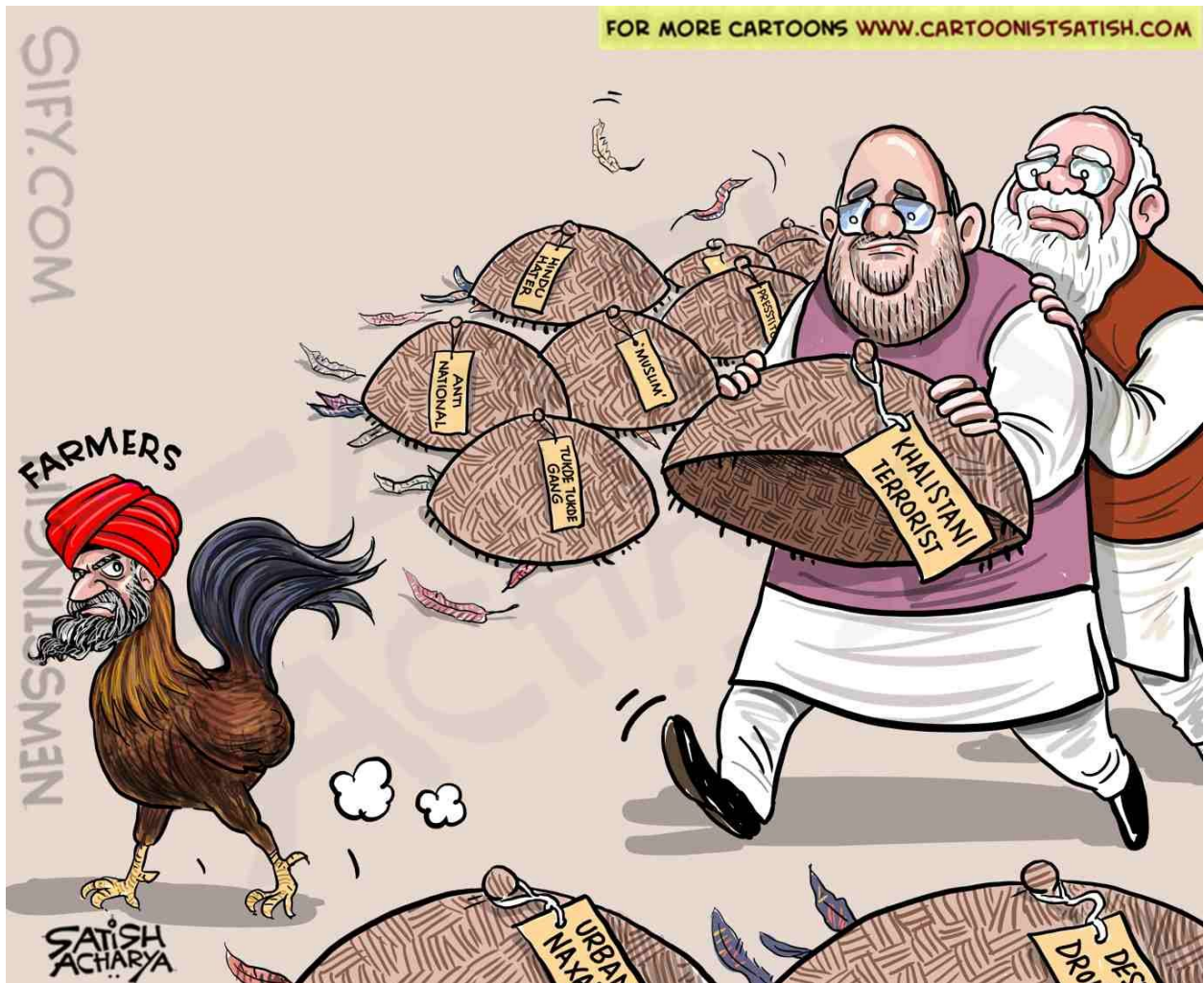
With the context of contempt of court established, the image connotes that the Court is using the contempt law to try to escape from questions, which is a clear stance taken by the cartoonist on the matter. Interestingly, the questions are depicted as the Court's own shadow. This is actually a good example of a conceptual blend: the space of the Court (an abstract reference to an institution) trying to prevent questions (again in a general sense) being asked of it, is blended with the space of a person telling their own shadow to stop following them.

The reading of blends is naturally subjective, but the implication being made is that questions will follow the Supreme Court as naturally as shadows follow their owners, and attempts to silence dissent is as futile as attempting to banish your shadow.

In this cartoon, the stance on the political issue is made very clear, while the blended message makes a more philosophical point about dissent in democracy.

Figure 4. Date: 3rd December, 2020

Labelling farmers!



Note. This cartoon references the previously mentioned farmers’ protest in India, and the Government of India’s response to them.

In this image, PM Modi pushes HM Shah, carrying a chicken trap labelled “Khalistani Terrorist” towards a rooster with a pagri and beard labelled “farmers”. The rest of the image depicts other traps, presumably with other chickens in them (as identifiable from the feathers). Those traps are labelled, “desh drohi” (traitor), “urban naxal”, “tukde tukde gang”, “anti-national”, “Muslim”, “Hindu hater”, and “presstitute”.

The image suggests that the Government of India is trying to label the protesting farmers as Khalistani terrorists. The trap is used as a metaphor for how these labels

work. If the farmers are successfully portrayed as Khalistani terrorists, they are politically delegitimised. The main image contrasts with the ground of other “chickens”, or groups/classes of citizens, that have been successfully labelled and silenced using the labels described above. This is a use of conceptual blending of the space of trapping chickens with a basket, with the space of delegitimising critics by assigning them anti-national labels.

Interestingly, the PM is shown hiding behind the HM, who is tasked with dealing with the farmers. This could be read as a reference to the fact that HM Shah controls the Delhi Police that attacked the protesting farmers, and the image would therefore connote that Shah is tasked with doing the PM’s “dirty work”. Both men appear to be unsure or dejected, as if unsure of the action they are taking.

The reading of their expression, as well as its justification, is clearly ambiguous, but if the above is true, it would most likely be due to the very close relationship between respect (at least on paper) for the farmer and Indian nationalism. “Jai jawan, jai kisan” (hail the soldier, hail the farmer) has been a staple of Indian politics since the days of former PM Lal Bahadur Shastri. It is therefore unlikely that such a charge could be made to stick to the protesting farmers, and the benefit of hindsight has already shown that the labelling tactic has not worked in this case.

The cartoon is quite straightforward in its basic premise, where Acharya refers to the government’s penchant for labelling dissenting voices as different kinds of enemies of the people. It must be noted that this idea is used as a premise instead of a debatable proposition, which suggests that the cartoonist takes a clear stand on the matter.

Figure 5. Date: 2nd December, 2020

...



Note. This image refers to the farmer's protests that have been discussed previously, and PM Modi's appearance at the Dev Deepawali festival in Varanasi on 30th November.

The image depicts a peacock singing as it watches a light show on a starry night, on a strip of ground, with a shovel and an excavator. The peacock is separated from a horde of people by a massive chasm in the ground.

There are several elements to this image. The peacock watching the light show represents PM Modi at the Dev Deepawali festival in Varanasi. On the day of the event, a clip went viral of PM Modi watching a musical performance with a similar set of lights from his yacht in the Ganga. Besides the visual correspondence of the two

images (which would require having seen the aforementioned viral video), the peacock itself is used here as a metonym for the PM. This has been done by cartoonists, including Acharya, since the PM uploaded a video on August 23, 2020 that depicted him feeding some peacocks, titled “Precious Moments”. Some critics considered the video distasteful, considering the distress in the country at the time, as the lockdowns ended.

The second element is a horde of people, some of whom are clearly the protesting farmers, from the depiction of the people that are clearly caricatured. However, from the size of the crowd, it is possible that the crowd of people is a more general reference to the people of this country in need of the government’s ear and support.

These two elements are separated by a massive chasm in the ground, connoting the distance between the PM’s regalia and the ground reality of the people of India (as the cartoonist sees it). Interestingly, the elements that presumably dug the hole (the shovel and excavator) sit firmly on the side of the PM, implying that he is responsible for separating himself from the people. Given the unambiguous message of this image (the gap between the PM and the people), it is also possible to assign more weight to the depiction of PM Modi as the peacock. Acharya has a recognisable caricature of the PM, and the use of the peacock instead is therefore deliberate. Peacocks have a deep symbolic history in India, and a common association they have is with royalty.

In that case, the imagery of the chasm works at two levels. First, it is a literal reference to the Government of India using excavators to dig up the highways leading to Delhi in an attempt to stop the farmers from reaching the capital. The PM was responsible for digging those holes. At another level, Acharya might also imply that the PM’s metamorphosis into the peacock (symbolising the side of the PM that enjoys the glamour of high-profile events) has itself distanced him from the people he governs.

Figure 6. Date: 30th November, 2020

Hyderabad Blues!



Note. This image refers to the GHMC elections of 2020.

This image depicts three men and a bull. The three men are PM Modi, HM Shah, and UP CM Adityanath. The repeated use of these three characters also suggests they are a synecdoche for the organisation of the BJP (considering PM Modi did not personally participate in the Hyderabad campaign). Modi whirls a lasso in the air, while Shah, holding a milk canister, tells him, "I'm getting a feeling that it's not a cow!" The bull represents the city of Hyderabad, evidenced by the portmanteau of its horns with the Charminar (a famous monument of the city).

The image suggests that the Modi's BJP was getting ready to wrangle the city of Hyderabad while Shah stood ready with a milk canister. The connotation is that the BJP thought they would be able to milk Hyderabad (for votes) using the electoral machinery and strategy that has brought them success in other parts of the country. However, the image depicts the city of Hyderabad as a snorting bull, implying that the strategy of the BJP was misguided. One may wrangle a bull, but milking one is out of the question.

The use of the cow-bull imagery is interesting, and semantically consistent. The BJP's brand is often associated with the sacred cow, as it integrates well with their Hindutva ideology. Moreover, the "Hindi heartland" states where they are politically dominant are also sometimes referred to as the "cow-belt" states, since many of their residents believe in the holiness of the cow. Under the semiotic relationship established by the image with regards to Hyderabad, these Hindi-belt states would indeed be depicted as cows, since the BJP electoral strategy is successful in those states at "milking" votes.

Bulls also have a symbolic history with Andhra Pradesh/Telangana. Ongole cattle from the region have similar humps, and are famous for their use in bullfighting in Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. This may connote that Hyderabad would put up a fight and resist the BJP's electoral efforts.

Another observation is that nearly all the symbolism used in the image is indigenous, except the element of PM Modi's lasso. The imagery of the lasso (including lasso spinning, which is depicted in the image) is today primarily associated with Spanish, Mexican and American cowboys. Lassoos also have a history of use for cattle-wrangling and combat around the world, but not in India.

Figure 7. Date: 29th November, 2020

Stopping them!



Note. This cartoon refers to the farmers' protests that have been discussed previously.

The image depicts a peacock and a pair of hands peeking out of the Indian Parliament, as a policeman digs a trench around the Parliament. On the other side of the trench stands a protesting crowd. The peacock says to the man (whom the hands belong to), "Now safe, sir!" In the corner of the image is a newspaper with the headline, "Roads Dug Up to Stop Protesting Farmers."

The man hiding in Parliament is identified as PM Modi through the metonymic use of the peacock. The policeman digging a trench refers to the roads that were dug up on the highways leading to Delhi to prevent the farmers from reaching the capital, as is

confirmed by the newspaper headline. This also confirms that the protesting crowd represents the farmers.

The primary connotation of the image is that the PM is scared of the protesting farmers, and is using the police machinery to keep them away from the capital. Interestingly, the policeman is digging the trench with a sickle, in the same manner that farmers themselves plough their fields. This draws a connection between the policemen and the farmers. The cartoonist is likely suggesting, therefore, that the police themselves are merely instruments of power, compelled to obey the political leadership, and that as members of the working class in a strict government environment, they likely have more in common with the farmers than their actions might suggest, as both groups are affected significantly by the actions of politicians.

At a broader conceptual level, the image repeats the theme of the separation, or distancing, of the government from the people. Again, the government is depicted as the party responsible for initiating the separation.

Figure 8. Date: 28th November, 2020

Farmer!



Note. This image refers to the 2020 Indian farmers’ protest discussed previously.

The image depicts a member of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), raising a lathi to beat a farmer, who carries a plate of food and says, “You must be hungry, beta!”

The image is a direct reference to a viral video of a scene visually almost identical to this cartoon, of a CRPF jawan (soldier) beating an elderly farmer as he ran away. The plate of food refers to the fact that the farmers had and continue to feed the police deployed at the protests, even after being attacked by the police.

Thematically, the image is very striking. The slogan of “Jai jawan, jai kisan” is brought into harsh ironic contrast; with the jawan being used by the political class to attack the kisan. The use of text, and in particular the word “beta” (son) is also most likely a poignant reference to the fact that much of India’s security personnel are from rural, agricultural backgrounds. It draws attention to the fact that many of India’s soldiers are the children of farmers.

Figure 9. Date: 27th November, 2020

Farmers protest!



Note. This image refers to the 2020 farmers’ protests discussed previously.

The image depicts PM Modi (identifiable by the caricatural use of his lockdown beard) asking, “Have they gone?”, as he hides behind a peacock whose tail is made of a large

number of armed police officers. In the corner, a newspaper headline reads, "Farmers Protest."

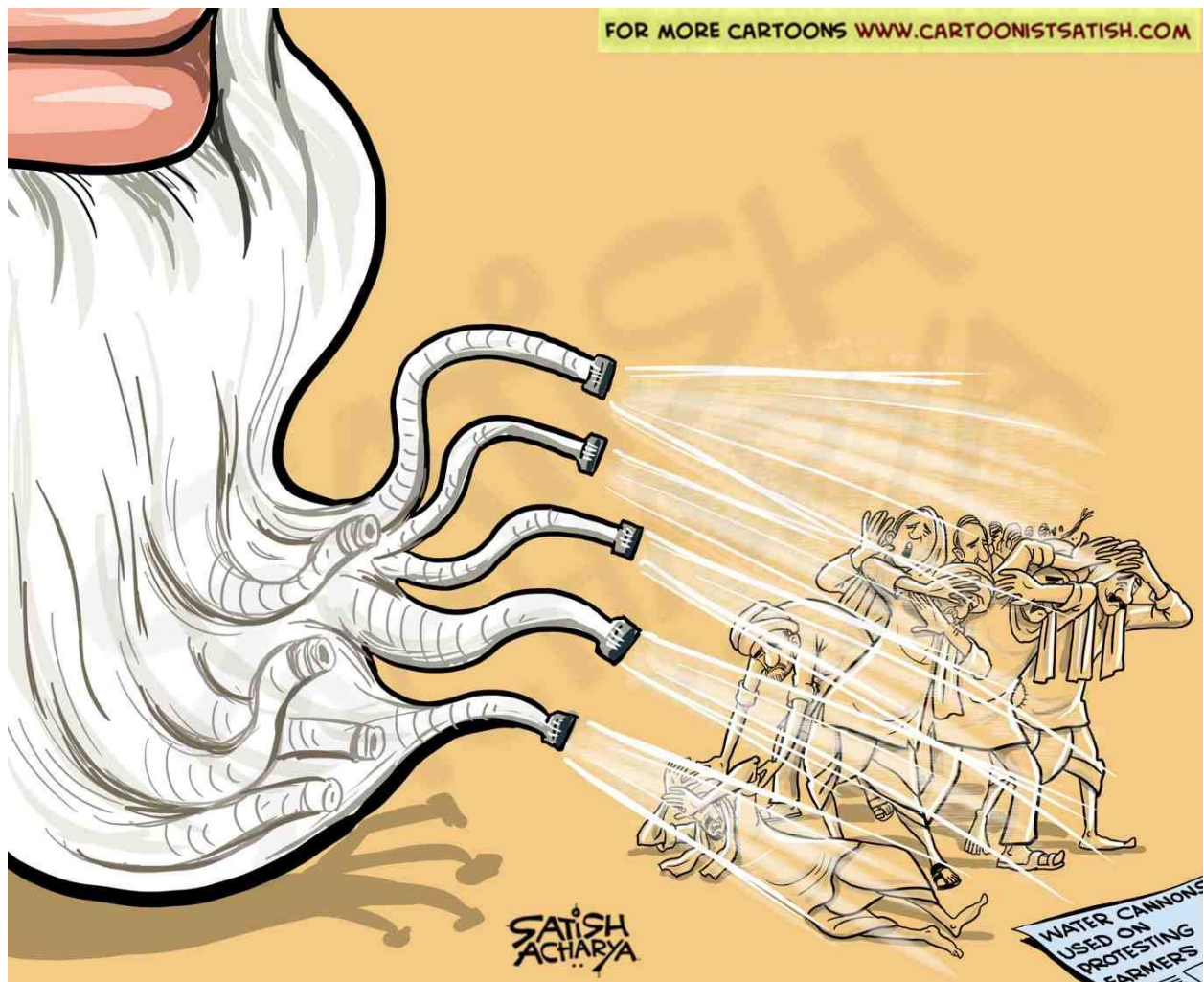
At the first level, the connotation of the image is quite straightforward: that the PM is using the police to shield himself from the protesting farmers. However, the interesting difference in this image is the separation of the PM and the peacock: in the examples so far, they have been inseparable, or even metonymic to each other. The use of the peacock's tail itself as the visual unit to integrate the police is also interesting.

A peacock's tail is arguably its most beautiful and defining feature. The striking iridescent patterns of the peacock's tail are replaced by a dull wall of brown, and the peacock itself appears to be visibly spooked by the situation.

This could have interesting implications at a less obvious level. A possible reading is that the peacock, representing the PM's towering, carefully cultivated political image, falls away in the face of the protesting farmers, and faced with opposition of that kind, the PM is forced to resort to force. The implication is therefore that the glamorous messaging has faded away, and what is left is only the use of force, again, to separate the government from the people.

Figure 10. Date: 26th November, 2020

Water cannons used on protesting farmers.



Note. This image refers to the 2020 Indian farmers' protests previously discussed.

This cartoon depicts a group of farmers being sprayed with water from hoses emanating from the beard of a very large man, while a newspaper headline in the corner of the frame reads, "Water Cannons Used on Protesting Farmers."

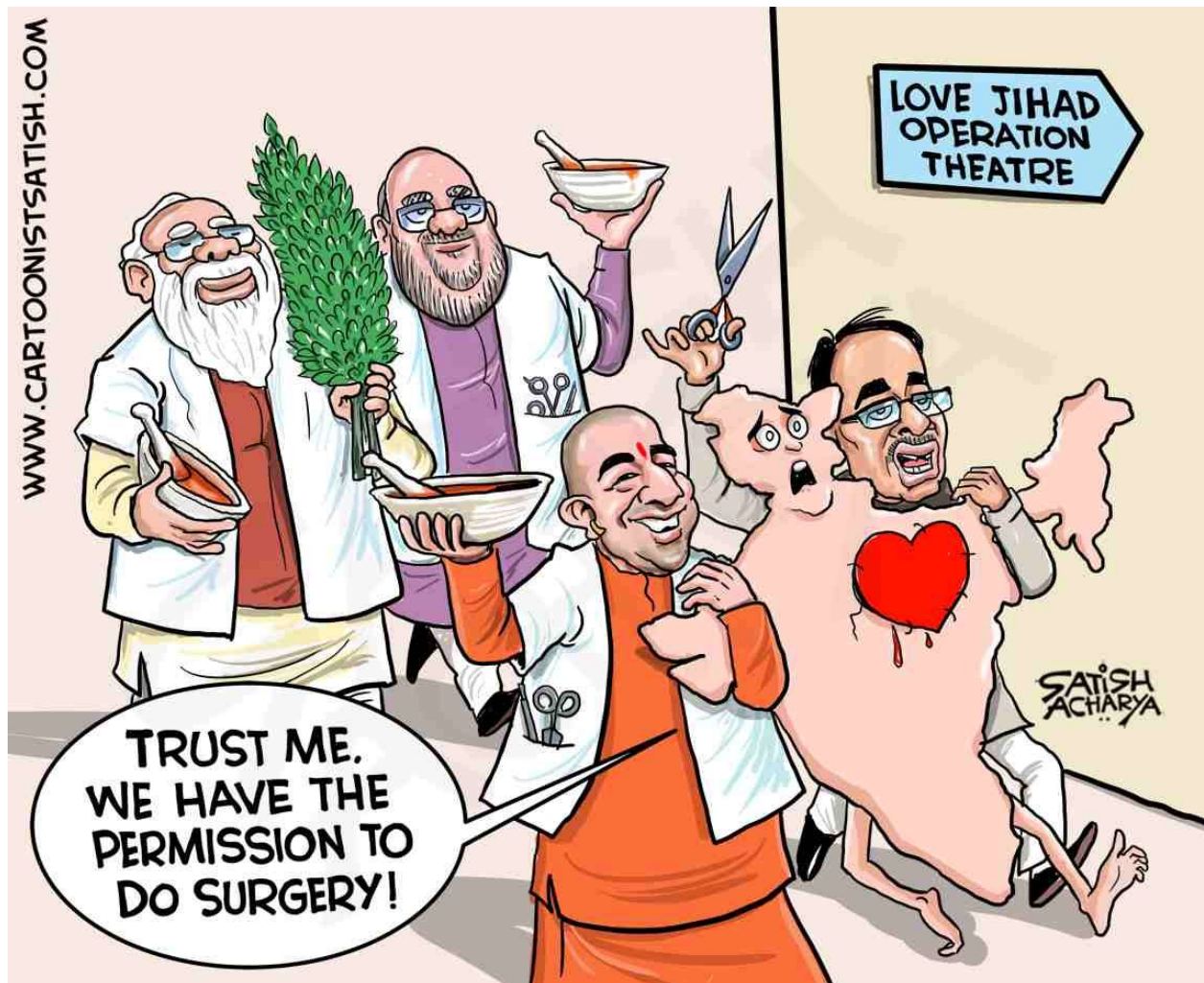
This image was one of the earlier cartoons produced on the farmer's protests, as they proceeded to Delhi, and the national media began to take notice of them (although they had been protesting within their states since September, 2020).

The beard is once again used as a synecdochal reference to PM Modi. As the cartoon itself states, it refers to the use of water cannons on the protesting farmers by police deployed by the Union Government and the State of Haryana, both currently controlled by the PM's political party.

The PM is depicted as impossibly large, in contrast to the farmers, who are shown in great distress. Connotatively, this contrasts the power of the State with the powerless of the citizen. The farmers, even in their pain, are not even coloured, while the PM's thick white beard alone is enough to suppress them and their demands.

Figure 11. Date: 26th November, 2020

Heart surgeons!



Note. This cartoon refers to two political topics. The first is a Union Government notification in November 2020, that granted post-graduate Ayurvedic vaidyas (Ayurvedic physicians) the right to perform a variety of general surgeries. The second is a series of laws in various stages of development by several BJP-led State Governments meant to address “love jihad” in India.

The image depicts Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Haryana Chief Minister Manohar Lal Khattar carrying a man in the shape of the map of India to a “love jihad operation theatre” depicted in a sign on a wall in the image. CM Adityanath carries an ayurvedic okhli-musal (mortar and pestle), while CM Khattar carries a pair of scissors. They are followed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, who also carry okhli-musal and herbs. CM Adityanath says, “Trust me, we have the permission to do surgery!”

The notifications passed on surgeries done by Ayurvedic vaidyas have been criticised by those in the medical fraternity, including the Indian Medical Association (IMA), that believes the new rules blur the distinction between the fields and will therefore detrimentally impact “allopathic” doctors, due to shorter training periods for vaidyas and the incorporation of methods from modern medicine (as opposed to strictly Ayurvedic practices). The concern this raises for them is that it incentivises people to enter Ayurveda as a more expedient route to practicing allopathic medicine, while escaping the regulatory standards of the medical community. Simply put, their concerns are to the legitimacy of allowing Ayurvedic vaidyas to perform what the allopathic doctors consider “medical” operations.

UP CM Adityanath recently passed an ordinance against “unlawful religious conversion”, also described as an anti “love jihad” law; which requires couples converting their religion for marriage to notify their District Magistrate 2 months in advance, and allow for objections to be raised in that period. The law has been used (within a week of its passing) to stop inter-faith marriages due to suspicions of forced conversion coming from various groups.

The image explicitly blends the questionable legitimacy of allopathic surgeries done by vaidyas with the questionable legitimacy of the ordinance passed by the UP government and currently under consideration by the government of Haryana. The UP government based their ordinance on a single judge decision from the Allahabad High Court which ruled that conversion purely for the sake of marriage is not legally valid.

This judgement was later contradicted by a three-judge bench in the same court on a different case, which referred to the former judgement as “bad in law.”

The love-jihad laws are visually symbolised by both state CMs carrying a personification of India to an operation theatre armed with okhli-musals and a pair of scissors. India’s heart is shown bleeding, and the implication is that the state’s laws are an attempt to cut it out.

The text used has interesting implications. The image did not necessarily have to include the reference to the Ayurvedic surgery issue to comment on the love jihad laws. The common thread used to establish the blend is questionable legitimacy.

The surgery in question is their ability to pass the ordinance, which they technically have permission to do, as they run the government. Intertextually, this is a satirical reference to the BJP government’s common defence of their policy decisions by referring to their successful electoral record.

Figure 12. Date: 25th November, 2020

RBI's milestone!



Note. This cartoon refers to a tweet by the RBI in November 2020 celebrating their Twitter account getting 1 million followers.

In this image, a man in tattered clothes exclaims, “one million!” The man is on a desert island with a palm tree and a starving tiger. A bird perched in the palm tree watches the man, bemused, while sharks circle the island. A newspaper headline reads, “RBI on Twitter Gets 10 Lakh Followers.”

The palm tree and the tiger are references to the RBI emblem, which contains both. The man and the tiger are starving, the few fish they could get having run out. The implication is that the RBI is losing its institutional integrity, and is reduced to being

excited about their Twitter followers. In humorous juxtaposition, the Twitter bird (likely representing Twitter users) appears bemused by this enthusiasm.

The sharks in the water are likely preparing to eat the man and the tiger. This is likely a connotative reference to allusions made over the years in response to repeated resignations of RBI Governors that the Union Government was undermining the RBI's independence in an attempt to gain control of monetary policy and the RBI's foreign exchange reserves of approximately INR 38 lakh crore.

In this cartoon, the RBI's diminished stature is explicitly referenced. However, the threat to the RBI is left ambiguous. This is despite the fact that there is only one entity in India that can interfere with the RBI (the Union Government). As with the Supreme Court in earlier examples, we observe that Acharya is more careful about layering his criticisms when it comes to Constitutional institutions, leaving the harsher layers of criticism under the surface. The reference to the RBI's diminution is explicit, while the government's role in it is left implicit.

Figure 13. Date: 24th November, 2020

Karachi Bakery!



Note. This image refers to a demand made by an MLA of the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra who demanded that Karachi Bakery (operational in India since 1953) be renamed, as Karachi is in Pakistan.

The image depicts a man climbing a ladder to paint out the bakery's name. Former Chief Minister of Maharashtra Devendra Fadnavis tells a reporter, identifiable by the microphone, "One day Karachi will be in India." The man who was supervising the painter then tells the painter to wait.

After the MLA had made this comment, senior leadership of the Shiv Sena released a statement that Karachi Bakery had nothing to do with Pakistan and that this demand

was unreasonable. Former CM Fadnavis had made the statement in the picture as a response to a question from the media on his thoughts on the matter.

The picture represents the humourous political dynamics caused by the recent BJP-Shiv Sena split in Maharashtra in 2019. Shiv Sena, as part of the Maharashtra Vikas Aghadi with the NCP and the INC, has been under some pressure to tone down some of the more hardline elements of their Hindutva ideology. This is likely why they felt the need to address their MLA's statement.

CM Fadnavis' statement came before Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut made his statement that his party did not endorse his MLA's views. As a result, Fadnavis was making this statement under the presumption that this was a view of the Shiv Sena.

This put Fadnavis in a bind, as to agree with the MLA would be an endorsement of a certain perception of the Sena's Hindutva credentials, which the BJP has continued to attack since the Sena joined the "secular" INC and NCP to form government.

Moreover, his statement suggested that he did not believe the bakery's name ought to be changed, but Fadnavis recognised that to disagree with the MLA might damage his own credentials as a strong Hindutva leader, as his statement might somehow be misconstrued as supporting "Karachi" and therefore Pakistan.

As a result, Fadnavis took a moonshot and said that Karachi would one day be a part of India, referring to the long-standing RSS agenda of Akhand Bharat (undivided India). The cartoon does not use much in the way of the kinds of techniques other examples, but the simple juxtaposition provides humourous commentary on the competitive Hindutva posturing currently going on in Maharashtra.

Figure 14. Date: 23rd November, 2020

Controversy over Kerala Police Act amendment!



Note. This cartoon refers to a proposed amendment by the Kerala Left Democratic Front (LDF) government to amend the Kerala Police Act, ostensibly to prevent cyber-harassment and bullying.

The image features Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, dressed in police uniform, holding a spiked club over the head of a man while saying, “Trust me, I’ll not misuse it!” A newspaper headline in the corner reads, “Controversy over Kerala Police Act Amendment.”

The proposed amendment was criticised due to its extremely broad framing that made any speech that could be considered as critical and causing harassment to an

individual a potential criminal offence carrying a sentence of 5 years. Even commentators supportive of the LDF pointed that a law such as the one they proposed would be extremely easy to misuse.

The image graphically represents the same concept. The CM is depicted with a rather genial look on his face, assuring the citizen that the law would not be misused. Acharya uses metaphor to brilliant effect to highlight his problem with draconian laws: the problem need not even be bad intentions from the government, the fundamental issue is that the government has that power, and can use it if they decide to. The issue is framed much more viscerally in the context of a real weapon, and the knowledge that it can be brought down upon the citizen if for any reason the government decides to.

Figure 15. Date: 21st November, 2020

Karnataka government forms caste development corporations!



Note. This cartoon refers to the Karnataka government's decision to open "caste development corporations" in the state.

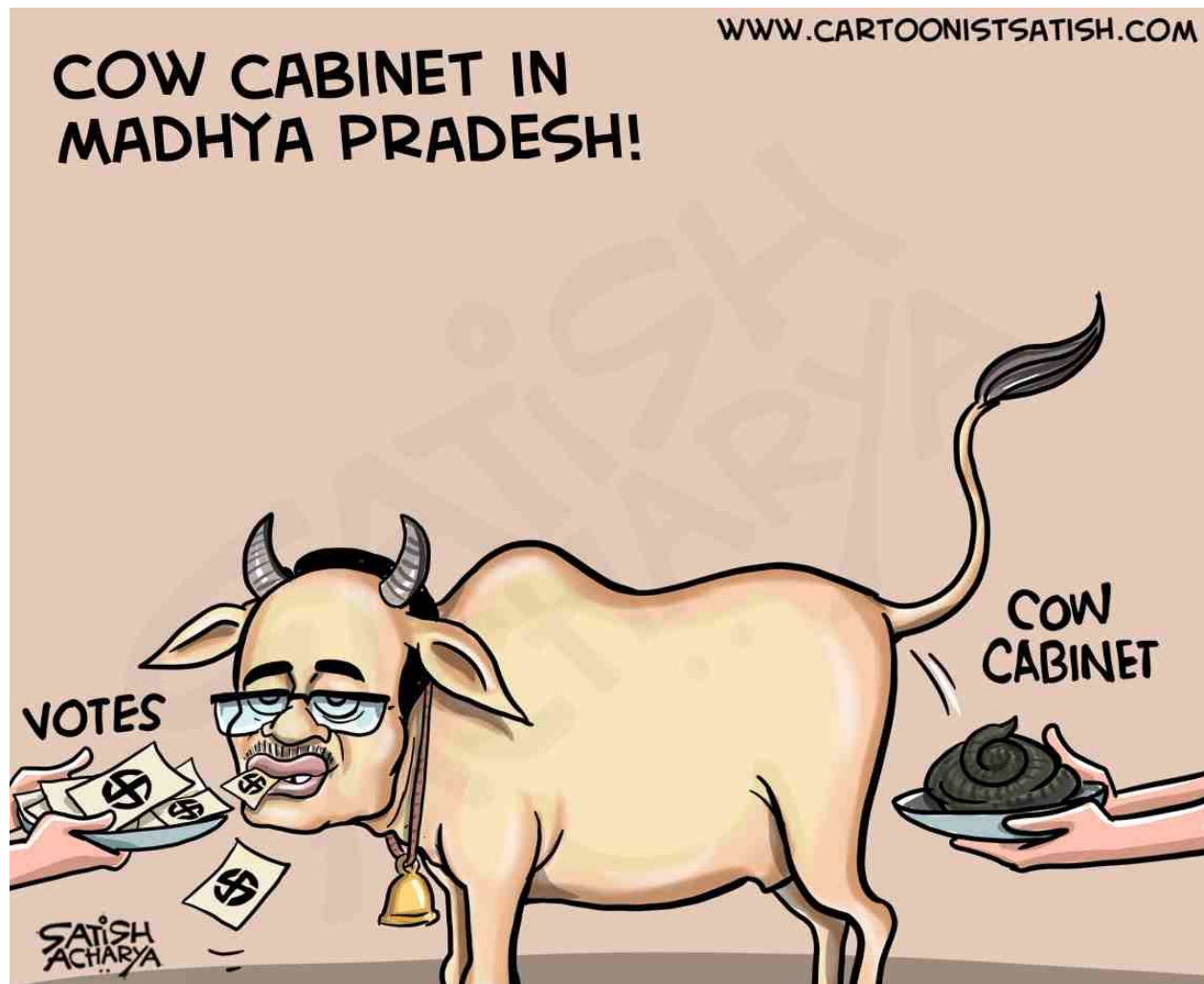
The image depicts a poor family asking Karnataka Chief Minister B. S. Yediyurappa, "One corporation for the poor, sir. We don't belong to any caste." The chief minister carries a stack of documents titled, "Caste Development Corporation Demands."

In November 2020, the Karnataka government decided to set up caste-based development boards across the state, ostensibly to ensure justice to historically marginalised communities. This led to a relative arms race of different groups demanding their own body from the government, with 18 in place by December, 2020.

Acharya makes his position clear that he believes a development corporation set up to ensure representation of the poor would be preferable to the caste-based approach. Besides that, CM Yediyurappa is depicted as somewhat indifferent to their demands. This implies that Acharya is accusing the CM of vote-bank politics.

Figure 16. Date: 20th November, 2020

Cow Cabinet!



Note. This cartoon refers to Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan's decision in November 2020 to constitute a "cow cabinet" to protect and promote the interests of cows in the state.

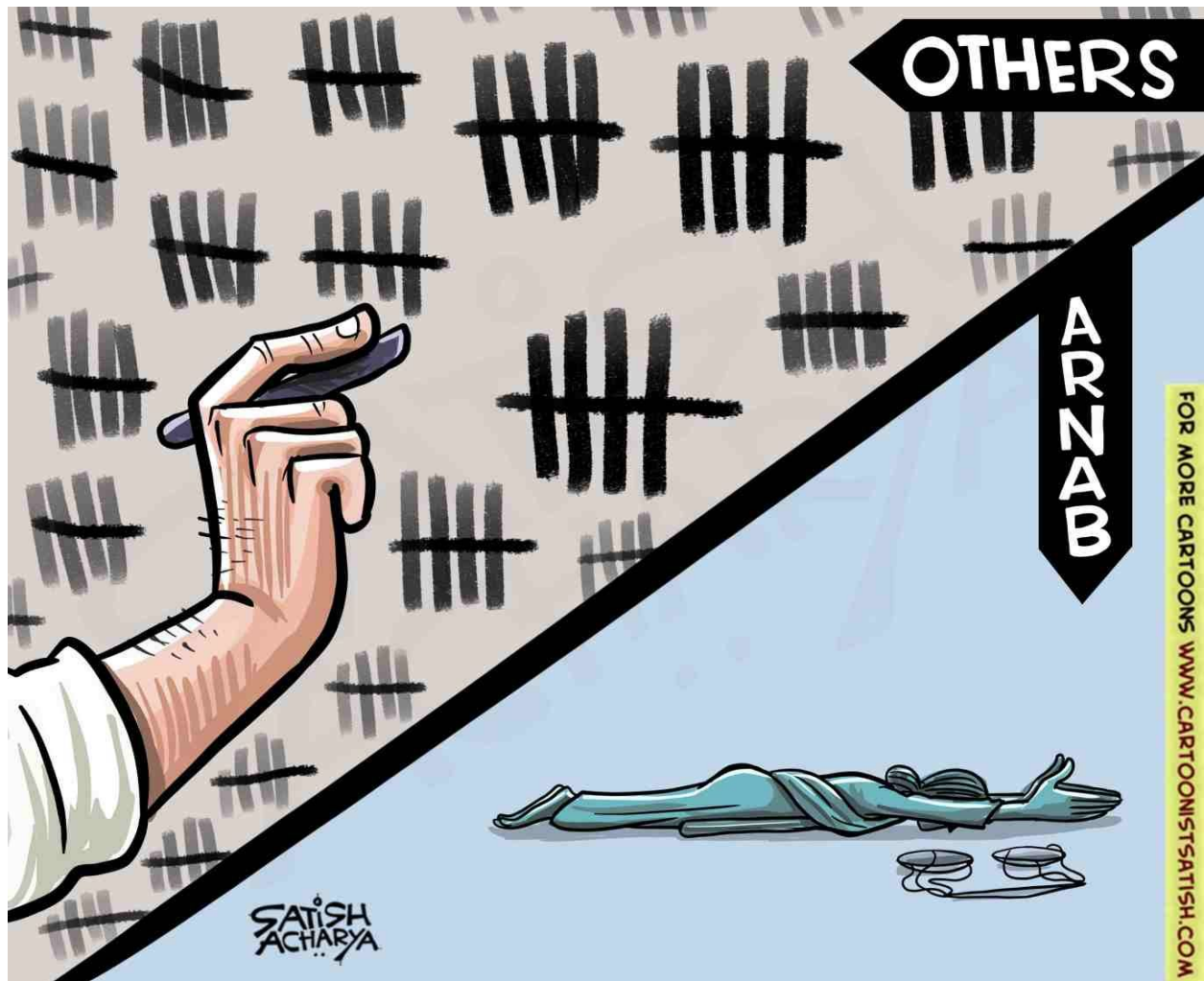
The image depicts CM Chouhan as a cow, eating votes and defecating a cow cabinet. Acharya makes it very clear what he thinks of the idea.

It could be argued that this cartoon does not need the text labels it uses. The pieces of paper labelled votes are marked with a swastika, which is used as a stamp symbol to validate paper ballots in India. As such, the swastika itself, in this more circular form, is a symbol for votes that de-necessitates the label. Similarly, the cartoon caption draws the connection to the cow cabinet issue.

Acharya's implication here is that the Shivraj government takes (eats) the people's votes and produces, literally, "crap" ideas.

Figure 17. Date: 19th November, 2020

Personal liberty!



Note. This cartoon refers to the Supreme Court order that granted bail to Indian media personality Arnab Goswami on the grounds of "personal liberty."

The image is divided in two sections, one labelled “others”, and one “Arnab”. In the first section, a man is seen marking tally marks on a wall. In the second, Lady Justice (identified by the scales) is performing a lie-in protest.

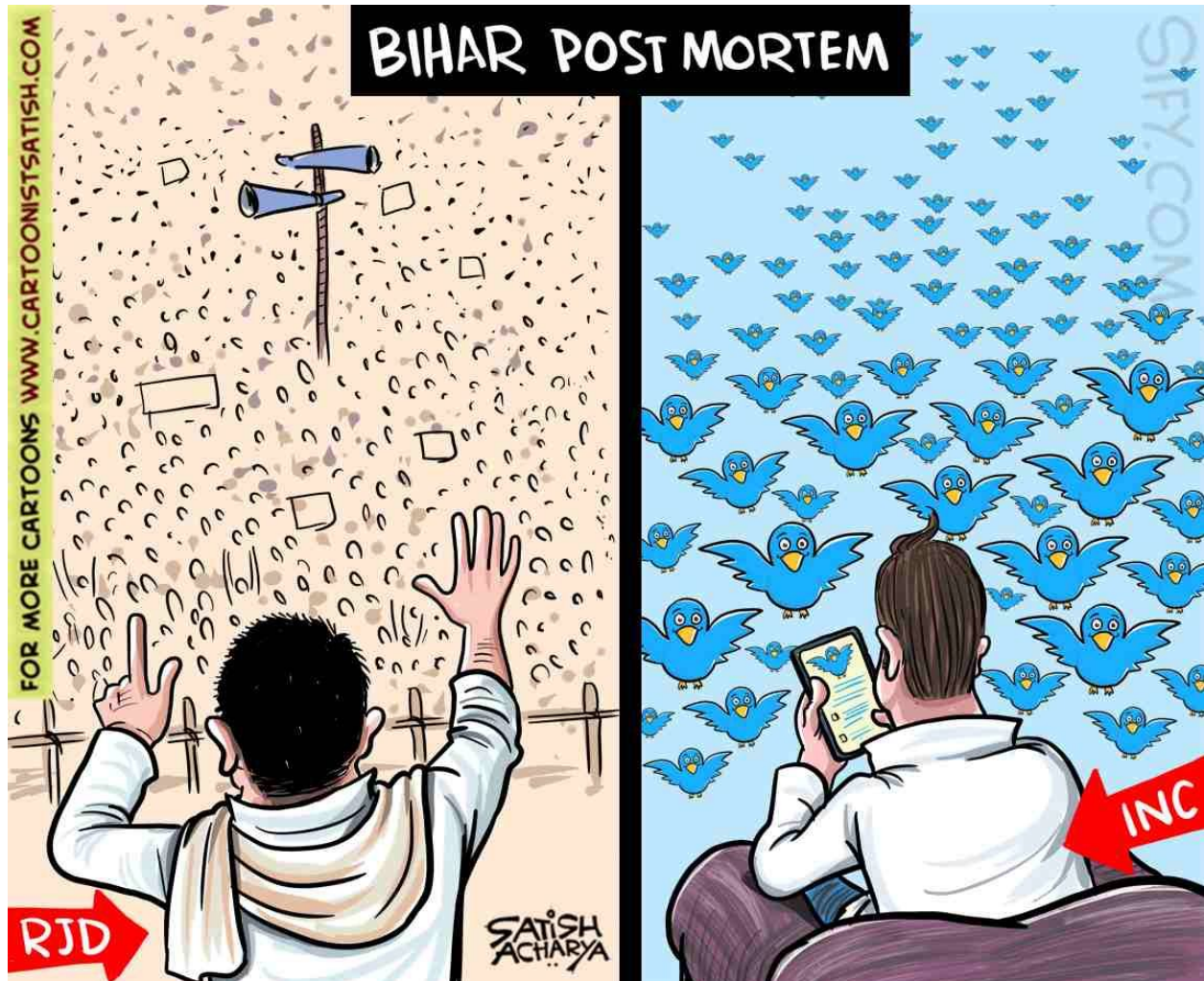
Goswami was arrested in November, 2020, after he was named in the suicide note of an interior director whom he had contracted, for alleged non-payment of dues. Goswami was arrested under the charge of abetment to suicide. Goswami broke the legal sequence of court appeals, and managed to get the Supreme Court to grant him bail and a hearing within one week of his being arrested. This was the third time in 2020 that Goswami had been heard by the Supreme Court within days of his approaching them, despite records surfacing that showed the court had raised multiple technical objections to his appeal.

Acharya contrasts this with the thousands of Indians (over 3 lakh as of December, 2020) who are currently under-trial prisoners. The Supreme Court has received criticism in India and the world for its delay in hearing matters of national significance, including habeas corpus petitions, considered one of the foundational principles of jurisprudence.

Connotationally, the image contrasts the long wait the common man faces in the search for justice (tally marks are commonly used to represent people counting the days they spend in jail, and the days left till they are released), with how Justice (a sufficiently plausibly deniable reference to the Supreme Court itself to avoid contempt of court) prostrates herself to get justice for the powerful.

Figure 18. Date: 19th November, 2020

Post-mortem!



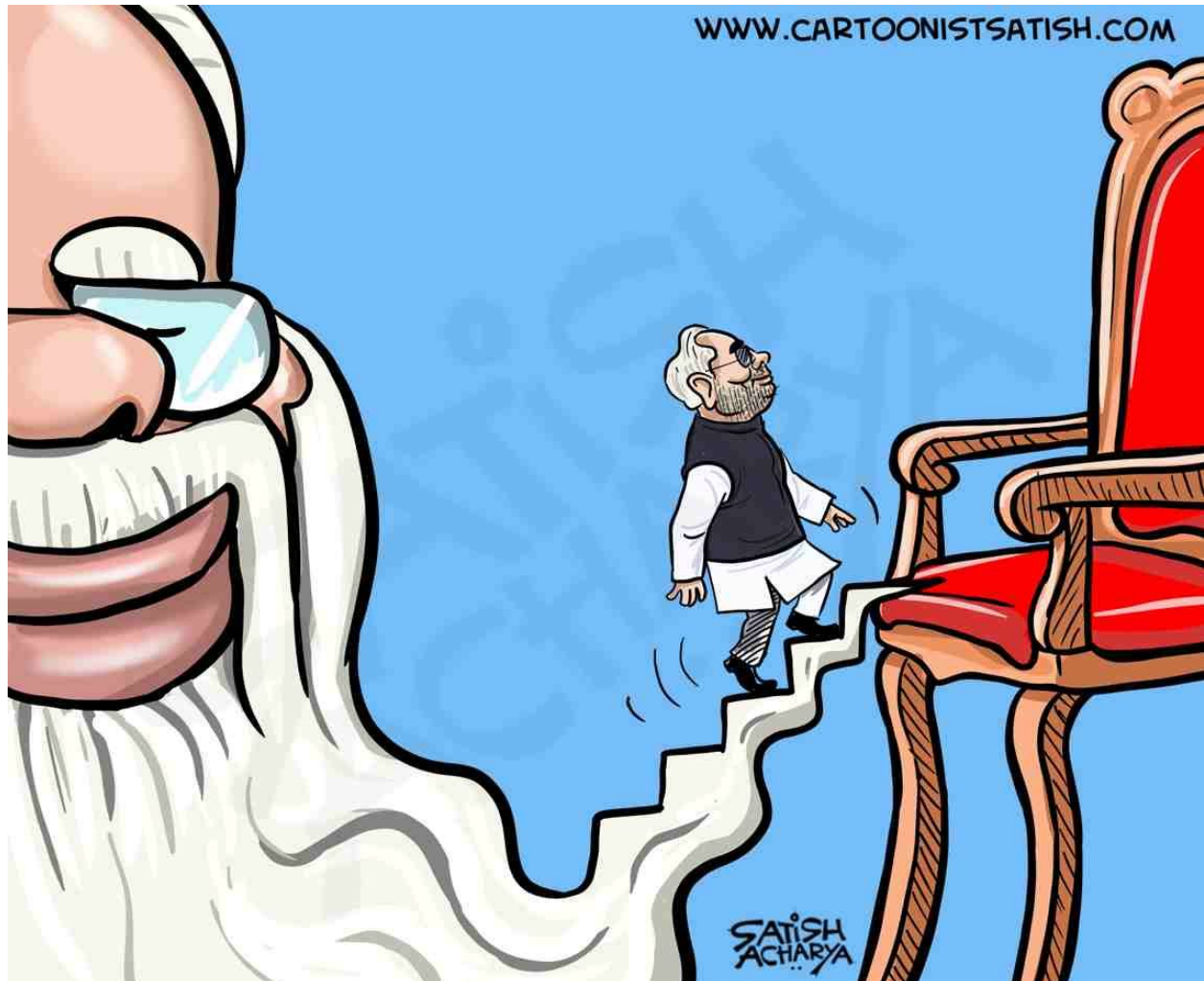
Note. This cartoon refers to the 2020 Bihar Legislative Assembly Elections.

The image is divided in two sections. One, labelled “RJD”, depicts the leader of their party, Tejashwi Yadav, addressing a crowd of people at a large campaign rally. The second, labelled “INC”, depicts the (unofficial) leader of their party, Rahul Gandhi, sitting in a plush sofa, tweeting to an audience of Twitter birds.

The Twitter birds are once again used to refer to people on Twitter, the “Twitterati”. The connotation of the image is fairly obvious, that the RJD campaigned on the ground, while the INC was stuck in a Twitter bubble. The RJD won 52% of the seats it contested, compared to the INC’s 27% (around half).

Figure 19. Date: 17th November, 2020

Nitish Kumar returns as Bihar CM with 43 seats!



Note. This cartoon refers to the Bihar Assembly Elections of 2020.

The image depicts Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, climbing a staircase made out of PM Modi's beard, to a chair metonymically representing the office of Chief Minister.

This cartoon makes strong use of exaggeration, particularly in size, to make its arguments. The PM is depicted as a giant figure, towering over both CM Kumar and his Chief Ministerial seat. CM Kumar is depicted as too small for his seat. As the cartoon's title mentions, his party only has 43 seats in a state that requires 122 to form government, meaning he is not powerful enough in the state on his own to have gotten to the chair. Finally, his climbing the PM's beard is a metaphor for him riding on the

strong popularity of the PM in Bihar to secure himself another term, as the BJP also needs their alliance with him to form government in the state.

Figure 20. Date: 17th November, 2020

Happy National Journalism Day!



Note. This cartoon refers to the Union Government’s celebration of National Press Day on 16th November, 2020 (as it is celebrated every year).

The image depicts a man holding a rose in front of prison bars, wishing those inside, “Happy National Journalism Day!” The cartoon refers to dozens of journalists that have been locked up by the government under stringent laws like the National Security Act (NSA) or the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA), which allow the government to indefinitely jail people without a trial for several years. This is contrasted fact with

the government's assertions on National Press Day that it is committed to a free and vibrant press. These announcements, being pleasant at face value, are represented by the rose. It is possible the rose was also particularly used in this context due to the inherent contradictions between roses and their thorns. The jailed journalists are only depicted by their eyes, likely to visually reinforce the idea that they have been deprived of their rights, and that while they are imprisoned and there are few who speak to them, they are nameless, faceless, voiceless, and rightless.

Figure 21. Date: 16th November, 2020

Nitish Kumar's new innings in Bihar!



Note. This cartoon refers to the 2020 Bihar Assembly Elections.

The image has three elements. The first is a man, stuck in a bottle named, “achche din”, is making tally marks on the wall. The second is a man is crammed into a syringe named, “vaccine”. The third is Bihar CM Nitish Kumar, sitting in a fishbowl with PM Modi’s face reflected on it. All three people appear to be happy.

The first element refers to PM Modi’s promises of “achche din” (good days) when he first came to power in 2014. The man sitting inside appears to be happy to continue to wait in the bottle, despite the bottle opening being too small for him to ever manage to get out (implying it may be a very long wait).

The second element refers to the BJP’s election manifesto for the 2020 Bihar Assembly Elections which promised free vaccines to every citizen of Bihar if they came to power. The man depicted has crammed themselves into a syringe representing the vaccine: however, the syringe is empty. The promise was made before a vaccine had been developed, and Acharya is likely signalling his agreement with critics of the BJP who described it as an empty promise.

Finally, CM Kumar also appears to be trapped in a fishbowl, with the image of PM Modi looming large over him. The connotation is that the PM has him trapped politically, with the BJP becoming the senior partner in their alliance.

The cartoon is humourously constructed, in that it points out the contradictions between the facts as Acharya sees them with the apparent contentment of each group depicted with their circumstances.

Figure 22. Date: 13th November, 2020

Personal liberty!



Note. This cartoon refers to the bail order granted to Indian media personality Arnab Goswami on the grounds of protecting “personal liberty”.

The cartoon depicts Lady Justice holding up her Scales, with two people in it, and saying “Personal liberty must be protected!” The first person is Arnab Goswami, and he is depicted lounging in the pan, as Justice feeds him grapes. The other person is the activist-poet Varavara Rao, who was arrested in 2018 for his alleged involvement in the Bhima-Koregaon violence that occurred earlier that year. He is depicted weeping and bleeding, and urine leaks out of the pan he sits in.

The urine refers to Rao's advocate Indira Jaising's statement in the Supreme Court, that discussed Rao's deteriorating health while in custody. Rao is 82 years old, suffers from dementia, was infected while in jail with COVID-19 in July, and Jaising alleged that he was fitted with a catheter that had not been changed in 3 months as there was no one in jail to do so.

Justice's statement about personal liberty in this cartoon is almost exactly what Supreme Court Justice D. Y. Chandrachud had said in his judgement on Goswami's bail application. This is, therefore, another use of Lady Justice as a representation of the Supreme Court itself.

Acharya uses this statement, and the visualisation of the difference in circumstances of the two men pictured, to ironically contrast the Court's statements on liberty with the actions that it takes. A subtle detail is that Goswami has his mic in hand. This refers to the fact that his TV channels covered his arrest and the time he spent in jail near-constantly, even when the results of the US elections were declared, and every other national news channel was covering that. The mic therefore represents that every minute in jail, he had a voice, and a loud one at that. This is contrasted with Rao, who has been in jail for two years with no progress in his trial.

Figure 23. Date: 12th November, 2020

How it started...



Note. This cartoon refers to the 2020 Bihar Assembly Elections.

This image has two parts. The first, captioned, “How it started...”, depicts a weeping man with bleeding feet carrying a sack of belongings down a road. The second, captioned, “How it ended!”, depicts the same man, now happy, carrying a chair with PM Modi and CM Kumar sitting in it.

The first part of the cartoon refers to the migrant crisis that was caused when PM Modi triggered a nation-wide lockdown with 4 hours’ notice; having made no arrangements for the millions of migrant workers in the country.

Migrant workers in India move to other states to work for better wages, which they send back to their families as remittances. With a nation-wide lockdown, most of these workers were left without income as their employers shut down their businesses for the lockdown, in non-resident states where they would not have access to the public distribution system (PDS) that provides rations to the poorest members of society. As a result, millions of workers decided to try to walk back to their homes, some travelling thousands of kilometres. Many of these workers died in the process, and in Bihar in particular: CM Kumar had initially refused to let his citizens back into the state, believing they would spread COVID-19.

The image displays the bleeding feet that many of those workers got as their footwear gave way, not designed for the task they were subjected to. It also shows that many of these workers had to travel carrying all their belongings, and some even had their children with them.

In the second part, the same worker appears to be happy again, and carries PM Modi and CM Kumar to another term in office. As seen before, the PM is depicted as the dominant figure, larger, and holding up Kumar's hand in a victory gesture.

The worker being happy is a reference to the fact that the BJP-JDU alliance won the election, and therefore had a sufficient amount of public support to return to power. As with one of the previous cartoons on the Bihar election, Acharya draws a humorous contrast between the facts as he sees them and the response of the people. His observations are factual, as if we were to juxtapose the issue of the migrant crisis in Bihar (where many migrant workers originate from, owing to the State's high population and relatively limited employment) with the election results, the lockdown was a decision by PM Modi, and CM Kumar was responsible for initially refusing to let the migrants come back into the state once they arrived in Uttar Pradesh.

Figure 24. Date: 11th November, 2020

RJD emerges as the single largest party!



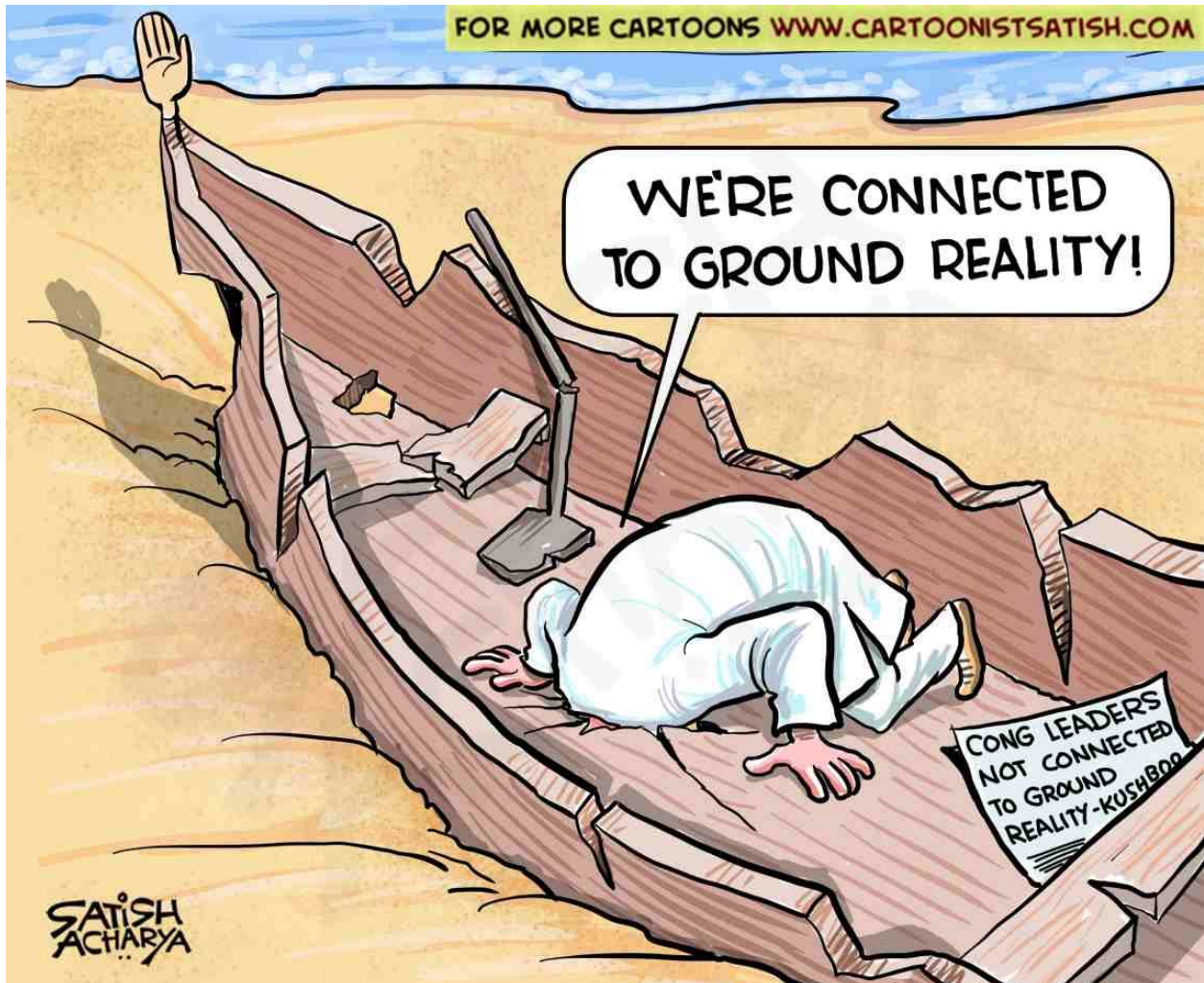
Note. This cartoon refers to the 2020 Bihar Assembly Elections.

This cartoon depicts RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav standing in first place on a victory platform labelled. A newspaper headline in the corner reads, “RJD is the single largest party.” PM Modi stands beside him in second place, but raises a syringe over his head to surpass Yadav. Modi says, “Win for development!”

Acharya takes a clear stand in this cartoon. The implication is that the BJP’s promise of a free COVID-19 vaccine pushed them into a position to form government in Bihar, despite Yadav’s RJD being the largest party. Also, the syringe emits something that looks like steam, implying that the promise made was just hot air.

Figure 25. Date: 14th October, 2020

Congress leaders not connected to ground reality- Kushboo!



Note. This cartoon refers to a statement made by former INC national spokesperson Khushbu Sundar after quitting the party and joining the BJP.

This cartoon depicts a man in a boat that has run aground, with his head in the sand. A newspaper headline reads, “Congress leaders not connected to ground.” The man says, “We’re connected to ground reality!”

The man in the picture is Rahul Gandhi, former President of the INC. The boat he is in represents the INC (identifiable by the hand symbol). The boat is depicted as having been smashed to pieces, its oars broken: but Gandhi has dug his head in the sand.

The cartoon uses metaphor, with Gandhi's leadership of the INC being compared to a sailor running their boat aground. It also makes use of the metaphor of ostriches supposedly digging their heads in the sand to escape danger: a strategy that obviously does not work, but enables the person to hide from reality.