

**COMICS  
POWER!**

## GRASSROOTS COMICS IN TAMIL NADU, 2000.

by Leif Packalén and Katja Tukiainen

### Background

Village Community Development Services (VCDS), Social Action Group (SAG), Finnish Comics Society and World Comics - Finland started this Finnida-supported NGO-cooperation project in 1997.

The aim of the project have been to promote the use of comics as an educational and information medium in human rights work in Tamil Nadu, India.

All workshops so far have been held in VCDS' Multi-purpose Training Centre in Karasanoor. The two first workshops were in October 1997 and 1998, with 20 - 30 participants from SAG's member organisations. The resource persons from Finland were Leif Packalén (97-99), Tarmo Koivisto (97), Jussi "Juba" Tuomola (98) and Katja Tukiainen (99). Basheer Ahmed, from Chennai has been the local tutor throughout the cooperation programme and he was joined by D. Marimuthu in 99. VCDS has conducted several 2-3 day workshops between the annual main workshops. The in-between workshops have been financed from VCDS' own funds.

*Drawing by Katja Tukiainen.*

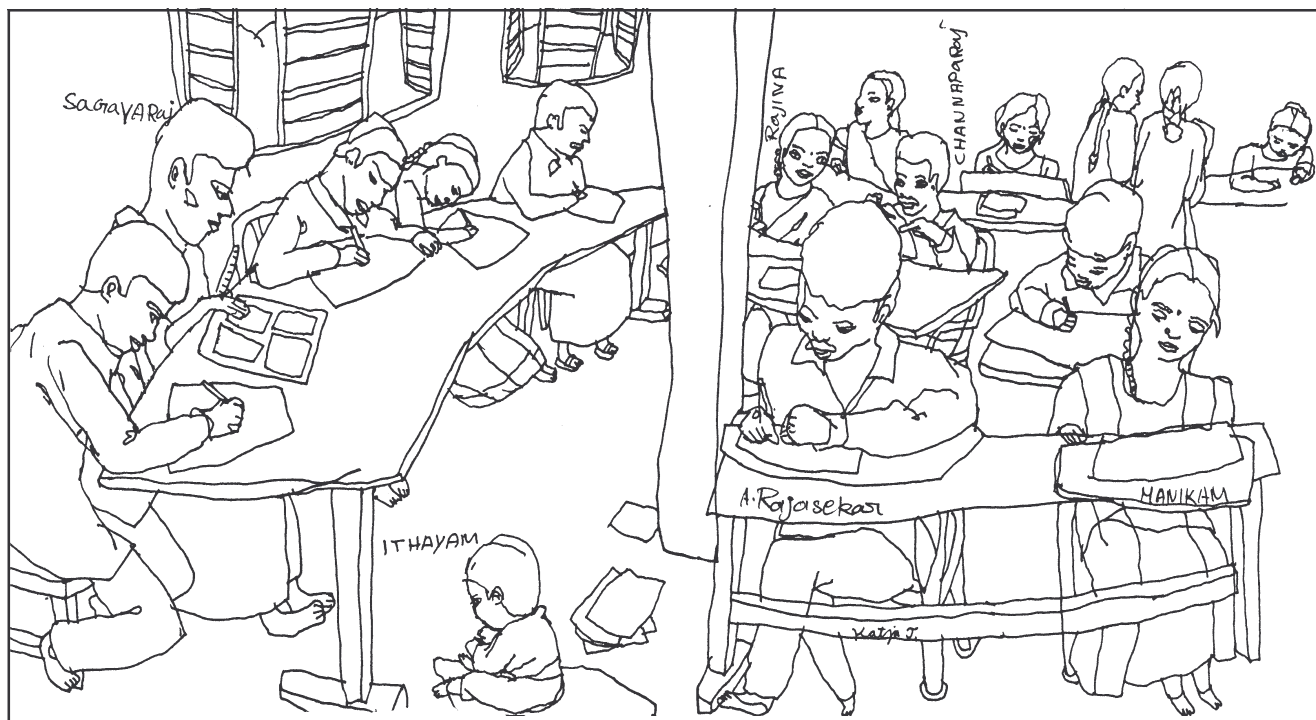


*Detail from an 8-page story by Sutha.*

### The programme

The participants were divided into two groups; an advanced one for those who had attended the previous workshops and a beginners' group.

The advanced group: First day, story scripting on human rights themes. Second day: story pencilling



and inking. Day three: Booklet artworks. Outdoor sketching at Tirruvyakkar temple. Day four: Pencilling and inking the stories. Day five: manufacture of the comics booklets. Day six: Evaluation and closing programme.

The beginners' group: First day: Comics basics and exercises. Second day: Scripts and artwork exercises. Day three: scripts on the chosen human rights themes. Outdoor sketching. Day four: Pencilling and inking. Day five: Final artworks and making of booklets. Day six: Closing programme.

## Resource persons

Leif Packalén led the workshop and worked mainly with the advanced group, Katja Tukiainen led the beginners' and the women's group and the booklet instructions, Basheer Ahmed and D. Marimuthu gave creative and artistic instruction. Susail Nathan acted as an interpreter. S. Martine and Ms. Kousalya, Ramesh, and a number of other VCDS' staff assisted in various ways. The Delhi-based cartoonist Sharad Sharma, worked as a resource person for three days.

## The participants

Advanced group: P. Jaya, A. Xavier, Noel Peter Shedden, Ms. Selvakumar, S. Lingamoorthi, N. Eagambaram, Ms. R.Rajeswari, Ms. M.Sivagami, Ms. D. Thanuskoodi, Ms. T.Poongothai, Ms. V. Tamilselvi, S. Baskar, D. Sahayaraj, G. Chinappa Raj, Mrs. R. Regina Mary, Ms. K. Suda, S. Ravi



*We went sketching to Tirruvyakkar Temple, here is a detail drawn by Tamilselvi.*



*Basheer and Sharad. From an 8-page story by Basheer Ahmed.*

Chandaran, L. Jayaragu, Ms. T. Epsi-Ba and C.A.V. Raj.

First time participants: P. Mathiyalam, A.Rajasekar, M. Prabu, Ms. A. Sutha, Ms. S. Sasikala, Ms. A. Sivagami, Ms. K. Jayalakshmi, Ms. M. Valamathi, Ms. N. Sasikala, Ms. M. Mahalakshmi, Ms. D. Manikkam, Ms. G. Mak, Ms. D. Anitha, P. Eswaran, S.F. Prabhakar Albert, Ms. A. Vailankanni and Ms. Tamil Selvi.

## Stories and themes

The comics that were made during the workshop were on human rights issues. Rights to education, rights to religious freedom, rights to employment and livelihood, etc. The stories were made as four- or six-panel comics and as small (A6-size) 8-page



*Thank-you speech to Sharad. Drawing by Leif Packalén*

booklets. In all 38 booklets and about 35 stories were made during the workshop.

### VCDS' book

VCDS/SAG has published in August their first collection of Tamil campaign comics called "Comics Power for Social Change" and has 42 pages. The book is filled with comics made at the workshops 1997-99. The book has been received with enthusiasm by the NGO community in Tamil Nadu.

### Loyola College, Chennai

We had been in touch with the Culture and Communication Department at the Loyola College in Chennai before and they invited us to meet them and give lectures to their students. The college is very much oriented towards social and human rights matters. They showed a keen interest in cooperating with us and VCDS/SAG in the future too.

### Future plans

According to the discussions we had, it seems that further cooperation should concentrate on training comics tutors or persons that could run a NGO comics workshop. Probably we would also like to include Northern Indian activists in the cooperation. This would be done in cooperation with Sharad Sharma and the following organisations: Charkha in New Delhi, Johar in Bihar and Mukthi Dhara Sansthan in Rajasthan. Any future programme should also have a component of distributing campaign comics in designated target areas.

### Conclusion

The workshop was very successful, although the number of participants was very high. The quality of the produced comics was high and especially the



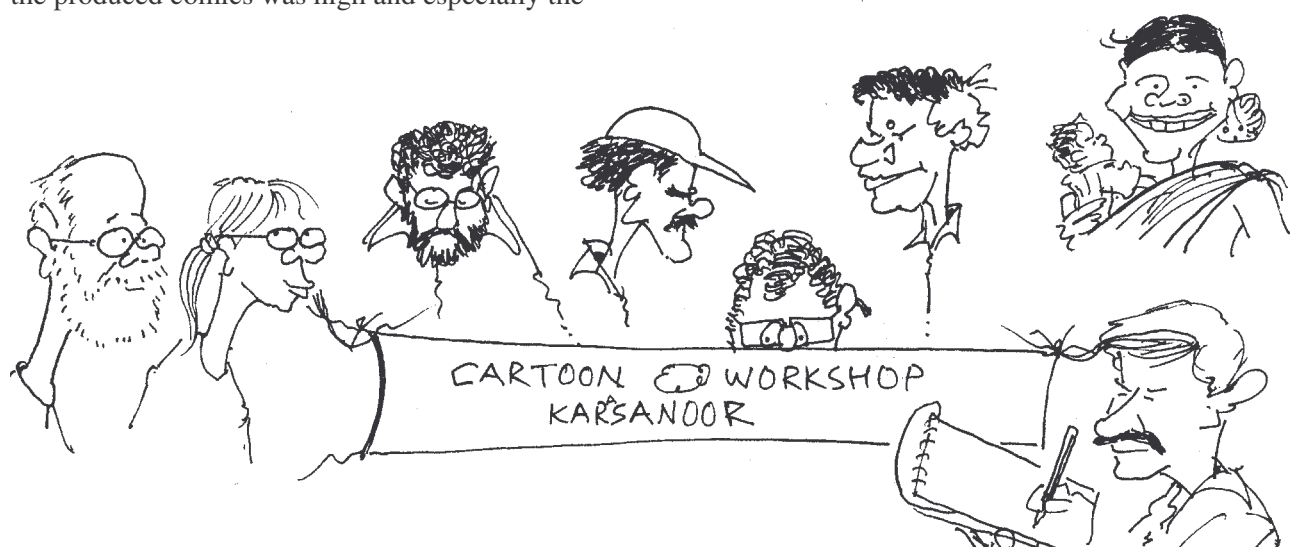
*The frontpage to an 8-page story by Baskar.*

production of the small 8-page booklets gave room for new ideas of how to use the medium of comics in the future. An 8-page story for the price of two photocopies - it's very handy!

**Leif Packalén**

**Chairman**

World Comics - Finland



*Some faces from the workshop as seen by Sharad Sharma*

## RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

This 8-page booklet was made by S.F. Prabhakar Albert, who attended our workshop for the first time. Here the pages are shown all, but in the booklet, each page is one panel. The story is about a Muslim, a Hindu and a Christian, who are friends...



Here the friends arrive to the village from town.



They meet the Hindu's family.



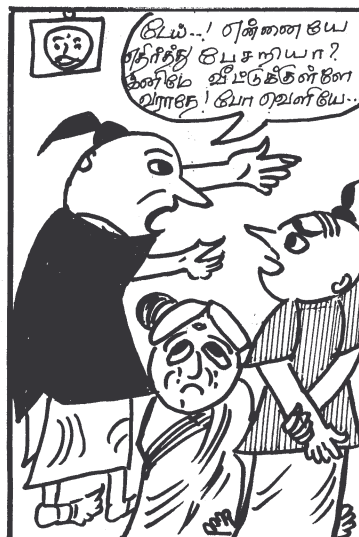
The father tries to talk his son out of being with his fellows.



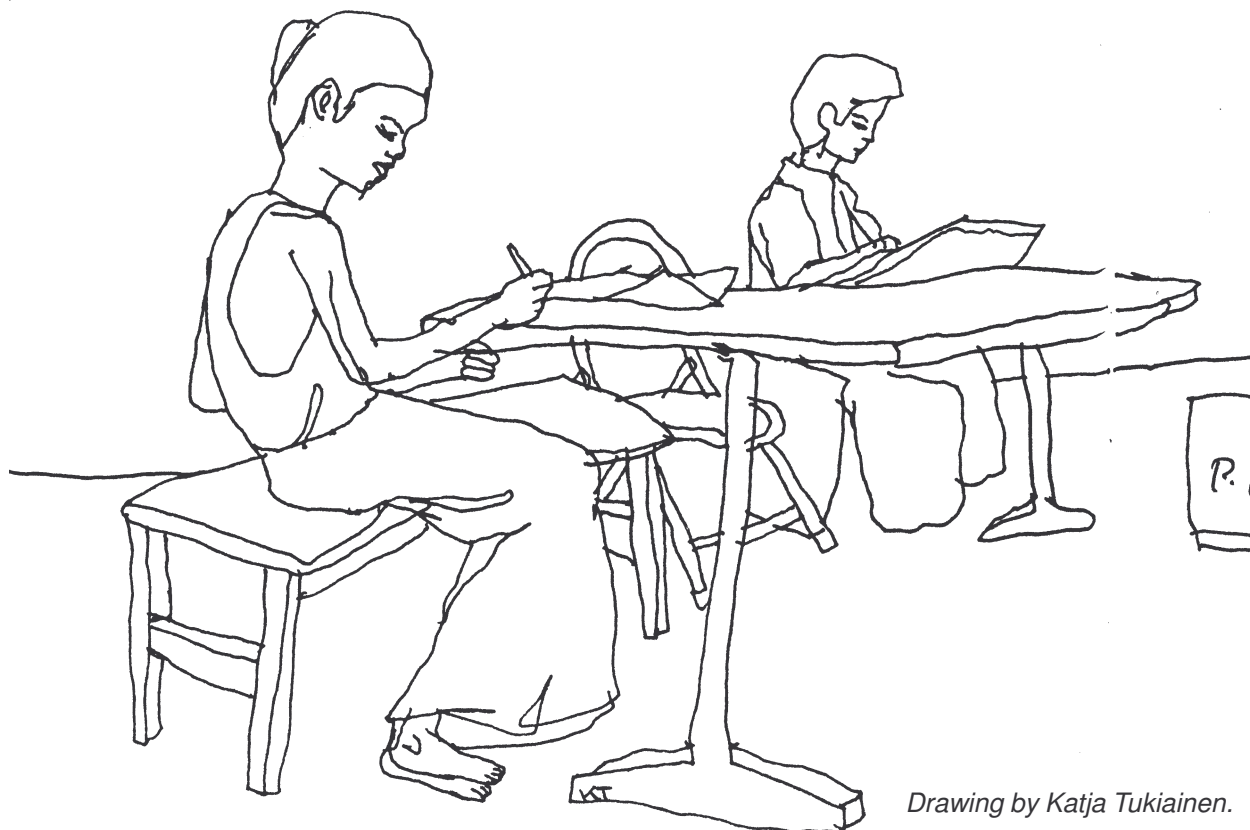
They argue...



and argue...



S.F. Prabhakar Albert



*Drawing by Katja Tukiainen.*

## Tamil Nadu 2000

The second comics workshop with the women's group in the V.C.D.S. centre of Karasanoor took place in the first week of a hot and humid September. Half of the young women's group participated already for the second time, and the other half were beginners. The age of the students was between 14 and 25. The issues we dealt with this year were about the human rights.

We wanted to give to our group the feeling of the real influence through our media, comic storytelling. That's why I based this year's workshop curriculum on the making of an A6-booklet. The feeling you get when seeing your comic story for the first time printed or copied is worth a lot. The students created during one week the manuscript, storyboard and the final eight-page comic original, and got their story printed with a copying machine in the form of an eight-page A6 booklet. They have now the knowledge to write and draw their comics, and what was new for most of them, to make up and copy the eight-page booklet and get their audience through these booklets.

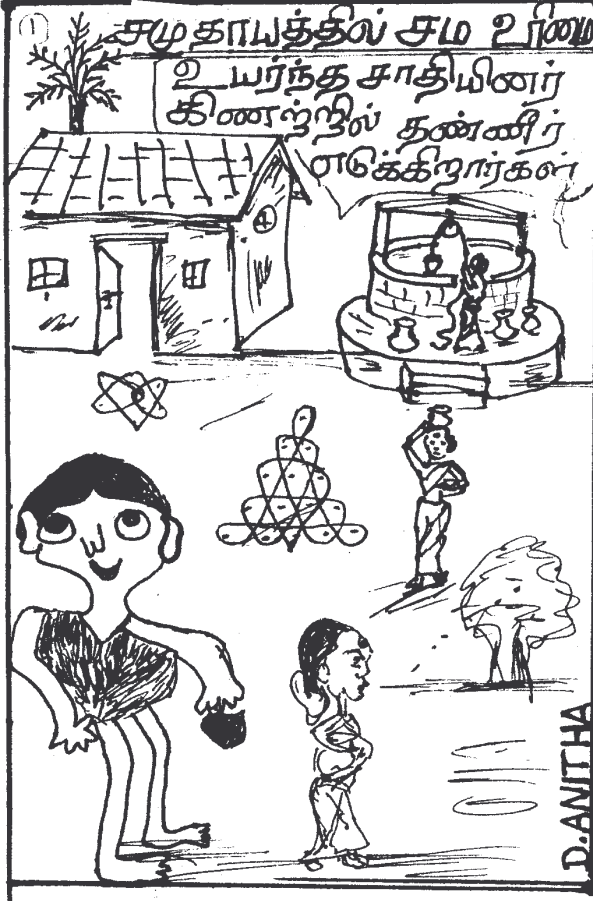
As a comic art teacher, especially when working with a different and obviously very rich visual culture, I want to point out how important it is to save and encourage the original visual language of

the students. What I feel to be the importance of my presence, is the giving to the students the instruments, material and understanding of storytelling in the language of comics, i.e. graphic stories. Equally, or even more important is to encourage them to use their knowledge of their own culture in their comic stories, and remember that those stories are made by Tamil Nadu people for Tamil Nadu people.

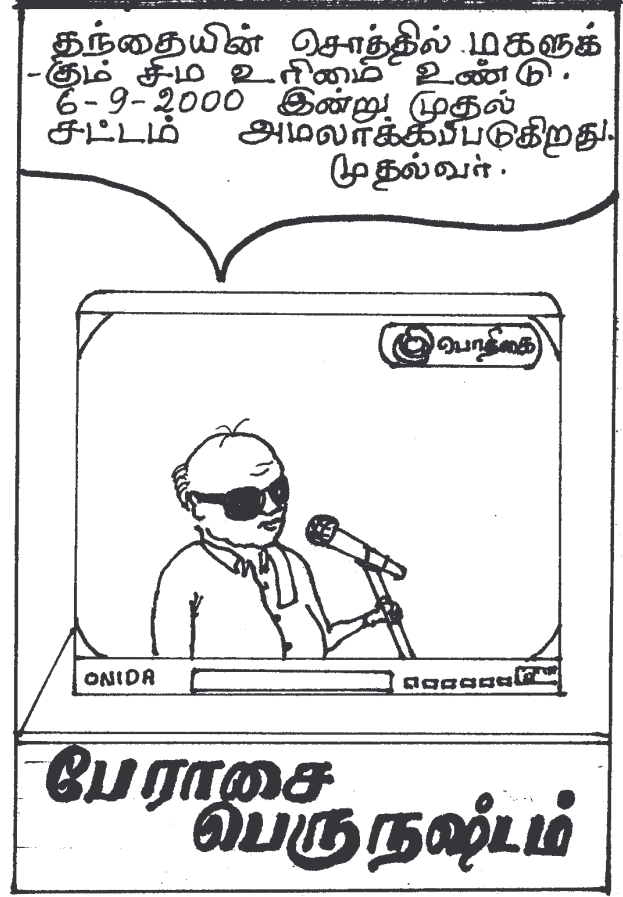
Katja Tukiainen  
Comix artist,  
Master of Arts in art education



*Drawing by Xavier.*



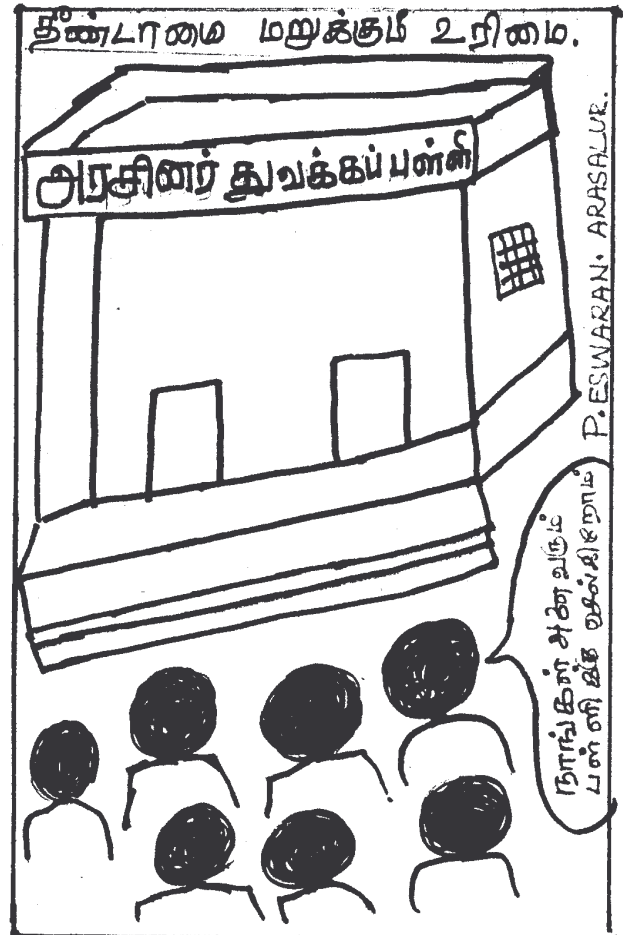
Front cover of D. Anitha's 8-page story on the village well.



Front cover of C.A.V Raj's 8-page story on corrupt politician.



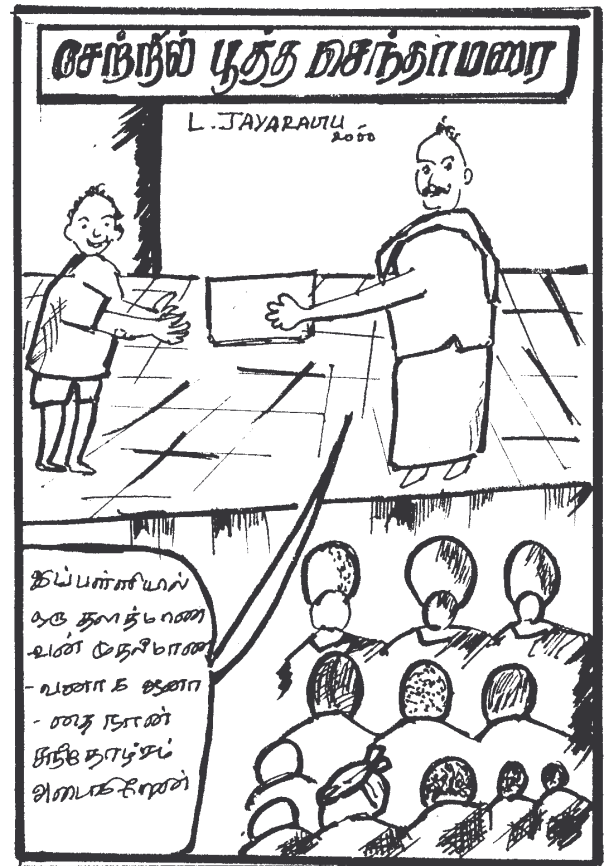
Front cover of N. Eaganbaram's 8-page story on the women's strike in the village.



Front cover of P. Eswaran's 8-page story.



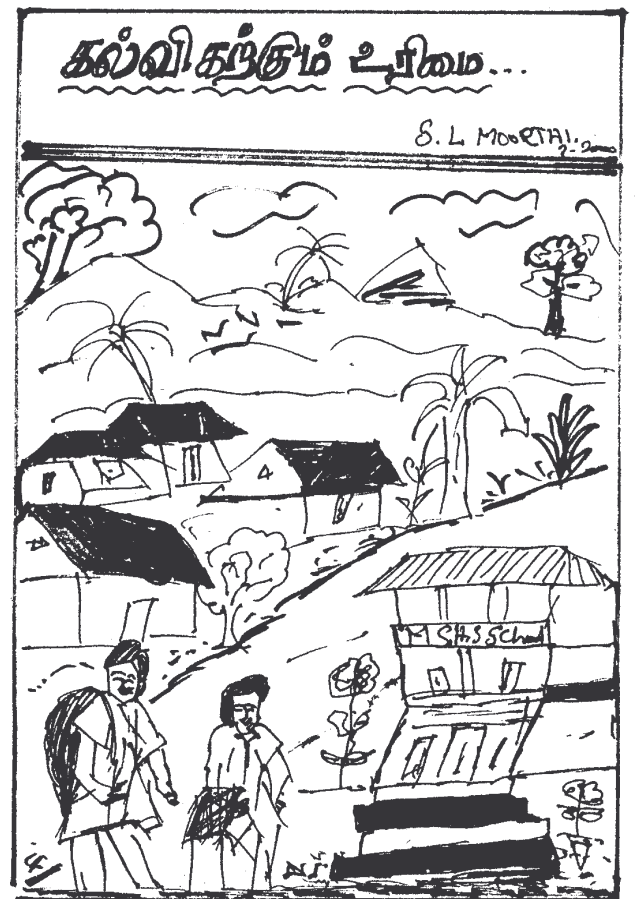
Front cover from K. Jayalakshmi's version of the story about a dishonest ration shop manager.



Front cover from L. Jayaragu's version of the story on the Dalit boy who became a tax collector.



Front cover from M. Prabu's story on support to education.



Front cover from S. Lingamoorthi's story on the Dalit boy who became a tax collector.



Front cover from S.Mak's story on a married couple.



Front cover from I. Mathi's story on elections.



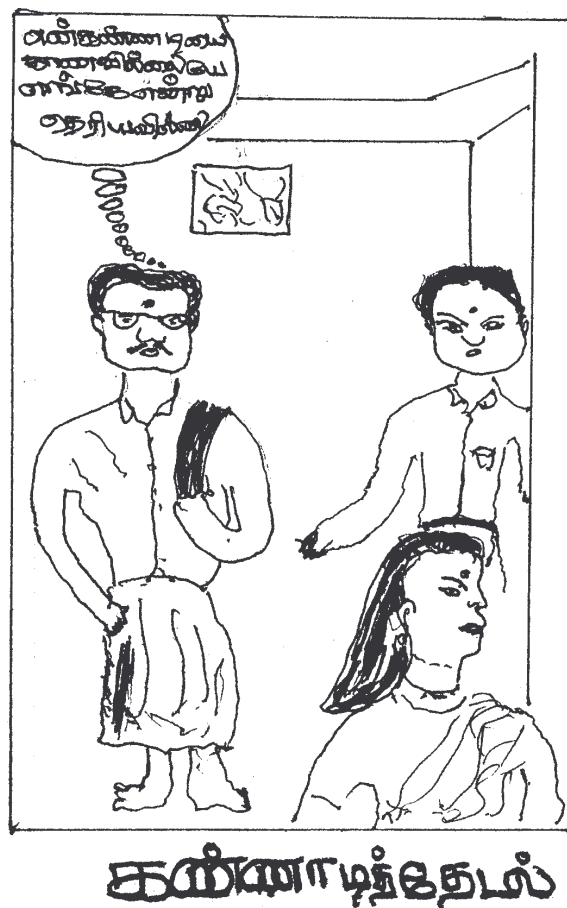
Front cover from Noel Peter Shedden's story on the farmer, whose land was expropriated for oil digging.



Front cover from T. Poongothai's version of the story about the dishonest ration shop manager.



*Front cover from R. Rajeswari's version of the story about the Dalit boy who became a tax collector.*



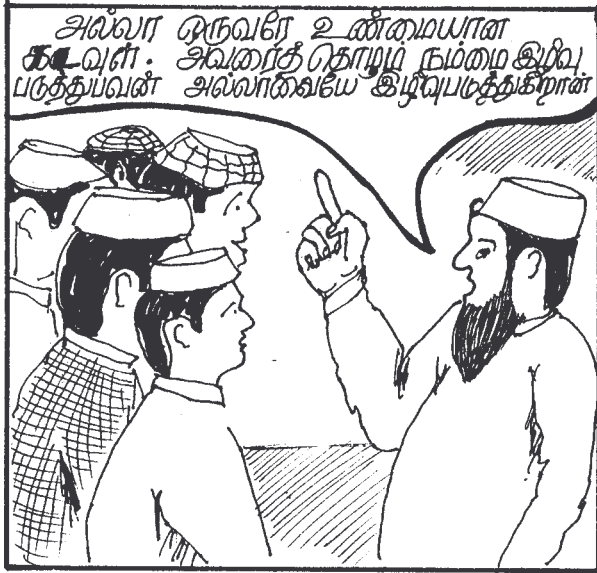
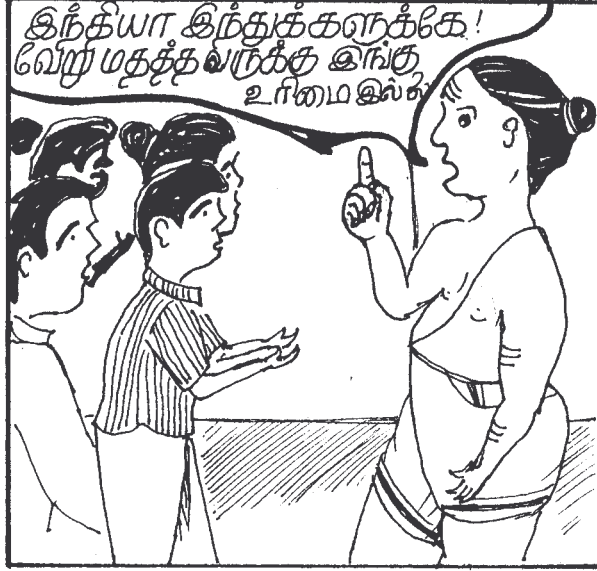
*Ranichandra.*



*Front cover from C. Regina Jesus' story on the womens' strike.*

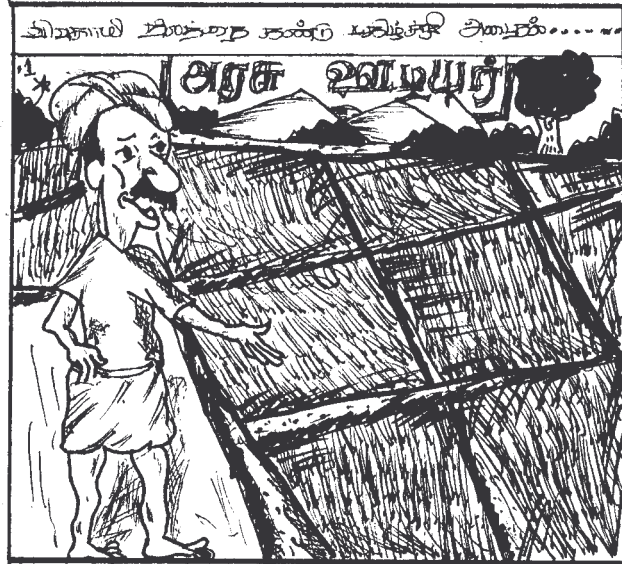


*Front cover from Epsi-Ba Sarojini's version of the story on the dishonest ration shop manager.*



மதமே மதம்

C.A.V. Raj



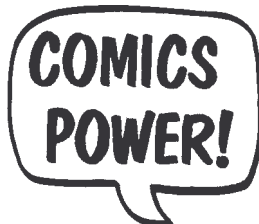
S. Baskar's story about a land dispute between a Dalit and a landlord.



This story about the difference between life in the city and the rural areas was made by S. Lingamoorthi.

This report is available from:

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