

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

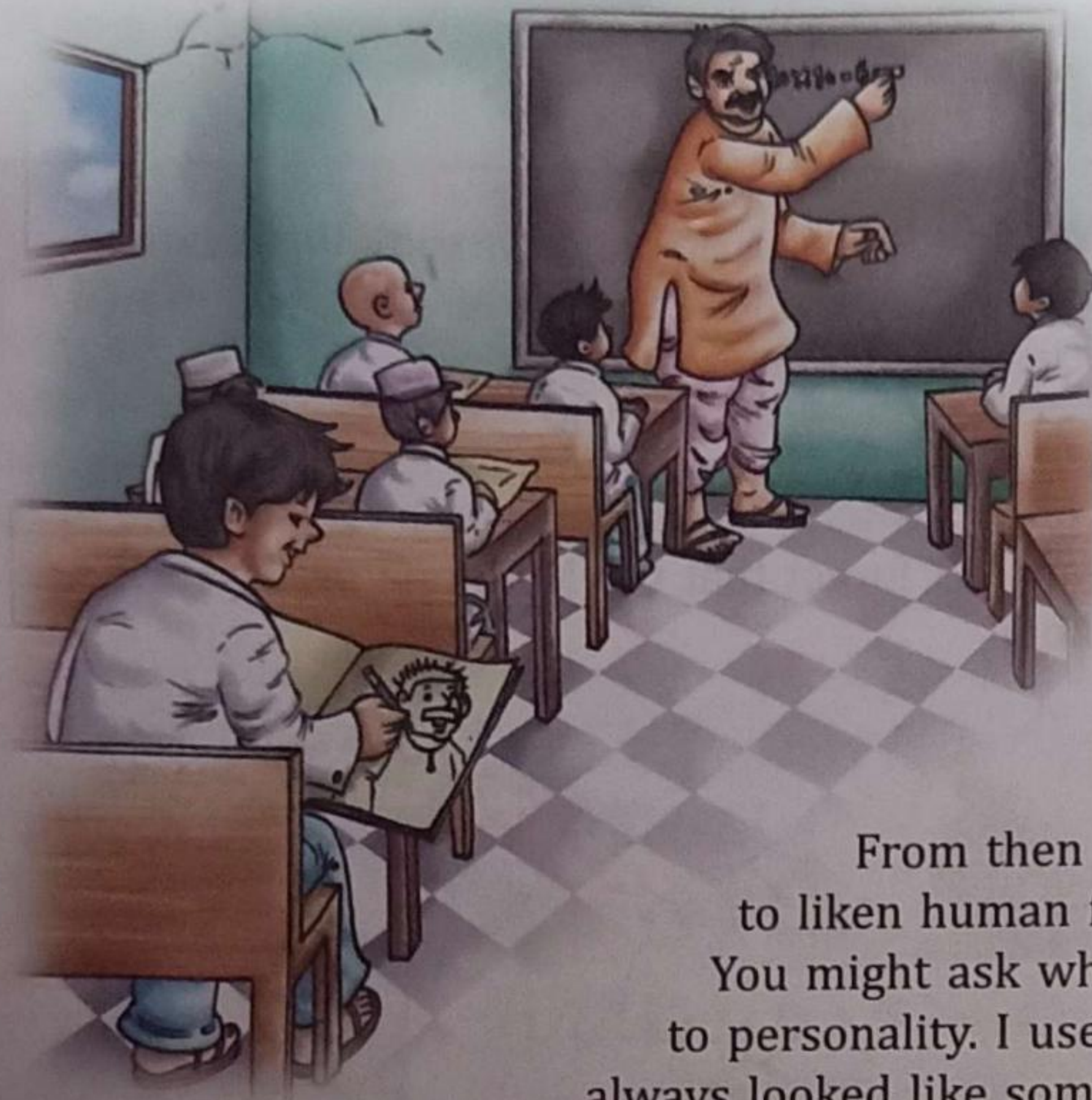


*Kannada is a Dravidian language spoken in South India, mainly in the state of Karnataka.
†Mysore is a city in Karnataka, India and a former seat of the Wodeyar dynasty.

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

WORDS TO KNOW

MEANINGS

1. Formidable : to respect or fear somebody who is powerful.
2. Caricature : A picture in which a person's features are highlighted.
3. bristling : something that is short and stiff.
4. Subconsciously : without being fully aware.
5. Inanimate : showing no sign of life.
6. Cadillac : A luxury brand of automobiles.
7. rubs everyone on the wrong side : to irritate or annoy.

Answer the following Questions :

1. What prevented the narrator and his classmates from getting the hang of simple calculations?

Ans: To prevent from getting the hang of simple calculations the narrator and his classmates hide themselves behind others who were all short little boys like the narrator. Then the narrator started sketching.

2. Why did the monster twist the narrator's ear?

Ans: The narrator was sketching an ugly figure that resembles like a tiger. It was of a man with bristling moustache, teeth. In this way he got involved in the caricature. The teacher was teaching in the first row. As he suddenly came to the last row he found that the narrator was busy with the ugly sketch. So he twisted the narrator's ear.

3. Why did the Cadillac that belonged to one of the Maharajas of Mysore look like a prince to the narrator?

Ans: The Cadillac that belonged to one of the Maharajas of Mysore looked like a prince to the narrator because it almost became a hobby to the narrator to liken human figures to inanimate objects or animals.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT CLASS