

When I Was Twelve

Getting Started

- * Most of us enjoy drawing cartoons. With pencil or pen in hand, we sometimes cannot stop ourselves from creating cartoons for all the ideas we have. Have you drawn cartoons in your notebooks during class hours?

We all went to a *Kannada Municipal school. It was a most elegant school—not the kind of Municipal schools we have today. Don't forget that the Maharaja of †Mysore himself took a special interest in the school!

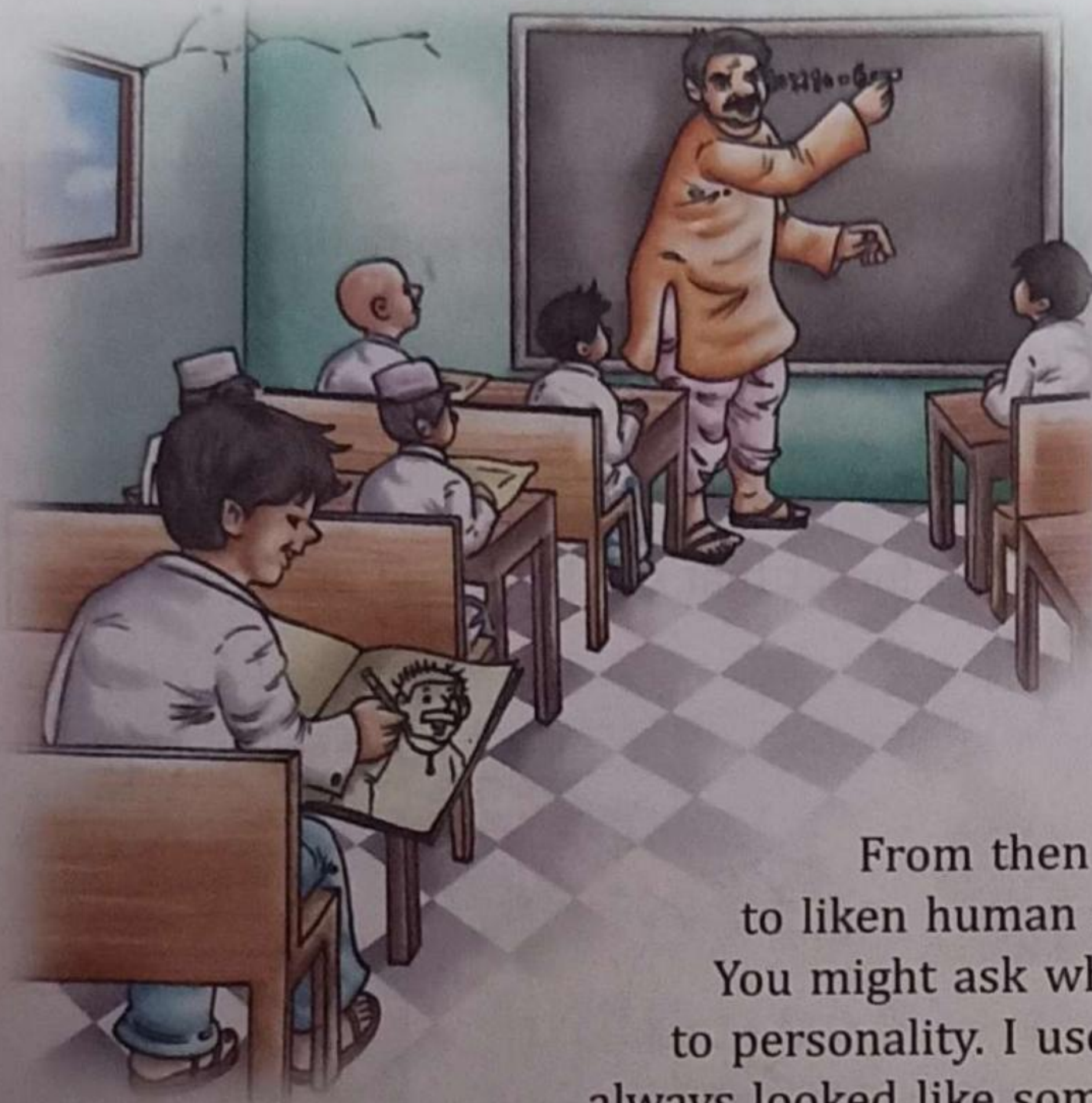
All the teachers, with rare exceptions, were excellent. All our younger days were completely wrapped up in the experiences we had at school, the teachers...having to pass an examination.

Every child dreads the presence of a teacher but I had a particularly nasty one. Being an arithmetic teacher, I don't think he had any sense of compassion or pity. He was only committed to his arithmetic. Somebody has 3 mangoes, someone has 4—together how much? This simple thing we couldn't get the hang of. We could have, but he was such a formidable character that we felt that even if we'd got the right answer, we'd be beaten



*Kannada is a Dravidian language spoken in South India, mainly in the state of Karnataka.
†Mysore is a city in Karnataka, India and a former seat of the Wodeyar dynasty.

anyway! So we mumbled and he twisted our ears and shouted. He was the target of my caricature. One day he'd written the usual sum on the blackboard—Ram has 3 mangoes, Krishna has 4. It was a simple sum but quite beyond me! I thought he'd not ask me so I sat hiding behind the others, who, like me, were all short little boys. I started sketching. It looked very much like a tiger. A man with **bristling** moustache, teeth and all that developed as the questions went on. He was in the first row. I was in the last. I got involved in the caricature. Suddenly, I felt a piercing pain in my left ear. I turned.



This monster was twisting my ear for having drawn him! He said, 'So you have drawn me?' I said, 'No sir, I did not draw you!' But he could recognise it through all that likeness to a tiger, that it was he! Of course I was punished.

That was the time I realised the art of caricature. I saw: 'My god, indeed he does look like a tiger!' My attempt was not to draw a tiger but I drew the face of a tiger **subconsciously** as an extension of the man's personality. To me, he was a tiger!

From then on it almost became a hobby for me to liken human figures to **inanimate** objects or animals. You might ask what it is that relates things or creatures to personality. I used to stand and watch the city bus. It

always looked like someone I knew. People spilling out of the bus began to take the shape of a giraffe or a monkey or a **Cadillac** belonging to one of the Maharajas of Mysore which used to stand in the porch next door. To me, it looked like a prince! There is a personality that gets rubbed off onto inanimate objects.

Even today, I feel that I got nothing out of the $2 + 4 - 1$ but I gained something invaluable that day in the classroom.

I'll tell you of another incident that is connected with the art of caricature. The art I've chosen is one which rubs everyone on the wrong side. From the prime minister to the policeman, from the President to the priest—they are all ridiculed. That is my profession. So long as it's about others, people like it.

It was my sister's wedding—a very big affair. In the south, the one who is very important at the time of the wedding is the cook. He was treated like a prince because the entire reputation of the wedding depended on this man's cooking. So that day, when he came, there was a general cry, 'He's come! He's come!' People who never stood up for anyone

also stood up! How to entertain him? To offer coffee to him is just not done because he's the one who makes excellent coffee! Discussions began. Everyone hung upon his words. 'What do you want?' he asked. 'We don't have to tell you what we want. You know best!' That pleased him. After an hour he said, 'I want this much rice, this much ghee, this much...' While all this was happening, I was in a corner of the room sketching as usual because I was a **compulsive** sketcher right from the age of three. While I was sketching, I was listening to the conversation. It seemed like they were ordering enormous quantities of food but in those days everything was so cheap. Discussions ended, he was about to go when someone said, 'You can't leave without coffee! Of course, it won't be good but we'll be highly honoured.' So he sat on.

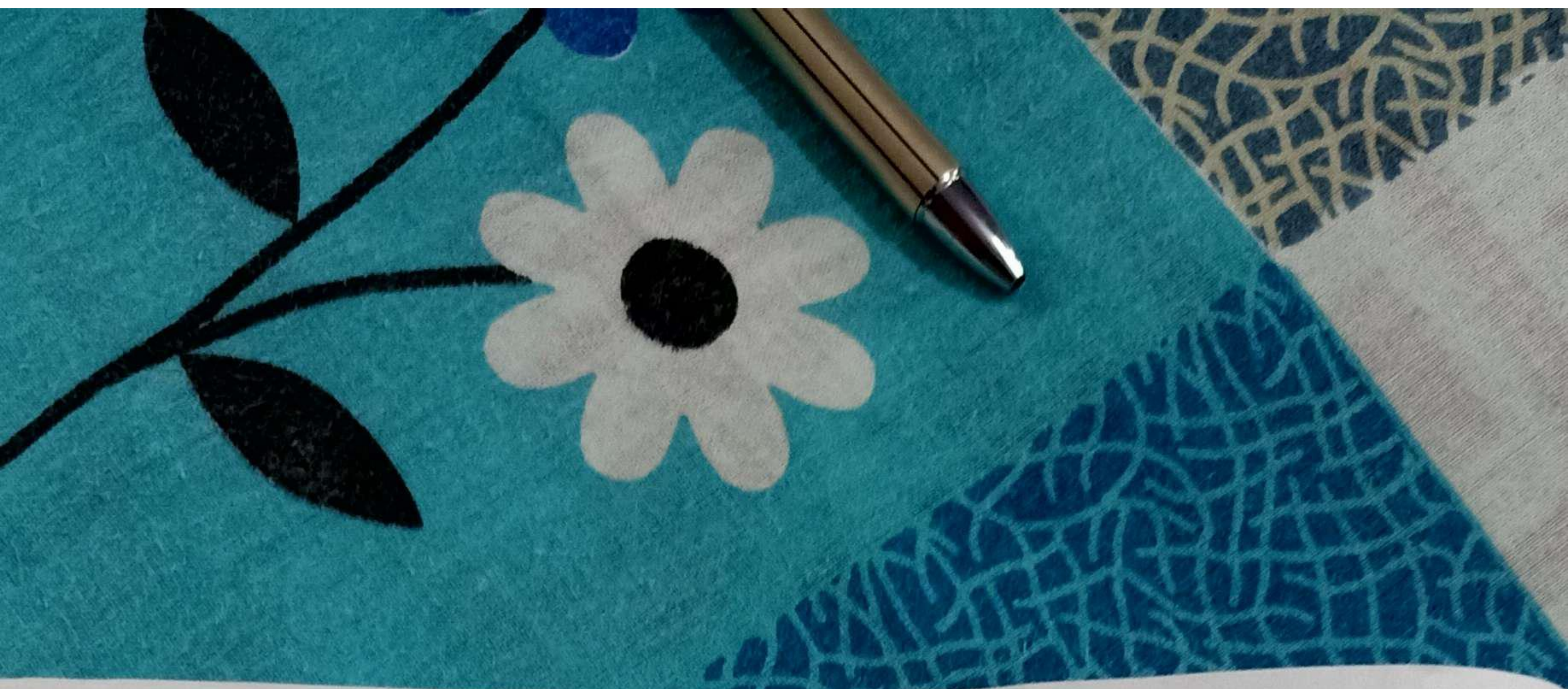
Everybody was relaxed. To get the man himself was difficult but to get the man to sit down and have coffee! At that time one of my cousins saw my caricature and began to giggle. Ha ha ha...the laughter spread like wildfire. Everyone wanted to have a look at the sketch. The group started moving towards me behind the pillar. The man found that his circle had **diminished**. 'What is it?' he asked good-humouredly.

Everybody thought it was a good likeness but he took one look and fell grimly silent. 'I am not going to cook for this marriage,' he said and began to make his way out. Members of the family—senior ICS officers and others in high government posts—ran after him. 'You have called me here to insult me!' he said. 'I have cooked for the Maharaja. I have cooked for Supreme Court Judges...I have cooked for...but never have I been insulted like this. Goodbye! Thank you!' And he **stomped** out. Then a very clever uncle was called upon to woo him back. How he did it is another story!

You might think I was roundly scolded for this major **catastrophe**. I wasn't. My family always supported me. I don't know why.

As an enlightened family, my parents neither encouraged me nor discouraged me. Mercifully, they left me alone. These same parents left me with a piece of chalk at the





age of three. This changed to a pencil at the age of six or seven. Then came colour pencils and paint boxes. I'm grateful to them. And they were very proud of me as I progressed from class to class.

—R K Laxman

About the Author

Rasipuram Krishnaswami Iyer Laxman (1921–26), famously known as R K Laxman, was an Indian cartoonist, illustrator, and humorist. He was best known for his creation *The Common Man* and for his cartoon strip, *You Said It*.

KRISHNAGAR ACADEMY.

CLASS - VI SUBJECT - ENGLISH - II

CHAPTER - WHEN I WAS TWELVE.

DATE : 20.05.2020.

WORD MEANINGS FOR THE REST PART.

1. Compulsive : to act on an irresistible urge.
2. Diminished : to make or become less.
3. I.C.S : Indian Civil Service in the 19th and 20th centuries.
4. Stomped : to tread heavily and noisily.
5. Catastrophe : A sudden event causing great damage or suffering.

QUESTION ANSWERS.

Q4. Why did the members of the family including those in distinguished services run after the cook?

Ans: After seeing the sketch of the narrator the cook became furious and decided to go away from there feeling insulted. So the members of the family including those in distinguished services ran after him to bring him back for the service.

Q5. How did a piece of chalk change and develop the narrator's life forever?

Ans: The narrator's parents neither encouraged him nor discouraged him in his life. They left him by giving a piece of chalk at the age of three. This changed to a pencil at the age of six or seven. Then came

colour pencils and paint boxes. His parents were very proud of him as he progressed from class to class. In this way a piece of chalk changed and develop the narrator's life for ever.

Q6. 'He's come! He's come!' People who never stood up for anyone also stood up! How to entertain him?

a. Who had come and for what purpose?

Ans: In the story "When I was Twelve" by R.K. Laxman here the cook had come for the purpose of cooking in the sister's wedding of the narrator.

b. Why were people so keen to entertain him?

Ans: People were so keen to entertain him because in South India the cook is regarded as the most important person in the wedding party. He was treated like a prince because the entire reputation of the wedding party depended on him.

c. What discussion was held with the person concerned?

Ans: The discussion that took place between the cook and the family members were all about the food items and their quantities to be prepared in the sister's wedding of the narrator.

d. What was offered to the person after the discussions ended?

Ans: A cup of coffee was offered to the person after the discussions ended.

Home Work for Today.

c. Why did the group gathered around the person start moving towards the narrator who had placed himself behind the pillar?

In the next class on Friday, 22.05.2020 we shall be doing ENGLISH - I of class - VI.

Till then Stay Safe, Stay Healthy and Secured at Home and Wash your Hands properly after regular intervals.