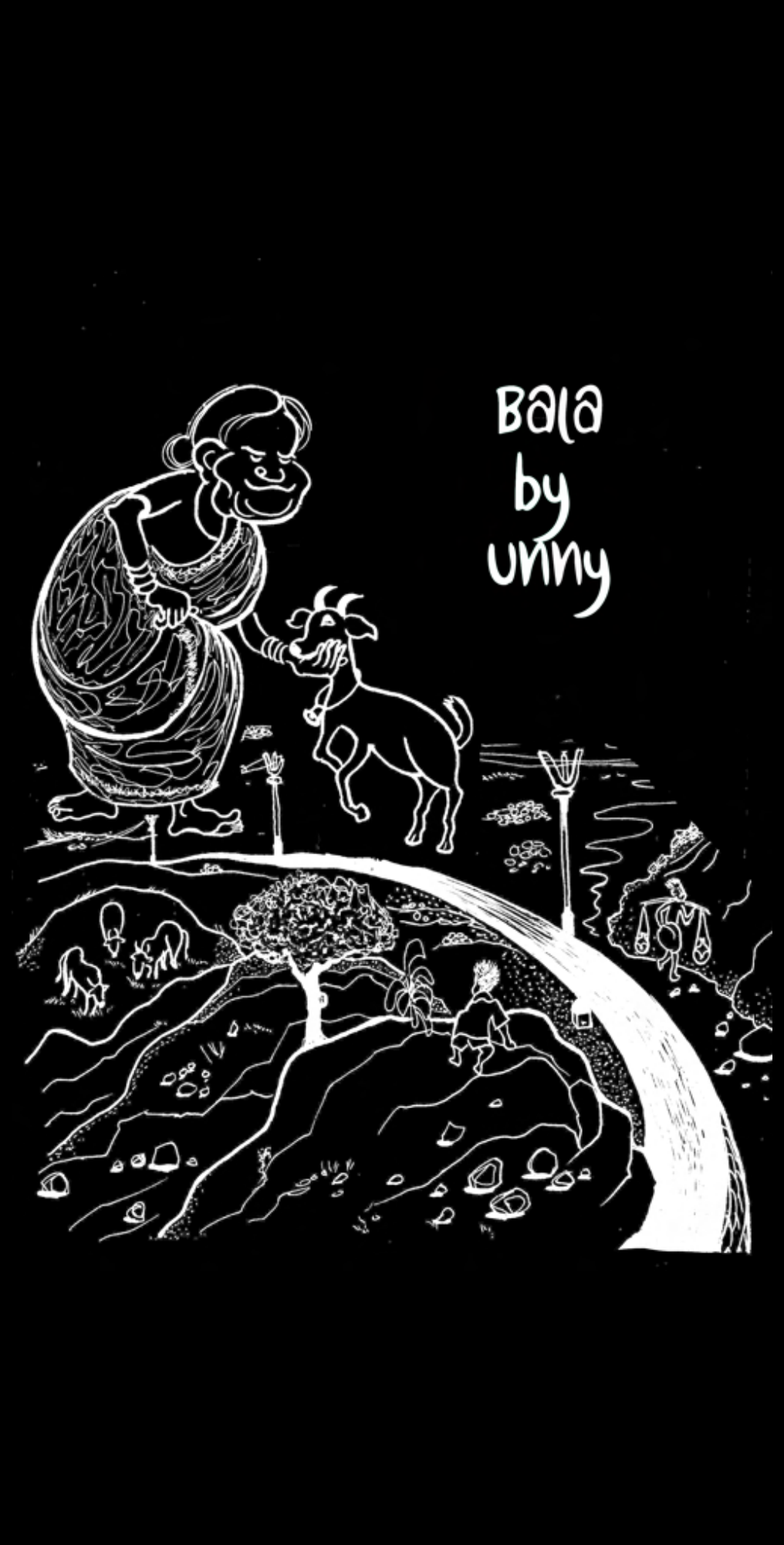

Bala
by
Unny

Bala

E. P. Unny
(Graphic story)

Copyright © 2025, E. P. Unny

The electronic versions are released under the provisions of Creative Commons Attribution Non-commercial No-derives Share Alike license for free download and usage.

The electronic versions were generated from sources marked up in LaTeX after incorporating all the sketches provided by the author, in a computer running GNU/LINUX operating system. PDF was typeset using LuaTeX from TeXLive 2025. The base font used is Cormarant Garamond Medium at 10 pt.

Cover: Sketch by E. P. Unny.

Sayahna Foundation
River Valley Campus, Malayinkeezh
Trivandrum, India 695571
URL: books.sayahna.org

INTRODUCTION

At the core of this graphic story BALA is the lady barber Balakistamma and her village. Everyone here — the men, women, children, and the goat no less are real. I was traveling with the camera team led by good friend Ajithan Kurup to document Andhra's fifth drought in a row. The Telugu-speaking team interpreted the interactions for me and I sketched.

This story is an afterthought that I worked on months later with no intention of publishing, primarily to test my graphic narration skills. Some day when you think of drawing long form, will you be able to tell a story? In the process it extended to a fictitious snatch of life in an apartment in the twin city of Hyderabad and Secunderabad that was then acquiring a third identity of Cyberabad.

Midway, the narration got adventurous enough to take a quick detour to Ramayana and back — the kind of freewheeling that makes the comic art what it is. Hope the connects work for the reader.

— E. P. Unny
Cartoonist, *The Indian Express*

BALA

by Unny

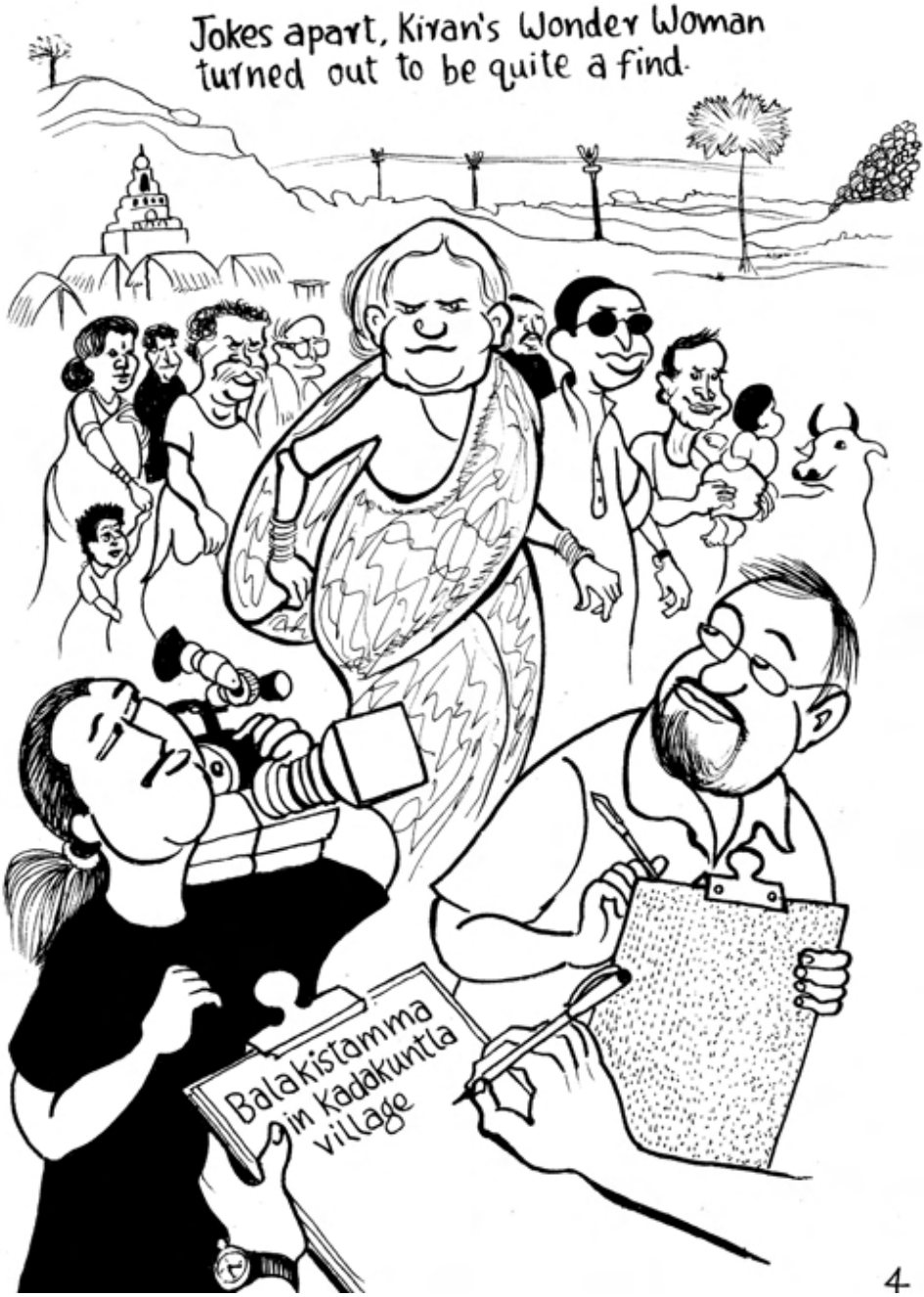


In Telangana, through its fifth drought in a row, we were documenting rural livelihoods. And this was the last thing we wanted to hear.


THE AC HAS CONKED OUT.
GAWD! THIS'LL BE A BOILER ON WHEELS.

Social worker Kiran was the only one with some pep left. He wanted one more shoot.




Jokes apart, Kiran's Wonder Woman turned out to be quite a find.
Balakistamma in Kadakuntla village

Balakistamma- 65 years

Bala came to the village as the barber's bride. Ten years and six kids later, when the man died, the widow did the unthinkable — took up the late husband's work.

Appalled first, then hesitant, Kadakuntla's men eventually went to the lady barber.

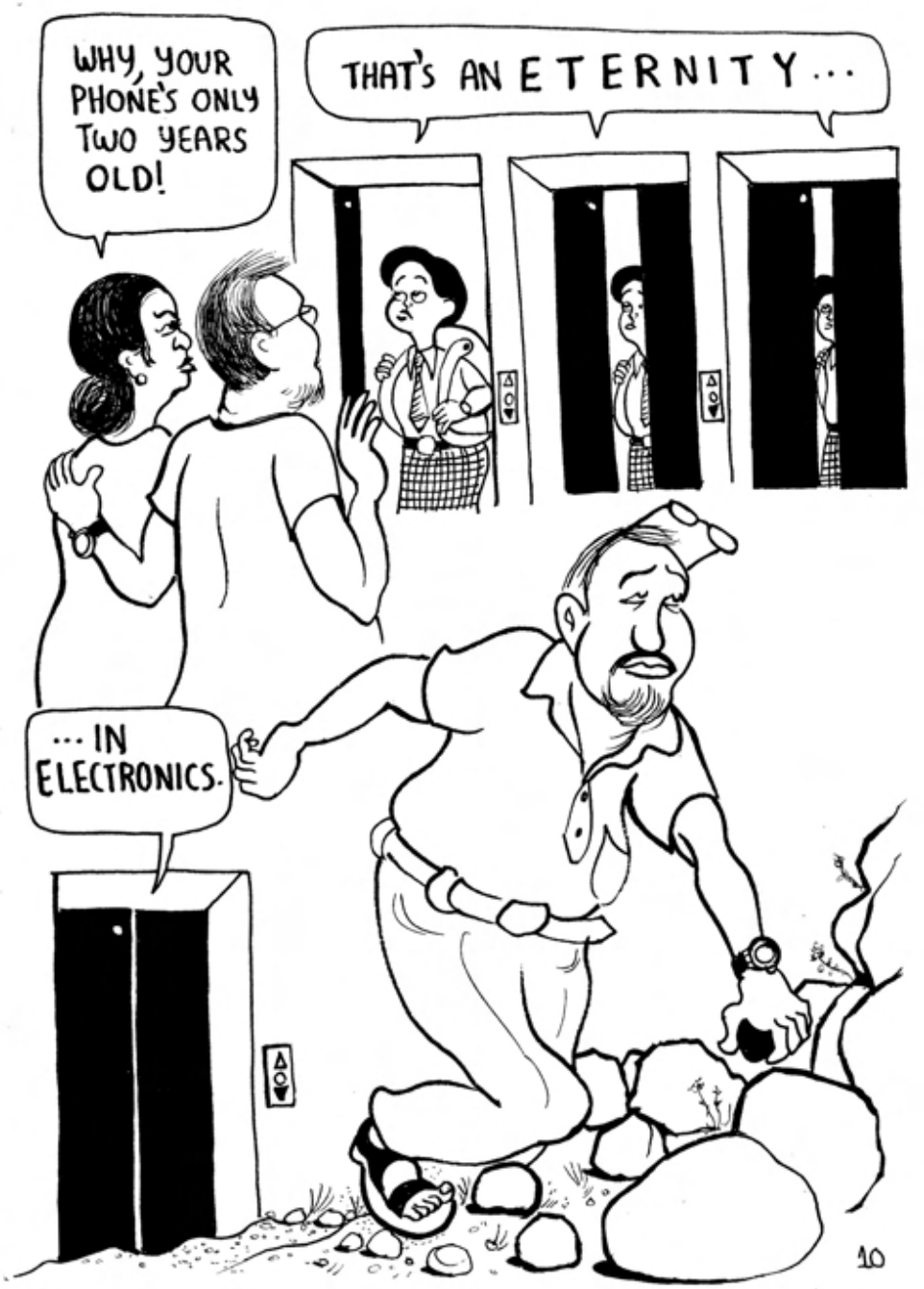



INTERVIEW, CHIEF?
LET'S GET HER AT WORK.
OK?
I CAN GIVE SIR A SHAVE AND THE CAMERA KID A PROPER HAIR CUT.
CAN I GET A VILLAGER TO VOLUNTEER?
YOU READ OUR MIND, KIRAN.
6


LIGHT?
A BIT HARSH. WE'LL MANAGE, CHIEF.
DON'T BE SO SHY! SIT STILL!


Dad, pl call..
SIR, ANY PROBLEM?
NO SIGNAL!
OH, THAT'S NOTHING.
IT'S A STEEP CLIMB, SIR
FULL RANGE UP THERE!

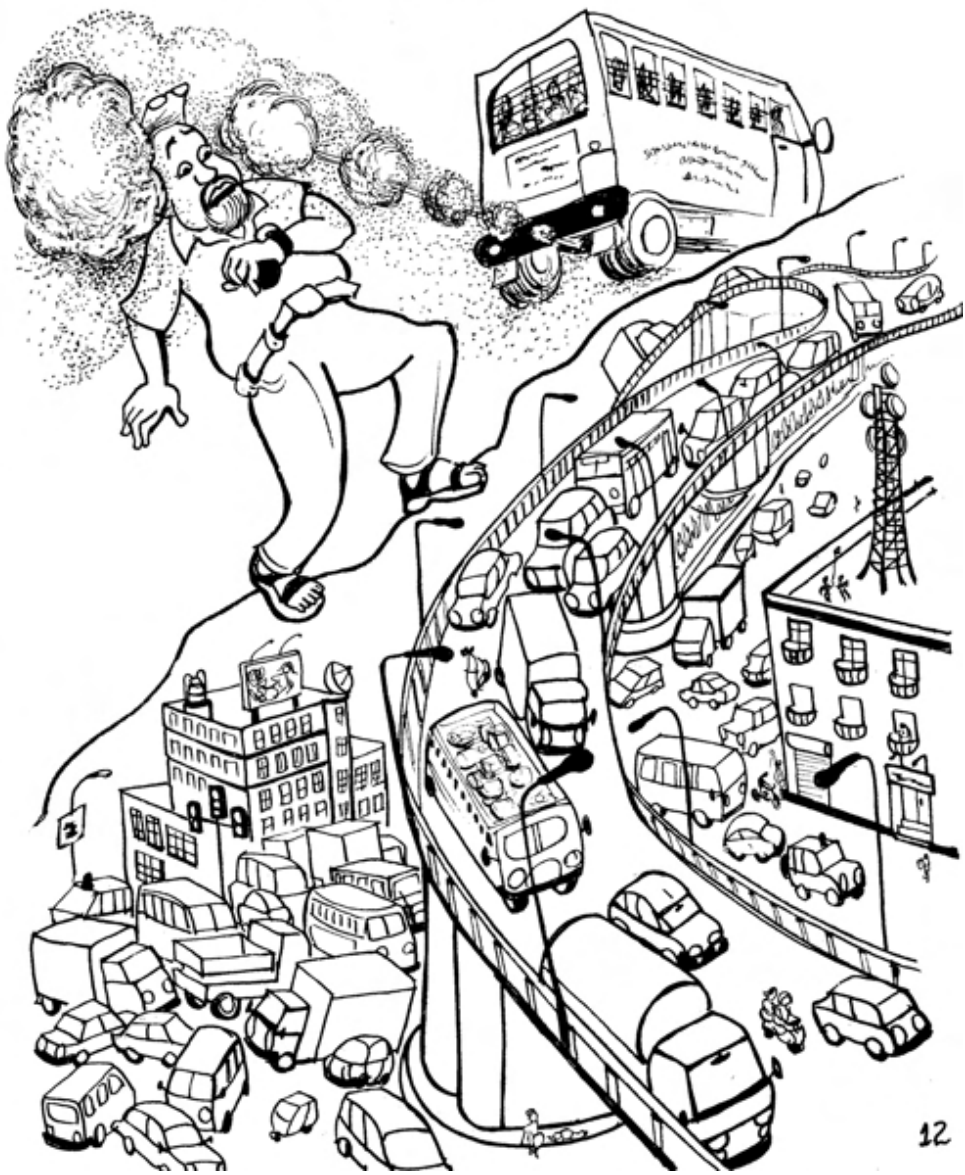

Message sent:
11-04-2005
03:42 pm
That's when she gets into the school bus... on her way back...
SCREECH
CLANG
KRRRRRRRRRRRRR
THE JALOPY'S HERE!
WITH ALL THE MONEY WE COUGH UP, CAN'T THEY GET A DECENT BUS?
KNOW WHAT'S MORE ANCIENT THAN THE SCHOOL BUS?
MY MOBILE.


WHY, YOUR PHONE'S ONLY TWO YEARS OLD!
THAT'S AN ETERNITY...
...IN ELECTRONICS.

If there's anything worse than the bus, it's the driver. They hire a new one every other month. This *dung heap* has a lady barber. The city school can't find a woman driver?



It's a good two hours since the bus left school. How do I locate it in the evening traffic?







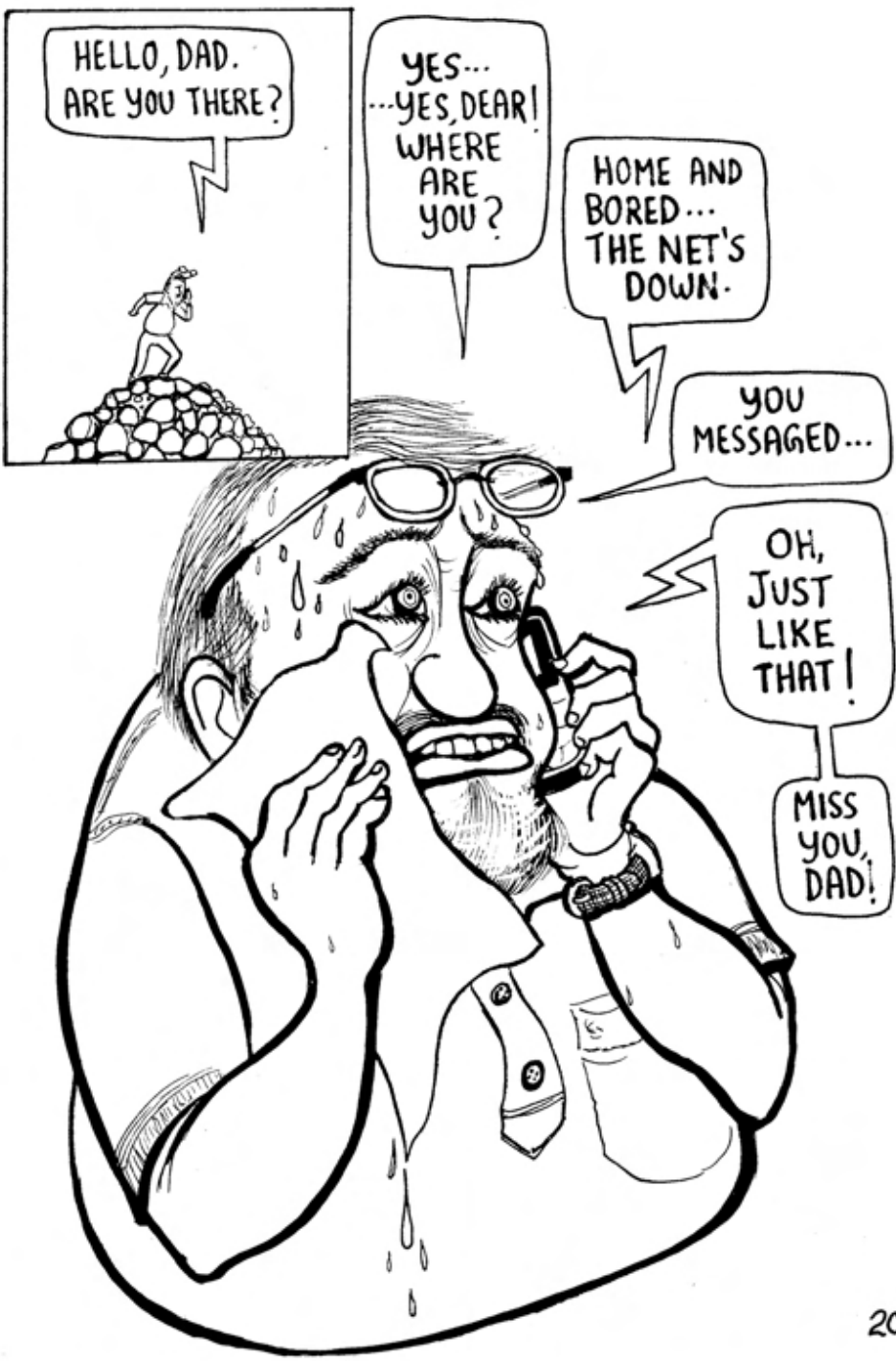

'KAUSALYA', I KNOW.
'LAKSHMAN', EVERYONE KNOWS.
'MAREECHAN'! WHO'S THAT, DAD?
TOMORROW'S THE RAMAYANA QUIZ.
THE GOLDEN DEER THAT DISTRACTED RAM AND LAKSHMAN TO MAKE WAY FOR RAVAN TO ABDUCT SEETHA.

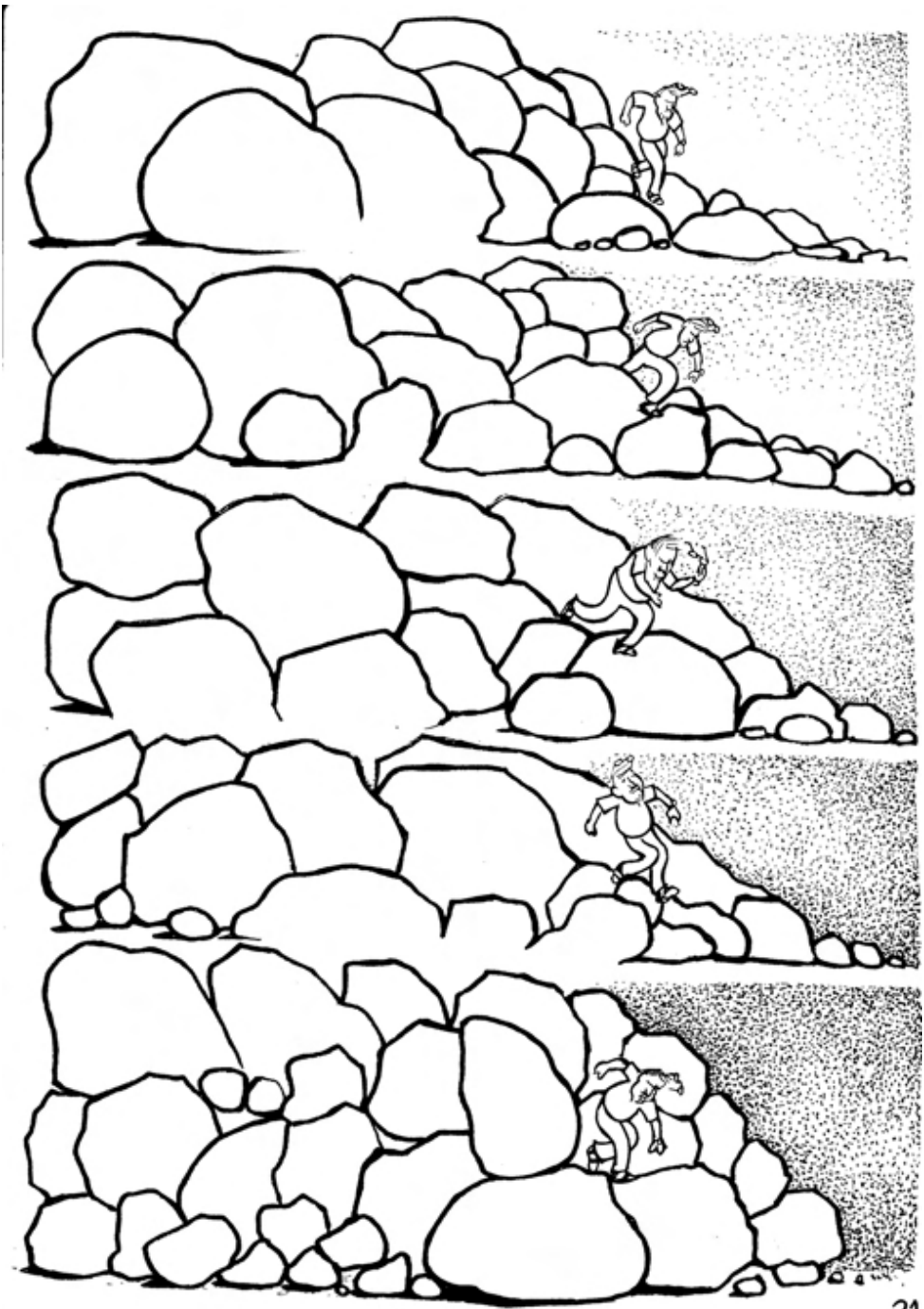







HI, DAD!


HELLO, DAD. ARE YOU THERE?
YES... ...YES, DEAR! WHERE ARE YOU?
HOME AND BORED... THE NET'S DOWN.
YOU MESSAGED...
OH, JUST LIKE THAT!
MISS YOU, DAD!





The End

SAYAHNA FOUNDATION, RIVER VALLEY CAMPUS
MALAYINKEEZH, TRIVANDRUM 695571, INDIA