Caricaturing Culture in India

Caricaturing Culture in India is a highly original history of political cartoons in India. Drawing on the analysis of newspaper cartoons since the 1870s, archival research, and interviews with prominent Indian cartoonists, this ambitious study combines historical narrative with ethnographic testimony to give a pioneering account of the role that cartoons have played over time in political communication, public discourse, and the refraction of ideals central to the creation of the Indian postcolonial state. Maintaining that cartoons are more than illustrative representations of news, Ritu Gairola Khanduri uncovers the true potential of cartoons as a visual medium where memories jostle, history is imagined, and lines of empathy are demarcated. Placing the argument within a wider context, this thought-provoking book highlights the history and power of print media in debates on free speech and democratic processes around the world, revealing why cartoons still matter today.

Ritu Gairola Khanduri is a cultural anthropologist and historian of India. She is Assistant Professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Texas at Arlington. In addition to her research on media, she is currently completing a book on Gandhi and material culture.
Contents

List of illustrations vii
Acknowledgments x

Introduction: the empire of cartoons 1

Part I Colonial times 43
1 Upstart *Punches*: Why is impertinence always in the vernacular? 45
2 Gandhi and the satyagraha of cartoons: cultivating a taste 68
3 “Dear Shankar . . . your ridicule should never bite” 93

Part II National times 119
4 Becoming a cartoonist: Mr. Kutty and Bireshwarji 121
5 Virtual gurus and the Indian psyche: R. K. Laxman 146
6 Uncommon women and common men: pocket cartoons and “situated knowledges” 174
7 Artoons and our toons: the prose of an Indian art 208

Part III Global times 239
8 Crafty petitions and street humor 241
9 “All our gods and goddesses are cartoons” 271
vi Contents

Conclusions: timeless myths and timely knowledge 294

Notes to the text 306
Bibliography 327
Index 348
Illustrations


I.4 “Pativrata (the chaste wife) and ‘the selfish male community.’” *Vyang Chitravali.* 1930. Calcutta.


I.1 Cartoonist Chandi Lahiri at his home in Kolkata. 2003.


1.3 Arthur Wynell Lloyd’s cartoon on the British Empire and Indians in South Africa. *Punch.* 1913.


2.1 Famous Indian political cartoonist K. Shankar Pillai, working in his studio, December 31, 1942.

viii  List of illustrations

3.7 Jawaharlal Nehru receiving some books and badges from the Dean of Moscow University, USSR. 1955. Cartoonist Shankar with Prime Minister Nehru’s entourage and Nehru’s daughter, Indira Gandhi, in Moscow. 112
4.1 Cartoonist Kutty at his home. 2002. Madison, Wisconsin. USA. 125
4.3 Cartoonist Bireshwar. 2004. Lucknow. 136
5.1 R. K. Laxman with his Magsaysay medal at his home in Pune, 2009. 147
5.2 Sai Baba caricature for the Yuva Mahotsav cartoon competition, 2003. New Delhi. 152
5.3 *Marmik* cover. 1986. 155
5.4 Cartoonist Sanjay Mistry caricaturing Sonia Gandhi. 2009. Mumbai. 158
5.6 Laxman’s pocket cartoon on the beauty of statistics. *Times of India*. n.d. Mumbai. 170
6.1 Cartoonist Maya Kamath. n.d. 175
6.5 Maya Kamath. *Deccan Herald*. 1993. Bangalore. 188
List of Illustrations


7.5 Cartoonist Kevy at his home in Kerala, 2003.


7.8 Cartoonist V. G. Narendra at his office in Bangalore, 2009.


At the core of this book lies the generosity of all the cartoonists, who shared their stories and pointed me to the rich history of their art in India. I am most indebted to cartoonists Kutty (1921–2011), Samuel (1925–2012), and Bireshwar (1920–2007), who accompanied me in this long quest and sadly, are not here to see this book. For extended and deliberate interaction, I am particularly grateful to Suresh Sawant, R. K. Laxman and Mrs. Laxman, Mario Miranda, Subodh Kerkar, Vins, Ashok Dongre, Mr. and Mrs. Phadnis, Mr. Sarvade, Raobail, Jagnjeet Rana, Dhodapkar, Kaak, Sushil Kalra, Shekhar Gurera, Sudhir Dar, Ajit Ninan, Sudhir Tailang, Pran, Govind Dixit, Mita Roy, Manjul, Irfan, Abhijit, Sanjay Mistry, Reboti Bhushan, Rajinder Puri, Unny, Kevy, BJ, Yesudas, Toms, Satya N. Govind, Pawan, and Triambak Sharma. Several more interactions, too numerous to list, helped me to navigate the cartoon scene and have left their impression in the chapters that follow.

An unaccountable degree of gratitude is reserved for the incredible staff at the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, the National Archives at New Delhi, the Lucknow State Archives, the University of Texas at Austin, the British Library, the cartoon archive at the University of Kent at Canterbury, the Library of Congress at DC, and the University of Texas-Arlington Inter-Library Service. Fieldwork and travel to various archives was sustained by generous fellowships from the Fulbright Foundation, the Social Science Research Council, and the Institute for Historical Research (University of London) Mellon Foundation. A timely Richard Carly Hunt Postdoctoral Fellowship from the Wenner-Gren Foundation allowed me to revise and complete the book manuscript. At the University of Texas-Arlington, my colleagues shared feedback and supported my professional growth in more ways than I expected – for this good fortune, I thank Christian Zlólniski, Kim van Noort, Amy Speier, Karl Petruso, Ben Agger, Desiree Henderson, Beth-Anne Shelton, Mark Cichock, and Chris Conway. Amy, Joci Ryan, Christian and graduate consultants at the UTA Writing Center posed questions and offered suggestions that have made this a better book.
Acknowledgments

Lucy Rhymer, Claire Wood, Sarah Payne, and Rima Devereaux at Cambridge University Press were a dream come true. I have tested the patience of this fine team of experts and thank them for their confidence in my book. Margaret Case offered much appreciated and vital input at the final stages of the manuscript’s preparation.

Sarah Lamb, Mrinalini Sinha, Indrani Chatterjee, Laurie Graham, Gail Minault, Deepa Reddy, Lynn Kwiatkowski, Mithi Mukherjee, Donna Goldstein, Janice Leoshko, Kevin Dwyer, Lawrence Cohen, Purnima Mankekar and Lee Segal inspired ideas, provided helpful feedback, energized me through their writings, and on several occasions nudged me to take the next step. For this I am grateful.

My brothers Gaurav and Shaurav, and sisters Seema and Shalini and their families, my in-laws the late Drs. Sushila and Om Prakash Khanduri, and friends Charu Gauniyal and Sumita Shankar Garg inspired ideas, provided helpful feedback, energized me through their writings, and on several occasions nudged me to take the next step. For this I am grateful.

At the University of Texas-Austin, James Brow, Gail Minault, and Kamran Ali shaped an earlier incarnation of this research in helpful ways. I am grateful to them and to Pauline Strong and Kathleen Stewart for always being available to read and comment on my work. Sandya, Nusrat, Nick, Chris, Keisha-Khan, and Jennifer provided friendship and much-needed helpful critique at important moments in my career.

Memories tend to evoke more memories, revealing surprising beginnings and connections. While engaging with cartoonists’ stories about their past, my own stories about how and why I chose to research newspaper cartoons took me down several memory lanes. Neeladri Bhattacharya’s fine mentoring and enthusiasm at the Jawaharlal Nehru University instigated this project, several years ago, when I wrote a seminar paper for his course in modern Indian history. I could hardly have anticipated Neeladri would be engrossed in NCERT cartoon debates as I finished writing this book! For thoughtful conversations, Ganga Dhabha chit-chat, and the short but lasting good times at the Jawaharlal Nehru University campus, I remember and thank Sumita, Prasanna, Anindita, Shikha, Chaitali, Archana, Ranjeeta, Chalapathy, and Niti.

My parents Usha and Krishna Gaireda stood by me through thick and thin. Their trust and unconditional love is difficult for me to match. Pankaj has been a patient and supportive spouse. He took on more than his share of domestic chores and responsibilities while also offering liberal doses of love and affection. This book has grown with our daughter Vidula, who good humoredly tolerated my absences, accompanied me to India, showed what matters most, taught me a thing or two about patience and brought music into our life. Cissy and Lou lit up matters in
unexpected ways by insisting on an evening walk and by purring for undivided attention.

Cartoonists and their families, libraries, archives, and presses have my sincere gratitude for permission to use their images. Versions of Chapters 1, 2, and 3 have appeared in *History and Anthropology, Visual Anthropology Review*, and *Visual Anthropology*.

I dedicate this book to GM – historian, teacher, and feminist extraordinaire.