Linguistic Quips as the Soul of Satire in Abu's Subversive Political Cartoons

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Abstract

The effectiveness of satirical political cartoons, especially in times of strict censorship, may be explained through their use of linguistic quips that complement the brevity and immediacy of the visual medium well. Several techniques within linguistic quips may be understood through the theories of Henri Bergson and Arthur Koestler that are drawn upon in this paper. However, it is through an analysis of the subjects and objects of these linguistic quips that we understand the subversive nature of the laughter produced through these quips. Linguistic quips, in addition to providing at least a minor, though inconsistent, protection from censorious authorities play a more vital role of exposing social and political hierarchies of power in the society. This paper locates the subversive potential of political cartoons and specifically of linguistic quips in exposing these hierarchies. The subversive laughter with its pin-pointed target, often asks for the participation of the readers/viewers in such a way as to create a space for the degradation of the target and vindication of the participant viewer. This paper demonstrates these ideas through an exploration of the cartoons of Abu Abraham during the Emergency Years in India (1975-77) when major restrictions were imposed on the freedom of the press by the government. In doing so, the paper tangentially comments on the role that satirical political cartoons play in the public sphere.

Keywords: laughter, satire, Abu Abraham, subversion, bisociation, reciprocal interference, Emergency

Introduction

Satire has been defined as "the process of attacking by ridicule in any medium" (Hodgart, 2009, p. 8) and as the "literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation" (Abrams, 1999, p. 275). Both definitions establish degradation of the target as the primary characteristic of satire. In satirical political cartoons where an economy of words is of the essence, it appears that this degradation is often

achieved through the use of, what this paper calls, linguistic quips. While a quip is a short and witty remark or response, this paper uses the phrase 'linguistic quips' to refer to quips that rely on a clever play of words for their wit and impact. Among various kinds of linguistic quips possible, words with multiple meanings (like puns and metaphors) and tweaking of well-known phrases are particularly the focus of this paper. The slippage between various meanings and codes involved in linguistic quips not only makes them suitable for use in the visual medium characterised with urgency, immediacy and brevity, but also makes them relatively more tensile in the face of censorship. When linguistic quips are analysed as the active elements in political cartoons that appear in contexts of strict censorship, the subversive potential of the resulting satire becomes evident. This paper is an attempt to demonstrate this role of linguistic quips as active elements in satirical political cartoons drawn by Indian cartoonist Abu Abraham during the Emergency Years in India (1975-77). This period has been seen as the first time in independent democratic India when freedom of expression was so decidedly curtailed and thus is significant to understand the interaction between political cartoons, satire, and censorship. In order to understand the way in which linguistic quips function, this paper refers to the theory expounded by Henri Bergson in his *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1911) in comparison with the concept of 'bisociation' put forth by Arthur Koestler in his *The Act of Creation* (1964). This paper then extends the understanding of the working of linguistic quips to an analysis of their deployment in satirical political cartoons and their cumulative subversive impact against censorious authorities by looking closely at certain other characteristic features of cartoons including the relationship between the visual and textual elements of cartoons. All cartoons in this paper are taken from *Games of Emergency*, a collection of his cartoons and articles that Abu Abraham published in 1977 immediately after the Emergency was lifted. This gives access even to those of his cartoons that were censored and not allowed to be published during the Emergency.

Historical context

Given that satire and political cartoons both rely heavily on the socio-historical context, it is imperative to establish the socio-historical context of the material considered in the present paper. The Emergency Years (1975-77) in India refers to a period when, during the governance of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, several fundamental rights of citizens were suspended by an order issued by the President which cited a possible internal/civil threat to the nation. On the petition filed by her competitor Raj Narain who lost to her in the race to the post of Prime Minister in the 1971 elections, PM Indira Gandhi was found to be guilty of electoral malpractices by the Allahabad High Court in a judgement declared on June 12, 1975. Her election to the general house of the Parliament (known as the Lok Sabha in India) was declared void and she was also barred from contesting in elections subsequently for 6 years (Bhushan, 2018, p. 108). Although the 12-day stay order obtained on this judgment meant that the PM was not legally bound to resign immediately, several people felt that she had lost the moral right to stay in power (Rao Jr., 2017, pp. 28-29). The 12-day stay provided the PM time to influence the President to use his Constitutional powers to declare an internal Emergency on the pretext that some opposition leaders had incited the people of the country to civil disobedience.

The Emergency was declared on June 26, 1975 and stayed in effect till March 21, 1977. Perhaps the most major casualty in this time was the freedom of the Press. Not only did a Central Censorship Order forbid the press from writing on several national and international matters, periodically a Pre-Censorship Order was also in place which required all news agencies to have all their content cleared before publication by the Chief Censor specially appointed for this business. In order to prevent newspapers from reporting freely about the imposition of the Emergency, power supply to publishing houses had been cut-off starting from the night of June 25, 1975. It is interesting to note that one of the first acts of subversive resistance which took place when the newspapers were distributed next on June 28, 1975 was based

entirely on a word-play. This subversive word-play was an obituary in the *Times of India*, a popular national daily of the country, and read: "O'Cracy, D.E.M., beloved husband of T. Ruth, loving father of L.I. Bertie, brother of Faith, Hope and Justicia, expired on June 26" (Mahadevan, 1975, *Times of India*). It is hard to miss the obvious comment on the death of democracy in the face of the Emergency which has left liberty, truth, faith, hope, and justice more vulnerable. This use of incongruity to produce laughter finds a fuller realisation in the hands of cartoonists who have not only the verbal but also the visual register at their command. As will become evident through the course of this paper, cartoonists were able to play with incongruity not only between the apparent and intended meanings of the words but often between the image and the accompanying text too. Abu Abraham, the designated cartoonist of another national daily of the country known as the *Indian Express*, was particularly known for his ability for spinning satirical quips with parodic and mock-epic effects.

Henri Bergson, Linguistic Quips and Laughter

Henri Bergson, in his book-length work *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, locates the cause of laughter in "mechanical inelasticity" (Bergson, 1913, p. 7) in living beings and dynamic concepts. In other words, we laugh when a human being appears to behave like a machine and shows little or no ability to change in accordance with the surroundings or the context. This conceptualisation of the comic as mechanical inelasticity can be fully understood only when placed in the context of Bergson's core philosophy as expressed in his other major work *Introduction to Metaphysics* (1912). Bergson asserts that many aspects of life that transcend the physical and material realms into the metaphysical and immaterial cannot be understood from the outside and/or only in parts. Thus, a typical scientific analysis is not suitable for these concepts, asserts Bergson. The dynamism of such concepts like consciousness, human selves, duration of time, and memory eludes comprehension if observed only in parts and thus cannot be captured through

conventional scientific methods of analysis. The dynamic vitality needs to be understood together as a whole and from the inside, as it were, for the observer to be able to feel the ever-evolving nature of these concepts. Bergson's premise, that the comic is a result of mechanical inelasticity, is also based on this core philosophy. A human being is expected to have a dynamic soul but when a human being appears to behave more like a machine without life, the result is a comic situation producing laughter. This inelasticity manifests itself differently in characters, words, and situations. An absent-minded character, coincidences in situations, repetition of words, caricatures which involve exaggeration of certain features, and nature's anomalies like deformities are all seen to be comic in this light.

In the context of comic produced by words and situations too, Bergson extends the same logic in *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*: "Any arrangement of acts and events is comic which gives us, in a single combination, the illusion of life and the distinct impression of a mechanical arrangement" (Bergson, 1913, p. 69). Bergson uses three games that are typically used to make children laugh to identify three or more elements that lead to laughter in words as well as in situations. Bergson locates the first element, repetition, in the game called 'Jack-in-the-Box' in which a little man pops out of a box every time the child tries to push it back in. The repetition of the action is what the child finds funny. In real-life situations, this element often manifests itself as repeated coincidences. The second element, inversion, is identified in the game called the 'Dancing Jack' in which a toy that is controlled by invisible strings performs actions and gestures that make the child laugh. In real life situations, inversion manifests itself in happenings such as a robber being robbed or a person making choices and performing actions without being aware of how s/he is being controlled by others to do so. Finally, Bergson refers to a third common life situation known as 'the snowball': "an effect which grows by arithmetical progression, so that the cause, insignificant at the outset, culminates by a necessary evolution in a result as important as it is unexpected" (46). For Bergson, a mechanical arrangement is evident in the mismatched proportion between the

intensity of the cause and that of the effect. This possibility of a repetitive and mechanical relationship between cause and effects leads to laughter. In real-life scenarios the snowball effect manifests in what Bergson terms 'reciprocal interference'. He uses the phrase to mean a situation that refers to multiple 'signifieds' at the same time. This is how Bergson explains the use of puns and figurative language being comic. Each time the signifier is uttered, it appears to (mechanically) refer to multiple meanings beyond the obvious. Conversely, when something figurative is taken solely for its literal meaning, that too results in a comic situation since it signals a mechanical interpretation of the signifier that eludes its deeper and/or more dynamic meaning.

Abu's Cartoons in the Context of Bergson's Comic

While Abu Abraham's cartoons most closely seem to follow principles of reciprocal interference, they also seem to reflect elements of repetition and inversion upon closer analysis. Abu's cartoons often rely on linguistic quips and the most common of these seem to be double entendre (puns and metaphors) and tweaking oft-quoted sayings. While puns and metaphors seem to work on the principles of reciprocal interference and often result in crafty inversions, the tweaking of familiar sayings and proverbs deploys a combination of the techniques of repetition and reciprocal interference, pushing familiar words to produce unfamiliar meanings. In the cartoon in Figure 1 which was not cleared for publication by the Chief Censor on July 14, 1975, for example, ordinary words are forced into double entendre as the tall and lean man carries a placard that reads: "The end is near". The meaning of the cartoon pivots around the meaning of the word 'end' since it could mean the end of various things. Perhaps the first interpretation that readers/viewers may have would be of subjects speaking from a depressive attitude and anticipating the end of the world. However, a couple of subsequent observations complicate this reading: the figure holding the placard is smiling which signals that he is anticipating the end of something undesirable; and second, the text at the bottom of the cartoon that reads

"We're optimists". This text re-affirms the speculation that the end is desirable. Given that the Emergency had been in effect for close to a month by this time, the readers/viewers are likely to read it as the desirable end of a painful period. The play with the multiple possible meanings of the word 'end' enables the cartoonist to draw the reader into the cartoon and perhaps even identify with the sentiment being expressed. It is not only the interaction between different words but also the interaction between the text and the visuals that leads the reader/viewer to this premise. It is also interesting to note the subjects in this cartoon: the short stodgy man and the tall lean man, the stock figures of Abu's cartoons. In his book *Games of Emergency*, he calls them "my Congress characters" (Abraham, 1975, n.p). (In India, "Congress" is the name of one of the operative political parties). Since Congress was the ruling party at that time, we understand this to mean that they are party workers. This adds another layer to the analysis as an ironical inversion becomes evident. Irrespective of which meaning of 'end' the reader/viewer subscribes to, it is ironical that the workers of the ruling party that led to the current scenario are anticipating the 'end'. If the end also refers to the end of the regime of the ruling party, then the party workers would also be out of power. This seems to anticipate the loss in elections of the ruling party that really took place about eighteen months later.

Figure 1

Figure 2

The cartoon in Figure 2 similarly combines ordinary words into the completion of a metaphor. We see Abu's stock figures watching the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi on television commenting on the necessity of imposing the Emergency: "A bitter pill was needed to restore the nation's health". Abu's cartoon beautifully completes the metaphor: "And the production of sugar coating has already exceeded the plan target". Sugar-coating here would mean all the measures the government had been taking to keep up the appearances of a healthy and democratic nation. The reciprocal interference evident here was commenced by the Prime Minister herself with the use of her metaphor of the bitter pill to describe the Emergency. By doing so, she brought into the public conscience the imagined idea of a diseased nation requiring treatment with a bitter pill. However, the cartoonist extends the same metaphor and uses the word "sugar-coating" to refer to various kinds of censorship measures which forced the publishing houses and news agencies to present the act of imposing the Emergency in a positive and healing light. In doing this, the cartoonist also manages to exploit the connotations associated with the phrase

"sugar-coating" which is almost always used in the context of attempting to pass off something undesirable as alluring. The cartoonist's response to the Prime Minister's metaphor then acts as a catalyst for the snowball effect, transforming the solemn appeal of the Prime Minister of swallowing the bitter pill as a necessary evil into a parody of itself by exposing it as a familiar tactic of disguising the undesirable with sugar-coating. The result is what Bergson terms a "transposition" in the context of comic produced through words. Contrast is central to such an effect and it abounds in this cartoon: the real versus the ideal, the disguise versus the reality, and symbolically, bitter versus sweet. The slippage results in a degradation in the image of the Prime Minister and her government.

This skilful technique of the cartoonist of acting as a catalyst for such slippages realises its potential when it is employed upon the use of what Bergson terms "ready-made formulas" and "stereotyped phrases" (Bergson, 1913, p. 6). In Abu's cartoons a frequent use of pre-existing proverbs, sayings and idioms is noticeable but none go without being played with. While the use of these ready-made phrases corresponds to the element of repetition in the Bergsonian paradigm, the tweaking of these phrases that Abu effects reciprocally interferes with the received meaning of these familiar phrases. In the cartoon in Figure 3 which was published on June 25, 1976, exactly one year after the Emergency was declared, for example, we see the stock figures standing in front of what looks like a birthday cake. The cake is clearly marked "Emergency" but as the stock figures blow the candle and the reader/viewer expects a birthday wish for the Emergency, the text below reads instead: "Many happy returns of the ….monsoon!". The oft-used phrase "Many Happy Returns", typically used for wishing someone a happy birthday, was here being tweaked to wish the Emergency but the cartoonist then seems to have reconsidered his choices, presumably for the fear of being censored. While he allowed the cake to remain labelled "Emergency" he edited the text below to wish many happy returns of the monsoon which also visits the country around that time every year. The cartoonist allows us to see this stroke of self-censorship on purpose: he wanted to wish the

Emergency but since that would have been censored, he found an alternative instead. The expectation that the oft-used phrase along with the visual of the cake generates in the reader/viewer is used to make self-censorship apparent. The ellipses here become symbolic of the moments spent by the cartoonist in censoring himself so that he would not be censored by others. This birthday celebration therefore results in parodic humour that tends to degrade the image of those who made such self-censorship necessary.

Figure 3

Figure 4

In a style remarkably similar, the cartoon in Figure 4 shows the two stock figures walking as if dejected at the end of a working day while the text below reads: "I've decided that speech is silver". The text is a reworking of a part of the old saying "Silence is golden, speech is silver", and therefore brings to mind the context in which the original saying is typically used. Since it is typically used to advise the

benefits of silence over speech in various situations, the short and stodgy character who appears to be speaking here also seems to be advising on the unspoken benefits of silence. Once again, the effect seems to be one of degradation of those who have pushed people towards self-censorship. While this exposes the hierarchical power relationship between the government and the citizens once again, it complements another cartoon that was published about five months later on December 27, 1975 in which the President of the ruling party exclaims: "even dissent is silver". This signals his personal position of power and security while the stability of the Prime Minister and the rest of the party was at stake. He decides that he could stay silent and enjoy the position of the President of the party (and that is a golden opportunity) or he could even dissent and form a competing party of his own (and that would at least be silver in comparison). Once again, it is the power relations between the obvious and hidden subjects of these cartoons that form the core subject here, and the laughter seems to result from the incongruity between the original context of the proverbs and the contexts in which they are forced to produce a different set of meanings.

In order to understand how such incongruous changes to the context of words and other utterances cause laughter instead of other emotions, we take a cue from the concept of "bisocation" premised by Arthur Koestler in his work *The Act of Creation*. Koestler proposes "bisociation" (Koestler, 1964, p. 20), as the principle that underlies and can explain all comic situations. He defines bisociation as a "clash of the two mutually incompatible codes or associative contexts…" (19), and suggests that this clash is the process that is at work in all comic situations. In Koestler's premise, amongst the incompatible contexts in any comic situation the invariable or fixed aspect of the context is the underlying code. The code, however, could manifest itself in multiple ways which vary and are referred to as matrices. Creative processes and situations like the comic work by bringing two different matrices together which are connected to each other through the underlying code. The creative process produces a poetic image when it deploys two or more matrices which are compatible

with each other and complement each other with additional layers of meaning such that they evoke the sympathy of the audience. An innovative scientific discovery is the result of the creative process when the matrices come together in such a way that they complement each other to produce something new, evoking marvel. A comic situation and laughter are the most probable result of a creative process that deploys two or more matrices that are incompatible with each other and do not complement each other at all. The realisation that two matrices, seemingly fundamentally incompatible with each other, have an underlying code in common is the cause of laughter. Similarity in the midst of incongruity forms the basis for the comic in this conceptualisation. This is best observed in the cartoons in Figures 5 and 6. Figure 5 features a cartoon that was pre-censored and was not allowed to be published on July 15, 1975. The short and stodgy Congress party worker can be seen sitting at a desk with a pen in hand and a blank sheet of paper in front of him. He seems to be saying to his lean and tall companion: "My train of thought has derailed". The punch of the cartoon pivots around the word 'train' since a popular joke around the time was about how even the trains were running on time owing to the state of Emergency. The Congress party worker's humour now becomes clear: while the trains of the country are running on time, the train of his thoughts has derailed possibly owing to the pervasive censorship of expression. While the original meaning of the word 'train' is a literal one referring to the mode of transport, Abu uses the word as a metaphor to refer to the stream of thoughts of the subject, thus effecting a slippage from the literal to the metaphorical codes. On that metaphorical plane, the comment seems to be on the government that has brought the all-pervasive censorship into the lives of citizens.
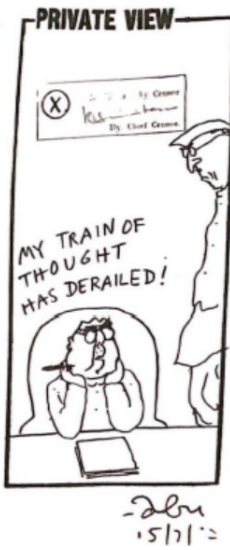
Figure 5

Figure 6

Similarly, the cartoon in Figure 6 shows the short and stodgy Congress party worker making the 'V' sign with his middle and index fingers which typically signals victory. However, the Congress party worker is seen to exclaim: "You've guessed it! V is for Vasectomy". The reference is to the Family Planning Programme that was carried out as part of Emergency measures. In order to bring the population of the country under control, the government set up camps to carry out vasectomies for any men who wanted it. Since the government incentivised the ministers in every state to report high numbers of vasectomies carried out in their respective states, it soon turned into a forced activity from which no man was safe. Abu himself writes about the excesses of the Family Planning Programme in an article in his book *Games of Emergency* thus:

> In the table tennis tournament mixed doubles final the players used red triangular bats. The match was interrupted at two games all, when the headmaster announced the capture of a new vasectomy volunteer. This is the first time an operation has been carried out on a table tennis table in the middle of a match.
> (Abraham, 1977, n.p.)

While Abu's writing is obviously a parodic exaggeration, it captures well the coercive spirit of the time as is evident in the oxymoron of capturing a "volunteer" and in the urgency with which the vasectomy was carried out, interrupting a match. The red triangular bats are reminiscent of the red inverted triangle that became symbolic of the family planning initiatives of the government at the time. It is perhaps also to point at the all-pervasive nature of the sterilisation programme that the Congress party worker in Figure 6 says "You've guessed it!". He does not expect anything except vasectomy to pop up in his companion's mind upon seeing the 'V' sign. Yet, for readers/viewers of the cartoon familiar with the more conventional meaning of the 'V' sign, the humour is hard to miss and is based on the incongruity and incompatibility between the code of the original meaning and the code of the transformed meaning.

Subversive Potential of Political Cartoons

This brings to the forefront the question of the subversive nature of the laughter produced in these instances. If there is any doubt about the perception of the threat posed by cartoonists, we only need to remind ourselves about the emphasis placed on screening every cartoon and every word before it was published in a newspaper by the Chief Censor. The post of the Chief Censor was specially created at this time to effectively implement the Pre-Censorship order and the efficiency that the appointed Censor seems to have maintained in screening these cartoons is evident from the stamp of the Censor on the cartoon in Figure 7. In addition to and above the usual stamp of the Chief Censor that reads "Not Passed by Censor", there is another time stamp too which reads: "Time of Receipt: 2:50 pm Cleared: 3:00pm". The measly time of ten minutes taken to come to a decision about the cartoon shows the urgency with which the Chief Censor dealt with the cartoon received in his office, hinting at the immediacy of the impact that is perhaps associated with the cartoon if it reaches the masses through the newspaper. The urgency of the Censor's action perhaps also hints at the threat to the Censor's own position if he failed to efficiently

censor everything that seemed to have the potential to mock the government or hurt it in any other way.

Figure 7

R.K. Laxman, another cartoonist working for a different newspaper at the time, recalls the interaction of his cartoons with the censorious authorities during this time:

> A prominent member of Mrs. Gandhi's staff who was the official in charge of keeping vigil over the activities of the press told me about the psychological predicament of the censors. These officers were chosen from among the clerical staff. When my cartoon came under scrutiny, the censor was in a fix, I was told. If he understood a cartoon and it tickled his wit, he immediately banged the rubber stamp "Rejected" on it on the basis that something that made people laugh might be an anti-government reaction. But if the cartoons showed no scope for laughter at all, it got the reject stamp even so—because it might harbour pernicious intentions. (Laxman, 1989, p. 88)

These accounts of the activities of the Chief Censor and censorship in general convince us about the perceived threat of satirical political cartoons. In order to

investigate how satirical political cartoons have this effect, we must consider closely the subjects and objects of these linguistic quips. Several of the cartoons discussed above seem to hint at power hierarchies in the political sphere which are brought to light either to be re-affirmed or to be challenged in the cartoons. While a covert acknowledgement of hierarchy is evident in these cartoons, in two other cartoons these hierarchical socio-political relationships become even clearer and so does the intent of the cartoonist. The cartoon in Figure 8 shows the short and stodgy Congress party worker writing at a desk while the tall and thin one asks: "Are you writing your New Year Amendments?". The reference is clearly to the oft-used phrase 'New Year Resolutions' which are promises that people make to themselves before the beginning of a new year or on the first day of the new year. This cartoon was published on December 29, 1976 which is usually when people make New Year's resolutions but the Congress party worker ironically wonders if his friend is writing amendments. It is probably a way of taunting the PM about the endless self-serving amendments to the Constitution that her party had been facilitating. To make an attempt at a more precise contextualisation of the cartoon, we could refer to then Additional Solicitor General of India Soli Sorabjee's list of verbal and written orders that were sent to the press by the government during the Emergency. On December 19, 1976, an order was sent directing the press to not publish "stories, comments, reports relating to Intra-party rivalries within the Congress and between the Youth Congress and the All India Congress… This applies to West Bengal, Orissa and Kerala" (Sorabjee, 1977, p. 37). The Chief Ministers of these states took a disapproving stance towards the activities of the Youth Congress led by PM Indira Gandhi's son Sanjay Gandhi, and this was one of the reasons for them to threaten deflection from the ruling Congress party. Thus, the stability of the Congress party was in question. The statement of the Congress party worker in Figure 14 then could also be Abu's way of hinting that since the party's stability is at stake, the PM might have some more amendments in mind to attempt a unification of these conflicting segments to avoid the splitting up of the party. This anticipation on Abu's part is reminiscent of June 1975 when Gandhi imposed the Emergency to save her post as

PM and subsequently used her influence in the party to pass hurried amendments in the Constitution. Some of these amendments made it virtually impossible for her to be prosecuted further in the cases against her, thus saving her post as PM. Such an aggressive assertion of (arguably) Constitutional powers on the part of the government hints only at an autocratic method of functioning in which amendments are forcibly made to the Constitution even as citizens' fundamental rights remain suspended. The subversive impact of the cartoon thus lies in revealing this autocratic equation between the government and citizens whom the government is meant to serve.
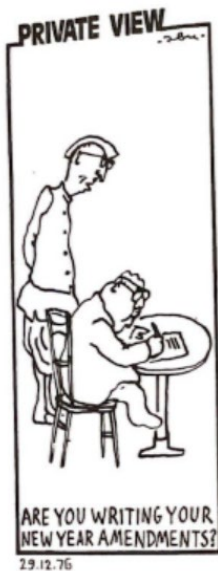

Figure 8   Figure 9

Similarly, in Figure 9 we see Emergency becoming a toy in the hands of the PM. This cartoon mimics the popular game 'She loves me, She loves me not' in which a lover uses a flower to anticipate if his affections are reciprocated by his beloved. With the plucking of the petals one by one the player repeats alternately 'She loves me' and 'She loves me not'. The utterance landing on the last petal is assumed to be the truth. A very interesting revelation about the power dynamics can be observed

in this cartoon as the phrase changes to "She lifts me, She lifts me not" and a figure titled Emergency is shown playing this game. In the conventional version of the game the agency always seems to lie with the beloved for whose love the player yearns. In this cartoon, since the PM has taken the place of that beloved and Emergency the place of the player, it is Emergency that seems to be powerless like a toy and at the mercy of the PM. Interestingly, since the Emergency is inversely proportional to democracy, as a corollary democracy too is at the mercy of the PM. Once again, in this scenario, it is the citizens who are powerless while ironically it is the citizens that democracy, the Prime Minister and even the Emergency were supposed to serve. To analyse Abu's cartoons in a similar context, Neha Khurana and Reena Singh have applied the theoretical concept of "linguistic vulnerability" proposed by theorist Judith Butler to suggest that in an act of censorship, "What is regulated then is not just speech but the subject position itself that defines the limits of legitimacy for the individual. It is not speech but subjects who are effectively censored by recalibrating the limits of what is acceptable as ways of being and expression" (219). By focusing on the hierarchical power relations portrayed in the cartoons, the present analysis extends this understanding beyond the level of individuals to include systems too. The personification of the Emergency (and by extension, democracy) in the above cartoon, for example, can be more effectively read in this manner as the state of Emergency and the system of democracy themselves appear to be censored.

The final question to be considered is about the role that subversive cartoons play in the public sphere. Politics operates, as Fairclough and Fairclough demonstrate, "in a context in which the possibilities of democratic deliberation and political participation are often limited by people's unequal access to resources, by power inequalities and by the institutional complexity of modern societies" (235-236). In such a scenario, it is imperative that the common masses find forays into the political sphere by reading and responding to the happenings around them. Drawing on Fairclough and Fairclough, Villy Tsakona argues that "most analyses of political

humour agree that it is definitely part of the public 'deliberation' of political issues…. It also allows for citizens' "political participation" even if it is limited by people's unequal access to resources" (Tsakona, 7). Thus, Tsakona concludes that political humour can suggest alternatives and be a significant method of political deliberation and decision-making. In this context, it appears that satirical political cartoons like Abu's that invite the participation of the readers/viewers through repetition of old and familiar sayings and crafty word-play would draw the participation of the masses into the political sphere. The fact that these cartoons appeared usually on the front page of the newspaper along with the other important news of the day also meant that the cartoons provided a lens through which to view the happenings of the day.

Conclusion

Overall, linguistic quips serve to achieve the necessary degradation of the targets of satirical political cartoons using a combination of techniques such as repetition, inversion, and reciprocal interference. While these Bergsonian techniques explain the effectiveness of puns, metaphors, and tweaking of proverbs and idioms, Koestler's concept of bisociation presents more clarity to laughter as the emotion resulting from incongruous situations. This laughter is subversive as linguistic quips expose the social and political power hierarchies between the obvious and the hidden subjects of political cartoons. Thus, while on the one hand it can be argued that "cartoonists have become masters of subtlety, stealth, insinuation, innuendo and the double entendre" (Lent, 5) to become better suited to navigating censorship (Khurana and Singh, 228), on the other it is evident that these double entendres and other quips lead to slippages which reveal far more about social and political relations than any other medium. Laughter, especially the kind resulting from a participation of the readers/viewers in the process, tends to enable the participation of the masses in political deliberation by taking the cause of that laughter seriously.

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