



Yesudasan Cartoons Satire vs. Cynical Political Discourse

Sethu Das

It might be an effortless task to write about a cartoonist, not a father who happened to be a cartoonist because of overlapping and intertwined personalities. And I am given the challenging task of writing about my father, **Yesudasan (1938-2021)** – a writer, publisher, editor, scriptwriter, and celebrated political cartoonist.



Cartoonist Yesudasan

For a state event celebrating his 50th year in the field of cartooning was kicked off by the former Prime Minister Shri V P Singh, the task of naming the year-long event was assigned to a creative writer. After a couple of days, he presented the title – ‘**Yesudasan: 50 Years of Responsible Cartooning**’, which was immediately approved by the organisers. But the word ‘responsible’ was indeed very confusing to me, I even found it illogical. It took me a couple of years to understand what the writer meant by ‘Responsible Cartooning’.

And I still remember accompanying my father as a small kid to see the dead body of his beloved sister at a morgue in his village. After paying respects, we both travelled back home covering a long distance by road while others were preparing for the funeral. I had no courage to ask him why we were rushing home in the middle of the night. As soon as we reached home, he rushed to his studio to prepare his regular cartoon column for the *Malayala Manorama* newspaper. The immense pressure and sorrow he was undergoing after the demise of his childhood playmate, did not stop him from being ‘responsible’ and delivering the cartoon for the late-night edition. I used to wonder how a person in deep remorse could even think of entertaining readers the very next day. Even when he was not in a position to get up from his bed due to health issues, he somehow managed to do his pocket cartoons for *Janayugam*, a

communist party mouthpiece. When we pointed out that in the last cartoon he drew he had used a ‘red’ ink instead of black, he realised the error but had no strength to change or complete the cartoon. His passing has truly left a vacuum in his wake. We do estimate that in his career as a cartoonist, he must have drawn at least 60,000 cartoons and written hundreds of articles. He was a good orator and a meticulous planner – qualities that helped his career throughout. He inspired us to start the **Centre for Social & Political Art (CSPA)** and develop ‘Indian Cartoonists on Tibet’, a travelling exhibition. Yes, he truly understood the social and political responsibility of a cartoonist. Moreover, he was ‘responsible’ for making readers think and laugh for about six decades.

Though calm by nature, my father was a restless person till the end of his life. He was surrounded by numerous friends and fans from all walks of life, but he was a loner in real life. He did entertain others and made them laugh, but lived a sober life. He did rub his shoulders with the rich, powerful and glamorous, but lived a simple life. He was a man of few words, but harsh with his political writings and satirical cartoons. He loved controversies but preferred a peaceful existence. His words did hurt others but disliked being criticised. He disliked crowds but loved being surrounded by good friends and humorists. I am not sure if he lived life to the fullest, but he lived a life that he considered ideal. In many ways, he was truly an inspiration to those who hoped to follow in his footsteps, but in many ways a man of contradictions too. As in life, beauty lies in contradictions!



A Cartoon by Yesudasan from ‘The Week’

About the Writer: Sethu Das co-founded *Design & People*. He has worked with *The Economic Times*, *Netscribes India*, and *IIT Bombay* as a Consultant and as a Resource Faculty for the *National Institute of Design (NID)*. Sethu Das was also an *International Observer to Sri Lanka* and to several other conflict regions.