

IMAGES OF WOMEN IN CARTOON STRIPS AND THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT OF SRI LANKA

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Cartoon strips provide an interesting mirror of the changing socio-economic situation of Sri Lanka and of the different roles of women. Since the mid-fifties, a significant change has been the spread of political power away from Colombo-based upper classes to at least partially, the rural-based middle class. The rise of this new class has also been accompanied by an increased integration of the values and aspirations of town and countryside. All these changes are depicted dramatically in the cartoon strips.

The study sampled the principal cartoon strips in Sri Lanka and subjected them to a content analysis. The following are the broad results obtained.

Cartoon strips in the best selling cartoon weeklies are demarcated in the following categories.

1. Stories arising from the local milieu—
 - (a) those depicting perceived urban and western values and aspirations.
 - (b) those depicting village society reminiscent of feudal times.
2. Stories transplanted from western comics having for example cow boy stories, "James Bond" and "Superman", stereotypes and science fiction stories.
3. Old classics like Arabian Nights, Spartacus and Jataka stories.

The major stereotypes within which women in cartoon strips are usually portrayed are as follows:

- (1) Girls waiting to "trap" boys. School girls are usually the central characters.
- (2) Women as victims of kidnap, assault, harassment and rape.
- (3) Women as thieves and gang leaders.

The values and attitudes reflected in today's cartoon strips only partially depict today's reality, the particular biases and prejudices, of both writers as well as readers transforming this reality to the presentation of a pseudo reality in the cartoon strips.