

**FRAMED DIALOGUES: A STUDY OF GRAPHIC SATIRE
AND CARICATURE IN COLONIAL CALCUTTA
1850~1930**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

Submitted by

Sanjukta Sunderason



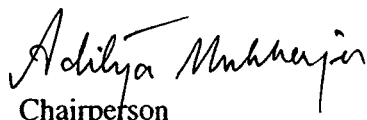
**CENTRE FOR HISTORICAL STUDIES
SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY
NEW DELHI-110067
INDIA
2006**

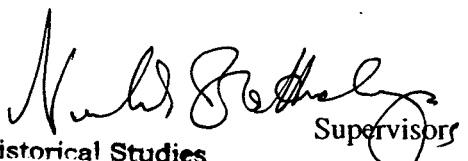


Certificate


Certified that the dissertation entitled 'FRAMED DIALOGUES: A STUDY OF GRAPHIC SATIRE AND CARICATURE IN COLONIAL CALCUTTA 1850-1930', submitted by **Sanjukta Sunderason**, is in partial fulfilment of Master of Philosophy degree from the university. The work presented is original and has not been submitted in part or in full for any other degree to this or any other university to the best of our knowledge.

We recommend this dissertation be placed before the examiners for evaluation.


Chairperson
(Prof. Aditya Mukherji)


Supervisor
Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067

CHAIRPERSON
Centre for Historical Studies
School of Social Sciences
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110067


Prof.
(Dr. Jyotindra Jain)
School of Arts & Aesthetics,
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Marauli Road,
New Delhi-110067

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	iv
<i>List of Illustrations</i>	v
<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Chapter 1</i>	
<i>Humour, Society and Politics: Locating Pictorial Satire in Discourse</i>	8
<i>Chapter 2</i>	
<i>Satirical Frames in Late Nineteenth Century Calcutta: A Study of Popular Imageries</i>	36
<i>Chapter 3</i>	
<i>Print, Politics and Pictorial Satire: The Rise of Graphic Journalism in Bengal</i>	69
<i>Chapter 4</i>	
<i>Art as Dialogue: Gaganendranath Tagore and his 'Realm of the Absurd'</i>	112
<i>Conclusion</i>	149
<i>Bibliography</i>	157

Acknowledgements

To my supervisors, Prof. Neeladri Bhattacharya and Dr. Jyotindra Jain, for all the comments, criticisms and support that have shaped this piece of research. I thank them for introducing me to a historical reading of visual culture.

To Shri Chandi Lahiri, for the many stimulating discussions over coffee, which provided direction and reassurance in many a moment of doubt. My field trip in Calcutta would not have been complete without the active help of the staff of National Library and Bangiya Sahitya Parishad. I am especially grateful to Mishraji and Mr. Kumarappa of National Library for providing me with all the rare periodicals and images. The Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta had kindly allowed me to use images from their collections. I also thank ICHR for granting me the Travel and Contingency Scholarship, which made the field trips easier.

To Sharmila, Padmini and Uditi for being a part of the early days of this research. To Sohini, and Sudeshna for all the moments of blissful laughter. To Anshul, Kamlesh, Rachna, Arti, Saheli, Poulomi, Manisha and especially, Sudipta, for the unconditional help. To Shipra for all the reminders and the persistence, and for the many lighter moments in between.

To Mamma, Baba and Bubli for the silent understanding and encouragement – I can never thank you fully.

Finally, to three people whose presence has woven into every moment of this research – I take this opportunity to thank Amrita, Kakul and Priyanka for simply being there, in every manner, through everything- Thank you for making the journey smoother.

~

The research for this work began with the passing away of my grandfather, whose encouragement had set me on this path. It is to his memory that I dedicate this dissertation

To dadu ...

List of Illustrations

1. Babu Holding a Hookah, *Kalighat Painting*, late 19th century
2. Musk Rats' Party, *Kalighat Painting*, late 19th century
3. Victim of a Charmer, *Kalighat Painting*, late 19th century
4. Woman Trampling upon a Man, *Kalighat Painting*, late 19th century
5. *Ghor Koli*, *Battala woodcut*, late 19th century
6. Woman Beating up Mendicant, *Kalighat Painting*, late 19th century
7. A Vaishnava Mendicant, *Kalighat Painting*, late 19th century
8. *Biral Tapaswee*, *Battala woodcut*, late 19th century
9. Title Page, *The Indian Charivari*
10. Title page, the *Basantak*
11. The Babu's Progress, *The Indian Charivari*, March 3, 1873
12. The British Lion and the Bengali Ape, *The Indian Charivari*, Jan. 24, 1873
13. *Varaha Avatara*, *Basantak*, Year I, 1
14. Bihar under a Terrible Famine, *Basantak*, Year II, 2
15. 23rd Special Dispatch from the Famine Districts, *Basantak*, Year I, 8
16. Finis Coronat Opus, *The Indian Charivari*, 31 October, 1874
17. Society for the Prevention of Obscenity, *Basantak*, Year I, 3
18. Wife: "Can't you close the door while lighting the fire?", *Basantak*, Year II, 9
19. To the Indian Reform Association, *The Indian Charivari*, 16 May, 1873
20. The Modern Krishna, *The Indian Charivari*, March, 1875
21. Free Trade, *The Indian Charivari*, August 20, 1875
22. The Real Indian Incubus, *The Indian Charivari*, September 3, 1875
23. Persuasion is better than Force, *The Indian Charivari*, December 10, 1875
24. Hybrid Benagalisses, Gaganendranath Tagore, *Birup Bajra*, 1917.
25. Metamorphosis, Gaganendranath Tagore, *Birup Bajra*, 1917
26. *Parabhrityer Kakali*, Gaganendranath Tagore, *Adbhut Lok*, 1917
27. The Cramming Machine, Gaganendranath Tagore, *Nava Hullor*, 1921

28. Forced Evolution under Artificial Illumination, Gaganendranath Tagore, *Modern Review*, June, 1921.
 29. Modern Marriage Market in Bengal, Gaganendranath Tagore, *Nava Hullor*, 1921
 30. The Rising Sun-in-law of Bengal, Gaganendranath Tagore, *Nava Hullor*, 1921
 31. Millstone of Caste, Gaganendranath Tagore, *Adbhut Lok*, 1917
 32. Priest Selling Benediction, Gaganendranath Tagore, *Birup Bajra*, 1917
 33. Hypocritical Brahmin, Gaganendranath Tagore, *Birup Bajra*, 1917
 34. Auto Speechola, Gaganendranath Tagore, *Birup Bajra*, 1917
 35. The Living and the Non-living, Gaganendranath Tagore, *Nava Hullor*, 1921
 36. Fearsome Mercy, Gaganendranath Tagore, *Adbhut Lok*, 1917
 37. Man Proposes-Fire!, Gaganendranath Tagore, *Nava Hullor*, 1921
 38. Charka at the top of all, Gaganendranath Tagore, *Nava Hullor*, 1921
-

Introduction

Commenting on the visuality of an image, John Berger, in *Ways of Seeing* says: "The reciprocal nature of vision, is more fundamental than that of spoken dialogue...and often a dialogue is an attempt to verbalize this – an attempt to explain how, either metaphorically or literally 'you see things' and an attempt to discover how he sees thing."¹ Berger's observation serves as a point of departure for my study in what is called 'visual culture', a study of the language and politics of the visual image in society. The theme of the present work is the domain of graphic satire and caricature in Bengal between the 1850s and 1920s. I will be reading the satirical images as visual dialogues; and see how humour and satire, when translated into visual images, gain a special potential in capturing the vicissitudes of a colonial society. The cultural history of British India has not delved into these curious iconographies, neither has art history considered them seriously. However, as reflections of social negotiations, responses and attitudes of a heterogeneous people, these images serve as 'social objects' that create, articulate and reproduce identities and structures of power; they embody within their frames a critical vision as well as a serio-comic vein.

That being the thematic outline of the research, I will begin by looking at the ways in which the image in satirical art has been conceptualised. It is a medium, which combines within itself the strongest features of two independent traditions – the visual, and the literary. What we get as the product is an exposition of satire through the visual image; a domain where the power of the image in art blends with the pointed language of satire, thereby creating a tool that provokes, excites and demands attention and critical response. Humour is articulated here not by signifying harmless mirth, but as a rhetorical tool, in what can be called a dialogue of dissent between the producer and the reader/holder.

¹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, London, 1981.

As a genre of critical expression, pictorial satire poses certain problems for the researcher, and one sees the necessity of proceeding with a sense of those problems. In studying satirical art in the turn of the century, one is researching a tradition that was at once enmeshed within the various other categories of reference, be that popular culture, print culture, or plastic art, and therefore had not been considered independently for study. At another level, because of its marginal location between high art and mass art, it suffered, and still does, from an anxiety of location, as to where one would place this kind of iconography and this medium in the larger context of art per se. Further more, why does a historian need to delve into these prints, which otherwise seem to have a value almost ephemeral; and with what methodology might s/he approach the images.

Pictorial satire can be understood as a graphic visual rendering of incongruities and inconsistencies in society, encapsulating within its form, a condensed commentary on the content of critique. It is in this condensation of a complex idea in a striking and memorable image that makes pictorial satire both interesting and important. Caricature, the *sine qua non* of satire is used as this rhetorical and motivational device. It takes cue from hyperbole by stretching faces and behaviours into easily recognisable comic features. The satirist uses the same technique, and the features of society he selects for magnification are of course those of which he disapproves. The result is juxtaposition, in the reader/beholder's mind, of his habitual image of the world in which he moves and its absurd reflection in the satirist's distorting mirror. The beholder is made to recognise the familiar features in the absurd and the absurdity in the familiar. It is in this double-vision that the success of the satirical image lies.

In Bengal the domain of graphic satire and caricature has been a mosaic of different traditions, rather than a monochrome. The present study will develop around four pivots. In the first chapter, I will locate the study of the satirical image in discourse, looking at how humour and caricature in the visual arts have been

conceptualised and theorised in some of the crucial works. In the following three chapters the study will revolve around three distinct nodal points, the popular *bazaar* art of the city's lower orders, the new genre of cartoon journals in the 1870s, and finally, the painted cartoons of Gaganendranath Tagore in the second decade of the twentieth century. With the coming of print, the cultures of caricature and satire in literature and the performing arts as well as the popular iconographies in the *bazaar* art were refigured and reoriented into the distinct language of political cartooning. However, social issues linger, and in the context of a colonized society, often the social becomes intimately connected with the political and even the economic at certain levels. Moving beyond the colonizer/colonized binary, it will be important to look at the production of satire through the lens of race, class and gender. The cartoons embody not merely the comments on socio political or economic issues, they often serve as the text of racist or nationalist protestations. It will be important for us to examine the images and see the ideology that goes behind it. More importantly, we need to break down some of the ideological determinants and discern for ourselves whether the politics of the image took a conservative or a liberal stand in the contemporary socio political milieu. This again links up to the larger question of the correlation between satire and caricature on one hand, and the society and the body politic on the other. The beginnings of pictorial journalism in Bengal mark the entry of the art of caricature in the contemporary print culture, and simultaneously, an entry of the middle classes in the production of graphic satire and caricature, which is a move forward from the parallel traditions of earthy caricature and pictorial satire as created by the poor in the form of the *Kalighat pats*.

Therefore caricature in print had created for itself a whole new language of representation. One of the key issues that will emerge here would be that of colonialism as an agent of social change and how satire was being produced to capture, critique and resist that change. I will also explore how perceptions, identities and a politics of difference were framed through the production of visual clichés.

What surfaces importantly is the need to read the satirical image beyond its frames, in a way 'decode' them to understand how it is created and in turn creates a culture and politics of critique. A conceptual and theoretical study of the satirical image will be attempted in the first chapter, *Humour, Society, Politics: Locating Pictorial Satire in Discourse*. I will study how philosophers, litterateurs, and indeed, historians, have conceptualised humour and caricature in art. The study will proceed through three sections; the first will look at humour as socio-cultural expression, through the works of Henri Bergson and Mahadev Apte. The second section will look at the political edge of the satirical image, which has been developed extensively in the works of Charles Baudelaire and Mikhail Bakhtin. The dominant concepts around the satirical image that will surface here are the moral didactic imagery through a comedy of manners in Bergson, the creation of the grotesque in Baudelaire and the carnivalesque in Bakhtin. While Bergson spoke of the social signification of laughter and the comic imagery, in Baudelaire and Bakhtin, the satirical images embodied a critical dialogue between the subject positions, the lived experience and the art per se. In the third section I will take up a text where cartoons have been used as visual narrative, and see how the image embodies politics. Some of the problematics of a historical reading of satirical prints will be developed through the works of E. H. Gombrich, who has made a significant intervention towards a historical and art-historical reading of satirical prints. In studying cartoons, says Gombrich, we study the use of symbols in a circumscribed context. The novelty of the cartoon lies in the freedom to translate the concepts and shorthand symbols of our political speech into such metaphorical situations - "cartoonists can mythologize the world of politics by physiognomizing it."²

The concepts discussed here will serve as theoretical markers in my treatment of pictorial satire in Calcutta between the 1850s and the 1920s. However, there are some specificities about the Indian context that shapes this study differently from the theoretical premises arrived at through a predominantly

² E. H. Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse*, London, 1965, p.139.

Eurocentric experience. This was the colonial condition, which made the social reality, experience and power dynamics all the more fractured. Unlike the European experience, India~~n~~ did not see a profound political movement like the Reformation or the French Revolution; neither did a culture of political mobilisation through the visual images exist. The peculiar context for the proliferation of satirical prints in the nineteenth century was provided by the colonial influence, whether that be in introducing the print medium or the social forces of change or even the perception of the 'other' in the coloniser. These created the cultural praxis needed for the production of satire.

My second chapter, *Evoking the Comic: Caricature & Folk Laughter in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, builds up around the form, substance and culture of the popular *bazaar* art of Calcutta. I will introduce here the pool of imageries ranging from the genres of folk art, popular prints and performative cultures. The object will be to get a sense of the spaces from which satire was produced in the nineteenth century, who were producing them, and what were their frames of reference. Satirical images from the popular art of the Kalighat and Battala genre, as well as the pantomimes and the earliest cartoon periodicals will feature here. An expression of the city's lower orders, the scroll paintings of Kalighat and Battala as well as the pantomimes or *shawng* performances embodied an earthy and bawdy form of satire, lampooning the *nouveaux riches* and the new urban ethos. They were in fact pictorial equivalents of the satirical texts or *naksha* literature that flourished in Bengal in the mid nineteenth century. These were, however, primarily social satire. As we follow the course of the development of pictorial satire we see a greater politicization of satire in art. The significance of the Kalighat and the Battala satires lies in the powerful language of the satire that they evoked, and also the manner in which they were circulated at that time. This brings us to one of the most important issues in the study of graphic satire and caricature. This is the development of the art of printing in Bengal, with the introduction of lithography, chromolithography, oleography, off-

set printing, and even photography in the mid nineteenth century. This had affected mass circulation of imagery, and contributed to the genesis of a space for the printed cartoon in the 1850s. Appearing in both English and the vernacular periodicals, or cartoon journals, caricature and satire became during the 1870s, a part of the print culture, and thereby, in most cases, a text of public opinion as well.

This shared space of humour, print and politics becomes the theme in the third chapter, *Print, Politics & Satire: The Advent of Graphic Journalism in Bengal*. The specific focus of this chapter will be on the genre of graphic journalism that emerged strongly in the 1870s. My point of entry here will be two satirical journals of the 1870s-, *The Indian Charivari*, an English fortnightly published between 1872 and 1880; and the vernacular cartoon monthly, the *Basantak*, lasting for two years from 1874 to 1875. These were not the first ones in their respective domains, and in some cases they were deriving their idioms from the existing pool of satirical imageries, in literature and the popular arts. Yet by embodying a politics shaped by the germane nationalism of the 1870s, they brought about a significant transition in their respective iconographies.

Political cartooning in Bengal acquires a fresh idiom in the art of Gaganendranath Tagore in the 1920s. We see the rise of the individual cartoonist for the first time, as well as a distinct maturity in the visual language of the cartoon. In the fourth chapter *Art as Dialogue: Gaganendranath Tagore as 'Realm of the Absurd'*, I will attempt to study the pictorial satire of Gaganendranath in the context of high art and nationalism, and see how caricature became a mode of artistic expression within the parameters of high art, particularly in the context of the *nationalist* art of the Bengal School in the 1920s. Gaganendranath, though himself a part of the artistic milieu of the Bengal School, sought to negotiate some of the common ideals through following different trajectories. Thereby he crafted a different relational value between art and society, art and politics, as well as art and morality. We see the artist experimenting with new visual forms, caricature and controlled distortion, the first expression of the grotesque in modern Indian art. He

had published three albums- *Birup Bajra* or Strange Thunderbolts (1917), *Adbhut Lok* or Realm of the Absurd (1917), and *Naba Hullor* or Reform Screams (1921). I will look at his images through three main categories, social, educational and political, and explore whether the artist was creating in the process an aesthetic of caricature. In portraying the incongruous in society, was he in the Baudelairian dictum fashioning a 'grotesque'? Do we see him arguing for a different notion of beauty in art? And in all these where do we locate his voice and his own politics?

In the images explored in this study, I will argue for a nuanced idea of the comic, through a parallel study of the techniques of caricature and controlled distortion, as well as, the socio-political action of the image in a colonised space. I have treated pictorial satire as a part of a larger project of understanding the cross-cultural dialogue between the colonizer and the colonized on one hand, and an inter-class and even inter-caste dialogue on the other, through the images, as these are inscribed with deep cultural meanings. I hope through further research on this I will be able to illuminate on the 'social' and the 'political' in art, and see how graphic satire and caricature can act as 'framed dialogues'.

Chapter 1

Humour, Society, Politics: Locating Pictorial Satire in Discourse

Robert Seymour, the editor and the caricaturist of *Figaro in London*, one of the earliest satirical journals in Britain, had in 1831, devised the paper's emblematic headpiece, a representation of the satirist/caricaturist at work. Figaro, the valet turned barber, strops his razor; at his feet runs the maxim,

"Satire should, like a polished razor keen

Wound with a touch that's scarcely felt or seen."³

Seymour here implies two things, first, the satirical image embodies a critique that is not overt, and therefore, the image itself is deeply layered. Second, the target of satire does not necessarily see the assault, because it is the art of the satirist to create through his dexterity, an image that combines the critical eye with the subtle vein; the aim being, in the words of another eminent satirist Joseph Addison, 'to enliven morality with wit, and to temper wit with morality'.

We thereby arrive at a nebulous understanding of what we have till now called the *satirical image*, and it is clear that this image seeks to embody a synthesis of a culture of critique with a culture of humour. Such a statement would, however, be a necessary generalisation to begin with. The image in question resonates with much more than what meets the eye. Between the macro-frames of criticality and humour, there are multiple frames of reference- experience, identity, culture, or, mentalité, ideology, politics. As the reader/holder, one is therefore dealing with a much-nuanced visual text, or so to say, a visual document. In this chapter, I shall endeavour to locate the satirical image in discourse, through the thematic markers of

³ Thomas Wright, *A History of Caricature and Grotesque in Literature and Art*, London, Virtue Bros. & Co., 1865, p. 15.

humour, society and politics, and, see how philosophers, litterateurs, sociologists and indeed, historians, have conceptualised it.

The whole gamut of references –humour, society, politics and images, evidently call for a collapsing of disciplinary closures; the discourse therefore, needs to be fragmented. I will operate through three broad sections. The first deals with the works of the anthropologist Mahadev Apte⁴ and the philosopher Henri Bergson⁵; both speak of grounding humour production and comic imagery in deep socio-cultural contexts. Yet to understand the satirical image, s/he needs to probe beyond the site of production, and look at what function the image is performing in its context. I will call this the politics of the satirical image, a dynamism that shapes and is shaped by the image itself. In the works of Charles Baudelaire⁶ and Mikhail Bakhtin⁷, the politics of the satirical image emerges through the treatment of burlesque, caricature, parody and the grotesque. In the final section, I will read into a text that has used satirical prints as a narrative device. Antoine de Baecque⁸ treats the cartoons of the French Revolution as visual narrative, much in the lines of the celebrated art historian E.H. Gombrich⁹, in whose works we see one of the first art historical treatments of pictorial satire. In all these sections what will surface is a nuanced notion of humour, satire, and the phenomenon of laughter, when studied through the prisms of society, culture and politics.

⁴ Mahadev Apte, *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach*, Ithaca, New York, 1985.

⁵ Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, London, 1911.

⁶ Charles Baudelaire, *On the Essence of Laughter, And, In General, On the Comic in the Plastic Arts*, London, 1955 (original 1856); 'Some French Caricaturists' and 'Some Foreign Caricaturists' (both first published in 1857), in *The Mirror of Art: Critical Studies*, London, 1955.

⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, Cambridge, Mass, 1968.

⁸ Antoine de, Baeque, 'The Citizen in Caricature: Past and Present', in Renée Waldinger and Philip Dawson (ed.) *The French Revolution and the Meaning of Citizenship*, Connecticut, 1993.

⁹ E.H. Gombrich, *Caricature*, Harmondsworth, 1940; 'A Cartoonist's Armoury', in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse*, London, 1965; *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, Princeton, 2000.

Humour, Society & Culture

Mahadev H. Apte in *Humour and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach*¹⁰, has studied humour conceptually and structurally, framing the phenomenon around the two basic axioms: first, humour is by and large culture based, and second, humour can be a major conceptual and methodological entry point for gaining insights into cultural systems. Humour and the socio-cultural reality are fundamentally connected, and this connection, says Apte, is forged at two levels, first at the level of social organisation, and second at the level of expressive culture. In the domain of social organisation Apte has dealt with the roles of kinship, sex, status etc., while in the expressive culture, the use of language, religion, folklore, etc., have been traced by him as crucial tools in the production as well as in the form, substance and function of humour.

To Apte, humour is a cognitive-conceptual process, and at the same time a practical phenomenon. Thus there is a cognitive core of humour, and there are behavioural responses of the humour experience. Apte makes here a conceptual demarcation between the experience and expression of humour. Sequentially, he arranges the humour experience as a three-fold process, involving the humour stimuli, the cognitive-perceptive process leading to the humour experience, and the behavioural responses expressed as laughter or smiling or both. There is space for terminological variety in the treatment of humour, given the multiple levels at which it unfolds. However, for Apte, humour is primarily a psychological and a cognitive phenomenon, involving an "internal redefining of socio-cultural reality and resulting in a mirthful state of mind."¹¹ This is the basic postulate around which he traces the antecedents i.e. the external socio-cultural factors that trigger the humour

¹⁰ Apte, *Humor and Laughter*.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.14.

experience, and the effects of that cognitive experience, i.e. the anatomically and physiologically observable overt activities like laughter.

Apte raises certain key issues, which he feels are crucial for a fruitful appreciation of humour. These are the particular social context in which humour is produced, the techniques used in the production, the motives of the individual producing it, the targets and the cultural themes that underlie the production and the experience of humour. Apte looks closely at use of language as a basic tool for creating comic imageries. "The construction and articulation of incongruity", says Apte, "can be affected and structured through various combinations of the verbal and the visual media, to create a wide array of visual imageries."¹² Apte discusses its various configurations under the categories of ethnic, ritual humour, humour in folklores, etc.

The techniques of evoking the comic become crucial when we look at his treatment of the genres like ethnic humour, or ritual humour. Caricature of out-groups or parodies of the social order or authorities are the tools that create comic imageries. In case of ethnic humour, techniques of imitation, exaggeration are used extensively to suggest the physical appearance, clothing, behaviour, body movements and gestures, and language, considered to be characteristic of the target groups. In case of ritual humour, what is seen is an absence of social control, behaviour contrary to established norms, extensive sexual and scatological elements, a burlesque of rituals, people in authority and foreigners, and most importantly an appearance of disorder and chaos. It would be interesting in this connection to remember what Freud had to say about the importance of studying the methods of evoking the comic. In one of his essays on humour he comments, "Mankind have not been content to enjoy the comic where they have come upon it, in their experience, they have also sought to bring it about intentionally; and we can learn more about

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

the nature of the comic if we study the means which serve to make things comic.”¹³ Such methods are intrinsically rooted in the socio-cultural experience and existence of man, and his negotiation of his environment at various levels. Apte clearly sees that an appreciation of all these issues will lead not only to an understanding of the social organization and inter-group/intra-group dynamics of a society, but also its value system and, the interconnections between these and the production and experience of humour.

Ethnic humour, in particular, is intrinsically related to a politics of difference or what we can call politics of identity, a construction and crystallization of a ‘self’ vis-à-vis the ‘other’, a defining of the in-group versus the out-group by the standard of their respective cultures. Ritual humour, on the other hand, performs a distinct function of social inversion, through comic caricature and parody of the social authorities, scriptures and even ritual processions. However, the implicit or explicit politics of humour has not been analysed in detail in Apte’s work, though he does mention the oppositional elements, intrinsic to certain manifestations of humour. There is also a mention of the normative function of folkloric modes of humour. However, these are mostly the theoretical propositions drawn by the author, and, he does not quite follow these up. In fact, the author clearly states this in the postscript of his work, where he claims his work to be rather preliminary, located primarily as an entry point to a larger study of humour within the socio-cultural contexts.

Apte’s treatment of the comic, we might say is rather introductory, insofar as a deeper analysis of the comic is concerned. He successfully sets before the researchers certain thematic markers and problematics for a complete appreciation of the form and agency of humour. The structure he adopts, however, limits him at the level of socio-cultural production. We do not see a conceptual treatment and

¹³ Sigmund Freud, ‘Jokes and the Comic’, in Robert W. Corrigan ed. *Comedy: Meaning and Form*, Scranton, 1965.

articulation of the comic image. This is what has emerged in some of the key texts on the comic, at least three of which I shall regard in the subsequent sections.

The comic image becomes the focus in one of the earliest texts of humour, Henri Bergson's *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1911).¹⁴ The comic image or the comic character, for Bergson, is a mechanical man, one who is not human, but instead a clockwork apparatus, leading the special kind of life that a puppet seems to have— "something mechanical encrusted upon something living." It is this 'mechanical inelasticity' that provokes laughter. "We laugh", says Bergson, "every time a person gives the impression of being a thing."¹⁵ Thus what has fascinated Bergson is the comic quality of automation— 'the world of the jack-in-the-box, the marionette, the doll, the robot'.

The essay is one of the earliest works on the phenomenon of laughter. It was written almost 100 years ago as a response to what Bergson saw as the dehumanisation of man in the industrialization age. He has looked at comedy within a wider field of vision, focusing on laughter and what makes us laugh. His study examines the comic characters and comic acts, comedy as high art, and base entertainment to develop a psychological and philosophical theory of the mainsprings of comedy. Bergson in fact is writing more about comedy than mere laughter. As we read through his ideas on the comic, what surfaces before us is an exposition of a larger philosophy of life, and a systematic critique of the modernity that had dawned in the wake of the industrial revolution.

In Bergson we find a stress on a particular kind of comedy, a kind that above all others was needed in the nineteenth century--a comedy of manners. He read into the comedy of manners new social meanings. Locating humour in its social context is one of the most basic elements in the study of humour. Bergson has made a direct connection between the comic spirit and the social, collective and popular

¹⁴ Bergson, *Laughter*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

imagination. A study of the comic, he feels will reveal much about art and life. Bergson begins by charting out three observations, which he thinks are fundamental to the understanding of the comic. The first is that the comic is essentially and strictly human, humour does not exist beyond the pale of mankind. Secondly, laughter is accompanied by an absence of feeling or emotion, a 'momentary anaesthesia of the heart'. Thirdly, in order to understand laughter it is fundamentally important to locate it within social contexts. All laughter, he says is the laughter of a group. To understand laughter, says Bergson, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all we must determine the utility of its function, which is a social one- "Laughter must answer to certain requirements of life in common. It must have a social signification."¹⁶

The two core concepts that seem to emerge from Bergson's picture of the comic man, are those of rigidity and repetition. The comic figure possesses or is possessed in a way by a certain stiffness or inflexibility. Such mechanical behaviour, for Bergson, is one result of the division of labour. The modern comic that emerges in Bergson's text is a professional man who acts with rigidity, he thinks with the automation of his business code. He has the egoism of the expert, the inhumanity of all those who dwell inside the "small societies formed on the surface of the large." This comic figure is identified by his 'professional callousness', his inelasticity, which is a mode of pride. The automatic responses of this egoist make him appear, when we look at him attentively, like a readymade product standardized for the market. The motor efficiencies of the specialist give him the aspect of one who is absentminded or who is incapable of authentic personality. He lives by formulas, not by animation, and his behaviour is a series of repetitions. But life, according to Bergson, should be a negation of repetition. So we laugh at the mechanical man. Society, says Bergson, holds over him the 'the threat of correction', whenever he proves himself inadaptable. Laughter thus acts as a corrective, a remedial tool, to

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

cure society of its incongruities. Here Bergson is making a direct reference to the social function of humour, thereby relating it to life at large. We see him entrenching a satirical and didactic view of comedy, making the entire apparatus of laughter a social gesture of humiliation. Bergson begins his essay by stating that laughter is essentially human; however, in his text he sort of descends from the universal to the specific. He singles out the mechanical man, who is more like a toy manikin, and makes him the target of his satirical attack.

Bergson's idea of the comic character brings us closer to his larger philosophy of life, a systematic critique of modernity that dawned in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. The comic image in Bergson, is in effect his revolt against the dehumanisation of man in the industrial age. The Bergsonian philosophy upheld 'vitalism' as an explanation of human experience, as against the coarse logic and machinery of the nineteenth century. This theme was developed in *The Two Sources of Morality and Reason*, and is carried over into this essay on laughter, as he saw the comical as something encrusted on the living— "the movement without life."

However, the range of the comic is far wider than what Bergson had supposed when he remarked that the comic is something mechanical encrusted upon what is living, and the comic hero is dehumanised because he makes only gestures, automatic motions, which looks ridiculous when interrupted. We might say here that Bergson saw the comic man only from one angle, treating him as if he were a toy manikin, which when wound up, is geared to execute the same motion wherever he is put. In a way Bergson's mechanical man thriving on comic automation is a caricature of man, rather than man himself. Laughter certainly has a deeper philosophical base, and is the result of a larger perception of the conditions of humanity. Critique of the mechanistic is just a part of the larger framework of laughter. We might say here that the essentially narrow perspective of Bergson came from his larger project of a critique of the industrial age and division of labour. There is thus a politics hidden behind Bergson's treatise, a systematic critique of the

cultural crisis in the middle class in the wake of the scientific revolution. There is a distinct moral dimension to Bergson's idea of humour, which is the reason he highlights more on the social corrective role of humour. In fact Bergson systematically entrenched a satirical and didactic view of comedy, making the entire apparatus of laughter, a social gesture of humiliation.

Yet, at the end of the essay we see Bergson stating that laughter can only be a 'slight revolt on the surface of society'. Its gaiety happens like froth along a beach, for comedy, he thinks, looks at man from outside: "it will go no further."¹⁷ According to him, there is a difference between comedy and art, notably tragic art. Comedy oscillates between art and life because it looks at life from outside, and because laughter is an undulation on only the surface of existence. Such a perspective is rather disconcerting, particularly if we take into account how evoking the comic is more often than not socially rooted, and a part of a broader dialogic process between lived experience and environment. Bergson's comic man was essentially rooted in a comedy of manners. But a complete understanding of laughter emerges from a wider treatment of the comic, one that takes a much more nuanced look at the image of comedy. In the following section we will encounter a denser treatment of the comic image, and a more nuanced understanding of laughter itself.

II

Humour, Society & Subversion

In this section, I will try to locate humour and its imageries not only in society, but also in relation to the intrinsic and acquired politics it engages in. The creation of subversive imageries through caricature and the destabilising role of laughter surfaces in the works of the eminent French poet Charles Baudelaire and Mikhail Bakhtin. Baudelaire's ideas on laughter and its significant tool, caricature, are developed in three essays he had written between the years 1855 to 1857. These were, 'On The Essence of Laughter, And, In General, On the Comic in the Plastic

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

Arts' (first published in 1855), 'Some French Caricaturists', 'Some Foreign Caricaturists' (both published in 1857).¹⁸ In these, he offered the first sustained defence of the value of caricature as serious art, worthy of study in its own right, at a time when it was considered as a minor genre, as impermanent as the events it chronicled. In doing so, Baudelaire developed an aesthetic of caricature, and also, a caricatural aesthetic - a realization of beauty in the "deformed and the distorted, in 'ugliness', the monstrous, satanic, grotesque, and the ironical, farcical, and the sinister."¹⁹ These define Baudelaire's conception of modernity and the art of modern life.

The central problematic in Baudelaire is his treatment of caricature as a tool for the creation of the comic, particularly, the grotesque. "Laughter provoked by the grotesque", he says, "has in it something profound, axiomatic and primitive, which more closely relates it to innocence and to absolute joy than does the laughter occasioned by the comedy of manners."²⁰ Caricature, to him represents, much to the discomfort of the charlatans of high art, one of the most curious art forms. It reflects the 'other' of man, the moral and physical ugliness, and yet, it provokes laughter in man. This is what makes the comic image created by caricature curious and mysterious, and very profound. For Baudelaire, caricature, like the laughter it inspires, is dual and contradictory, a sign of both superiority and inferiority: superior to the object it satirizes, inferior in its ugliness and deformity. It is a mirror that distorts, sending back an image that is at once laughable and troublingly recognizable. Through it the observer sees him/herself as the 'other', as both 'superior' confident subject, as well as, 'inferior', ridiculous object. The image reflected embodies both vice and folly, producing pleasure and delight, an image of beauty in ugliness. From the tension resulting from the clash of the two images, springs the ambiguous convulsion of laughter. Laughter, to Baudelaire, is "a product

¹⁸ These essays appear in *The Mirror of Art: Critical Studies*, London, 1955.

¹⁹ Baudelaire, 'The Essence of Laughter', p. 117.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

of the original fall, of degradation of both the body and the mind".²¹ This outburst of laughter, says Baudelaire, is an expression of pleasure and unease, an affirmation of the self, and an apprehension of a threat to the self. This dualism in the comic image converts the products of the fall, which is the comic, caricature and laughter, into the means of redemption, the transfer of ugliness into beauty.

In Baudelaire, the comic image gets a dense treatment. He has investigated the creation of that image through caricature, by a treatment of the works of some of the eminent caricaturists of his day. What particularly interests him is the concept of the grotesque. He places the grotesque image at a higher position vis-à-vis the comic image created by a comedy of manners. The latter to Baudelaire, is the 'significantly comic', while, the grotesque embodies the 'absolutely comic'. The grotesque, as conceptualised in Baudelaire's work, is the essence of the comic, it is creation, rather than imitation; it is created without common sense, and thus it challenges nature. In the 'significantly comic' image, that is that created through the comedy of manners, there is an overt moral idea that is clearly satirical. In fact, in the Bergsonian paradigm, we see this moral didactic function of the comic image. For Baudelaire, such an image is easier to understand, because its prime element is clearly double-art plus a moral idea. The 'absolutely comic, on the other hand, being much closer to nature, has a unity, which the author feels, has to be grasped by intuition. The grotesque image is created through a sensational combination and contrast of incongruities, and provokes immediate laughter, unlike the image of the significantly comic.²²

Caricature is the tool for the creation of the grotesque, and this Baudelaire explores through a treatment of the stylistics of some of most eminent caricaturists of the day. We see him particularly inspired by the work of Daumier. His comic imageries, according to Baudelaire, created a world that was "hurly-burly, a farrago,

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 122.

a prodigious satanic comedy, now farcical, now gory, through whose pages, the political elite march past, rigged out in motley and grotesque costumes.”²³ The physiognomic details in Daumier’s work, the spaces explored, often in the images of workers, and the poor, out of the glistening civilization of Second Empire Paris: “Look through his works and you will see parading before your eyes all that a great city contains of living monstrosities, in all their fantastic and thrilling reality.”²⁴ Daumier’s imageries of the grotesque are derived out of the incongruities of this world. In fact, we see a resonance of Baudelaire’s moralism and critique of modernity in the work of Daumier. Like the grotesque images of Daumier, the Baudelairian city is indeed a space for ‘the terrifying, the grotesque, sinister, and farcical’, in all its ‘fantastic and gripping reality’. It is a space for the comic and the caricatural, demonic and infernal, the degradation of a mythical eternal paradise into a place of filth, stench and noise, a place of disorder, and incongruity, inhabited by eccentric, freakish figures. This is exactly the image that he sees in the creations of Daumier.

What surfaces here is the politics of Baudelaire’s philosophy that critiqued Positivist materialism, and the idea of Progress. His work was shaped by the political transitions, preceding and during the 1848 Revolution, and then most profoundly, by the culture and politics of the Second Empire, and by the loss of Paris as it existed before Haussmannization. The experience of the individual in the city, according to Baudelaire, is dual and contradictory, just like the nature of caricature. The individual is at the same time isolated from the city, yet connected to it through his communion with the crowd, the streets, and the shared reality. The dualism, the division and isolation of the self can be transcended through the self-conscious

²³ Baudelaire, ‘Some French Caricaturists’, p. 160.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

“comic doubling, by knowingly creating an image of ignorance to bring others to a consciousness of dualism too.”²⁵

The experience of caricature, to Baudelaire, inescapably entails reflexivity and reciprocity, the implication of those who laugh in their own laughter. Thus Baudelaire’s theory of the comic invests the idea of modernity with reciprocity, one’s status as laughter and object of laughter, thus preventing the subjective construction and appropriation of the world that has so often been linked with the project of modernism.²⁶ The specific features of Baudelaire’s theory of caricature and the grotesque, also surface in Mikhail Bakhtin’s influential treatment of the grotesque: the reflexivity of laughter, which implicates one who laughs as well as the object of laughter; the ambivalent and contradictory nature of the grotesque images, which incorporates the old and the new, death and rebirth, ugliness and fullness of life; the overcoming of the isolation they effect, integrating the grotesque body with the world, and with others. Baudelaire had talked about this unity in the grotesque image, in his treatment of the comic. In Bakhtin we see a fuller articulation of the grotesque. True to his method, Bakhtin moves beyond the form of the comic grotesque, to locate it within the space of a social and cultural interaction. The dialogic of laughter emerges in Bakhtin conceptualisation of the *carnavalesque*.

Humour receives probably the richest treatment in Bakhtin’s rendering of festive folk humour, set against a larger discourse on the dialogics of popular culture. In *Rabelais and his World*,²⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin undertakes a structural analysis of the comic imageries in the text of Francois Rabelais, the sixteenth century French writer. He has evoked in the text the elements of the *carivalesque*, one of his most widely disseminated concepts, an unfolding of a gay, ambivalent popular laughter

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

²⁶ This theme has been developed by Michelle Hannoosh, *Baudelaire and Caricature: From the Comic to an Art of Modernity*, University Park, Paris, 1992.

²⁷ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Hélène Islowsky, Cambridge: Massachusetts, 1984 (original in 1965).

that celebrates a culture of ritual humour through parody, caricature, burlesque, and pantomime. We see Bakhtin making a clear entry into the realm of the visual, grappling with the pictorial and the gestural 'sign systems'. Bakhtin focussed on the aesthetics of the creative process itself, on the activity of the artist or the activity of the artist or the author who creates. He was concerned with how human beings give form to their experience; how they perceive an object, text or another person and how they synthesise that perception into a synthesised whole.

Bakhtin's ideas on visual arts are, however, is discursively connected with his systematic engagement with language and verbal multi-linearity. He developed an unusual vocabulary for describing the process by which texts and works of art are authored, and meanings produced. Our understanding of folk humour and the comic image through a treatment of the Bakhtinian *carnivalesque* will lead us time and again to the author's larger engagement with what he calls *dialogism*, *answerability*, and *heteroglossia*. Before we proceed with Bakhtin's method, it would be important to make a brief review of the outlines of his treatment of Rabelaisian comic images and carnival laughter.

The treatment of folk humour, which Bakhtin has offered in this text, is multi-layered, yet highly structured. The space within which he is operating is that of the popular unofficial sphere, the streets and the marketplace. The festive moment of the carnival is to him, the 'symbolic space of utopian freedom', 'an island in time', where routine and social norms are momentarily suspended to give festive license to the play of the comic, grotesque and the absurd. The result is the spawning of a laughter that uncrowns, destabilizes, and shatters, at least on a symbolic plane, all oppressive hierarchies, thereby redistributing social roles according to the logic of the world 'turned upside down'.²⁸ What becomes significant in Bakhtin's text is the treatment of the comic image - its language, substance, form and function. Folk laughter, according to Bakhtin is not completely spontaneous and unstructured.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

There is a logic and a consciousness that goes into the making of the comic imagery, and Bakhtin traces in its form an 'oppositional culture' of the subalterns that destabilizes through laughter -laughter 'degrades and materializes'.²⁹

In his discourse on the nature of this folk humour, Bakhtin has streamlined some of the characteristic elements that define the form and agency of the comic image. The most important of these is that ambivalence in festive laughter, a simultaneous presence of both, the creative and the destructive, the gay and the deriding, the positive and the negative. Ambivalence in form is embodied in the image of the grotesque body. Exaggeration, hyperbolism, excessiveness are the fundamental attributes of the grotesque style. The imageries dominating the grotesque are those of the body in the act of becoming, a continuum of death and birth, of destruction and renewal. There is a predominance of the material bodily elements in the imageries, a merger of the outward as well as the inward features of the body, where images of the human body with its food, drink, defecations and sexual life become crucial. Bakhtin has called this type of imagery 'grotesque realism', an all-popular utopian concept, where the cosmic, social and bodily elements become an 'indivisible whole'.³⁰

A typical feature of the grotesque image is the downward push, both in the literal sense of the space and the metaphorical meaning of the image. It seeks to degrade, to uncrown through parody, caricature and burlesque of the people and the institutions of authority. The author has treated in this connection, the use of abusive language in the marketplace and at festive meets. However, folk laughter, says Bakhtin, is never mere negation, it has positive, regenerative elements in it that make it very different from negative laughter of satire. Its ambivalence lies in its simultaneous regenerative power.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 24-30.

A second crucial feature of the carnival image is its universality. It includes everyone, even those who produce it. We can trace here an important deviation from the elements of satire proper, where the satirist places himself above the subject of satire. There is a distinct moral positioning, which is completely absent in the comic as manifested in the Rabelaisian images. What Bakhtin sees here is the striving towards a universal totality, an 'openness in closure', that is harmonious with the wholeness of life. It enjoys a legitimacy, a license for deviation, what Bakhtin calls 'universal legality', a space for utopian freedom.

The expression of popular laughter through the comic imageries, that Bakhtin decodes and analyses is socially rooted and culturally coded. It is a dialogue between man and his socio-cultural location, and thus has a logic and politics of its own. This dialogism brings us to the essential feature of the Bakhtinian discourse. Each cultural voice, for Bakhtin, exists in a dialogue with other voices: "utterances are not indifferent to one another and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another."³¹ The process of constructing the self, for Bakhtin, involves the hearing and assimilating of the words and discourses of others, all processed dialogically. His understanding of art and aesthetics too is shaped by this idea of dialogism. In the Bakhtinian paradigm, the cognitive-sensory experience is inseparable from the ethical evaluation and action. Aesthetics, to Bakhtin is not a strict formal cognitive structure, but it describes how relationships between the self and the other, self and the object, and, self and the world are structured. In artistic creation, reality and life interpenetrate with art. The treatment of the visual image in satire can read through the frames of both cognitive and ethical reorganisation of reality.³²

³¹ Mikhail Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Speech Genres', in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, Austin, 1986, p. 91.

³² Mikhail Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability: Early Philosophical Essays*, translated by Vadim Liapunov, ed. By Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov, University of Texas Slavic Series 9, Austin, 1990, p. 120.

Language becomes a crucial theme in the study of the comic image in the Bakhtinian paradigm. However, the form of the language is not the ultimate for Bakhtin, his location of meaning lies not in the linguistic form, but rather in the use of language in action and communication, specifically, the utterance, and the multiplicity of social voices anticipating and answering one another. These voices represent distinct socio-ideological positionings, whose conflictual relation exists at the very heart of language change. This is what Bakhtin has called *heteroglossia*- the dialogically inter-related speech practices operative in a given society, at a given moment, where the idioms of different classes, races, genders, generations and locales, compete for ascendancy. Heteroglossia does not point to a mere heterogeneity, but to the dialogical angle at which voices are juxtaposed and counterpoised so as to generate something beyond themselves. It represents, "the coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between different epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form."³³ The space of the carnival, offers the space for the dialogue across classes, expressing what Bakhtin has called the 'joyful relativity' of all structure and order, and through its celebration of the 'bodily lower stratum', affirms a perpetual organic process of birth and death, nourishment and decay.

Thus, the festive folk humour that Bakhtin theorizes on is an essentially wide and open category. It parodies social customs, institutions and authorities, even sacred scripture, rituals and processions. Parody is crucial in this genre of humour, and the essential tone is one of subversion. For Bakhtin, festive folk humour offers a trans-individual taste of freedom, social inversion and a counter-hegemonic subversion of established power. We see him, therefore, locating a certain agency and social consciousness within the production of such humour. He reminds us that folk humour is never totally gay and ephemeral. To him these imageries

³³ Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Mikhail Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Mikhail Holquist, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981, p. 291.

served often as a powerful means of grasping reality, a form of a 'new free and critical consciousness'. More importantly, popular festive images for Bakhtin can be read as symbols or texts of the engagement of a class with the social reality. The laughter according to Bakhtin, "the ever growing, inexhaustible, ever-laughing principle, which uncrowns, and renews is combined with its opposite: the petty, inert 'material principle' of class society."³⁴

Thus cultural processes for Bakhtin are intimately linked to social relations, and culture is the site for social struggle. Thus a consciousness of power and its articulating effects, form an integral part of the Bakhtinian discourse on culture. While he opposes a transcendental oneness and consistently emphasizes plurality and variety, his sympathies are clearly with the non-official, the popular, the marginalized, and the peripheralized. When we look at the space of the carnival, the public squares, the marketplace, we see the play of the social heteroglossia, the dialogue between a multiplicity of voices, constantly engaging and contesting with one another. All languages of heteroglossia represent specific points of view of the world, different modes of conceptualising the world in words, meanings and values. Thus, popular culture becomes a social text for the study of the dialogue across classes, and folk humour in the Bakhtinian paradigm becomes an expression and engagement of the popular with social authorities and institutions. It is the text of an oppositional culture, encapsulated in the moment of the carnival. The politics of culture thus appears significantly in the Bakhtinian discourse. Entertainment and evoking the absurd in carnival is not merely a sub-phenomenon in the ritual, but an expression of the 'second life' of the people, located outside the official hierarchical order, and, has to be read in a critical relation to all official discourses, whether political, literary or ecclesiastical.

Humour and laughter gets a distinct agency in Bakhtin's treatment of the subject. For him, it becomes a mode of negotiating social experience and engaging

³⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. 95.

with it. It is the official world seen from below, and the comic imageries and languages are tools that craft and forward that engagement. Thus our understanding of popular humour will need to consider the various dimensions of popular logic, which lies embedded in their languages, verbal, gestural or pictorial. However, while keeping in mind the class dimension in any treatment of popular laughter, it would be necessary to remember that elite culture cannot be poised in an exact binary opposition to the popular. The two coalesce and engage at various points, and, the carnival or moments of rituals offer such spaces when the two meet dialogically through communal performance.

The satirical image, therefore, becomes an embodiment of various voices in society – voices of conformity and discomfort, mirth and pain, ridicule and exaltation. The image thus, has its own logic of embodiment and an ideology within its frames. It becomes therefore, a political text, a narrative of dialogue and dissent.

III

The Image as Text: Towards a Visual Narrative

In this section I will try to explore the logic and ideology that goes behind the 'embodiment' of satirical iconography. I begin with an essay on the caricature during the French Revolution. Antoine de Baecque in 'The Citizen in Caricature: Past and Present'³⁵, explores the visual language of a series of caricatures, printed during the Revolutionary years, in order to understand how the printed image embodied the ideal of citizenship, which was being discussed in the political and philosophical discourses of the day.

A series of almost 600 caricatures were printed during the period between the summer of 1788 and the January of 1790. The author explains how these served as a 'visual narrative of events': "By creating a series of standard characters, codified situations, conventional backgrounds, and symbols during the initial stages of the

³⁵ Appeared in *The French Revolution and the Meaning of Citizenship*, Eds. Renée Waldinger and Philip Dawson, Connecticut, 1993.

Revolution, caricature provided engravers with what amounted to a fictional canvas of political events.”³⁶ Thus, caricature became an incarnation of the political discourse, by way of making ideas visible through a set of standardized characters, gestures, and appearances for political principles guiding the contemporary thinking and writing. This was achieved through a series of visual metaphors, which were arranged in curious configurations, using a patterned logic of incarnation. It is this logic that Baecque seeks to uncover through the text. What we see here is an exploration of the visual language and visual politics of caricature.

The prints have been treated by the author as text of corporeality, a configurational schema of figures, their bodies, appearances, garments or gestures, arranged differently, to demonstrate the emergence of the idea of citizenship. The abstract idea was embodied was in the figures of the caricature, through a reversal of the body-to-body relationship, changing people’s postures, their gestures, bodily proportions, etc. thus representation in the image embodied the change of the position of the citizen, that was brought about by the historical rupture.

The study of comic art, therefore, reaches a higher level of political sophistication in the text of Baecque, where we see him exploring the potent political subversive or inversive language of caricature. The author begins by a series of three caricatures, which together form a visual narrative of events. The conceptual transformation, or the ‘transmutation’ of the citizen is clearly shown in the series. The visual metaphors used to represent symbolic activity are noteworthy, and have been systematically explored by the author. The first engraving represents the ‘anti-social disease’, where two nobles were seen carried by an exhausted peasant of the Third Estate, who is being prodded by the noble’s bloodstained sword. The second engraving shows the reversal of the positions of the first one, and we see the peasant seated on the backs of the two privileged orders, holding the nobles’ sword. The symbolic inversion of the image is noteworthy. We see here a symbolic reversal of

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 59.

the social order, through a more just redistribution of social roles. Thus social change gets a physical metaphor through the comic image. The third engraving describes the symbolic destruction of the old order through the image of the new social type', the embodiment of the French citizen-the French Guard. The image operates at multiple levels of political and social subversion. Firstly, the French Guard is seen performing his function of representing the power of the citizen symbolically, by covering the two members of the privileged orders with excrement, to the great joy of the man of the Third Estate. A suspicious character peeps from behind a wall, as black clouds gather overhead. The scatological device so potently used in this caricature, clearly serves to embody the violent rupture that had occurred in the social labyrinths. The act of covering the social orders with excrement, the dark clouds, the entente between the French Guard and the peasant, all correspond symbolically to the emergence of the image of an all-powerful citizen. The idea of historical rupture and the emergence of the citizen was embodied in the caricatures, by the reversal of the physical postures, the use of identical descriptions of the disease of privilege afflicting pre-Revolutionary France, and in the shared idea of the citizen's vigilance as the first line of defence for the new regime born in 1789.

In the images discussed, privilege was seen as the corporeal vice, introduced in the body of the citizen. Bodily metaphors were therefore fundamentally used in the caricatures to depict the actual abstract transmutation of the citizen. The revolutionary moment of rupture was seen as the operative act, by which the 'body' of France was cured. Such visual metaphors we seen in the pamphlets too, and here, the author mentions one by Abbey Sieyes in particular, where France is shown as a body politic undergoing change, through the burial and funeral processions of 'social injustice', 'clergy', and 'nobility'. There are images of the autopsy of the old body, where the surgeon exclaims in zestful mockery, 'I can't find a heart', after having opened the chest cavity of and 'aristocratic monster'. There are often bloody images, the historical rupture being represented as a bloody operation. The element of corporeality is particularly strong where the patriot pharmacist is shown

suggesting a potion for the 'cure' of corns, which was supposed to destroy corns and prevent them from recurring. The remedy was represented by a caricature where the two citizen soldiers are seen busy "grinding the fat of a canon and the brains of a noble" and an abbot is "cooking over fire" that is being tended by the pharmacist.³⁷ Baecque has in fact shown here, through a treatment of some of the contemporary Revolutionary caricatures, how the fragmentation and dismemberment of the old corporative privileges involved symbolic elimination of corns, warts, tumours etc.

In this article the author has sought to show how caricatures used bodily metaphors to provoke malevolent laughter, which became a part of the social and political subversion. The political abstraction of the ideal of citizenship is concretised and framed in comic, deeply satirized images, which together with the Revolutionary pamphlets became the crucial bearers of the ideology of the Revolution. This article places before us the agency of caricatures as texts of social inversion and political subversion. The visual images endorse the subversive potential of laughter. It has its own narrative strategy for embodying change and challenge. Caricature is shown by the author as transcribing words, into a body of imagery, and thereby become a symbol in itself of political power. Baecque has made a particularly interesting use of visual images. They are not used for merely illustrative purposes; they are in his article, the true text. Caricature as a form of representation seldom gets political acclaim, but Baecque has successfully retrieved it from the array of grotesque faces, misshapen bodies, and dissolute characters, and recovered its logic of incarnation, raising it thereby to the higher levels of political philosophy. Thus caricature moves beyond mere ridicule, in Baecque's text, and is shown to have embodied a visual incarnation of social change, class politics and Revolutionary philosophy.

Baecque's text is exemplary in more ways than one. It opens up an interesting space for the study of cultural politics. It introduces a distinct methodology of

³⁷ *Ibid*, p. 69.

studying politics as well as the resonance of that in graphic art. The distinguished art historian, E.H. Gombrich, has explored caricature as a genre of artistic expression and the political potential of the comic caricatural images systematically. In his historical work on the evolution of the art of graphic satire, 'Caricature'³⁸, Gombrich explores the problematics of comic pictorial art. Undertaking a historical review of the development of caricature from the earliest times to the early twentieth century, through an evaluation of the work of significant caricaturists, Gombrich has sought to rescue a space and agency for comic art vis-à-vis the 'grand manner' of high art.

The act of reducing the sublime to the ridiculous is intrinsically subversive, and such acts have always been, says Gombrich, a part of the comic performances and travesties since the ancient times. With the coming of graphic caricature, however, the individual rather than a class or a group became the target of attack. This in fact was more subversive and politically potent because to copy an individual, to mimic his behaviour, meant annihilating his personality. Since the days of the Reformation, comic art, says Gombrich acquired a distinct politics of its own. Attack on the individual and upper class institutions became harsher. A glaring example of the subversive potential of the caricatures has been shown by the author in the image of a medal showing the face of the Pope, which when inverted, became that of the Devil. The image of the Devil was in fact the most frequent motif in this type of political imagery.

Throughout the post-Reformation period, the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, the power of laughter and the hidden politics in the comic image was realized all the more, where pun, humorous allusions were deployed and political allegories adopted in cartooning. In England, it had become a political weapon in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The trend was only followed more thoroughly in other nations. To Gombrich, the political power of the comic images is unfolded

³⁸ E.H. Gombrich, and Ernst Kris, *Caricature*, Harmondsworth, 1940.

through the stylistic devices of physiological distortions and exaggerations, gestural positions, use of political metaphors, and so on. He says in fact, that the absurdity of comic art is at one level its freedom: "Comic art could always console itself for its position as Cinderella, with the knowledge that, disregarded by the dogmatic and loved by the public, it enjoyed a freedom denied to great art."³⁹

Gombrich's analysis of the satirical image comes forth systematically in the two essays, 'Magic, Myth and Metaphor: Reflections on Pictorial Satire'⁴⁰ and 'The Cartoonist's Armoury'.⁴¹ Speaking on the recurring motif of the Devil in pictorial satires in the continent, Gombrich noted that it is in the 'oscillation between reality and dream, between myth and metaphor, which pictorial satire relies for its psychological effect.' Together with his mentor, Ernst Kris, Gombrich initially saw the starting point of this in Freud's Theory of the Joke or Wit, which when translated to the context of pictorial satire, made them conclude that as a genre, pictorial satire used 'conscious exploitation of an unconscious mechanism'. Following Freud, Ernst Kris saw this as an instrument of hostile impulses in man- the roots of such imagery therefore, lay in the practices of black magic, for example the burning of wax dolls, the similarity of which he saw in the practice of effigy burning, whereby the image of the victim is subjected to death penalty. Ernst Kris saw the artistic genre of *caricatura* or caricature as an evolution from the practices of black magic; portrait caricature emerged from the rejection of the image magic and the taboos governing the use and abuse of personal imagery. However, Nazism and the events of the Holocaust changed the perspective of Progress from primitive irrationality to a rational, secular world. Subsequently Gombrich came to the view that the visual image can work at a number of levels and the beliefs in which beliefs about them are

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴⁰ E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation*, London, 1960.

⁴¹ Published in E. H. Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse: and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, Chicago, 1963.

activated depends on the social circumstances, that is the reason why images of violation persist till date.

In *Meditations on a Hobby Horse*, Gombrich had argued that the toy served the child as a substitute of the real thing. Thus the crowd that cheers at the mock executions, though not children, share with them the capacity of entertaining fictions, something that is really part of unchanging human nature. Gombrich goes on to say that though the image is fictional, their function is not; even though the purpose was not to injure the victim physically, it was still intended to injure his or her *persona*. It is, therefore, the symbol and the symbolic that needs to be read in satirical images. In studying cartoons, says Gombrich, we study the use of symbols in a circumscribed context. The novelty of the cartoon lies in the freedom to translate the concepts and shorthand symbols of our political speech into such metaphorical situations - "cartoonists can mythologize the world of politics by physiognomizing it."⁴²

In 'The Cartoonist's Armoury', Gombrich charts out the resources that make a cartoon. Some of these would be illustration of the figures of speech, condensation and comparison, portrait caricature, the political bestiary and natural metaphors. The most crucial twin resources of the cartoonists' armoury to Gombrich are the topical and the permanent, the passing allusion and the lasting characterisation. Interestingly, he does not see humour as a necessary weapon in the cartoonists' armoury. Whether or not we laugh will depend on the seriousness of the issue. It is the use of metaphor to comment of the topical issues of the day, which creates the modern political cartoon. It enjoys, says Gombrich, the wit of the comparison, which may not explain but sum up a situation. Here Gombrich addresses some of the anxieties around the satirical image. Is the image after all such a formidable weapon? Does it influence public opinion? And more importantly, does it add anything that is not already stated in literature? In answer to these, Gombrich states that the satirical

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 139.

print, like the sermon and other ritual acts exists to renew and reinforce the ties of common faith and common values, which holds the community together. One can see resonance of the moral-didactic function of satire here, the role of humour as a *corrective* in society.

The texts discussed so far provide a historical engagement with the genre of caricature and graphic satire. This is important, because we have very little work on the form and agency of the comic in actual societies. The texts of Bergson, Baudelaire or Bakhtin are primarily theoretical treatments of humour, providing us with broad conceptual frameworks. It surfaces through this essay, I suppose, that the potential of an analysis of humour as a socio-cultural dialogue and critique has been realised repeatedly by scholars and philosophers. Yet, there has been comparatively little reflection of that theoretical engagement in actual historical field research. What Gombrich or Baecque have charted out need to be followed up with historical analysis. The cultural politics of humour needs to be explored in itself for the study of society, art and politics.

The concepts discussed so far will serve as theoretical markers in my treatment of pictorial satire in Calcutta between the 1850s and the 1920s. However, there are some specificities about the Indian context that will shape its study differently from the theoretical premises explored through a predominantly Eurocentric scholarship. We do not see a vibrant culture of satirical art in India, though the tradition of caricature and serio-comic art can be seen in cave temples, or in temple architecture, where social types and manners would be caricatured to bring in comic relief in the social or religious narrative. The celebrated Anand Kentish Coomaraswamy saw caricature as a usual phase of Indian drawing, embodied most prolifically in the image of the *rakshasa* or the mythical demon of Hindu mythology, which provided ample opportunities for the expression of grotesque imagination. Coomaraswamy traces elements of secular caricature and satire in the Pahari School of paintings. He mentions an example where the most

revered poets of northern India were made subjects to bitter ridicule, furnishing a bitter satire against the excesses of false asceticism.⁴³ The element of the grotesque in the religious art of India had been worked upon by Stella Kramrisch⁴⁴, who identified it as a deep undercurrent of Indian art. In India, little research has been done in the area of humorous art. Coomaraswamy speaks about the possible elements of caricature and satire in folk motifs and folk art. He, however, he did not delve into printed imagery, which had a parallel tradition since the mid nineteenth century. s

In the following chapters, I will explore some of these imageries, in colonial Calcutta, clustered around popular art, printed cartoons, and high art. In each of the genres, we will see the satirical image transforming itself, moulded by its provenance. Its form, content and politics are reoriented in different socio-cultural contexts and in different genres. In nineteenth century Calcutta, a culture of satire was pervasive. We see the articulation of a variety of satirical imagery, from a comedy of manners to caricature and lampoon, to the creation of a grotesque, all created in a dialogue with what was seen as incongruous and absurd in society.

There is another peculiarity in the Indian case that needs to be stated at the outset. The colonial condition produced a variety of fractures and incongruities; satire and caricature provided a form of public expression through which the colonised explored these fractures, and critiqued the grotesque, laughed at the incongruous and searched for an elusive authenticity. The peculiar context for the proliferation of satirical prints in the nineteenth century was thus provided by the

⁴³ Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, *Indian Drawings, Second Series* (chiefly Rajput), London, 1912. The example stated here (Plate XXI) is a 17th to 18th century Rajasthani style, with northern and central Asian influence. The painting shows the caricatures of Prem Das, Gharib Das (17th century), Tulsi Das (c 1600 AD), Kesur Singh, Raj Singh and Ram Singh. Coomaraswamy points out, however, that most probably, it was not the great men themselves who were caricatured but under their names, the satire was aimed against the excesses and insincerities of the holy men in general.

⁴⁴ Stella Kramrisch, 'The religious and the grotesque in Indian art', *Modern Review*, November 1923.

colonial influence, whether that be in introducing the print medium or the social forces of change or even the perception of the 'other' in the coloniser. These created the cultural praxis needed for the production of satire. In the following chapters, I explore this dynamic exchange between social transition, social criticism and visual imagery.

Chapter 2

Evoking the Comic: Caricature & Folk Laughter in Nineteenth Century Calcutta

The study of pictorial satire is the search for symbols and codes that a society creates to capture, critique, and at one level to contain its own transformation. The satirical image embodies this dialogue within its frames; it enacts the negotiation through evoking the comic, and thereby becomes a space for the play of multiple currents—humour, opinion, ideology, and indeed, the power of the visual image to evoke. This chapter investigates a pool of satirical imageries in the popular art of Calcutta in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Burgeoning as a genre critical expression, the visual culture of the imperial city was bristling with images of satire, lampoon and caricature. The scroll paintings of the Kalighat genre, the woodcuts of the Battala printing presses or the pantomimes or *shawng* performances that lit up the city streets at the end of every Bengali year, were cultural expressions of the city's lower orders. Bright, vivacious and subversive, they represented metaphors from a society in transition.

Following the Bergsonian idea of the 'social signification' of humour, these satirical imageries need to be read against the socio-cultural context that was producing them. It is very difficult to define the structure of humour or satire in a colonial situation because of the essentially unstable cultural context. Within the framework of colonialism, modes such as satirical imageries take on an even greater cultural importance. They become a site for challenging or confirming identity, of recognizing or attempting to negate cultural hegemony, of exploring the cultural and political changes brought about by a colonial regime, and also, appropriating the induced transformations. As we approach the images we might ask in what ways such imageries formed, confirmed and reformed worldviews, how they reflected

experience, and how satire was evoked to express agony, disillusionment and ridicule.

I

Satire, Metaphor & Social Change

A society's response to an alien culture can be studied in two different aspects: tension and change within the society, or confrontation and interaction with the external force. The production of satire can be located at the interface of these two, where evoking the comic became a mode of dialogue. It is here that we need to take a closer look at Calcutta, as a text of socio-cultural transition and pluralism. The urban life in nineteenth century Calcutta, the colonial presence, and the various transformations induced thereby, evoked in different social classes multiple levels of negotiation. The popular art, also known as the *bazaar art* of the Kalighat and Battala genres embodied such negotiations within their frames, whereby these became 'embedded codes', framed dialogues, between lived experience, critical consciousness and social transition.

Nineteenth century Calcutta was a melting pot of people, experiences and expressions. Towards the middle of the century, Calcutta, termed as the 'Second City of the Empire', had become the main political and economic outpost of British India. The colonial settlement had split up the city into three segments, with the sharply distinguished Black Town and the White Town as the most important divisions. The three villages that formed Calcutta were Sutanuti, Kalikata and Govindapur. European Calcutta consisted of the original Govindapur and a part of original Kalikata. Sutanuti was inhabited entirely by the original inhabitants and then their descendants. Between the White Town and the Black Town, there lay a grey area inhabited by the Anglo-Indians and the Eurasians. The culture of Sutanuti or the Black Town was basically Bengali culture with modifications most clearly observable in the upper classes of the society. The caste system had crumbled in Calcutta with the power and money brought to certain sections of the people. Hereditary status

gave way in the city to monetary status, followed by educational status. Caste distinction and discrimination persisted, but wealth and education became additional factors in a person's rise in society. Out of this, Calcutta developed a distinct urban culture. It is this urban ethos that the popular satirical images repeatedly try to critique.

The present chapter will explore the satirical imageries within the space of the *bazaar* or the marketplace and the streets, the abode of the lower orders of society. Though caricature as a genre of artistic expression has been encountered in Indian art earlier, it was here, in the art of the *bazaars* that it surfaced with a unique vigour, in form and language. I will introduce in here a set of imageries from the Kalighat and the Battala genres, as well as the powerful caricature in the city's pantomimes or *shawng* performances. The *pats* of Kalighat represented the tensions between the sensibilities of the rural migrants coming to the city, and the urban ethos of the city. The images that keep recurring are those of the dandyish *babu*, foppish and servile before a dominant and spurious public woman, the licentious priests and religious mendicants, and the whole rhetoric of an impending apocalypse.

However, satire as a genre of critical cultural expression had already been well grounded in the literature of the city. The satirical literature that was being produced throughout the nineteenth century was in a way providing some of the idioms, which would later find visual rendering in the genre of the Kalighat and the Battala prints, or even the graphic satire, which emerged vividly in the 1870s. It was in literature that we see unfolding, the consciousness and critique of social change, though it emanated from a class completely different from that, which was producing the *pats* and the woodcuts.

From the 1820s, there was a steady growth in the production of satirical texts, constituting the genre of what was called *naksha* literature, or texts abounding in visual metaphors, satirising the mannerisms of the urban elite. They dealt with the

peculiarities and tensions of the urban life, the moral lapses and the decadence of the city's rich, capitalising on contemporary scandals, family conflicts, mutual slandering within the elite class, fanned by the informants. *Naksha dharmi* literature was written principally based on lampoon and caricature, from a moral standpoint. The writers of these chap books formed what has been called *ninda sahitya* or literature of critique, claimed to write these for social corrective purposes. Written mostly in the form of farces, such productions can be located at the far end from serious satire and more sedentary, cerebral comedy. They occupy a low comedic niche of crude, knockabout but harmless, amoral hilarity alongside burlesque, situation comedy and slapstick. Societal scandals ran havoc and found an eager readership within a cross section of the urban populace.

The wave of new literature assumed a dual identity, at one level idealising a past which the colonial rule ruptured, and at another level, a panorama of piercing caricatures. Even a single text embodied this dual character of idealism and sarcasm. *Parihash* or social raillery was thus aimed at giving vent to a social conservatism, resisting change. The overwhelming themes of these texts were the urbanisation of Calcutta, the mannerisms of the urban elite, their language, practice, mentalité and scandals. The first expression of this can be seen in the work of Bhawanicharan Bandopadhyay. In 1820 he wrote the *Babu Upakhyan*⁴⁵, followed in the next decade by a series of social satires, written in a moral-didactic tenor- *Kalikata Kamalalaya* (1823), *Nababubibilash* (1825), *Nababibilash* (1831). In *Kalikata Kamalalaya*, Bhawanicharan calls the city the 'alay or the abode of *kamala* or *Lakshmi*, the Goddess of wealth: the city, to him, is a money maker's submarine paradise, where *Lakshmi* dwells surrounded by sharks and crocodiles. The author sees this coexistence of the divine and the infernal as an inevitable consequence of the historical circumstances that created the city: "The sea of Calcutta was churned when the English fought the Nawab; out of it came the pain of sorrow and the nectar of joy. The city became

⁴⁵Brajendranath Bandopadhyay, *Sambadpatre Shekaler Katha*, Vol.2, Calcutta, 1949.

nirupam, unmatched and famous. But there were ravenous sharks surrounding it and abounding ignorance in the form of crocodiles.”⁴⁶ The work develops through a dialogue between a Calcuttan and a stranger, on the follies of the urban life, in the process of which the author unfolds the peculiarities of urban Calcutta. In his next work *Nabababilash* (1825), we see him pouring scorn on the spoilt child-turned-hedonist, with no sense of social propriety, surrounded by self-seeking flatterers. The author describes such a man with a pun on *Phulbabu* (flower-babu), the Bengali word for a fop or a dandy: ‘*Phulbabu* or a *babu* who is a fool’. *Nababibilash* (1831) speaks of the escapades and drolleries of the wanton New Lady in a degenerate city. These anxieties around the ‘New *Babu*’ or the ‘New Lady’ will be seen translated to visual metaphors in the pictorial satire of the city.

In the second half of the century stalwarts like Pyarichand Mitra and Kaliprasanna Sinha dominated satire in literature. Pyarichand, a famous Derozian wrote *Alaler Gharer Dulal* (1858), a humorous story around the nuances and vagaries of urban life, the tussle for social prominence and recognition among the *nouveaux riches*. The hero is the wayward scion of an established family in Calcutta; his experiences take us through the schools, police circles and courts of the city. The most prolific satire remains, however, Kaliprasanna’s *Hutom Penchar Naksha* (1862), the magnificent *tableaux vivantes* of Calcutta life. One can see parallels of Dickens’ *Sketches by Boz* in this work. *Hutom* gives a satirical sketch of the idiosyncrasies of the *nouveaux riches* through depiction of the festivals of *Charaka*, and *Baroari Durgapuja*. The use of satire is stylistically entwined with the narrative, and at the level of conceptualisation and presentation, it moulds the characters, contains their actions, and weaves a stark portrayal of the social milieu of the late nineteenth century. In 1871 came Kedarnath Dattta’s *Sachitra Guljar Nagar*. It is seen through the eyes of a rural migrant, a young lad who comes to the city in search for employment, and floats around rootless through the lanes, bazaars, courts and prisons of the city. In the

⁴⁶ Bhawanicharan Bandopadhyay, *Kalikata Kamalalaya*, Calcutta, 1823, p. 6. (translation mine)

process he experiences the glitter, the gloom and the flux that characterized the urban experience. Through his voice is critiqued the Municipal reforms that spelt excessive taxation, adultery in food, scramble for official titles, rampant bribery among the police and so on. As a critical text, it raises questions around the racist divide in the treatment of prisoners as well as between the White and the Black beggars. It calls for a Poor Commission for India, similar to its parallel in Britain. *Naksha* literature is mainly of two types: first, random sketches of individual characteristics or particular social events. An example of this type would be the *Hutom Penchar Naksha*. The second kind in the *naksha* genre would be story-based *naksha*, for example *Alaler Gharer Dulal*, *Sachitra Guljar Nagar*.

In particular, the *naksha* literature dealt extensively with the emergence, structure and critique of the 'Babu Culture', exploring and analysing different categorisations of the apparently homogeneous class of *babus*. However, between the 1820s, the time when *Kalikata Kamalalaya* was written and the 1860s, when Kaliprasanna wrote *Hutom*, the consolidation of the imperialist economy saw a decline of the old aristocrats. Initially this class was dominated by the zamindars, consisting of absentee landlords, the new mercantile class, or agents of the British. Gradually the lead passed to the Western educated professional urbanized middle class, who came to be called the *bhadralok*. This special mutation of the *babu* was also called *ejuraj* or 'educated raja', i.e., the Western educated elite.

The satirical literature reflects different anxieties around the breakdown of the social hierarchy. There are three kinds of *bhadralok* listed in *Kalikata Kamalalaya*. The first are those who are in 'high office', that is, are *banians* or *dewans* to the British. The second are the *madhyabitta*, the middle class, who are 'not rich but comfortable'. The third are the 'poor but *bhadra*' group who work as accountants or *sarkars* and have to account daily to the humiliating treatment of *dewans*.⁴⁷ This categorisation

⁴⁷ Amiya Bagchi, 'Wealth and Work in Calcutta, 1860-1921', in Sukanta Chaudhuri (ed.), *Calcutta: The Living City*, Vol. 1, Calcutta, 1990, p. 215.

brings us to the crux of the problem about the *bhadralok*. The division *within* the group is done by Bandyopadhyay on the basis of wealth, but clearly wealth was not a constitutive factor for the group as compared to the rest of society. The staying power of this ambiguity around wealth is great. When the rich *banian*, mentioned by Bhawanicharan in the 1820s petered out from the social-economic stage following the economic crisis in the mid century, Calcutta was left with the remaining two categories. It was this 'comfortable middle class', as Bandyopadhyay has called them, that we shall see gave rise to the educational ideology and it was the 'poor but *bhadra*', the lower rungs of a petty-bourgeois class who had been forced into higher education, that became a part of it.

By the time Kaliprasanna Sinha wrote *Hutom Penchar Naksha* in the 1860s, the extravagance and decadence of the aristocrats came to be pilloried like never before, particularly in the wake of a rising middle class. *Hutom* identifies three kinds of *babus*- the old world anglicised elite, the *nouveaux riches babus* and the conservative Hindu elite. A scathing critic of the frivolous life of the declining aristocracy echoes in Kaliprasanna Sinha:

As the Nawabs declined and the English rose, the great *babu* grooves uprooted and their reeds grew in their place. Nabo Munshi, Chire merchant and Pute oil maker became the Rajas. The titles of rajas along with the weapons of the police and the rods of justice lay in the gutters like the rubber shoes and Shantipur shawls. Krishnachandra, Rajballabh, Mansingh, Nandakumar and Jagat Seth fell from grace and with them disappeared the Hindu religion, charity to the poor, the poet's honour, interest in learning and good plays. The youth of the town were divided into groups. Money gained a greater social status than aristocratic birth.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Kaliprasanna Sinha, *Hutom Penchar Naksha*, Calcutta, 1868, p. 16 (translation mine)

The social and cultural upheaval that this generated in the wake of the colonial rule made room for a unique pictorial imagination and conceptualisation that found the most immediate reflection in the popular art of the period, referred as *bazaar* art, created by the city's poor, the rural migrants, or the working groups in the city. The scroll paintings of Kalighat, and the cheap woodcuts of the Battala presses embodied in the late nineteenth century, a dynamic engagement with the readjustments, inconsistencies and discomfort brought about by the rapid social changes in the wake of a colonial consolidation. It is this juncture of social change, which produces the cultural praxis needed for the production of satire. They provided a perception of an out-group, using caricature in images and performance to attack the rich and privileged in society.

II

Caricature in the Bazaar: The Graphic Satire of Kalighat & Battala

Bazaar means in Bengali a market. *Bazaars* formed the nucleus of the Black Town, around which the dwellings of the rich were set up. Artisans settled in these *bazaars*, clustered into *tola*, *tuli* and *para*.⁴⁹ The *bazaar* also became a space of the new urban rich, who often invited artisans for peopling these marketplaces. The *patuas* who created these *pats* were rural migrants in Calcutta, uprooted from their villages, and settling in the vicinities of the Kalighat temple, lured by the prospect of a thriving market for their talents among the visiting pilgrims. *Patuas* formed a small part for this artisan settlement. Their original profession was to paint scrolls narrating stories from Hindu mythology and display them before an audience, accompanied by singing. The urban experience, however, induced in their art a fresh language and technique. Cheap paper from the Serampore presses replaced their earlier canvasses, making it suitable for rapid reproduction in the need of the market. However, most interestingly, the themes of the *pats* changed to depict social events of the city, images of the foppish dandy, the hypocrite religious mendicant, the dominating wife

⁴⁹ Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, Calcutta, 1978, p. 36.

and the public woman. The social and cultural upheavals of the colonial urban space became motifs in their pictorial conceptualisation: "Kalighat painting was a moving mirror, moving forward in time and moving around in the social and cultural space of the city, reflecting the sifting realities of both."⁵⁰

Migrating to the big city, the rural poor saw Calcutta as the abode of prostitution, clownage and deceit: "*Rarh, Bharh, Mithey Katha, Tin laye Kolkata.*"⁵¹ Pitted against the new society of Anglo-Indian Calcutta, the sharp sense of moral discomfort and disorder of the migrant *patuas* expressed itself in a powerful repertoire of satirical imageries. Art here took the idiom of social satire, embodying a critique of the frivolous, *bhadralok* class and the new metropolitan value system, which the elite absorbed from their colonial masters. The *babu bibi pats* that they created, mark one of the earliest articulations of social satire in the pictorial idiom.

The imageries of the Kalighat *pats* recur in the Battala woodcuts. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Calcutta was flooded with picture folios, popularly known as Battalar *chhapapat* (printed *pat* or pictures from Battala). The name came from the area Battala, Jorabagan, Darjipara etc. in North Calcutta, which were the main centres of the flourishing printing business. The culture of mutual slandering had become a persistent preoccupation of the new genre of satirical literature, which received a great fillip with the proliferation of the cheap Battala books. Apart from the standard religious, mythological and epical subjects like the Hindu deities, more these prints also touched on Bengali festivals, social satires and sensational news items of the time. The Battala pictures were on cheap paper and hand tinted in very crude paper with cotton swab. Blocks of Battala were done in relief. In the modelling of the figure, in the depiction of the eyes, and the shading of body contours, the influence of *pat* painting is noticeable.

I will introduce here a set of imageries from the two genres. In the *pats* of the Kalighat genre, the *babus* we encounter are the remnants of the old aristocracy. They

⁵⁰ Jyotindra Jain, *Kalighat Paintings: Images from a Changing World*, Ahmedabad, 2000, p. 97.

⁵¹ Bhawanicharan Bandopadhyay, *Kalikata Kamalalaya*, Calcutta, 1823, (reprint 1936), pp. 3-10.

are not the English educated westernised elite whose language, attire and practice became mimicry of the British. Let us consider Fig. 1 and 2. The *babu* shown in the first image is a dandy, the 'man about the town', more like what one sees in Hogarth's '*The Rake's Progress*', or Rowlandson's caricature of the decadent nobility in eighteenth century England. He represents the quintessential image of the *babu* in the Kalighat *pats*, ornamentally attired, sitting cross-legged on a Victorian chair with



Fig. 1: Baboo Holding a Hookah
(Kalighat Painting, late 19th century)

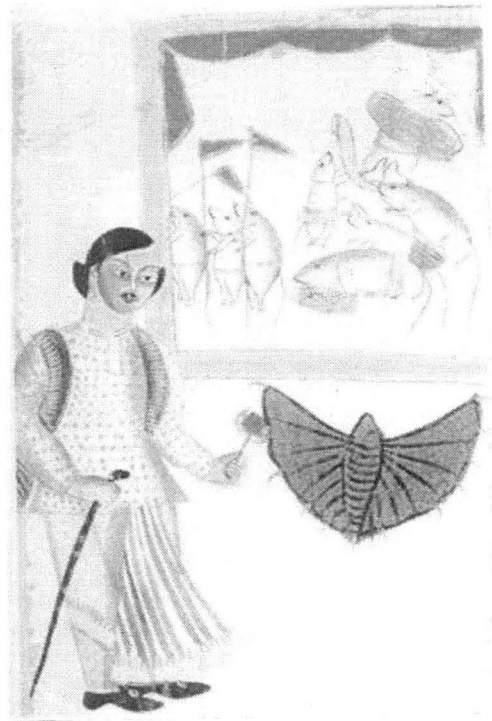


Fig. 2: Musk Rats' Party
(Kalighat Painting, late 19th century)

an air of luxury and a lazy poise, His neatly parted hair, styled in the fashion of Prince Albert, his muslin *chapkan*, embroidered *dhoti*, chiffon scarf, jewels as well as the *hukkah*, all betray a sense of magnificence, fashion and exclusivity. This is the *babu* that Kaliprasanna had ridiculed in *Hutom*, as remnants of an erstwhile aristocracy, flaunting a frivolous lifestyle despite the actual bankruptcy. This is reflected vividly in the second image, which illustrates a popular Bengali proverb: "*bahire konchar potton, bhitore chuchor kitton*" (the *babu* flaunts his external fineries, while musk rats infest his empty house). Once again it shows a meticulously dressed

dandy, carrying a *chhari* (a walking stick) and a flower, strolling in front of his house, which is infested by huge musk rats. The rhetoric of the *phulbabu* or the 'flower-delicate *babu*', as evoked by Bhawanicharan Bandopadhyay in *Nabababubilash*, is seen recurring here, to symbolise a certain coquettishness and effeminate nature of the dandy. We see here the actual bankruptcy of the old aristocracy, which, however, was not apparent in the external glitter of the *babus*, who were obsessed in maintaining a lifestyle despite their otherwise penniless affairs. The proverb gets a visual rendering to create a distinct social commentary.

The aristocracy in the *pats* were in the late nineteenth century, a receding race, overtaken soon in the social milieu by the English educated anglicised elite. The point of transition is the genesis of a new public space, and what has been called a civil society. The alienation of the *patuas* in the nineteenth century Calcutta followed the rupture of the traditional patron-client relationship that existed in the eighteenth century Bengali village. The Kalighat *pats* for example repeatedly show the transformation of the erstwhile patron, the rural *zamindar* into the *babu* of Calcutta. Ratnaboli Chattopadhyay points out in this connection, that this was a period of social transition; the disappearance of the *Nawabi* age led to the creation of a new elite who, acquiring wealth through the comprador relationship with the East India Company, transformed themselves into the new aristocracy. The moral discomfort of the *patuas* in the commercialised urban set up of the town has been an almost constant feature of the art of these painters. To quote a significant passage from Chattopadhyay's work,

In a period of transition, a social order can break down, rupturing the hierarchical relations which are built into its core. When this happens then the break down of any one of its elements can serve in art as its major metaphor. In the nineteenth century Bengal, the crisis in the arts was created by the breaking down of the traditional patron client relationship, which pushed the craftsmen like the Kalighat painters

out of the security of an older employment pattern. In order to portray this disruption, the artists chose as their major motif, the fallen patron- the 'ridiculous *babu*' dominated by women.⁵²

The portrayal of women in the *bazaar* art in this period formed an essential element in their pictorial language. The *babu* is again portrayed as subservient to the charms of the courtesan, or enslaved by the wife. We see in the popular art of Kalighat and Battala, the depiction of two distinct woman types: the courtesans, as a continuation of the *nayika* tradition, visualised as singing, playing musical instruments, or idly sitting with a flower in hand; the other image is that of the shrew, be they the wife or the prostitute, depicted in voluptuous and sensuous form. This sensuality surfaces in most of the *pats* of the Kalighat genre. The representation of this particular woman type, gave the Kalighat paintings its distinct aura. Ratnaboli Chattopadhyay sees in this art, the transformation of the representation of the woman, from an aesthetic category (typified in the *nayika*), into a moral category. The woman in her aggressive sexuality became the persecutor, her physical strength became a contrast to the 'effeminacy' of the servile *babu*. In Fig. 3, we see the dandy as a sheep being tied to a leash and led by a courtesan. In one hand, she carries a flower, symbolic of the bewitching powers held by the beauty of the courtesan. The *babu*'s subservience to his mistress was seen as a certain kind of emasculation by the *patuas*, a failure to provide the leadership they were expected to. The presence of a red-light area near Kalighat presented the artists with a vision of the under belly of society, while all around them they saw the drastic changes in the new society of Anglo-Indian Calcutta. The element of change, anguish and ridicule was expressed in the curious device of caricature that they created in their images. The *babu* was referred time and again as *bherua*, a docile sheep, who has his reins in the hands of the sensuous woman, who could be his wife, or his mistress. Fig 4 shows a

⁵² Ratnaboli Chattopadhyay, *From the Karkhana to the Studio: Changing Social Roots of Patrons and Artists in Bengal*, New Delhi, 1990, p.68



Fig. 3: Victim of a Charmer
(Kalighat Painting, late 19th century)



Fig. 4: Woman Trampling upon a Man
(Kalighat Painting, late 19th century)

courtesan trampling upon her client. W. G. Archer sees the portrayal of women in the Kalighat *pats* as essentially representations of the image of *shakti*, as embodied in the image of Goddess *Kali*.⁵³ In Hindu iconography, the Goddess, naked and dishevelled, is seen trampling upon *Shiva*- a symbol of feminine power and rage. This imagery recurs in the *pats*, which show the courtesan stepping on the chest of their clients, the *babus* or beating them with brooms. In Fig. 6, we see the courtesan beating up a mendicant. More than showing the power of women over men, this kind of satirical iconography represents rather, the power of lust and vice over the servile *babus* and licentious priests. They speak of a fear, the image of an impending apocalypse—*Ghor Koli*. The anxiety around the ascendancy of the woman becomes most vivid in the image of *Ghor Koli* (Fig. 5), which shows a man leading a devout

⁵³ W. G. Archer, *Bazaar Paintings of Calcutta*, London, 1953; Milfred Archer, *Indian Popular Paintings in the India Office Library*, London, 1977.

old woman by a chain. The bent figure has sandalwood paste on her forehead and a rosary bag hanging from her neck. On the man's shoulder sits a bejewelled young



Fig.5: Ghor Koli

(Battala woodcut, late 19th century)



Fig. 6: Woman Beating up Mendicant

(Kalighat Painting, late 19th century)

woman holding a parrot. With his right hand, the man holds the woman steadying her. The woman sitting on the shoulder is the wife, while the old woman in chains is the mother. It is the visual illustration of the description of *Ghor Koli*, or doomsday as given in the Brahminical text, *Garuda Purana*⁵⁴: when men are steeped in sin, women disobey their husbands and become licentious. The God *Koli* then presides over this degenerate society. In the semi-popular literature of farces and tracts, or the Kalighat paintings, Calcutta often became the city of *Koli*, the epitome of the degenerate present or *Koli-yuga*. The present time was seen as the nadir of this decline (*ghor-koli*), of the breakdown of norms of caste and gender behaviour. Feminine vice, came to constitute an overwhelming anxiety in the rhetoric of *kaliyuga*- the image being of

⁵⁴ Ratnaboli Chattopadhyay, *From the Karkhana to the Studio: Changing Social Roots of Patrons and Artists in Bengal*, New Delhi, 1990.

a woman, insubordinate, quarrelsome, luxurious and lazy, who cared nothing for the family or national fortune.⁵⁵ This pervades the anxiety around *kamini*, *kanchan*, *dasatva*- female vice, gold and servitude, that Ramakrishna, the popular saint in late nineteenth century Calcutta had inscribed on the Bengali middle class psyche.⁵⁶ In an 1880 farce entitled *Kaler Bou* (the Wife of the Times), the subordination to wives in paralleled to political subjection to the sons of the London Queen', and the figure of the suffering mother, neglected by sons entrapped by the modern wife with expensive western texts, becomes a metaphor for the enslaved motherland.⁵⁷

The rural immigrants to the city felt even more insecure, when they saw the religious leaders- the Vaishnavas, the *mohantos* and the Brahmins to be totally corrupt. In Fig. 7, we see the image of what the *patuas* saw as the quintessential fake mendicant. The painting depicts a fat man in a saffron robe with a Vaishnava mark of sandalwood paste on forehead and arms, sitting a rosary. The artist tries to bring out the real character of the fake mendicant, puts a crow on his head. The addition of these details brings forth the profane character of the mendicant. In Fig. 8 we see a Battala woodcut, depicting a much used Bengali expression 'Beral Tapaswi', a cat trying to disguise itself as a mendicant, complete with sandalwood *tilak* on the forehead, rosaries and a beard; however it holds a huge prawn in its mouth, betraying its true identity. The satire here is on the social hypocrisy of the Vaishnava mendicants whom the *patuas* saw as greedy and licentious, behind the garb of religiosity. A couplet popular in the nineteenth century ridicules the hypocrisy

⁵⁵ Tanika Sarkar, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation, Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, New Delhi, 2001, p. 35

⁵⁶ Sumit Sarkar, 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and Bhakti: Ramkrishna and his Times', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18 July, 1992

⁵⁷ Goswamy, Jayanta, *Samajchitre Unabingsha Satabdir Bangla Prahashan*, Calcutta, 1320 (BS).

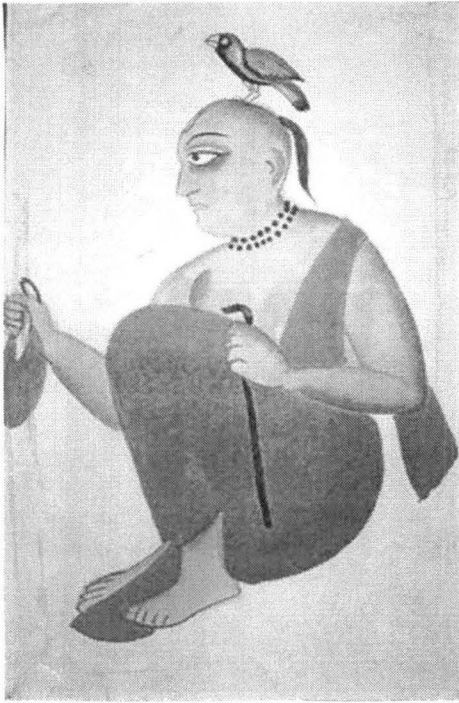


Fig. 7: A Vaishnava Mendicant
(*Kalighat Painting*, late 19th century)

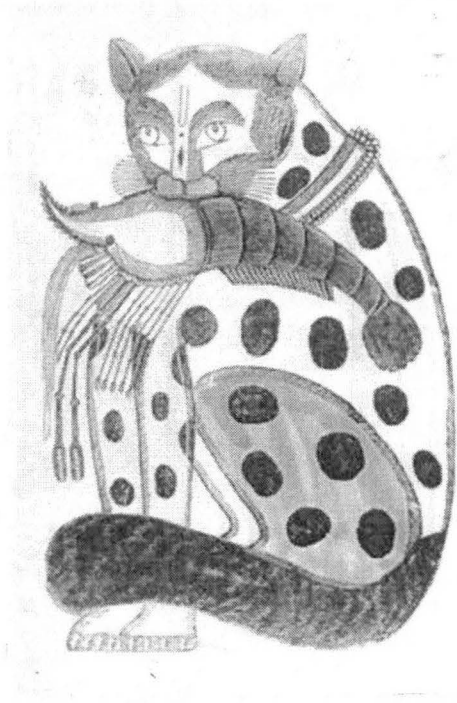


Fig. 8: Biral Tapaswee
(*Battala woodcut*, late 19th century)

of the Vaishnavites: “Magur machher jhol, jubotir kole/ Hari bole, Hari bole (They have a soup of Magur fish for their meal, they are fond of the laps of young girls, and they chant: Hari! Hari!)⁵⁸ The image the spots on the cat and the quiet expression of his eyes reflect what the *patuas* saw as the dangerous nature of the Vaishnava priests. This iconography of a hypocrite cat-mendicant recurs in a Sanskrit fable that shows a wily cat who stands on the banks of the Ganges, holding its paws in zealous gestures and claiming to have purified its mind. The fame of the cat as an ascetic spread and soon a pack of mice came to it for refuge and teaching. Accepting them as disciples, the cat asked them to lead the way to a sacred spot for the performance of the holy rituals. Following behind them, the cat got fatter and

⁵⁸ Sumanta Bannerji, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1989.

fatter while the number of mice got smaller and smaller and smaller. Religious satire is a warning: Beware of piety, holiness, sanctity, and decorum.⁵⁹

The satirical iconography of the religious mendicants received further impetus after the *Elokeshi Mohanto* scandal,⁶⁰ which rocked the city, and became a part of the visual narrative of the *pats* as well as the satirical plays and *prahashans* of the day. In the year 1872 the seduction of a woman called Elokeshi by the *mohanto* or chief priest of the Tarakeshwar temple, led to a chain of events, first the murder of Elokeshi by her husband Nabin, his surrender to the police and finally, the implication and imprisonment of the *mohanto* of Tarakeshwar. The *pats* of Kalighat provided a visual narrative of every step of this 'sensational' event, followed in form by the woodcuts of Battala. They produced a series of sequentially connected pictorial narrative, satirising and demonising the action of the *mohanto*. The *pats* were offering in pictorial imagery what the popular farces of the day were enacting on stage, or what the cheap Battala books were printing. We see in the representations of such societal scandals, a fluidity, which was cutting across different media- art, print and performance. The corruption in religious leadership in Hindu society had come to be critiqued systematically in nineteenth century reformist discourse, highlighting in particular the sexual promiscuities of the *shakta* priests and the *Vaishnavas*.⁶¹ *Hutom Penchar Naksha* and other satirical literature of the late nineteenth century focussed repeatedly on the sexual escapades of the Hindu priests, contributing in an indirect manner to the questioning of the dominance of the religious *gurus*. While reverence and faith rendered one vulnerable to the hypocrite, imageries of the profanities of this class surfaced time and again in the satirical art of the day. The ineffable gluttony of Brahmins is an ancient motif in satire and

⁵⁹ Quoted in Lee Siegel, *Laughing Matters, Comic Tradition in India*, Chicago, 1987, p. 195.

⁶⁰ Tanika Sarkar discusses the widespread representations of this scandal in *pats* and theatre in 'Scandal in High Places: Discourses on the Chaste Hindu Woman in Late Nineteenth Century Bengal', Meenakshi Thapan (ed.), *Embodiment: Essays on Gender and Identity*, New Delhi, 1997.

⁶¹ Discussed in Charles H. Heimsath, *Indian Nationalism and Hindu Social Reform*, Princeton, 1964, ch. 3.

caricature. In the nineteenth century urban popular culture, this anxiety becomes a part of a larger rhetoric of a moral critique of the new urban ethos.

The *patuas* in the city were imbibing in their art a particular conservative ideology, a glorification of the past order, a resistance to change, and a discomfort with change, a sense of disillusionment and rage against what the city's lower orders saw as emulation, emasculation and degeneration. Their visual language represented that conflict of values, with satire becoming a tool of subversion that engaged with the urban sensibilities, and ruptured through the contradictions between different mental worlds. Evoking the comic through the device of caricature contains that sense of outrage. Folk laughter therefore crafts here an idiom of resistance through the frames of social satire. Laughter erupted at such junctures of clash, and became a response to the *patua's* perceived sense of incongruity. There is in these a certain degree of pathos that was transformed to the ridiculous.

Another form of popular visual art in the late nineteenth century that made caricature a very strong device in resistance and subversion through ridicule would be the *shawng* performances, or the pantomimes. Forming an integral part of the performative culture of the city, the pantomimes not only provided a stark language of social satire, but also grappled with curious spaces of a nascent political opinion as well. It is in the pantomimes of the street culture of Calcutta, that one can perceive the rise of a certain ambiguity, a space within the 'popular', but embodying both the lower class anxieties and the *maddhyabitto* or middle class aspirations and sensibilities. It marked the entry of the middle orders in the popular expressive genres, even a contest for control between rival *dals*. This is what makes the *shawng* performances important in the pool of imageries here. In the following section I will elaborate this ambiguous space of satire and caricature, which serves, in fact, as a bridge between the earthy social satire of the Kalighat genre and the more politically articulate genre of the printed cartoons that were to emerge in the seventies.

III

Performing the Absurd: The Shawngs in Nineteenth Century Calcutta

Shawng performances were humorous, often satirical acts pieced together in a repertoire of songs and dances. It was an annual carnival, consisting of the members of the lower orders, from different caste-guilds or occupational guilds. The performers used to dress up in costume and character, and move along singly on foot or in groups, either on decorated buffalo carts or on lorries, representing a scene or a dramatic situation. The *shawngs* or pantomimes can clearly be ascribed as one of the earliest forms of dramatic expressive culture. We can trace its forms to ancient Egypt and Greece, where such performances had sought to give expression to feelings, action or environment through gestures, bodily steps and facial expressions. To begin with these were heroic or religious in nature, though gradually current social and political idioms were being incorporated, often through the evocation of the humorous vein, in the form of the comedy of manners. A gradual institutionalization of these could be seen in Rome, through the use of masks etc. The later development of pantomime tradition in the West would be the *commedia dell'arte* and subsequently Harlequin, which were essentially mocking or humorous in nature.⁶²

In Bengal, the *shawngs* were primarily connected to the festive occasions, and had a religious background or basis in the beginning, but current events increasingly started having a full share in the poetical compositions, which were sung or chanted or declaimed by the *shawng* performers. Kaliprasanna Datta in his illustrative sketch of nineteenth century Calcutta, *Hutom Penchar Naksha (1868)* had given a vivid description of *Charakmela*, a festival connected with the *Shiva* cult observed at the Bengali year-end. It was during this period that *shawng* performances were enacted amidst festive galore. The day after *Chaitra-Sankranti* is the beginning of a fresh year for the Bengalis. *Shawng* performances were meant to celebrate the initiation of a

⁶² *Encyclopaedia of Satirical Literature*, California, ABC-CLIO, Inc., 1996, p. 316.

new year. Apart from such special occasions, the *shawngs* were integral part of the *jatra* performances, and *Durga Puja* celebrations.

The *shawng* processions used to emerge from different *pallis* or localities in the Black Town of old Calcutta. During the *Charak* festivals, Calcutta's streets were crowded with these pantomime shows, their main centres being the colonies of the artisans, like the *Jeleypara* (the colony of the fishermen), the *Kansaripara* (the colony of the braziers). Different areas of Calcutta, like, *Jeliapara*, *Kansaripara*, *Ahiritola*, etc became famous for producing every year creative topical sketches, sometimes gross and even obscene to an extent, yet glistening with sharp expressions of wit and banter. The *shawngs* produced a wide variety of poems and songs, which continued mostly as floating literature.⁶³ Such songs formed an integral part of the *shawng* performances. These were known as *shawnger gaan*. The *shawngs* used to have an elaborate accompaniment of musical instruments with them to add to the dramatic performances, and the songs were an integral part of the repertoire and a crucial tool for evoking the element of humour and satire. Some of these songs were pre-composed and pre-structured into the performative apparatus, while some were spontaneously sung during the acts. Earlier composers include, Rupchand Pakshi, Gurudas Das, Nepalchandra Bhattacharya etc.⁶⁴ Later composers included stalwarts of the Bengali theatre like, *Babu Amritalal Bose*. The participators in the *shawng* by means of singing in costume or by dancing or engaging in pantomime, were conscious of engaging in a social service by bringing home to the public the new transformations that were happening in society. More often than not, the songs were directed at the upper classes, as for example, the present song, was sung in the manner of taking a crack at the obsessive hankering of the Bengali gentry for titles like '*raja*' or '*maharaja*':

Ami raja bahadur

⁶³ Bireshwar Bandopadhyay, *Bangladesher Sang Prashange*, Calcutta, 1972, p. 24.

⁶⁴ Durgadas Lahiri, *Bangalir Gaan*, Calcutta, 1312 (BS), p. 399.

Kochubaganer hujur

Jomi nai, jama nai,

Naiko amar praja,

Andorey abola kande

Kheye amar shaja

Orey baja,baja, baja,

Ta dhin ta dhin nachi ami

Kochubaganer raja.⁶⁵

(I am a noble raja, the King of the garden of trifles. I have no land, no savings, nor do I have any subjects. I punish women in my home, and make them weep. Beat the drum! Let me dance! I am the king of the garden of trifles).⁶⁶ If this song can be seen as directed against the title hankering of the rich gentry, the following song offers a critique of the desperate emulation of the young Anglicized *babu*, of the mannerisms of the White masters:

Holo ghor koli

Kare bolo boli

Samaj diya chhare khare

Shaheb shaje Bangali.

Pametom shob dei chule,

Tel makha shob gechhe bhule.

Uchit katha shob bolte gele,

Babugo diben amai galagali.

⁶⁵Bandopadyhay, op. cit. *Bangladesher Sang Prasange*, Calcutta, 1972, p. 181.

⁶⁶Lahiri, *Bangalir Gaan*, p.35

Shamaj diya chhare khare

Shaheb shaje Bangali.⁶⁷

(How can I explain what decadence has set in, dumping the society to the rocks Bengalis are trying to become Shahebs. They have stopped oiling their hair, they apply shampoo instead. If I try to tell you the truth, o *babu*, you will curse me. Dumping the society to the rocks, Bengalis are trying to become Shahebs).

There are further examples of *shawng* songs lampooning the false mendicant, the flaws of the education system, spendthriftness and consequent bankruptcy of the old aristocrats. These songs in fact continued well into the early quarters of the twentieth century, particularly due to the patronage of the likes of Amritalal Bose. In fact, the song on the titles, was used by Amritalal in his farce, *Rajabahadur* (August, 1304, BS).

I will consider here some of the visual sketches of *shawng* performances, derived from some of the contemporary periodicals. Though we do find middle class patrons, the *shawngs* were primarily a popular lower class performance. The *Hindoo Patriot*, and its editor Babu Krishnadas Pal, along with Babu Taraknath Pramanik gave immense support to these performances, and we find particularly illustrative sketches of the processions in some the editions of *Hindoo Patriot*. So there are traces of a possible joint enterprise here. But the overwhelming presence in these performances of the lower classes made these an essentially popular folk form. The edition of April 15, 1872, gives a detailed account of *shawng* procession that proceeded from the Varanasi Ghosh Street of North Calcutta, known as the famous *Kansaripara shwangs*. It describes the *shawngs* of that year's *Charak* festival caricaturing the rich and the religious.⁶⁸ A procession of *shawngs* in Calcutta during the *Charak* festival that year mentioned one that mocked the bloated rich by depicting an old man covered with flowers, with a foot affected by elephantiasis. Another *shawng* was depicted as worshipping his foot with all the piety of a devotee.

⁶⁷ Bandopadyhay, *Bangladesher Sang Prasange*, p. 183.

⁶⁸ *The Hindoo Patriot*, April 15, 1872.

This was followed by a wooden platform carried by a group of *shawngs*. On the top sat a religious guru counting the beads of his rosary and muttering prayers. As the bearers moved him around, he kept turning his lecherous eyes now to the women watching the procession from the balconies, and the next moment upwards in gestures of prayers to his God. The *Hindoo Patriot* of April 13, 1868, offers another set of imageries, of the *shawngs* caricaturing the contemporary society – "...for instance, the Indigo vat with its thousand reminiscences, the Hell with its dismal horrors, the Burning Ghat cinetrators with a posse of Municipal officers, the modern Bengali Theatre, and the concerts with their stereotyped airs, songs, and discourses."⁶⁹ We see here the presence of a nascent consciousness of the revolt against the indigo planters as well as the municipal politics and issues of the day. It is here that the complex character of the pantomimes surface. These ritual processions were often commissioned and controlled by members of the *maddhyabitto* class, particularly the editors of reputed newspapers. This contributed in the weaving in of nebulous political themes in the visual repertoire of these performances. For example, the editor of the *Hindoo Partiot* had strong stakes in the *shawngs* of Kasanripara; he had even engaged in a steady diatribe with the *Amrita Bazaar* group over the play of obscenities in the scatological metaphors in the pantomimes.⁷⁰

However, social metaphors dominate such performances. In the sketch given in the *Hindoo Patriot* of April, 1875, we see a stronger element of caricature. A wider range of social issues were incorporated. We see images of social types, a party of water plumbers with tools and instruments, an utter-seller from Persia superbly dressed, a company of bag-menders, an imitation military band playing acoustics upon pipes, drums and kettle drums, a corps of Dravidian Brahmins, a washerman washing clothes, an oilman making oil, a fisherman dallying with his sweetheart, a

⁶⁹ *The Hindoo Patriot*, April 13, 1868.

⁷⁰ Amritalal Basu, the renowned playwright, discusses this in his memoirs, *Amritalal Basur Smritikantha*. It is discussed further in Jyotishchandra Biswas, 'Amritalal O Jeleyparar Sawng', *Mashik Bashumati*, Sraban, 1336, p.30.

fast but ruined *babu* with a group of flatterers – these were some of the comic representations, all singing appropriate and humorous songs. There were then mythological representations of *Krishna*, making love to his milkmaids, of worshipping the Holy Shrine at Gaya, and of adoration to *Kartik*, both most comically conceived, etc. Some of the social customs and novelties of the day were most effectively caricatured:

...the *Kulin* marriage was exquisite. The new form of marriage under Mr. Stephen's Act was beautifully illustrated. The bridegroom was dressed in a patloon and a chapkan, the bride in the costume of a Hindustani *nautch* girl, and in top-boots, holding a book in her hands. The priest who called himself *Juggat Guru* or *Guru's Guru*, wore a straw helmet, by reason which we believe he was dubbed "the man of straw", officiated in the marriage. The ceremony was simple, and in keeping with the spirit of the age. The bridegroom declared aloud that 'he was neither a Hindoo, Mohamedan (Urdu!), Christian, Jain or Buddhist', and the bride made a similar declaration with becoming modesty. They then informed the priest that they were ready to join hands, and the latter said – amen! The bridegroom then shook hands with the bride, and imprinted a loving kiss on the bride's cheek. The ceremony concluded by a shout from the visitors – "This is the new form of marriage!" A meeting of the barbers was represented who delivered indignation speeches, bitterly complaining that while all other castes were represented in the Town Council, their important guild was not, and passed a resolution requesting the Hindoo Patriot to move the Government to appoint a representative of their body, and on being asked to return a nominee, they elected one called *Creore-fucka* or the millionaire with the ciphers on the wrong side. The sweet work of the '*Anaries*' (Honorarys) of Calcutta was also a subject of their representation sitting in judgement upon the 'immortal tub',

and gauging its delicious contents. Such were the amusements with which the Braziers of Baranussy Ghosh's Street entertained the lovers of fun and frolic on Wednesday last...⁷¹

These images in the newspapers were, however, not the only sketches of the *shawngs*, though these are undoubtedly the most available ones for researchers. We find a particularly vivid description of the *shawngs* in the *Charakmela*, in Kaliprasanna Sinha's satirical sketch *Hutom Penchar Naksha* (1868). However, here there is little description of the performative aspects of the *shawng* processions, the focus being on the festivity and peculiarity of the *Charakmela* and the manners of the *babus*. There was also a false *Hutom*, a copy of Kaliprasanna Sinha's *Hutom Penchar Naksha* formula. It used to be published in the form of small articles every Saturday, from 24 April, 1875 onwards. We see a particularly strong depiction of the *shawng* processions in one of these sketches.⁷² It describes a procession of *shawngs* of *Kansaripara*, with the performers dressed as religious mendicants, singing *prabhati bhajans* or devotional songs, casting lustful looks at the prostitutes lined up in the balconies of the houses along their route. We see in this particular sketch a depiction of a re-enactment of the famous Mohunt-Elokeshi scandal, with *shawngs* dressed up as the Elokeshi, her husband Nabin, and the corrupt Mohunt of the Tarakeswar Temple. A *jeleni*, or a woman of the fisherman caste, was seen singing a satirical song hitting at the high bride price paid at the upper class households, while she failed to get the same for her own daughter. The *shawngs* were also represented by clay models of the urban characters, caricatures, comical subjects and figures representing any scandal current at that time.⁷³ These were prepared by the *kumors*, or the clay-modellers of Kumortuli and other colonies in Calcutta, and were displayed at the fairs during the festivals, particularly the Durga Puja. The styling of

⁷¹ *The Hindoo Patriot*, April 15, 1875

⁷² 'Kansarider Swang Parban', in the series of sketches by the false *Hutom*, collected and edited by Chandi Lahiri in *Hutomer Kolkatar Naksha*, Calcutta, 1368(BS), p 9.

⁷³ Sumanta Banerji, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1989, p. 128.

the idol of *Kartika*, the son of Goddess *Durga*, became a particularly favourite topic of the *kumors*, and the moulding of his image would change in keeping with the changing fashion trends in the metropolis. For example one could see an idol fashioned on the style of the dandyish *babu*, sporting a western look, rather than the earlier traditional, classical outfits. We find a vivid sketch of such clay *shawng* idols in Kaliprasanna Sinha's *Hutom Penchar Naksha*, where the author describes such *shawngs* at the *Durga Puja*:

On either side of the image [of the Goddess] there were *shawngs* – first, the religious hypocrite, and second, the 'pigmy *nawab*'- both exquisitely done. The religious hypocrite's body was roly-polly like a cobbler's dog – his belly round like a tomato – the pigtail on his shaven head tied in a tuft – a garland, and a few golden amulets like tiny drums hanging around his neck, amulets tied around his arms – his hair and moustache died in black – dressed in a black bordered dhoti and a vest... giving sidelong glances at the housewives and whirling round his fingers the pouch of his rosary beads...The pigmy *nawab* - looks quite handsome – his skin as fair as milk with a drop of lack dye on it – his hair parted in the Albert style – like a Chinese pig – short-necked – carrying a red handkerchief and a stick – wearing a fine, transparent dhoti made in Shimle [Simulia in North Calcutta], tucked firmly behind...⁷⁴

The comic images mentioned in the above extracts, call for a deeper investigation. In keeping with Freud's emphasis on understanding the mode of evoking the comic, we might rightfully pause here to probe into the images that the *shawngs* were creating and enacting. The *shawng* performance had started as illustrations of common proverbs. We hear of a *shawng*, a live actor illustrating a proverb, during

⁷⁴ Translation from Sumanta Banerji, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1989, p. 131.

the Saraswati Puja, in February 1895.⁷⁵ The Bengali proverb - *Pathey hage ar chokh rangaye* – (literally meaning - He shits in public and yet threatens others) was depicted by the *shawng* in order to lampoon the civic authorities who themselves violated all laws and yet hauled up the man in the street for the slightest misdemeanour. Gradually, however, the *shawngs* began to embody the social changes, and manners of the metropolis in its imageries, mimicking various characters and their habits. Thus caricature was the defining element of the *shawngs* of Calcutta. We see the *shawngs* enacting a mimicry or caricature of occupations and manners, often drawing upon the physical appearance, clothing, behaviour, gestures, and also language and manners of the target groups or individuals. Techniques of exaggerations and imitation were used extensively in creating the images. We see recurring caricatures of the religious hypocrite, or the *babu*, or even at times the foreigner or the missionary. We see clay *shawng* images of the missionary preaching with a Bible in his hands.⁷⁶ Colonialism features in these performances in an indirect fashion. The images that we see in these depictions offer caricatures of largely the *babus* who emulate the western customs, or adopt the rites of their White masters. However, the caricatures go much beyond the images of the anglicized *babus*. We see the lashing out against religious hypocrisy, or even orthodox social customs, and practices like Kulin marriage etc.

The rhetoric of social change forms the predominant theme of the *shawng* imageries. At one level we see images of the vicious Kulin Marriage, and at another level, the image of the New Marriage. There is a juxtaposition here, which becomes starker when the bride and the groom appear, the latter in western attire, and the former in that of a *nautch* girl. The ceremony clearly reflects the Christian mode of marriage, ending with the solemn declaration-“amen!” This performance simply plays out the hybridity enforced by a colonial law, a measure that sought to

⁷⁵ *The Hindoo Patriot*, April 14, 1889.

⁷⁶ In a description of the Hindu Mela in Calcutta, 1873, Prankrishna Datta, *Kalikatar Itibritta*, Calcutta, 1945, p. 90.

accommodate many contrasts, through the promulgation of a secular marriages act. Incidentally, the act in question was the Act III of 1872, which was enforced by the initiative of the Brahmos, and legalized the inter-caste marriages. Likewise in the image of the poor mother lamenting on her inability to procure bride price for her daughter, like the upper classes, reflects a subaltern critique of the ills in the upper reaches of society. The new institutions in the society, for example, the Municipality in particular became a target of much parody and satire.

In the Kalighat *pats* or the *shawng* performances of the late nineteenth century, the visual metaphors and images used in evoking the comic, often became means in the hands of the poor for lampooning the upper classes. We see in these images a construction and crystallization of the images of the 'self' vis-à-vis the 'other', a tendency of defining the 'in-group' versus the 'out-group', by the standards of their respective cultures. *Shawng* performers as we have said earlier were members of the lower classes of artisans. They had a very strong bias against the members of the *bhadralok* class, who consistently protested against what they perceived as obscenity in the performances of the *shawngs*, particularly in their use of abusive expressions, and the play of the scatological devices in the performance.⁷⁷ There is thus a tendency to crystallize the upper classes, the social heads in particular, as the 'other', as opposed to the self-perception of the performers. However, there is more to what meets the eye here, and in some records we see the *shawngs* of some of the localities actually having patrons in the upper classes. Yet such instances are too rare, and in a way bring out the actual popular character of the performances. The *shawng* performances we may note here petered out due to the actual lack of patronage, although in the Swadeshi period, there was a transformation of the language of the *shawngs*, thereby seeking to incorporate it

⁷⁷ The sang who enacted the proverb stating "he shits in public and yet threatens others" was arrested, and was brought in front of the District Magistrate who reprimanded him for 'vulgarity', and imposed a fine of Rs50. There are instances of a persistent protest of the *bhadralok* class against obscenity in the popular performances, which in fact led to the abolition of such acts for quite some time, ensuing a series of protest and counter-protests from either camp.

within the larger space of the mass culture, and also, probably, use its potent power of arousing public enthusiasm.

A very interesting feature in the *shawng* performances was the play of language, which was used significantly to create the comic images, and even draw the caricature of the 'other'. For example, a peculiar form of *bazaar Hindustani* was used to mimic the up-country cobbler, or the Marwari trader, the Kabuli money-lender, or the up-country washman.⁷⁸ Language was twisted to create the comic effect in a deeply satirical vein. Thus 'Honoraries' became 'Anaries', meaning worthless fellows, in Bengali. Later, in the comic songs of Amritalal Bose, language became a crucial tool for satirizing the current events and lapses of the Government or the social heads, in a mock-heroic form. In other instances, language reflected the verbal representation of juxtaposition, a play of contrasts that evokes laughter. Thus some of the *shawng* songs incorporated both English and Bengali words, or in some cases, Bengali and Hindustani words to create the image of a hybrid, that provokes laughter. For example, I mention here a *shawng* song composed by Rupchand Pakshi. The song is composed in a mixed jargon of Bengali, mixed with English words – fashionable among sections of the educated Bengalis of that period, who spoke that hybrid to raise themselves up to the status of their British bosses, as well as to impress their less educated Bengali neighbours. The song deals with the traditional theme of Krishna's infidelity and Radha's complaints, composed in a light satirical vein:

Amare fraud korey

Kalia damn tui kothai geli?

I am for you very sorry

Golden body holo kali ...

⁷⁸ Suniti Kumar Chatterji, 'Calcutta Hindustani: A Study of a Jargon Dialect', quoted in Bireswar Bandopadhyay, *Bangladesher Sang Prasange*, Calcutta, 1972, p. 111.

Shuna re Shyam

Torey boli

Poor kiriture milk-girl

Tader breaste marili shel

Nonsense, tor naiko akkel,

Breach of contract korli.⁷⁹

(Where have you disappeared, damned Kalia, after having deceived me? My golden
hued body has turned black. Listen to me Shyam, you have hurt the poor milkmaids,
you have no sense. You have breached the contract.)

Although not from the city's lower orders, Rupchand contributed to the repertoire of
songs and verses at the *shawng* processions, particularly, the *Kansaripara shawngs*. We
might not include him within the bracket of the city's popular culture, but certainly
he formed an integral part of the comic culture of Calcutta. His songs also traversed
topics like the dowry system, on the evils of female education, on the Municipal
innovations in Calcutta, and other topical subjects.

Interestingly enough the gradual politicization of the *shawng* imageries
shows the fluidity in its thematic configurations. Although initially, these *shawng*
groups had no political affiliations whatsoever, the British government always
considered these as potential acts of political subversion. We do see subtle political
undertones even in the late 1860s, with the recurring image of the indigo planters,
and the indigo vat in the performances. Although often overtly social satirical in
nature, occasional glimpses of political critique do surface in some of the sketches we
see. More often than not, these were too subtle, and largely symbolic. With the
dawning of the era of nationalist politics, however, we can see a bolder depiction of
the political critique.

⁷⁹Lahiri, *Bangalir Gaan*, p. 143.

The *shawng* performances were peculiar by themselves. We cannot categorise them within a bracket of a subaltern cultural expression. The middle classes, particularly, newspapers like the *Hindoo Patriot*, had a stake in these, and some of the processions, for example, the *Kasaripara shawngs* were, in the late nineteenth century, funded by the editor of the *Hindoo Patriot*. In fact, when members of the *bhadralok* class protested against the play of obscenity in the *shawng* processions, and *Amritabazar Patrika* led the campaign, along with others like, the *Englishman*, *Hindoo Patriot* stood by the artisan guild that brought out the processions⁸⁰. Thus the *shawngs* embodied a performative, caricatural and social satirical form that in a ways move beyond class boundaries. We can call this a larger culture of critique through performing the targets of attack, directed against the perceived incongruities in society, and in the early twentieth century, *shawng* performances become tools in political critique as well. Caricature, as a mode to evoking the comic acts as a powerful tool in these acts. It subverts through mimicry, exaggeration, and distortion of form. In the *shawng* tradition in Calcutta, the essence of the performances was essentially dialogic. It represented a play of conflicting forms of consciousness, engaging with the perceived reality through the trope of the comic, serving as the basis of an "authentic and deep realism."⁸¹ Such imageries, whether in the *pats* of Kalighat or the pantomimes of the city streets, in the words of Bakhtin, "...did not reflect naturalistic, fleeting meaningless and scattered aspect of reality, but the very process of becoming its meaning and direction."⁸² Basic to all of them was mocking laughter, sometimes light hearted, but often pointed and taking the form of hostile derision. This is what Bakhtin sees as the 'symbolic lowering of all that was high, spiritual, ideal and abstract.'⁸³

⁸⁰ Bandopadhyay, *Bangladesher Shawng Prasange*, p. 69.

⁸¹ Discussion of the meaning and politics of the popular festive imageries feature in Mikhail Bakhtin's analysis of medieval folk laughter, in *Rabelais and His World*, translated by Hélène Islowsky, Cambridge: Massachusetts, 1984 (original in 1965).

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 211-212.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

We cannot categorise these expressions exclusively as folk culture, because the whole concept of the 'folk' gets reoriented in the urban context. While the metaphor of social change dominates these imageries, the responses to that experience cannot be seen in a monochrome. The *patua* as a rural migrant in the streets of Kalighat experienced the city differently than the various occupation groups in the Black Town, who formed the main players in the pantomimes. They were, in fact, closer to the performative groups in the city, including some of the *babus* who were involved in popular performances, like the *jatra* or even the Bengali stage, which derived much of its idiom from the popular farces and performative genres. The universal target was to attack the *bhadralok* sensibilities, by evoking the extreme. Obesity and bloatedness in the visual forms, whether in the images of the religious hypocrites or the dandy or the prostitute, in the *pats* or the *shawngs*, convey the perceived hollowness of the society embodying an earthy and bawdy satire. However, while 'popular' can be used as a category for these imageries, one needs to be careful, because in the decades of the seventies, these 'popular' expressions were imbibing in their frames idioms of the *madhhyabitto* or the middle classes, particularly in a shared anxiety about the fallouts of the colonial modernisation. These impulses of critique repeatedly strove to move beyond class. The pantomimes reflect this ambiguity within the popular. It created, so to say a grey zone between the elite and the popular, the patrician and the plebeian. Seen as cultural voices, these satirical forms need to read as existing in a dialogue with other voices. "Utterances", says Bakhtin, "are not indifferent to one another and are not self-sufficient; they are aware of and mutually reflect one another."⁸⁴ The process of constructing the self involves the hearing and assimilating of the words and discourses of others, all processed dialogically.

In the pool of imageries discussed here, in the *pats* of Kalighat or the *shwang* performances, visuality formed the crucial element in articulating the comic and in

⁸⁴ Bakhtin, 'The Problem of Speech Genres', p. 91.

forwarding a critique. However, the nebulous articulations of a political opinion that we encounter in the pantomimes, whether it be around the Municipal Acts or the indigo planters, get an altogether different embodiment with the beginning of printed cartoons in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The stage in Bengal had begun articulating a political language since the 1860s, particularly with Dinabandhu Mitra's *Nil Darpan*. With the mid-seventies the Great National Theatre began staging a number of nationalist plays that aroused the wrath of the government.⁸⁵ The following chapter will try to arrive at the beginning of a political iconography in the graphic art of Bengal. The mid nineteenth century saw the genesis of multiple currents in the 'prints' culture of the city, with printed cartoons surfacing in a prominent manner through the cartoon journals and periodicals. Such was the trend not only in Bengal, but also in the United Provinces and Maharashtra as well. My next chapter will operate within this space of humour, colonialism and print culture, and see how the visual language of pictorial satire changes with the transition from popular culture to print culture.

⁸⁵ In this context, the plays depicting the notoriety of the Indigo planters, tea planters are important. Important among these were Sarat Sarojini, Surendra Binodini etc. The latter prompted the Dramatic Performances Act of 1878.

Chapter 3

Print, Politics & Satire: The Advent of Graphic Journalism in Bengal

The 1850s in Calcutta saw the genesis of a political rhetoric in the satirical iconographies in the city. By the seventies, this crystallised into a well-articulated space of print, politics and visual imagery, leading to a fresh genre of political expression, the political cartoon. Image creating was a part of opinion building, and the public space in the city served as a space for debate and dialogue, an arena for the expression of public opinion. It is in the context of this dialogue that print surfaced as a medium with a wider audience. The printed cartoon became a device in the production and sustenance of a public discourse. Its advent, first in the English periodicals and later in Bengali, marked the beginning of graphic journalism in Calcutta. Flourishing around the same time as the popular art of the Kalighat and Battala genres, printed cartoons in the 1870s brought about a transition in the frames of reference from the social to the political.

In this chapter, I will explore how the satirical image became a site for the expression of the 'political'. My point of entry will be two specific cartoon journals of the 1870s. The first is *The Indian Charivari*, an English cartoon fortnightly; the second is the *Basantak*, a Bengali humour magazine. *The Indian Charivari* began its publication in the year 1872 as a fortnightly magazine and continued till 1880, while the *Basantak* started as a monthly in 1874, but was discontinued from 1875. They were certainly not the first ones in their respective domains. However, they turned out to be extremely significant in terms of the genre of political cartooning and pictorial journalism they created in Bengal.

Of Humour, Print & Politics: Early Cartooning in Bengal

The tradition of humorous iconography had established itself in India by the 1850s. However, the prints and were largely imports from England, or copies of the same by European artists in India. Also mostly these fell in the category of social cartoons. One of the first in these was Atkinson's *Curry and Rice: Ingredients of Our Station in India*, an album of humorous sketches of various social types in British India, the planter, the lieutenant, the colonel, the English lady etc. However, though the humour of the *Curry and Rice* had racial overtones, it did not form the body of satirical iconographies or political cartooning that was to come in the late fifties, particularly after the Revolt of 1857. It was during the 1850s that cartooning proper gained roots in India. It is not known when the first cartoon appeared in any Indian journal. The earliest newspapers to mention cartoons were the English owned *Bengal Harkaru and the Indian Gazette* in the 1850s.⁸⁶ In its issue of 30 April, 1850, the *India Gazette* wrote: "With the *Delhi Gazette* of the 24th Inst we have received an illustrated prospectus of a pictorial publication which it has intended to bring out every month...it is to contain occasional caricatures, pencillings, and sketches of the day..." Less than a month later in its issue of 25 May, 1850, the *Bengal Harkaru and Literary Gazette* (a weekly supplementary sheet) recorded: "The first number of the *Delhi Sketch Book* has reached us. The engravings are humorous and clever... it promises well."⁸⁷

With the *Delhi Sketch Book* began the tradition of political cartooning which was duly followed by the *Momus* (from 1853 onwards), *The Indian Punch* (started in 1859 in Delhi, after the Press of the *Delhi Sketch Book* was destroyed in the Mutiny of 1857). The *Delhi Sketch Book* was printed at the Delhi Gazette Press and its founder editor was John O'Brien Saunders, who became the proprietor of *The Englishman* in

⁸⁶ K. N. Sarkar, '100 Years of Indian Cartoons 1850-1950', *Vidura*, 6, 3, August 1969.

⁸⁷ *The Bengal Harkaru and India Gazette*, May 25, 1850.

1862. He was succeeded by George Wazentrieber, who edited the *Sketch Book* towards the end. After the Mutiny, they launched *The Indian Punch*. The *Bengal Harkaru and India Gazette* of 11 January, 1859 wrote:

We have to acknowledge the receipt of the first number of The Indian Punch which has just reached us. The Indian Punch takes the place of the old Delhi Sketch Book, and it is brought out under the auspices of the proprietor of that periodical who rightly thinks that a change of name is desirable, considering the events which have occurred since the last number of the Sketch Book came out- and considering the manner in which its publication was put a stop to.⁸⁸

It is to be noted here that the mutineers at the end of May 1857 had attacked the press of the *Delhi Gazette* and threw the types and the machinery into the Yamuna river. The issue of May 1857 was the last number of the *Delhi Sketch Book*. The Revolt of 1857 marks an important shift in the politics of the cartoon journal as well. As the racial suspicion and the hatred grew following the outbreak of the Mutiny, the official ideology was reflected in pictorial satire too. *The Indian Punch*, though born in a peaceful atmosphere, produced between 1859 and 1862, successive provocative cartoons against Indian political leaders, social customs, traditions, culture, religion and most particularly, against the sepoys. There was, however, no vernacular cartooning till the early 1870s, when the nationalist newspaper *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* published the first cartoon on the Municipal act of the districts. This was followed by the inception of the first cartoon journal, a bi-lingual one, in January 1874, called *Harbola Bhand*. It ceased publication within two months, but was succeeded, in the same year by the most important of the vernacular cartoon journals- the *Basantak*, a monthly that continued publication till end 1875. The tradition of English cartooning too received a fresh idiom with *The Indian Charivari*.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 11 January, 1859.

The focus of the present chapter then, is the 1870s, when the culture of cartooning gained a firmer ground in Bengal. One might ask as to what made the seventies particularly conducive to the proliferation of political cartooning. Three factors will surface here: the first would be the political pulse of the time. Bengal in the seventies, saw a period of active political mobilisation of the middle class. Agitational politics surfaced for the first time, with an increasing demand for the Indianisation of the Services and administration, the incorporation of the elective principle, particularly in the context of the Municipal governance. The press rose eminently during the seventies, to articulate the political ideas and instincts of the people, voicing grievances and shaping largely the political culture of colonial Calcutta.

The second factor that follows from the increasing politicisation of the 'native' population would be the entry of the householders or the *grihasthyas* in politics.⁸⁹ They were different from the landholding, aristocratic *bhadralok babu*- the *abhijatas*. The English clubbed them together with the middling classes or the *maddhyabittos*, and gave the conglomeration a generic term, 'the educated native' or as we shall see in the satirical images of the journals under review, the 'political *babu*'. This class becomes the target of the racist attacks of the English cartoon journals, like *The Indian Punch*, and later *The Indian Charivari*. This is again the class that produces the editors of the nationalist newspapers as well as the illustrated monthlies like the *Basantak*. Between the British and the 'educated native', there was created a circle of readership, which was particularly receptive to the political issues, and debates of the day. What had been until then a political commentary in the grim editorials of the newspapers, got a visual rendering in the cartoon tempered with brilliant wit and political invective.

⁸⁹ This theme has been discussed by Rajat Kanta Ray in *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism*, Calcutta, 1979; S. N. Mukherji, *Essays in Urban History*, Calcutta, 1993; Partha Chatterji, 'Nationalist Elite', *Nation and its Fragments*, Princeton, 1993.

Our third factor comes at this point. When we have a political culture and a class conducive to the creation and reception of the political cartoon, or the newspaper cartoon in particular, what becomes crucial is the technology that can support the mechanical reproduction of the satirical images. In the West, as well as in India, the rise of the newspaper cartoon can be traced parallel to the rise of the sophisticated printing technology.⁹⁰ Caricature had thrived in the form of wood engravings in the early nineteenth century in Bengal. But for the creation of the newspaper cartoon, Indian journalism had to wait for the improvement of the technique- the perfection of lithography and the development of wood blocks. While the exact date of the introduction of lithography in India is uncertain, successful lithographic engraving was being done in Calcutta in 1822. The artists were two Frenchmen – Messers Belnos and de Savighnac.⁹¹ Long before cartoons appeared in any Indian journal, they were circulated as lithograph prints by *The Englishman* during the days of James Gillray, Thomas Rowlandson, and Isaac Robert Cruikshank. With the development of the printing technologies, the political cartoon became prominent. The woodblocks developed in England in the mid nineteenth century, and along the same time, we see the first cartoon printed in any periodical in India. *The Delhi Sketch* and *The Indian Punch* had consolidated the position of the cartoon in India in those early days even though their drawings were offensive to the Indian sentiment. They had successfully begun the tradition of political cartooning, taking cue from *The Punch* or *The London Charivari* (since 1842).

The first cartoon in Bengali was printed in *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, on 28 February, 1872. It was called 'The Municipal Sabha', with a caption: 'The Government teaching governance to Bengalis through the Municipal Sabha. The dearth of technique and skill had delayed the emergence of cartooning in the

⁹⁰Claude Roger Marx, *Graphic Art of the Nineteenth Century*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1962; Shikes, Ralph, *The Indignant Eye: The Artist as Social Critic in prints and Drawings from fifteenth century to Picasso*, Boston, 1969; Nikhil Sarkar, *Jokhon Chhapakhana Elo*, Calcutta, 1978.

⁹¹Graham Shaw, *Printing in Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1981; Nikhil Sarkar, *Jokhon Chhapakhana Elo*, Calcutta, 1987.

vernacular press. *Amrita Bazaar's* attempt was thus congratulated profusely by its contemporary native press. The *Hindoo Patriot* wrote: "We are glad to observe that the *Amrita Bazaar* proposes to supply in a small way the place of a Bengali Punch. In its last issue, it gives a cartoon of a Mofussil Municipal Commission. It represents the Government teaching self-governance. It is full of meaning. We wish our contemporary success in this new line."⁹² This trend persisted for a long time, and *Amrita Bazaar* remained the pioneer in introducing cartooning in the Bengali press.

The seventies saw the proliferation of political imageries, in periodicals and newspapers, both English and vernacular, providing visual articulation of a germane nationalism. However, if we are to draw a lineage of graphic satire and caricature in Bengal, there are two parallel traditions that require critical consideration. The first of these would be the literary and performative cultures of caricature and satire, the already existent pool of imageries that found graphic representation through the culture of cartooning. Indigenous cultures of humour and satire had proliferated in both literature and the performative arts. Apart from the Kalighat pats and the pantomimes that have been discussed in the previous chapter, one also sees the tradition of satirical songs and poems in the *Bolan* songs of Western Bengal, the *Gambhira* tradition of North Bengal. The second tradition would be the steady flow of ideas from the cartooning traditions of the West, particularly in our context, the traditions of political cartooning in Britain. An understanding of these will help us draw the lineage of the pictorial journalism that we see in the 1870s.

II

The Indian Charivari & the Basantak: Picturing Politics

The Indian Charivari was started by Colonel Percy Wyndham, an American serving in the British army in India. *The Indian Charivari* was renowned for the quality of cartoons, satirising the foreign policy, economic regulations as well as caricatures of the Governor Generals and prominent Indian social leaders. In 1879, after the colonel

⁹² *The Hindoo Patriot*, 14 March, 1872.

transferred to Burma, the control was passed on, but after the magazine could not be continued due to financial constraints after 1880. *Basantak* started publication from 1 January, 1874, just one month after the appearance of the first Bengali cartoon magazine, *Harbola Bhand*. *Harbola Bhand* had started publication on January 1874 too. From February 1874, it started calling itself *The Indian Punch*, and by the third edition, it was being called 'Monthly Anglo-Vernacular Illustrated Journal'. But had to be stopped, soon to be taken over by the *Basantak*. Prannath Datta the editor of *Basantak*, was an activist of the Municipal Movement in Calcutta. The main demand of the movement was the active participation of the Indians in Calcutta Corporation. *Basantak* contained cartoons on the mismanagement of the city, its thoughtless implementation of arbitrary laws and various caricatures on social issues. It was used as a tool to justify the cause of the Municipal Movement. The illustrator of the periodical was Girindrakumar Datta, an activist of the movement. Though *Basantak* continued for merely two years, it remains an important document for studying satirical iconography in Bengal.

Both *The Indian Charivari* and the *Basantak* placed themselves in the lineage following from *The London Punch* or the *London Charivari*. The title pages of both show remarkable similarities with that of *The London Punch*, in the illustrations and pictorial styles, only grafted in an Indian context. But in both cases, we see a particular construction of an identity that had not only claimed a lineage from *The London Punch*, but also from the indigenous tradition of the *vidushaka* or the clown. Humour is impersonated through the images of *Punchius Charivari* or Mr. Punch and the protagonist *Basantak* in the magazines. Mr. Charivari presents himself as belonging to the 'caste' *vidushaka*⁹³, so does *Basantak* in his introduction in the first issue of the first year.⁹⁴ The *avatar Basantak* is addressing his audience at the outset, claiming descent from the ancient *basantak* a or court jester of the Hindu courts or the Sanskrit *kavya* tradition. He places himself within the traditional fold as a poor

⁹³ *The Indian Charivari*, 1872, Preface written by the editor, Col. Percy Wyndham.

⁹⁴ *Basantak*, Year I, I, p. 6.

Brahmin; and his audience, he says, is a curious breed of neither Hindu, nor Muslim, they are what he calls 'Shaheb Bangali'. In a satirical construction of identities, *Basantak* placed himself in juxtaposition with the anglicized Bengalees, between modernity and tradition. Beneath the rhetoric of an apology for being traditional, he says that his audience might brand him as 'an old fool' seeing his attire of a dhoti and sacred thread, but he can tear away the thread and join the ranks of the Brahmos; as far as the manuscript he is shown carrying in his hand in the title page is concerned, he can bind it into a book, which he is sure would make it more acceptable to his 'modern' audience.⁹⁵

Humour too is conceptualised in a particular manner in each of the magazines in question. The proprietor of *The Indian Charivari*, Sir Percy Wyndham summarises the purpose of his magazine in the Prospectus at the beginning of the first issue:

It has been frequently remarked among the European community of the Glorious East, and of this its Metropolis in particular, that no literary vehicle exists by which the faults and follies of our public men may be satirically exposed, and our own various grievances humorously ventilated...It is our purpose...of supplying once a fortnight an illustrated paper, reviewing current topics and matters of interest in a playful spirit - shooting folly as it flies, 'nothing extenuating, nor setting down ought in malice...contributions of wit, humour and fancy are solicited, but it must be distinctly understood that *The Indian Charivari* will not admit anything savouring of personality, its object being rather to promote hilarity and dissipate all depressions of spirit and ill-humour. We intend to laugh at and

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-10.

with our small world around us and hope they will return us the compliment.⁹⁶

The motto of the *Charivari* was, 'If humour be my folly, let satire be my song.' *Basantak*, on the other gives a rhetorical presentation of the purpose and target of its humour. Many of the literary pieces in the *Basantak* develop through the dialogue between *Basantak* himself and his wife, *basantika*, more in the English burlesque tradition of Punch and Judy. We can retrieve the essence of his humour through one of the conversations where *Basantak* is telling his wife why he in a month he had married twice before. In a curious yet deeply meaningful monologue he says, that his first wife was named *chirahashini* or 'the ever smiling one', but she died out of endless laughter. The second wife was called *katubhashini* or 'the foul mouthed one' and when her ill words turned peoples' wrath against *Basantak*, she left him. Finally, he has married *basantika*, a perfect balance of mirth and ire, whose laughter or anger does not harm anybody, but yet succeeds in stating the point. His present wife, *basantika*, he says, is the eternal flow of satire and wit.⁹⁷ We can clearly read into this an exposition of the kind of humour *Basantak* as a magazine pictured for itself, neither aimless banter, nor scathing attacks, but a harmony of poignant wit and satire against the lapses around. *Basantika* is seen telling *Basantak* that he should present before the people an effective satire on the social ills, and never indulge in personal attacks; the *Punch* in London should be his inspiration in this task. Whether the *Charivari* or the *Basantak* adhered to what they had professed in their respective introductions is something we will explore in the following section in a more in-depth study of their images and texts.

In the *Charivari* and the *Basantak* we see a wide range of issues being grafted on to the form of graphic satire, and more often we see common issues being addressed, either in a similar ideological vein or differently. Before I move on to a

⁹⁶ *The Indian Charivari*, Prospectus, Vol. 1, Nov. 1872, p.12.

⁹⁷ *Basantak*, Year I, I, pp. 12-14.

thematic discussion around the issues raised in the journals under review, it will be crucial to reiterate that comic representation of subjects through caricature and pictorial satire embodies more than the immediate text. There is a certain visual economy that goes into the making of condensed images like cartoons. They embody within their frames a politics and an active engagement with lived experience. In some of the cartoons I will discuss in the following section, even social satire has a distinct political undertone about it. Thus we must look out for the political vision that articulates the visual economy in cartooning. More importantly, behind the making of satirical images, there is a politics in production. In this connection the political ideology of the editor or the publishing house is very crucial. We need to break down some of the ideological determinants and investigate whether the politics of the image took a conservative or a liberal stand in the contemporary socio-political milieu. As the study will try to reveal, the images as well as the politics they contained were multi-layered and can be read at different levels.

III

The Text in the Image: Understanding the Idioms of Representation

In this section I propose to take up some of the satirical images of *The Indian Charivari* and the *Basantak*, for a close scrutiny and analysis; this will take us closer to the ethos and politics of the journals on one hand, and give us a perspective over the culture of pictorial satire that was developing through the last quarters of the nineteenth century. Some of the prominent and recurring issues of the 1870s, which found graphic articulation in the journals, could be broadly classified around a set of themes: municipal politics, the Bengal Famine of 1873-74, issues of social reform, economic policies of the Raj, etc. A significant theme running through the comic journals was the rise of a 'political class', quite different from the aristocratic elite of the fifties and the sixties and the increasing pressure from the new 'political *babu*' for the Indianisation of the Services, and greater scope for self-government. The cartoons offer representations of the political attitude of the period around these issues.

The analysis of humour magazines and satirical art calls for a specific methodology in treating the art - its form, content and politics. The idiomatic and rhetorical aspect becomes very important here because the images become the text in these cases. The language that we need to understand is therefore the visual language of the image. Often, as in the journals under review the cartoons are supplemented by satirical poems etc. But in most cases the cartoons themselves become condensed comments or narratives of events or of issues. To begin with, what is required therefore, is a study of the idioms of pictorial representation. As we see the images, some of the questions that we might pose would be, who is being targeted in creating satire, what is the author position and how is satire being articulated i.e. what is giving a political event or a social attitude the comic or serio-comic rendering. What a cartoonist uses as his tools or tropes in creating satire in art, and what he crafts with those will reveal his own location or the location of the journal that is producing them. This will become clear when we approach some of the cartoons of *The Indian Charivari* and the *Basantak*.

To begin with, let us focus on the title pages of *the Charivari* and the *Basantak*. The title page illustrations are very significant in framing the location of the agent of humour. They became the carriers of the essence of the magazine's identity, seeking to locate the source of humour and satire in the contemporary social context. Between the cover pages of *The Indian Charivari* and the *Basantak*, we see a similarity in form. In fact, a look at both the covers makes it clear that the *Basantak* was inspired at least in its form from *The Indian Charivari*. Both showed the protagonists at the centre surrounded by illustrations and illuminations on all sides. *The Indian Charivari* appeared in 1872 complete with the Indian version of Richard Doyle's famous *London Punch* cover. It was created by Alfred Thomson and showed a turbaned Mr. Punch of Calcutta seated on an elevated platform with a royal aura, smoking a hookah. He is being fanned by tuskers and dusky oriental maidens are entertaining him. The cover also shows a baby Punch being fed pale ale by an Indian nanny. Across the gilded frame the title '*The Indian Charivari*' is strung, held on both sides by

a stork and a monkey clad in Indian attire. Mr. Punch sets himself in a typically oriental canvas, seeking evidently so, to locate himself symbolically in an Indian context as the Indian version of *Punch* or *The London Charivari*.



Fig. 9: Title page: *The Indian Charivari*

A similar lay out is seen in the *Basantak*, with the protagonist, an obese Brahmin who calls himself '*Basantak* ', evidently a transmogrification of Punch, seated at the centre, leering at the audience. He is clad in a dhoti and a loosely tied cloth on his head. In one hand he holds his sacred thread and in the other a bunch of manuscripts. All around him are scenes from the daily life of Calcutta, broken carriages, drunken *babus*, public orators, and courting English couples. There are mountains in the background, with the title *Basantak* sprawled across it. A crow can be seen perched on *Basantak's* shoulder. The presence of the crow on the shoulder of

the obese Brahmin in fact reminds of a similar layout in a Kalighat pat of the contemporary period depicting a caricature of a Brahmin with a crow sitting on his head. The symbolism speaks of a juxtaposition of the



Fig. 10: Title page: *The Basantak*

sacredness of the image of the Brahmin, with the profanity and the crudeness associated with a crow. The presence and juxtaposition of both suggests a hint of absurd and crude humour. In the following sections I will explore some of the cartoons of *The Indian Charivari* and the *Basantak*, and see how the pictorial embodiment of humour, politics and social commentary was effected. I have divided the imageries into sections, based on certain topical modalities.

IV

'The Baboo's Progress or what we are coming to': Picturing the Political Babu

The Indian Charivari excelled in creating stereotypes of the native character. What drew the ultimate wrath of the *Charivari* was the 'lobbying, petitioning, protesting political *babu*'. The target of scathing attack seems to be the Classical *Babu*, the candidate for the Subordinate Executive Service. The political *babu* has been described in various ways, as a 'jabbering swell', who can begin to chatter and jabber in the most affable manner, a 'curious mixture of conceit and sedition', in which he indulges. On the occasion of the Vienna International Exhibition of 1873, the magazine proposed sending a live *babu* as an exhibit. He was to be labelled as a 'talking machine', which mixed conceit with sedition and took pride in vilifying his rulers to whom he owed his existence.

A significant cartoon named "The *Babu's* Progress or What we are coming to"⁹⁸ (Figure 11), reflects exactly the discomfort of the comic magazine around the native demand for the Indianisation of the Services, and greater representation in the administration of the country. We see in this cartoon a composite imagery of the *babu* in various roles. There is a complete subversion of the colonizer-colonized equation and we see the *babu* taking over of the location, identity and power of the master- as a graduate in the university, as a judge trying a White in the court, as the Commander in the army, as the Lord Chancellor and so on. His carriage is being drawn by Whites, his boots being polished by his erstwhile masters. He strolls and dances with European ladies, in an awkward 'un- gentlemanly' manner. Finally the cartoonist creates in the centre of the canvas, the image of the future '*babu king*', looming large against a pitch-dark background, symbolising essentially an impending doom. Europeans are paying lengthy tributes to His Excellency, while the dark *babu king* dominates the British throne in an almost awkward grandeur.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, March 3, 1873, p. 110.



Fig. 11: The *Babu's Progress*

(*The Indian Charivari*, March 3, 1873)

The Indian Charivari took pot shots at the nationalist newspapers that attacked the British monopoly of the ICS. The '*Babu Ballads*' published following the challenge posed to the ICS by Surendranath Bannerji wove its theme around the ambitions of educated Bengalees of competing for the ICS examination. Nationalist newspapers like the *Hindoo Patriot* and the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*, that voiced the political aspirations and demands of the natives, were wittily parodied as the '*Hindoo Howler*' and the '*Scurrilous Bazar Patrika*'. In particular the *Charivari* was infuriated at the

prospect of more Bengalees becoming District Collectors, and Army Generals. The quintessential *babu* was represented in the person of *Babu Bhuggobutty Bose MA*, who epitomises the 'Native Political Rhetorician'. In a series of 'purported' letters of the *Babu* appearing throughout all the issues of the *Charivari*, the career of *Babu Bhuggobutty Bose* was traced from his graduation till he becomes Maharaja, MA, MD, Ph. D, etc. Right in the first issue of the *Charivari* we are introduced to the *Babu*, who aspires to make it big in the state services. *Charivari* published 'How our *Babu* Rode "Twelve Miles at a Rapid Pace"⁹⁹ and dedicated it as the following - 'We gladly publish the following interesting communication in the interests of the Civilisation Enlightenment and the rule of India for the Indians". *Babu Bhuggobutty Bose* aspires to be a Deputy Magistrate like his uncle. Therefore, he resolves 'to perform patriotism and enlightened *babu* business and get post under beneficent Sarkar Bahadur'. He goes to school, and very soon shuns his mother tongue to learn the manners of the English. Next he starts writing letters to the Editor of *Hindoo Patriot* (parodied in the *Charivari* as the *Hindoo Howler*), and by cheating he passes all examinations upto MA at the Calcutta University. This is what he thought would make him fit for the position of a Deputy Magistrate and Collector, and Sarkar Bahadur and Star of India. His attempts are, however, wasted in vain, with the arrival of Chota Lord Sahib from England. The Lord Sahib mentioned here is Sir George Campbell, the Lt. Governor of Bengal, who had introduced gymnastics for *babu* to make them physically fit to join the Services. *Bhuggobutty Bose* is seen mourning that when he went to the new Chota Lord, begging for good post, he said, "No, you must ride twelve miles at rapid pace, and stand on your head, and then get Deputy Babuship". *Bose* quotes Milton, Shakespeare, even Kalidas, and Sanskrit slokas, but all stand in vain, and Chota Sahib forces him to ride a horse, and after many frustrated attempts, he finally decides that he would rather write 'beautiful article in *Hindoo Howler* and *Scurrilous Bazaar Patrika*, and please Exeter Hall Sahibs; and after sometimes Brutal Anglo Saxons would go away, and leave Beloved

⁹⁹ *The Indian Charivari*, Nov 15, 1872, p. 9.

Native Land to Self Government, and then Bengali *Babu* Lord Sahib should not make his nephews ride twelve miles at a rapid pace, and stand on head, but 'shall take rupees and get too much abdominous like previous former ties'. The language of this piece is a stark parody of *Babu* English, with absolutely no sense of grammar, but full of high sounding terms and phrases. There is a scathing parody of *babu* English all over the journal in satirical rhymes and articles. Parallel to the comic portrayal of the *babu* there is also a persistent anxiety about the Government including more and more natives in the administration. The *Charivari* was very much against the Government's policies of incorporating the natives in administration, and time and again this was reflected in their cartoons.

Creation of stereotypes and a comedy of manners form one of the most widely used tools in evoking satire through visual images. As seen here, social types are chosen, or even constructed, through whose actions satire is articulated. The creation of condensed imagery and the articulation of humour or satire through it, in fact, presupposes a construction of not merely identities or 'stereotypes', but also a certain class politics. The history of caricature and cartoons is, in fact, intimately connected with the way one class or a social group looked at another. Cartooning thus can be seen as the art of disapproval and complaint. This element is present in both the journals we will discuss here. A curious feature that often placed the Indian and the English cartoonists within the same paradigm was the culture of satire on the Indian character. From the earlier traditions of creating humorous images of the Anglo-Indian lifestyle, the English cartoonists eventually turned to caricaturing the native character. The vernacular cartoonists too, especially in case of the *Basantak* turned their critical eye towards their own society and created caricatures of the native character, particularly a parody of the elite nationalist politics. Caricature thrives on a shared culture of 'us' versus 'them', and this is what makes the art intensely political. What makes the positions of two differ is the strong racial politics of the English comic magazines.

In a stark racist cartoon, 'The British Lion and the Bengali Ape'¹⁰⁰(Figure 12), shows the editor of *Hindoo Patriot* clad in a *kurta*, and carrying an umbrella, poking fun at a portrait of the British Lion, with 'Administrative Report', written on it. The ape says, "Therein the Lion has painted itself". The lion had been observing the ape now pounces on him, saying, "I'll paint you, you chattering Jackanapes!" There was a tendency to draw a parallel between the Irish and the

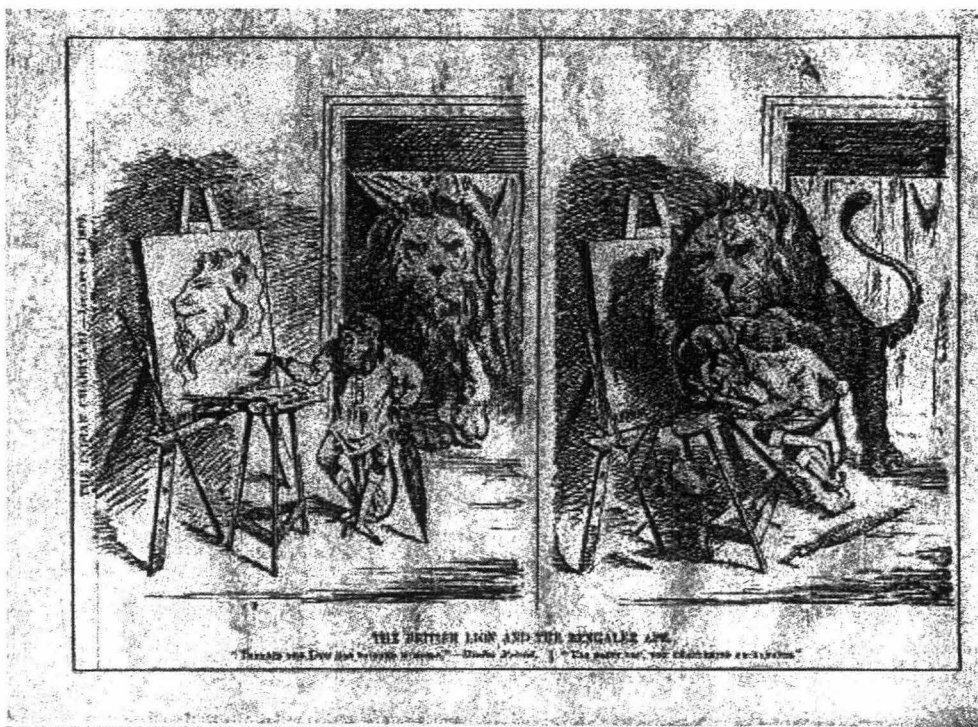


Fig. 12: The British Lion and the Bengali Ape

(The Indian Charivari, Jan. 24, 1873)

Bengalis when it came to the political protestations. The Bengali *babu* however, became more a buffoon because of his habit of aping the English. The overtly racist undertone of these cartoons cannot be ignored. The images of the natives are all pitch black. It 'is next to impossible for a native of Bengal to look pleased because he

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p. 69.

always looks black', wrote *The Indian Charivari*.¹⁰¹ The racial bias was fanned all the more by the vociferous nature of the Bengali middle class, reflected through the associations and primarily through the native press. The racism of *The Indian Charivari* needs to be located within the larger politics of the English comic magazines India, particularly in the aggravated racial malice of the post Mutiny years that had come to define the predominant attitude of the British towards the natives. The editor of *The Indian Charivari*, Sir Percy Wyndham was a British Knight and a cavalry officer of the American Civil War. He came to Calcutta in 1866 from New York and started the comic magazine *The Indian Charivari*. The *Charivari* actually followed the line of its precursor, *The Indian Punch* in its politics of critiquing the natives in all spheres, particularly in their political protestations. The English owned magazines viewed the Indians from the lofty heights of Victorian moral certainty, operating from a shared ideology of the essential 'otherness' of the natives, and the 'civilising mission' of the British Raj. The Revolt of 1857 only made things worse. The British public opinion both at home and in India, fed on the events of 1857. The politics of the English comic magazines was also a reflection of the political reality and conflict of the various pressure groups in England, also between them and the Viceroy in India, about which Indians to encourage for stable government in India. The Tories stood for a firm paternal rule, an alliance with the landed magnates and the zamindars, particularly so after the Revolt. The Liberals on the other hand stood for rule through the consent of the western-educated. A complex dialogue between the different English and Indian pressure groups informed the politics of the comic magazines, with the latter supporting the aristocracy against the western educated.¹⁰²

The iconography of a 'political' *babu* politics surfaces in *Basantak* also, particularly in the cartoons on the Municipal Politics of the 1870s. The *Basantak* right

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, Jan. 24, 1873, p. 73.

¹⁰² Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations*, Cambridge, 1994.

from its inception had a clear political agenda. Its editor Prannath Datta was an integral part of the municipal movement of the mid 1870s, and his journal acted as the official organ of the ratepayers in the Municipal debate between the aristocracy and zamindars on one hand, and the *grihasthya* or the householders on the other. The *Basantak* satirizes against the predominance of the *abhijatas* or the aristocrats in Municipal politics, particularly the Justices of Peace. The seventies saw the incorporation of the electoral principle in Municipal politics, following the reforms



Fig. 13: Varaha Avatara

(*Basantak*, Year I, 1)

by the Governor General Sir George Campbell. The political rhetoric of *Basantak* became an extension of the bid for Municipal reform, and the entry of the ratepayers

in local self-government.¹⁰³ A range of cartoons in *Basantak* were devoted to satirical attacks on the Corporation and its developmental measures in the city which, according to Prannath and his group were not doing any good to the common man. During the years between 1874 and 1875, the *Basantak* published a number of cartoons, which dealt with the Municipal matters in great detail. The politics of the *Basantak* becomes clear in one cartoon, where Sir Stewart Hogg, Chairman of the Corporation and the Police Commissioner is a trickster who makes millions vanish in the name of improvement¹⁰⁴. In another, he is the Varaha Avatara or the Boar Incarnation of Vishnu¹⁰⁵ (Figure 13). In this satirical version of the Hindu pantheon, the tusks of the deity hold up various boons, tramways, drainage, a modern public market; while one of his arms wields the rod of authority, the police. He tramples under his feet the citizens of Calcutta; on one side a Bengali Justice of Peace pays homage to him, while on the other hand, the Lt. Governor General Sir Richard Temple stands in obedience. The *asura* or the demon whom the Varaha Avatara is possibly slaying reflects the image of a strong and fighting native population, and this imagery could be taken to reflect the construction by the *Basantak* of a strong resisting image of the natives, vis-à-vis the authority of the British governance. We can read into this imagery a dormant nationalistic identity, which would become sharper in the later cartoons. *Basantak* upheld the discrepancy in Bengal Administration in one cartoon where an ailing Bengal is seen reclining on the sick bed; she is starved, weak and seeks help from the family physician, the Lt. Governor General, Sir George Campbell and the consulting physician, the Governor General, Lord Northbrook¹⁰⁶. As Bengal says that her children are starving, and she needs food, the doctors are trying to apply all sorts of remedies in the form of Police expenses, road cess, education cess, etc. to cure her.

¹⁰³ Rajat Kanta Ray, *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism*, Calcutta, 1979, p.34.

¹⁰⁴ *Basantak*, Year I, 1, pp. 12-13.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, Year I, 10, pp. 124-125.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, Year I, 2, pp. 16-17.

The Famine that Never Occurred

In the years 1874-1875 a famine had struck the Darbhanga district of the Bengal Presidency. But the famine was actually a construct of the Lt. Governor's fears of an impending famine that never really occurred. A huge expenditure was incurred in importing excess amounts of rice from Rangoon to meet the artificial scarcity. A



Fig. 14: Bihar under a Terrible Famine

(Basantak, Year II, 2)

huge list of notables, rajas, and British servants were prepared who were promised remuneration and titles on adding to the famine relief. Extensive reports were

written on the famine, and the Government of Sir Richard Temple created the famous Famine Minutes that wrote about the detail famine relief process. However, since in actuality there was no crop failure at all, the excess imported rice, which was anyway of a bad quality had to rot. People refused to buy them, but the government forced them at last to stomach all the excess rice. The *Basantak* unleashed a bitter assault on the faulty governance of the 'constructed famine'. One cartoon in the *Basantak* stands out in particular in this connection. The title said 'Bihar under a terrible famine'¹⁰⁷ (Figure 14). The cartoon is drawn in three layers. At the top, the Lt. Governor General of Bengal, Sir George Campbell and the Governor general, Lord Northbrook are seen pouring 12000 sacks of rice to the lower layers where a teeming multitude of rural poor are desperate for food. Hoards of men wearing aristocratic clothes, possibly rajas, and dignitaries, are supplying the sacks of rice to the two. However, almost all the rice falls into the gaping mouth of an obese man who is seated between the poor and the Governors, with only a few sprinkles going down to the lowest strata where the hungry multitude lies. This obese man is wearing Indian clothes, but also sports a hat, signifying a hybrid identity. Most importantly, he is carrying sheathes of papers that say 'Establishment Charges'. This cartoon directly shows how the Government relief measures in the famine stricken provinces feeds into the ever-soaring establishment charges, which are eaten up by the bureaucracy. The hybrid image (reflected through the clothing) of the obese man in the middle suggests the collaboration between the British and the Native chiefs in the so called relief operation, where the relief workers were lured into the task by the offers of titles and remuneration. The mismanagement of the official famine relief becomes stark in another cartoon, the '23rd Special Dispatch from the Famine Districts'¹⁰⁸ (Figure 15), where English officials force-feed overfed candidates, while the rest of the population starves. The caption reads: 'Beggar: Your Honours, I really

¹⁰⁷ *Basantak*, Year II, 2, pp. 28-29.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, Year I, 8, pp. 16-17.

can't manage any more. Their Honours: We are afraid that won't do, someone must finish so much rice." The trope of obesity recurs in the cartoons of *The Indian*



Fig. 15: 23rd Special Dispatch from the Famine Districts

(*Basantak*, Year I, 8)

Charivari as well. In a cartoon Sir Richard Temple is showing an obese village family to a set of famine relief officers, saying, "Gentlemen, before dispensing with your services, I am happy to display to you the most satisfactory results of your exertions (Figure 16).¹⁰⁹ The *Charivari* wrote a humorous poem on the 'Famine that never happened'. The *Charivari* had a number of serial articles on the Famine, titled, 'Facts from the Famine', 'Lay on the Famine', etc. The tax payers had to pay for the famine relief work expenses, while those who were summoned for the relief work got titles

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid*, October 30, 1875, p. 107.

in return of their services. A seething critique of Famine Governance can be seen in the satirical articles written in the *Charivari*. One such article begins with an assault



Fig. 16: Finis Coronat Opus

(*The Indian Charivari*, 31 October, 1874)

on George Campbell, the Lieutenant Governor General, who had almost manufactured the famine, thereby patrolling enormous resources to meet the emergency. The article says,

There is a tide in the affairs of men which, taken in the dry weather, leads them to make famines. This tide, strange to say is not under lunar influence; it is governed more by the ruler in the theoretically afflicted part. If the hero of the hour appears to be ambitious, a good spring tide famine may be expected, resulting in Railway, Reports and reckless expenditure...there is no real excitement in a famine unless it results in a brilliant report chiefly devoted in showing what

a swell the boss is, and concluding with a list of the noble an the brave who saved the people from death and destruction for the trifling remuneration of Rs 300 per mensem and upwards extra pay.¹¹⁰

In another cartoon, Sir Richard Temple, shown as the manager of a theatre company, is announcing before an audience, "Ladies and Gentlemen, I have to announce the speedy withdrawal of the popular farce "Indian Famine" He has a copy of the Budget tucked behind his pocket, and in the background, Sir George Campbell is shown peeping from behind the curtain.¹¹¹

In 1876 came the Black Pamphlet that proved by figures that not only was there no famine, but that if the be-praised officials had done their first duty, and made proper enquiries, they should have known that there was no chance of a famine. The *Charivari* asserts "it is well enough known to our readers that *Charivari* was never one of the believers in the Bengal famine. Sir Richard Temple has given to the world in his notorious Famine Minutes, statements to show that but for the exertions of 500 gentlemen whose names are mentioned therein as having specially distinguished themselves, and the lavish outlay of public money, millions must have died." When the Black Pamphlet was published, *Charivari* made a cartoon that showed the Ghost of Ceaser with the 'Black Pamphlet' (that carried the facts/reports on all the falsities of the Bengal famine) haunting the Lieutenant Governor General Sir Richard Temple, shown in the cartoon as Brutus. A tapering lamp called the Bengal Government, burns beside him. The caption quotes from Shakespeare- the Ghost holding the Black Pamphlet Temple-" Brutus (Sir R-T-e) How ill this taper burns! Temple exclaims- Ha! Who comes here?¹¹²

Looking at these one can say that though the generic hatred and attack on the 'political *babu*' prevailed, *The Indian Charivari* certainly had more to offer than the

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, March 19, 1875, p. 63.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, September 12, 1874, p. 71.

¹¹² *Ibid*, March 31, 1876, p. 79.

obvious apparent racial attack. Racial acrimony could only be a part of the overall political status of *The Indian Charivari*. A closer look at the magazine and its humour reveals a highly fractured political culture. This becomes clear in the cartoons on governance and social reform that were being published in the issues of the *Charivari*. Browsing through these, what immediately strikes the researcher is the highly critical attitude of *The Indian Charivari* towards the Government, and the Municipal politics of the day. This is what makes *The Indian Charivari* closer to a vernacular cartoon journal like the *Basantak*. We see in both the journals a consistent critique of the policies of the Governor Generals, right from Lord Northbrook to Lord Lytton as well as the Lt. Governors of Bengal, Sir George Campbell, and particularly his successor Sir Richard Temple. In two specific issues, the faulty official governance of the Bengal Famine of 1874, and the contemporary Municipal politics, the attack becomes scathing, and can be seen reflected in the cartoons.

VI

Picturing Reform

The cartoons in the *Basantak*, while embodying a nascent political identity, were extremely critical of the contemporary social reform, particularly among women's reform. In particular, the hostility was targeted towards the Brahmos. The Brahmos were persistently attacked by the *Basantak* in what seemed an all out offensive against the progressive reformism of the Brahmos, particularly under Keshub Chandra Sen. In a cartoon titled, 'What changes have happened after the establishment of The Society for the Prevention of Obscenity'¹¹³(Figure 17). The tradition iconography of Kali has been subverted to show how reformism was seeking to transform everything, including religion, to usher in the doctrines of modernity. In conventional iconography, the naked Goddess Kali with dishevelled hair stands on the god Shiva. In the cartoon, however, she is shown wearing a blouse, a pleated full length skirt and a hat with feathers attached to it, in the manner

¹¹³ *Ibid*, Year I, 3, pp. 40-41.

of the memsahibs. Her hair is arranged by a net, and in her four hands, instead of the usual *ashtras* or weapons, she is carrying, a carnation, an umbrella, a hand fan and a



Fig. 17: Society for the Prevention of Obscenity

(*Basantak*, Year I, 3)

lady's handbag. Lord Shiva, who in the Hindu iconography wears only a tigerskin, is shown wearing a pair of tweed trousers with braces. The entire practice of emulating Victorian clothing, by the native ladies, specially the Brahmikas, and the campaign for modest female attire has been mocked in this cartoon. The conservative attitude of the *Basantak* vis-à-vis social reform and women's liberation has been reflected more starkly in the cartoon where a well dressed Hindu lady is seen sitting outside the kitchen in an armchair, reading a book, while her husband is seen lighting the fire in the kitchen. The smoke from the kitchen irritates the wife, and she says in

irritation: "Can't you close the kitchen door while lighting the fire?"¹¹⁴ (Figure 18) This cartoon tries to drive home the almost banal effect of women's education. The *Basantak* as we can see through these cartoons were staunchly against the new morality propounded and practiced by the Brahmos.



Fig. 18: Wife: "Can't you close the door while lighting the fire?"

(*Basantak*, Year II, 9)

The attitude of the *Basantak* towards the 'modernisation' of women, however, needs to read against a wider system of gender perception during the late nineteenth century. Partha Chatterji divides the 'period of social reform' in the nineteenth century into two phases: in the first phase, the Indian reformers looked to the colonial power to bring about reforms in the traditional institutions and customs, through state action; in the latter phase, he says, "...although the need for change

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, Year II, 9, pp. 109-110.

was not disputed, there was a strong resistance to allowing the colonial state to intervene in matters affecting 'national culture'.¹¹⁵ Chatterji sees this second phase as the period of nationalism, when the social space came to be demarcated into the *ghar* and the *bahir*, the home and the world. The 'inner' world or the family was seen as 'the inner spiritual space', the site for the preservation of tradition, where the colonial penetration was prohibited. The nationalist perception of the social role of gender too was fitted, according to Chatterji, within this dichotomy of *ghar* and *bahir*: the family as the domain of the woman, who was to be the *adhara* or the carrier of tradition, and the *bahir* as the domain of the male. Any penetration of the 'inner' by the 'outer' world was perceived as a threat of 'modernization', destined to lead to a collapse of the family structure. The theme of the threatened Westernisation of women recurs in almost all expressions of satire, whether in literature, images or performance. The archetypal evil woman of these times was not the amoral or the economically independent one, but one who inspired by modern education had given up household chores, and adopted western clothes, giving up sacred ritual objects, the conch shell bangle, the ritually pure fabric or sindur.¹¹⁶ Satire on the 'New Woman', through cartoons becomes a powerful medium for such ideological propagations. Whether it be the new items of clothing, the blouse, the petticoat, the shoes, the use of Western cosmetics, or the reading of novels or needlework, every action of the woman, which sought to divert from the prescribed idea of the tradition or the *ghar* was subjected to ridicule, the suggestion being that the Westernised woman was fond of luxury and cared little for the well-being of the home. Thus in the image of the wife asking her husband not to disturb her with the smoke from the kitchen, she is shown holding a novel, one of the perceived threats to the stability of the traditional order. An echo of this we see in the late nineteenth century *bhadralok* literature, expressing a sense of crisis and anxiety around the threat posed to the

¹¹⁵ Partha Chatterji, 'Whose imagined community?', in *The Partha Chatterji Omnibus*, Calcutta*

¹¹⁶ Tanika Sarkar, 'Nationalist Iconography: The Image of Woman in Nineteenth Century Bengali Literature', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 November, 1987.

institutions of home and family, by the colonial rule: "A momentous external condition has been imposed upon us. We are now compelled to adjust to those alien conditions. But how can these external ways be allowed to enter our homes? Would that not destroy our inner identity?"¹¹⁷ This reflects the voice of a puritanical and inward looking literati with a reformist agenda, dominated by conservative high caste *bhadralok* anxieties about the process of modernization initiated by the colonial presence.¹¹⁸



Fig. 19: To the Indian Reform Association

(*The Indian Charivari*, 16 May, 1873)

Quite contrary to this kind of iconography, we see in the *Charivari*, images of that 'state penetration' into the *andarmahal* or the private space, which was feared by the nationalists. *The Indian Charivari* supported the Indian Reform Association,

¹¹⁷ Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, *Paribarik Prabandha (Essays on the Family)*, Hooghly, 1881, *Acharprabandha*, Hooghly, 1894,

¹¹⁸ Sumit Sarkar, *A Critique of Colonial Reason*, Calcutta, 1985; also 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and Bhakti: Ramkrishna and his Times, Economic and Political Weekly, 18 July, 1992.

encouraging in a cartoon, the native women to come out of the *andarmahal* and shun the Purdah. I will consider here two cartoons from *The Indian Charivari*. The first (Figure 19), *Charivari* shows Britannia and Mr. Charivari standing in front of a royal *andarmahal*, carrying a shield and a *trishul*. Charivari's pet dog Tobias drags the purdah, and two native ladies are shown peeping out. Britannia says to them – "Well, are you coming out at last?" The ladies reply, "We should like to very much, but we are a little afraid." Britannia assures them, "There is nothing to be afraid of. I will take care of you, and besides there is Sir Punch, and you couldn't have a more gallant and valiant protector than he!" the cartoon was dedicated 'without permission but with every good wish' to the Members of the Indian Reform Association.¹¹⁹ The element of luring women to leave the domain of the *ghar* becomes all the more stark in the cartoon that shows a reformer dressed as the 'Modern Krishna', playing the lute of 'Female Education', to lure women away from their homes. The Krishna in the image (Figure 20) is a bespectacled *bhadralok*, wearing his graduation robe. He is poised on a set of books; the ground is strewn with books, a globe, more in the manner of treasure troves, to be explored by the teeming women, and young girls who surround him enthusiastically, drawn by the charms of 'female education'. Thus in issues of social reform, we see the *Charivari* holding an encouraging attitude towards the reformers. The *Charivari Album*, published since 1875, offered profiles of prominent Indians. In 1877 the *Charivari Album* brought out a profile of Keshub Chandra Sen in a highly appreciative tone. He was portrayed as the Brahma Apostle, showing the support the *Charivari* had towards the reformers. The *Charivari* had a very encouraging attitude towards Bengali women seeking education. *Charivari* lauds the 'thirst for academic fame' in the Bengali maids, and curious mind, and hopes to see women B.A.s, M.A.s, B.L.s etc, who would prove to be 'graduates of a better sort', than the discontented rabble in newspaper sedition dabble like the *babu*. In poems depicting the thirst for knowledge in the native women, the *Charivari* is seen expressing the hope that soon

¹¹⁹*The Indian Charivari*, 16 May, 1873, p.165

women will become 'graduates of a better sort', and show the educated men that education can mean more than mere 'surface glitter'. However, parallel to this we see fun poked at the obsession women, whether native or European in clothes and trifling matters. Curiously enough, when Mary Carpenter came to Bengal with her



Fig. 20: The Modern Krishna

(The Indian Charivari, March, 1875)

condemnation of the purdah system, she was critiqued as meddling with private affairs. In fact in the *Charivari* we see a steady critique of the philanthropists, as according to its racist perception no welfare attempt on part of the British would change the fraudulent native character or their perception of the Whites as 'Anglo-Saxon Brutes'. Justice Phear, who advocated the entry of entry of the natives in the jury, was the target of scathing attack, so was Mary Carpenter. They were being shown as 'popularity hunting and shrieking sentimentalists'.

VII

Nation Enslaved: Handing over Goods to the Sahib

I will discuss here four cartoons in particular that sum up brilliantly the politics of cartoon journal like *The Indian Charivari*. The first cartoon is on free trade¹²⁰ (Figure 21). An Inspector (Lord Northbrook) is seen arresting a poor native coolie woman



Fig. 21: Free Trade

(*The Indian Charivari*, August 20, 1875)

(named Indian Manufactures), while a stout and wealthy man holding a hammer named 'Free Trade' looks on. The inspector is telling the coolie woman, "This poor man complains that you are likely to injure him in his most sensitive spot, his pocket; and, I must interfere for his protection. Again the combined impact of Home Charges, Guaranteed Interests, Interests on Public Debt, Army and Civil Pensions

¹²⁰ *The Indian Charivari*, August 20, 1875, p. 43.

and Contracts on the depreciation of the Rupee was clearly reflected in cartoons. In one cartoon the Monarch (the India Office) is shown saddled on the shoulders of a weak scantily clad poor native. The monarch is carrying a number of sacks, adding

THE INDIAN CHARIVARI.—SEPTEMBER 3, 1875.



Fig. 22: The Real Indian Incubus

(*The Indian Charivari*, September 3, 1875)

to the burden of the weak man. The sacks that he is carrying are Home Charges, Guaranteed Interests, Interest on Public Debt, military and Civil Pensions, Contracts etc. The cartoon is entitled 'The Real Indian Incubus Or One of the Causes of the Depreciation of the Rupee'¹²¹ (Figure 22). These cartoons on the economic policies of

¹²¹ *Ibid*, September 3, 1875, p. 55.

the Government are the most striking in the *Charivari*. They become particularly prominent after 1875, with the most important cartoonist of the *Charivari*, Isca, creating most of the cartoons on an economic critique of the Raj. The critique of the Financial Statements of the Lytton Government and his Financier Lord Strachey and the Retrenchment Policy following the Afghan Wars feature prominently in the journal. Particularly towards the late 1870s, the economic critique becomes more seething. The complete squeezing out of the native manufactures through the cotton duties was portrayed in a brilliant cartoon, titled 'The Milch Cow of Manchester'¹²². The cartoon depicts a cow (India) being milked by a gwallah or a milkman, and the produce is being kept in a vessel, titled Cotton Duties. This sub-gwallah is Sir John Strachey, while the head Gwallah is Lord Lytton. He tells the sub-gwallah to give all the milk to the two Britons, one being a quack, Lord Salisbury, and the other, Manchester. They are seen giving two cartons in exchange of the 'milk' of the 'Cotton duties' – one is labelled 'Shoddy Goods for India', and the other, 'Nostrums for India'. In the background we see pictures of closed cotton factories, while close to the cow, flows a river, named the 'English Money Market'. The Head Gwallah is telling his Subordinate- "Hand over the Milk to these Sahibs when you have got all you can". The Second Gwallah replies: "there is no more to get; she is milked quite dry". The Quack (Lord Salisbury) says: "Quite dry – Humph! We'll see – At any rate friend Manchester, it's all you will get out of her – you fellows keep her away from that river, she'll have to do on Indian Water". The trope of health and physical well-being used sensitively to depict the condition of the Indian economy or the cotton industry vis-à-vis the British, personified repeatedly as Manchester. The theme of corporeality runs all through the cartoons around the repeal the Cotton Duties. In a critique of the Budget Statements, particularly the policies of Sir John Strachey, Financier of the Lytton Government, the *Charivari* wrote a satirical piece around the repeal of import duties on cotton goods:

¹²² *Ibid*, August 31, 1879, p. 31.

The truly paternal character of the government is in no way more strongly illustrated than in their determination, at all hazards, to save us from the risk of falling into those vices which are apt to be generated by national prosperity...the new born and still sucking cotton manufacture of India has shown so many decided symptoms of robust and vigorous health that if not rudely weaned before its time, it may soon grow strong enough to prove a Saturn to its parent, Manchester....the Indian babe had had its food stopped for two days in the week already to save its parent from starving altogether. But even this would not do. Manchester must have its fill first, and then what is left must be given to Bombay. The sucking industry of Bombay must be weaned at all risk, so that its mother India may be sent to nurse Manchester. In short how very much the repeal of Import Duties was carried out in the interests of India is to be estimated by the fact that the news of the repeal, so soon as it reached England, took of no less than 50% from the proposed rate of reduction in the wages of the workmen of Lancashire.¹²³

This in a way challenges the perception of an English racist comic journal like *The Indian Charivari*, placing it almost within the same space as the nationalist periodical like the *Basantak*. The cartoons embody for the first time, a political critique of the Raj, introducing an iconography of the nation enchained, impoverished, overburdened and dry. We see here what Gombrich had called 'physiognomizing politics'¹²⁴. The imagery of Bengal as an ailing patient, that we had seen in *Basantak*, recurs in this genre of political cartooning where India features time and again as a weak, starving and impoverished woman. This is the beginning of a new iconography, which the new genre of graphic journalism initiated. The reflection of

¹²³ *Ibid*, April 11, 1879, pp. 95.

¹²⁴ E. H. Gombrich, *Meditations on a Hobby Horse: and Other Essays on the Theory of Art*, Chicago, 1963, p. 149.

this 'physiognomisation' of political identity, an impersonation of India can be seen emerging in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, not only in the cartoon journals in Bengal, but more steadily in the cartoon journals like the *Hindi Punch*, the *Oudh Punch* etc.¹²⁵

The Indian Charivari's critique of the economic policies of the government needs to be read in the larger context of the emergence of print culture in the seventies, with the colonial public sphere taking shape as a dialogic space of rational debate.¹²⁶ However, the colonial reality of the Indian context shaped the dialogics of this public sphere differently. The public spaces in colonial Calcutta served as spaces of contestation between communities over reform, governance and identity. The English owned newspapers and periodicals, participating in the public discourses, responded to public debates and issues of governance, particularly foreign policy and economic critique, issues of 'public concern'.¹²⁷ Such engagements, however, cannot be located outside the power dynamics of a colonial polity. While critiquing the colonial government, the politics of *The Indian Charivari* was never pro-self Government. In fact, it was vehemently against the 'native political rhetorician', 'seditious' and a 'jabbering swell', as is evident from its cartoons. It was the image of the native editor that kept recurring in the satirical imageries of the journal. Consider for example, the cartoon 'Persuasion is Better than Force' (Figure 23), where the Lieutenant Governor General, Sir Richard Temple is seen riding an ass, making him run by dangling carrots in front of his eyes; the ass has the face of the native editor

¹²⁵ In the *Hindi Punch*, for instance India was embodied as a docile woman, traditionally attired, always subservient to Britannia. Also the Indian National Congress emerging in the late 1880s was shown as a Maharashtrian woman, offering regards and gifts to Britannia, in the *Hindi Punch*, Third annual Publication, *The Indian Congress Cartoons from the Hindi Punch, from 1886-1902, with a selection of the Indian Social Conference Cartoons*, Bombay, 1902.

¹²⁶ As conceptualised by Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Enquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, Cambridge, 1992.

¹²⁷ This theme has been discussed by Neeladri Bhattacharya, 'Notes Towards a Conception of the Colonial Public', in Rajiv Bhargava and Helmut Reifeld (eds.), *Civil Society, Public Sphere and Citizenship: Dialogues and Perceptions*, New Delhi, 2005.

(Most probably, Krishtodas Pal, the editor of the nationalist newspaper *Hindoo Patriot*) and the carrots luring him to run have written on them I.C.S, Rajabahadur, District Magistrateship etc. The Governor General, Sir George Campbell looks on



Fig: 23: Persuasion is better than Force

(The Indian Charivari, December 10, 1875)

carrying a stick to speed up the ass – the stick has written on it, the caption: *ap ke waste*, meaning, for you. This cartoon embodies, in a way, the politics of the periodical itself. The politics of persuasion, cajoling and petitions was the dominant mode in these early years of the growth of the political sphere. A lot of policies of the Raj consisted in giving limited concession to the native demands, while controlling the rein. *Charivari* shows here, a perception of this politics, while the native is still shown as the ass, running after the promised concessions and titles.

VIII

Embodying the Political: The Genre of Graphic Journalism

Neither the *Basantak* nor *The Indian Charivari* could survive beyond the 1870s. Financial crisis was one of the most crucial reasons, as printing cartoons was an extremely expensive process, and repeatedly in the volumes of the *Charivari*, we see the editor asking for more contribution to keep up the production. However, in their brief tenure in the 1870s, both the journals succeeded in introducing a fresh language in the graphic journalism with a distinct critical tone about it. In the 1870s, *The Indian Charivari*, though suspicious of the native press, appeared undoubtedly as a staunch critic of the government. Its agency in this regard tends to get overshadowed by its apparent racist humour. But in the earliest days of pictorial journalism in Bengal, these much nuanced cartoons need to be re-read, beyond ideological determinisms.

In the *Basantak*, one sees an all pervasive conservatism vis-à-vis social reform issues, but politically, the *Basantak* upheld the pulse of a new political class. It had close ties with the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* group, and upheld in its brief life the ethos of a new political rationale brought forth by the India League. It has been speculated that the famous graphic artist, Girindrakumar Datta, the principal cartoonist of the *Basantak*, was also the first cartoonist of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika*. He had helped Sisir Kumar Ghosh, the founder editor of *Amrita Bazaar* in many ways, before the publication of *Amrita Bazaar* from Calcutta in 1872,¹²⁸ and also in founding the India League in 1875. The *Basantak* therefore seems to have strong ties with the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, particularly in the making of the political cartoons. The nationalist idiom of the latter clearly found an expression in *Basantak*, although the mutual slandering and ridicule remained the dominant factor. *Basantak* was also a tool in the curious dialogue between two different caste groups in the city, speaking for a particular group or *dal* of *kayasthas* of North Calcutta, as against the Brahmin aristocracy of the *mofussil*. The caste conflict forms an important dimension in

¹²⁸ Ananthnath Basu, *Mahatma Sisir Kumar Ghosh*, Calcutta, 1957.

studying the conflict and control function of humour, particularly in reading how through the creation of satirical imagery one community polemicised against the other in the public domain. The oppositions between coloniser/colonised, tradition/modernity, or private/public get blurred here, and we are often left with images of tension, rather than a dialogue between opposing mutually exclusive categories.

The specific target of attack was the political *babu*, a shift from the earlier traditional caricature of the *nouveaux riches* that we have seen in the popular caricatural forms of the Kalighat and Battala genres of social satire. In both the *Charivari* and the *Basantak* we do not see the images of a decadent aristocracy; instead what is upheld is a scathing satire on the native editors, and political elite. The *Basantak* in its claim to introduce the elective principle in the Municipal Council, strongly criticised the old aristocrats or the *abhijatas* and the Justices of Peace, and through its images argued for a transfer of political power from the aristocracy represented in the *zamindars*, to the *madhhyabittos* or the middle class. *Basantak's* connection with the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* and the India League makes clear its politics against the *zamindar* dominated British Indian Association.

The production of visual images was addressed to reading public already awash in the political words cascading from the printed speeches, pamphlets, treatises, ballads, journals, and increasingly from newspapers. So, the question arises that how far can the historian see them as primarily ornamental, merely duplicating, at most reinforcing, the information and sentiments which people derive from other sources, above all from the spoken or the printed word? Alternatively, were they integral and special to the processes of creating and conveying the wider sign systems of former times? Cartoons were above all produced for and brought about by the politically articulate metropolitan middle classes. It was thus preaching to the converted; newspaper readers bought items, which reflected their own pre-existing political views. Image creating is opinion creating. The cartoons in the 1870s

signified a positive and critical articulation of the political voice of the middle classes. While studying cartoons, we need to keep in mind a more dynamic notion of public opinion. One needs to consider both the medium and the message in a public discourse, because ideas cannot be disembodied, they are contained, conveyed and constructed through imageries, verbal or visual. Medium and message form what can be called a dynamic continuum. The agitation and mobilisation of the *grihasthyas*, for instance, in the bid for power in the Municipal politics of the day, was a movement that derived a wider audience largely through the involvement of *Basantak* and the allied newspapers like the *Hindoo Patriot* and the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*. Prints we can say reflected opinion rather than made it-above all they reinforced the tensions, insecurities and aspirations of a nascent civil society. It is unlikely that prints changed many people's minds, their role was rather to confirm prejudices to fan political flames.

Visual material is no less value laden than verbal. We must keep in mind the ideology behind the image. The imageries transmit messages about status, gender and power relations. The creation, fixing and normalisation of 'stereotypes' is an immensely complicated mental process, hinging upon a delicate interplay of words and images. The creation of visual clichés is important here. The transformation of stereotyped image of the *babu*, for instance, had a distinct idiom in the *pats* of Kalighat; his ornamented attire, buckled shoes, parted hairstyle, or dandyish poise, undergoes a complete pictorial transformation in the printed cartoons that we see in the seventies. We see the emergence of the *dhoti kurta* attired 'political *babu*', the 'native editor', or the reformer. At the same time, the image of the anglicised elite also gains ground, clothed in trousers, shirts, overcoats or hats, the full emergence of whom we will see in the next chapter.

In the seventies, the emergence of the politically articulate middle class casts its mark on the satirical iconography of the day for the first time, creating a fresh set of aspirations and anxieties in the satirical idiom. The perceived 'threat of

westernisation' of the domestic space, the housewife, too gains a distinct pictorial language, the *Brahmika* with her new style of draping saree, her use of blouses or petticoats, or carrying umbrella and vanity bags become symbols of an anxiety over the dilution of gender norms. Such imageries, proliferating all the way through the last quarter of the nineteenth century, created a visual documentary of a society, transforming itself, socially, culturally and politically. In the aspiration to change, and the constant yearning for the 'lost tradition', we can locate the fresh set of satirical imageries that followed the turn of the century. In the following chapter, I will explore the caricatures of Gaganendranath Tagore, which started coming by the 1910s. The quest for 'identity', 'tradition' and the nationalist ethic will surface in a more nuanced manner through the keen perception of Gaganendranath, with whom pictorial satire in Bengal received its distinct character as well as international acclaim.

Chapter 4

Art as Dialogue: Gaganendranath Tagore and the 'Realm of the Absurd'

Pictorial satire in Bengal reaches a moment of critical acclaim with the art of Gaganendranath Tagore in the first quarter of the twentieth century. It shares a space, for the first time, with the formal art of the Bengal School, and makes at the same time a stylistic and idiomatic transition in the visual language of pictorial satire in Bengal. Research on the art of Gaganendranath Tagore has focussed primarily on the Cubist and Post Cubist phases, rarely delving into the cartoons that the artist had created during the early years of his artistic career. Recent scholarship on nationalism and visual culture, however, has treated the cartoons as the high noon of graphic satire in Bengal.¹²⁹ I will explore here the visual frames of Gaganendranath's cartoons, by entering this 'Realm of the Absurd'.

In the preface to his cartoon album *Naba Hullor* (Reform Screams), Gaganendranath quotes Mark Twain: "Everything human is pathetic, the secret source of humour is not joy but sorrow. There is no humour in heaven." This introduces, in a way, the satire of Gaganendranath, and also one of the core issues in the understanding of satirical imagery: Is caricature and graphic satire necessarily an expression of harmless mirth? Coming to Gaganendranath, what do his cartoons embody? In what 'sorrow' can we possibly trace the 'secret source' of *his* humour? How do his forms embody his engagement with pain, humour and critical

¹²⁹ The cartoons of Gaganendranath Tagore discussed briefly in Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations*, Cambridge, 1994; Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics, and Nationalism in Bengal 1850-1920*, Cambridge, 1992; an anecdotal study of the cartoons have appeared in Chandi Lahiri, *Gaganendranath: Cartoon o Sketch* (Bengali), Sahitya Samsad, 2004.

consciousness? I will attempt at de-framing some of the most interesting cartoons of Gaganendranath Tagore to look for the answers to such questions.

I

Gaganendranath and his 'Realm of the Absurd'

Almost all the cartoons of Gaganendranath were published in the *Prabasi* and the *Modern Review*, the two monthly journals edited by Ramananda Chatterji. Pictorially they can be seen as a step ahead of the genre of pure pictorial humour that was being created by Upendrakishore Ray and his son Sukumar Ray. However, though Upendrakishore tried his hand in caricature,¹³⁰ Sukumar had specialised in the creation of a different world of pictorial humour, evoking caricature and absurdity in the form and poetry of the visual image,¹³¹ but there was no room for satire in his images. Gaganendranath was, therefore one of the pioneers in his class to articulate a distinct language of caricature in visual art, unmatched by the earlier trends of pictorial humour.

Gaganendranath's cartoons were published in the form of three albums, printed by the artist in his own litho hand press on the ground floor of the Bichitra Bhawan of Rabindranath Tagore. The celebrated art historian O. C. Gangooly had commented that Gaganendranath had drawn as many as 500 cartoons during his lifetime. In 1916, he published his first cartoon album, *Birup Bajra* (Strange Thunderbolts), followed by *Adbhut Lok* (Realm of the Absurd) in 1917, and *Naba Hullor* (Reform Screams) in 1921. For the sake of an entry into the cartoons of Gaganendranath, we may segregate the images into a few categories; broadly speaking such categories would be around identity, education, reforms and most importantly, politics. There remains, however, a thematic correlation among all these categories, with some themes surfacing repeatedly in the imageries. In studying the art of Gaganendranath, one is crippled by the dearth of autobiographical details, as

¹³⁰ Some of his cartoons appeared in *The Modern Review* (1907, 1908) and *Prabasi*, Kartik, 1310 B.S.

¹³¹ H. Sannyal, 'Sukumar Rai and Chitre Nonsense Club', *Desh*, 53rd Year, 44, September 1986 (Sukumar Number).

unlike the other Tagores, Gaganendranath never wrote anything about himself or his art. I will be relying on the satire he created, to understand the images as well as the artistic intent behind creating satire in visual forms.

Cartoonist Gaganendranath upholds a critique of the society around him through a juxtaposition of images, forms and categories. Through this he laughs at the way new identities take shape under colonialism – their contradictions and convolutions. The image of the 'hybrid man', a concoction of the East and the West, what he called the 'Inga-Banga', surfaces repeatedly in the satirical imageries of the artist. We see him in the first cartoon of the album *Birup Bajra*. The cartoon is called 'Hybrid Bengalesissis'(Figure 24). The image of a man, split vertically, one half of him



Fig. 24: Hybrid Benagalisses

(*Birup Bajra*, 1917)

being clothed in traditional dhoti-kurta and footwear, complete with a shawl and a *chhari* (walking stick), and the other half of him attired in suit and trousers, with monocles and boots. He stands with an air of pride and authority. However, he is totally oblivious of the fact that he is standing on a platform of brittle bone china, which might collapse any time. Gaganendranath introduces here his vision of the quintessential hybrid man- a curious mix of identities, a product of a desperate emulation of the West by the Indian elite. Smug and content in his emulation he is unaware of the futility of not belonging, not acquiring an



Fig. 25: Metamorphosis

(*Birup Bajra, 1917*)

authentic identity of his own. The juxtaposition of the confidence of the man, and the brittleness of this station drives home the ire of the cartoonist as well as his philosophy of an ideal synthesis. This Hybrid Man or the anglicised babu class

seems to be the target of Gaganendranath's satirical barbs, and we see him appearing in various settings. In two other cartoons, *Metamorphosis* (Figure 22) and *Parabhrityer Kakali* (Figure 25) we see him variously in a railway

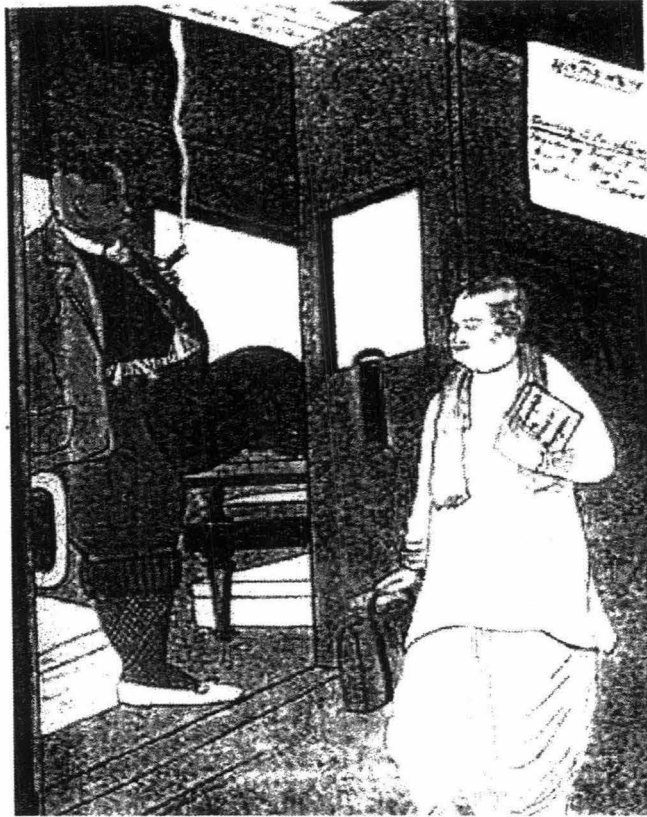


Fig.26: *Parabhrityer Kakali*

(Adbhut Lok, 1917)

compartment and a platform. In the first image, he is attired in dhoti-kurta, in the process of changing into trousers. He seems to be in great haste, when the guard opens the door of the compartment; he says: "Do not disturb me, I am about to become a Sab." He is pulling out his trouser from an erratically arranged valise, containing all the elements of a Western ensemble, a necktie, socks, belt, shirts and trousers- all the props required 'to become a Sab'. The irony of the cartoon is striking. We can see in him the anxiety of the mimic man, one who seeks to partake repeatedly the identity of the master by wearing his clothes, transforming his 'look',

and thereby claiming a different identity, and the power and authority of the Sab. The cartoonist calls this 'metamorphosis', the act of transition, the 'moment' of which he captures in the act of the man changing into the master's clothes, and thereby attempting to embody the master's identity. The revolt encapsulated in the image is not against the West per se, but more against what the cartoonist perceived as a superficial emulation of the Whites, a certain kind of a 'denationalisation' so to say. The ridiculous is emphasized by the superficiality of the metamorphosis. In the second image (Figure 26) we see a railway platform kicking the compartment door on the face of an 'Indian', attired in pristine white dhoti kurta and a shawl. The Indian in the image happens to be Gaganendranath himself, and we see him carrying a copy of Henri Bergson's *Laughter*. The hybrid man has been given a grotesque figuration by the cartoonist, translating him into the image of ugliness that he associated with the thoughtless emulation of the West. Significantly enough, in his essay *Laughter*, Bergson spoke of the ridiculousness of the 'mechanical man', one who is more like a toy manikin, who has lost his spontaneity and originality only to become a victim of the cultural crisis in the wake of modernisation. This implied slavery and the loss of the self becomes the ruling trope in Gaganendranath's satire. A point to note here would be that in the early twentieth century, admission to first class railway compartments was not permitted to the 'natives'. The arrogance of the anglicised hybrid man before the traditional Indian in the image becomes more relevant. The desire for master's clothes reveals a longing for power. The crudity of this claim is underlined by the contrast between the grotesque mimic man and the serene, genteel Indian clad in dhoti.

Gaganendranath's satire becomes sharper when he comments on the education system. His theme of a 'metamorphosis' of identity receives a striking continuation in the cartoon 'Forced Evolution under Artificial Illumination' (Figure 27). Gaganendranath here uses Jagadishchandra Bose's discovery of plant life into a critique of English education. Jagadishchandra had discovered that by artificially controlling the intensity of lighting, changes could be brought about in plant

behaviour. In the image, Gaganendranath shows the evolution of a bud in seven stages under the influence of 'academic light'. However, in gradual stages, the bud transforms to a flower, then to a human head reading a book, and finally a magnifying glass reveals that the human has become an ape attired in kurta and shawl, but smoking a cigar. The cartoonist makes the paradox clear here. Mere English education, unconnected to the traditions and the impulse of India is only 'artificial illumination', which cannot lead to the complete unfolding of personality, but will only transform instead, an individual from a potential 'bud' to an 'ape', a figurative metamorphosis of innocence and



Fig. 27: Forced Evolution under Artificial Illumination

(Modern Review, June, 1921)

originality to emulation and absurdity. The evolution thus is not spontaneous, but forced. An echo of this 'dehumanisation' is the cartoon 'University Machine' (Figure 28). Belonging to the Reform Screams series (1921), this cartoon is probably one of

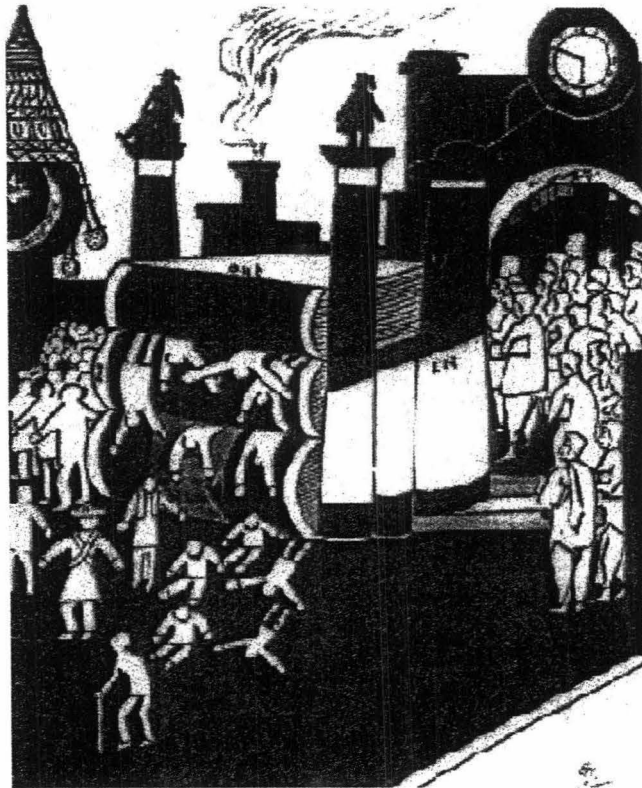


Fig.28: University Machine

(Nava Hullor, 1921)

the strongest satires on education. Gaganendranath creates here an image of the university, churning out fresh graduates through the machine-like books and inkpot. The youth are shown ground under the weight of the books and turned into puppets. Interestingly enough, before the students are shown entering the University Machine, they all are attired in dhoti-kurta, carrying books, clearly with a sense of purpose. However, when the same lot are churned out of the fat books, they

resemble either crippled beings or puppets with no direction or even strength. Some are attired as typical government clerks, some as *khansamahs*, while a large section head straight towards the marriage bureau symbolised in the form of the *topor* (the traditional marriage headgear worn in Bengal). The university appears as the interface where the 'self' of the students is erased and reoriented to suit the ends of the colonial government and the market at large.

These images reflect Gaganendranath's anguish at what had become the mechanical reproduction of graduates. The rhetoric of mechanical automation surfaces repeatedly in Gaganendranath's satire. It becomes the underlying theme in most of Gaganendranath's cartoons. This brings us to the ideology of education that Gaganendranath shared with his uncle Rabindranath Tagore. Education, to both of them, was supposed to nurture the originality and spontaneity of individuals, contributing to an all-round development of personality. Education amidst nature was the ideal to be cultivated. The practice of an education system and a curriculum, with no connection to the national impulses provoked Gaganendranath to translate his shock into the graphics of pictorial satire, and create some of the most critical images on education. In Bengal by the mid-nineteenth century, English education had become a passport to jobs, with no connection to indigenous roots. The student had become a cramming machine, as success in examination promised an opening in the imperial bureaucracy. In the Swadeshi era, a critique of western education had become a part of the political dialogue of the day. Rabindranath Tagore, in particular raised his voice against the education system. In *Shikshar Her Pher* (1892) he accused colonial education of setting the young adrift culturally, starving their minds of creativity which only a mother tongue could nurture. Since English did not spring from Bengali culture, it was not a fit vehicle for expressing a Bengali experience or creating a Bengali individual. It was only capable of producing clerks.¹³² The

¹³² Rabindranath Tagore, 'Shikshar Her Pher', *Rabindra Rachanabali*, XI, pp. 537-45

reverberation of this statement can be seen in the image of the University Machine that Gaganendranath created.

More than mere critique or ridicule, the images here embody the cartoonist's perception of a 'process' that he saw as the cause of degeneration in the anglicised *bhadralok* of his times. We see the artist repeatedly revolting against this theme of pretension and superficiality. The juxtaposition becomes



Fig.29: Modern Marriage Market in Bengal

(Nava Hullor, 1921)

more vivid in some of the cartoons on social reform that Gaganendranath created in his album *Nava Hullor* (Reform Screams, 1921). A striking example of this can be seen in the cartoon called 'Modern marriage Market in Bengal' (Figure 29). The image here is a reply to the reformer's cry that no dowry should be extorted from the bride's father by the bridegroom's family. Instead 'Soul Force' alone should be the

compelling force behind marriage. The cartoon is called 'Sold per Force versus Soul Force'. Gaganendranath here confronts the 'Soul Force' of marriage with mercenary marriages. We see a young man who has just been widowed leaning upon a volume of Romeo and Juliet, in an apparent air of grief. The dead wife's body has not yet been cremated. It lies in the background, covered with a sheet, pinned up with a butterfly. She was Bride no No.1, and she had become bride on the strength of a heavy dowry that she had brought with her. The pinning up with a butterfly is a metaphor native to Bengal. The Bengali term for a butterfly is *prajapati*, which is also the name for Brahma, the god of marriages in Hindu mythology. In Bengal, a butterfly symbolises marriage. In the image, the widowed man is being consoled by his mother with the prospect of a new bride (No. 2), just fished up from an earthen vessel with a hairpin. The new bride is a mere child with a Bengali primer in her hand. Clearly, she is not the perfect match for a man who reads Shakespeare. However, although the new bride carries an alphabet book in one hand, she has dowry in the other. The fishing out of a baby bride from the earthen pot has a symbolic significance in Bengal. There exists a practice of keeping alive nutritious fishes like Koi and Magur in earthen pots, to be fished out everyday for the consumption of invalids. Thus as one bride has already been consumed, another is quickly fished out for the health of the young man. This is the 'Marriage Market', where love or Soul Force is compromised repeatedly in the exchange of dowry. The echoes of this we see in another cartoon, 'The Rising Sun-in-law of Bengal' (Figure 30). It was created in the context of a notorious incident that occurred in Calcutta in 1920s. A fourteen-year old girl Snehalata immolated herself, unable to accept the fact that her father had to mortgage their house to procure the dowry money required for her wedding. Her death shocked the contemporary society; poems and songs lauding her bravery and plight were composed by eminent personalities of the day. Having made a cartoon on this event in his Reform Screams album, Gaganendranath painted the cartoon on a larger canvas to doubly emphasize the notoriety of the event. In the image we see a bride, attired in a red wedding sari and

blindfolded, in the process of getting wedded to a can of kerosene, with the face of a man, which the cartoonist calls 'The Rising Sun-in-law of Bengal'. Her sari is tied to kerosene flowing out of the can. Her hands are placed on two matchsticks that serve as the hands of the man she is marrying, in the ritual gesture of *kanya sampradan* or

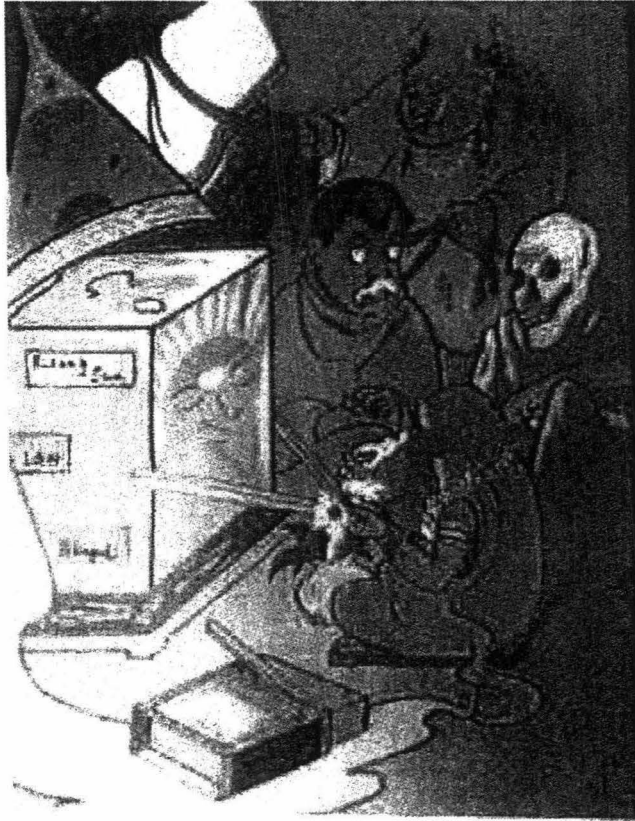


Fig. 30: The Rising Sun-in-law of Bengal

(Nava Hullor, 1921)

bequeathing the bride to the bridegroom. The father of the bride looks on with an expression of disinterest, while the priest- an incarnation of death, reads *mantras* from a scripture almost sniggering at the impending plight of the bride. In the background, we see the bridegroom's father arranging for another girl, dragging her by a rope. The destiny of the young bride who is completely unaware of her fate, as

well as the notoriety of the dowry system is embodied in this striking image. We see in these imageries expression of a certain empathy, a humanistic concern, that makes



Fig. 31: Millstone of Caste

(*Adbhut Lok*, 1917)

pictorial embodiment of social oppression possible. Let us consider here the cartoon Gaganendranath created on caste system in his album 'Realm of the Absurd' (1917), clearly the first of its kind at that time. It is called '*Jatashur*' or '*The Grinding Stone of Caste*' (Figure 28). The caste system is shown as a massive millstone, that is grinding millions of hapless low caste people. An impersonation of Satan is grinding the millstones with one hand with an ominous laughter on his face, while with the other hand he is steering a priest, who reads out hymns from the scriptures as the oppressed slip into a tumultuous abyss. Pictorially this cartoon creates a milestone in the tradition of satirical art in Bengal, a novel expression of socially conscious art within the larger milieu of high art in which Gaganendranath was situated. A sense

of pain pervades these imageries, the cartoonist's attempt to portray the tragic and traumatic aspect of social reality. Gaganendranath's graphic satire then becomes an embodiment of a language of empathy and humanist ethos. Satire becomes in his art a device for evoking not the comic, but the absurd, the painful.

The theme of absurdity runs through the images on religious hypocrisy as well, asserting the glaring gaps between religious protestations, and practice. The attack on Brahmins and priests is almost constant, whether it be the image of a priest, surreptitiously carrying whisky and chicken, under the cover of an umbrella, or that of a temple priest selling benediction in lieu of gold coins, at the same time eyeing the woman devotee. The futility and pretension of the orthodoxy receives a fatal blow in a cartoon that says, *sab chale tale tale'*, meaning in Hindu society



Fig. 32: Priest Selling Benediction

(Birup Bajra, 1917)

everything goes on secretly. A Brahmin is shown surreptitiously carrying a bottle of whisky and chicken, hiding himself under the cover of an umbrella. The artist

consciously names the street 1 Hindu Street, to drive home the paradox that the system and the idea itself are internally fractured. The vices of a greedy and corrupt priesthood comes forth brilliantly in the image of a priest taking gold coins from a female devotee, while eying her lecherously (Figure 32). Faith, in this image becomes

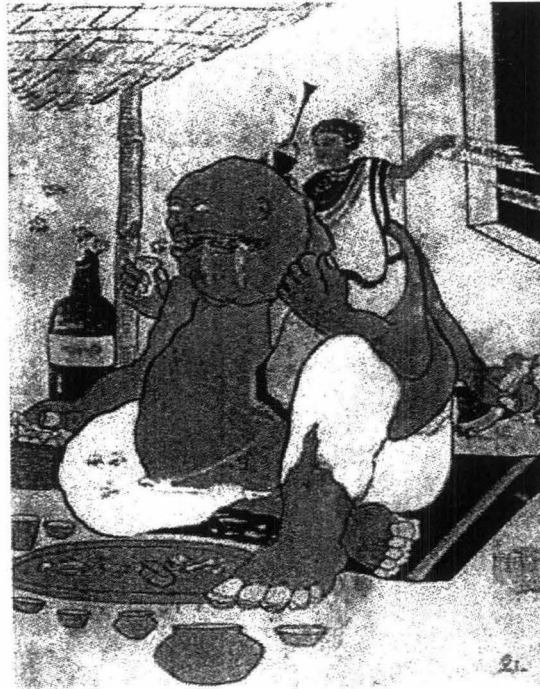


Fig.33: Hypocritical Brahmin

(*Birup Bajra, 1917*)

a pretext for appropriation of wealth and innocence. The grotesque figuration of the priest recurs in another cartoon, where notoriety is brought out with greater vigour. Gaganendranath creates a demonic image of an obese Brahmin, sporting wine, flesh and women, while religious texts are being thrown out of the window (Figure 33). In the figure of this hypocritical Brahmin we see Gaganendranath using grotesque exaggeration of forms, a *modus operandi* in caricatural art, to bring forth the ugliness of the practice. The image is made particularly demonic to lay bare the vulgarity that has found its way into the lifestyle of the so-called keepers of faith. The priest is shown having four hands, each occupied with wine, women, sweets and chicken.

The bloated, exaggerated physical presence of the Brahmin in this cartoon is a conscious calculated excess evoked by the cartoonist to create in his beholders a sense of repulsion, and therefore, a scrutiny of the problem of priestly decadence.



Fig. 34: Auto Speechola

(*Birup Bajra, 1917*)

Gaganendranath's élan as a cartoonist surfaces, however, more crucially in the political iconography that he created. Consider for instance, the cartoon 'Auto Speechola' (Figure 34). The puppet in this image satirises the Rajas and the maharajas of Bengal, whom Gaganendranath saw from very close quarters, and thus was aware of the protestations and lectures too. The speeches they eloquently delivered must have seemed to Gaganendranath almost mechanical and unfelt. The puppet like doll is the symbol of an aristocrat, holding a copy of a speech in his

hand, and an oilcan is fixed on the top of his head because he is a but a machine. The master machine that feeds him with speeches is ingenious invention of a Bengali scientist as written at the base of the machine. However, it is a weapon invented by the master cartoonist for the execution of his art. The machine has separate chambers with separate speeches stored, memorial speeches, Self-Government speeches, Congress speeches, Foolish speeches, Fiery speeches. There are Bengali speeches stored too, to suit the possible occasions. This particular cartoon is basically an assault on the entire rubric of the contemporary political culture that thrived largely as a culture of political speeches among the aristocracy. Interestingly, Gaganendranath personally knew some these aristocrats and he had seen from very close quarters the protestations of the high and the mighty, and his protest was pretty much a protest from within.



Fig. 35: The Living and the Non-living

(Nava Hullor, 1921)

Gaganendranath's political cartoons reflect his awareness and engagement with the contemporary political milieu. He depicts the political temper of the times in a curious representation, making a humorous comment on Jagadishchandra Bose's discovery of plant life (Figure 35). In the cartoon, entitled, 'The Living and the Non-living', the plants are energised into life by the application of electricity, and are seen shouting as agitators, demanding donations, employment, going for strikes and even upholding nationalist fervour in voicing the song *Vande Mataram*. This is one of the most interesting cartoons of Gaganendranath, which while lauding in a humorous manner the achievement of the scientist, also upholds the radical political mood of the day, which reverberates with nationalist fervour, working class strikes and the overall charged atmosphere in an age of mass politics.

The political cartoons of Gaganendranath were not directly anti British, though at times his humour does not remain restrained and calculated. It bursts forth in some of his political cartoons. Gaganendranath himself was a keen participant of the Swadeshi movement. In fact he was held to court for providing monetary help to the Anushilan Samiti members during the famous Alipore Bomb Case. However, his support could not be exercised in open because the Tagore family had close ties with the British, particularly Rabindranath Tagore did not want members of his family to come out in open sedition against the British. Therefore, we repeatedly see Gaganendranath attacking the regime in his own silent manner. One particular image created by him that created considerable stir was that of Bamsfield Fuller, the Magistrate of Midnapur, who had perpetrated extreme cruelty on the revolutionaries during the Swadeshi movement. The revolutionaries had decided to assassinate him, at which he justified his stance and claimed that he was in fact trying to save the rebels. Gaganendranath drew the cartoon that showed a gigantic Fuller trampling upon hordes of Swadeshi revolutionaries, who are desperately trying to escape. Fuller is brandishing a fiery wand of terror that seemingly has a sway that the rebels do not seem to escape. Another cartoon almost brought him the snare of the government. In the cartoon entitled "Peace reigns in Punjab", following

the Jallianwalabagh massacre, we see a kotwal standing atop the slain body of a native, with the slogan, 'Peace reigns in Punjab'. This cartoon was exhibited at the exhibition in the Indian Society of oriental Art. The then Governor General of Bengal Lord Carmichael had come to see exhibition and Gaganendranath was warned by the government for creating such provocative images.



Fig. 36: Fearsome Mercy

(Adbhut Lok, 1917)

However, Gaganendranath, like a true cartoonist had a political foresight that went beyond a unilateral opposition of the enemy. His introspective scrutiny was directed towards in own society, and that was reflected equally in his cartoons as well. Consider, for example the cartoon (Figure 37) of C. R. Das, handing out matchsticks

to a pupil to set fire to the university books. Gaganendranath was himself against the regime of unrest or destruction as envisaged by the non-cooperation movement. He condemned the sacrifice of education and pillage of books in the pursuit of political agitation. In the image lays bare the political manoeuvres that lead the young and the impressionable to set fire to cherished knowledge and establishment.



Fig. 37: Man Proposes-Fire!

(Nava Hullor, 1921)

Again in the image where he shows a charka flying over a terrain doomed and destroyed, full of rubble and cobwebs, his disillusionment with the Gandhian ideal of national emancipation through the spinning wheel or the Charka becomes evident. The image shows broken trains, derailed tracks, snapped electricity wires, deserted universities, colleges, hospitals, works of art, literature and science- an overall vision of dismay and neglect, spaces full of cobwebs and spiders. In the sky is

flying a charka on a magic carpet. The images bring forth Gaganendranath's politics in a stark manner. Gaganendranath was not against the Gandhian constructive philosophy. But he respected equally all the institutions and argued for a harmonious development, and an equally harmonious mode of protest. Himself being a member of the Anushilan Samiti, he was ideologically against the primacy given to charka as an agent of regeneration in

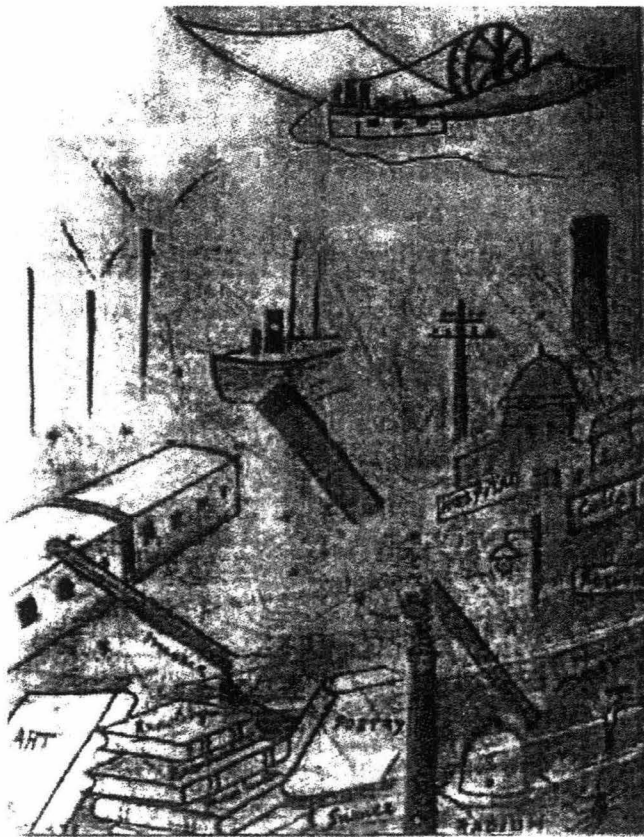


Fig. 38: Charka at the top of all

(Nava Hullor, 1921)

the political ideology of Gandhi. His support clearly lay with the Swadeshi nationalists, whom he used to secretly fund. To him the spread of social reform, education, upliftment of women- all these were realities that could not be ignored or forsaken in the nationalist agenda of spinning as the sole mode of resistance.

An understanding of the visual ideology of Gaganendranath is important here. Through his cartoons, he was fashioning a critique of what he saw as the 'absurd'; the images embody the artist's keen engagement with the social reality and the perceived incongruities. We need to understand the logic of this artistic engagement with reality, this embodiment of his dialogue with the incongruous, the grotesque. In portraying the incongruous in society, was he in the Baudelairian dictum fashioning the creation of a 'grotesque'? How far was Gaganendranath creating in the process an aesthetic of caricature? Alternatively, do we see him arguing for a different conceptualisation of beauty in art? Moreover, in all these where do we locate his voice and his own politics? To understand the artistic intent, one needs to look at the context in which his art was shaping up, and what made the artist look for a fresh language of caricature and satire in his artistic expression.

II

Frames, Dialogues & Embodiment

In the preface to his album *Birup Bajra* (Strange Thunderbolts), we find Gaganendranath saying "...when deformities go unchecked, but are cherished by blind habit, it is the duty of the artist to show that they are ugly and vulgar, and therefore abnormal." We see here a different conceptualisation of the 'duty of the artist', a move beyond the creation of forms for their sake, with a clear stress on the social responsibility of an artist. In his need to portray the 'deformities' we can look for Gaganendranath's search for a fresh language in art. The cartoons provided a touch of irony and self-criticism that the whole art of the period lacked. It could be seen as a dialogue with his age, the dominant modes in cultural life, social mores and political discourse that marked the first quarter of the twentieth century in India. The art of Gaganendranath matured at a time when the romantic mythological art was dominant in Bengal, pioneered by Abanindranath Tagore. We therefore have to begin by locating Gaganendranath within the 'nationalist ethos' and 'cultural regeneration' of the Bengal Art Movement.

Gaganendranath was an untutored artist. His foray into the world of art happened rather late, at the age of forty-three. It was around the 1910s that he emerged as a serious artist. He began with a series of brush paintings of the studies of the Indian Crows, somewhat in the manner of Japanese painters with a vigorous flourish of technique all his own. In the 1910s, he worked largely on portrait sketches and watercolour sketches of rural Bengal, Ranchi and Puri, or the Himalayas; he also made illustrations for Rabindranath Tagore's autobiography *Jibansmriti* and a whole range of paintings on Chaitanya. The caricatures fell between these and the phase of the Cubistic experiments and symbolic pictures of death and other world in the late twenties and thirties.

An essential Gaganendranath is hard to recover. Critics have mostly essentialised the Cubist phase of his art. Gaganendranath was certainly the first Indian Cubist. However, his art spanned a wider spectrum, and as we enter his 'Realm of the Absurd', his world of graphic satire, it becomes necessary to take a macro-perspective of what his art meant, to him and to his times. In studying Gaganendranath one is crippled by the dearth of biographical details. I will therefore attempt to understand the cartoonist Gaganendranath by looking at why he searched for new languages of expression and defined fresh departures in art forms.

The Bengal School created a new art style, done mostly in watercolour and depicting Indian religious, mythological, historical and literary subjects. It was a synthesis of Ajanta frescos, Mughal and Rajput miniatures, European naturalism, and Japanese wash techniques. Coming to the forefront in an age of intense Swadeshi politics, with a clear nationalist agenda, the art of the Bengal school gained the approval of the Indian nationalists of the Swadeshi era. Making art an embodiment of 'national' identity, search for synthesis, and the evocation of *bhava* or sentiments in visual imagery were some of the preoccupations of the Bengal School of art. The assertion of national identity and the claim to past glory gave these images a distinct nationalist air. The epitome of this can be seen in the celebrated image of *Bharat Mata* by Abanindranath Tagore. It personified as a woman holding

four objects in the symbolic manner of a Hindu deity. But the objects are not conventional; they are emblems of national aspirations towards economic and cultural self sufficiency: *anna* (food), *bastra* (clothes), *shiksha* (secular learning) and *diksha* (religious learning). It defines in a way some of the preoccupations of the Bengal School, evoking an idea in the image, as well as an 'Indian' identity.¹³³ This idea was seen as the expression of an eternal beauty that transcends the objective material reality. It is the metaphysical ideal, an expression of the highest beauty and the artist's inner vision. The material world was seen as *maya* or illusion that shrouds the eternal ideal; the function of art should be to make that ideal visible. Abanindranath later attempted to develop links with Japanese artists as part of an aspiration to construct a model of art. The political ambience of the first decade of the twentieth century that saw the ascendancy of Japan as an Asian power symbolised even in Indian political imagination, the rise of the East, as against the Western hegemony. Abanindranath was inspired by the Japanese thinker and philosopher Count Okakura's Pan Asianism. He embraced *nihonga* a Japanese nationalist tradition of painting that provided an 'idealist' vision based on tradition, nature and originality. In particular, the use of the Japanese wash technique by the Tagore brothers imparted and added to the distinct romantic and nostalgic aura, typical to the Bengal School. Okakura sent two Japanese artists Japanese artists Taikan and Hishida to India and they worked in Abanindranath's studio in Calcutta. From them, Abanindranath developed the idea of *bhava* or sentiment in art. The ideological exchanges between Taikan and the Tagores, including Gaganendranath had a pronounced impact on the art of the Bengal school, its form, content and

¹³³ An extensive treatment of the emergence of a nationalist idiom in art in Bengal can be seen in Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art: Artists, Aesthetics, and Nationalism in Bengal 1850-1920*, Cambridge, 1992; also, Partha Mitter, *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922 : Occidental Orientations*, Cambridge, 1994.

ideology. The Swadeshi nationalist idiom around the Bengal School surfaced time and again in the ideologues of the spearheads of the movement. Sister Nivedita, a close associate of the Tagores, and an integral part of the art movement saw art as the most important vehicle of nationality, a medium that 'offers us the opportunity of a great common speech and its rebirth is essential to the upbuilding of the motherland'.¹³⁴

In the early decades of the 20th century we see Gaganendranath operating very much within the stylistic and visual structure of the Bengal school of art. He shared the same space with the doyens of the art movement, including his own brother, Abanindranath Tagore. Increasingly, however, we see Gaganendranath moving beyond its parameters; by striving repeatedly for a new language within the 'nationalist' art of the Bengal school, he sought to dilute some of the boundaries as well. Rabindranath says about his nephew, "Closely surrounded by the atmosphere of the new art movement, initiated by his own renowned brother, the movement which was directed towards the exploration of the sources of inspiration in the creative mind of the ancient East, half-obliterated at that moment by age long obscurity of oblivion, -he sought out his untrodden path of adventure, attempted marvellous experiments in colouring and made fantastic trials in the magic of light and shade."¹³⁵

Like Abanindranath, Gaganendranath too came under the stylistic and ideological influence of the nationalist fervour in art, as conceptualised by the likes of Sister Nivedita, the celebrated art historian Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy and certainly Abanindranath himself. This nationalist urge for the revival of what was seen as the glory of oriental art was felt by Gaganendranath too. In the first decade of the twentieth century, his art reflected the elements of continuity with the Bengal school. His watercolours and illustrations for *Jibansmriti* were not radically different

¹³⁴ Sister Nivedita, 'The Function of Art in Shaping Nationality', *Modern Review*, January 1907, p. 49.

¹³⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, 'On Gaganendranath', *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art*, June-December, 1938.

from the visual worlds of the Bengal School. In 1907 we see him founding the Indian Society for Oriental Art, of which he remained an ardent patron. The works of 'Crows' dated 1910 and the later Himalayan series, express the desire to maintain the unbroken continuity with the Bengal School in its visual rendering. However, with his sketches of *Sibu Kirtaniya*, a kirtan singer, who used to visit the Tagore household, we see Gaganendranath creating a certain fluidity of gestures in the picture, which spelt his future departure from the Bengal School. With his cartoons, we see Gaganendranath increasingly creating a separate niche for himself, attempting different themes and representation. He had always had a unique penchant for making sketches of people in action, of the nuances and mannerisms of the people around him, without they noticing it. Dinesh Chandra Sen, a close associate of the Tagores writes: "His searching eyes even when he was engaged in some serious business, noticed the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of the people around him."¹³⁶ Not only did he do his sketching while at home, but also he to his sketchbook with him wherever he went. Dr. Sen remarks that this 'critical keenness' that was to find expression in the cartoons that he was to create, where the depiction of the peculiar mannerisms of the characters added an extra dimension to the realistic portrayal. His eye for keen details as well as styling postures is an aspect that defined his art of pictorial satire.

The evocation of satire and the mechanism of caricature became in Gaganendranath's paradigm his answer to the national and cultural crisis of his age. The art of Gaganendranath reverberates with his sense of the 'real' around him. Gaganendranath first raised the problem that the mythological past, in which the contemporary art was rooted, was no longer sufficient to capture the changing socio-political condition of Bengal, that a different relational value between art and society, between art and people, was required. Both in his mature paintings where he sought to integrate world influences into his own vision forms, and as a commentator through his cartoons, he displays a depth of understanding about the mental and

¹³⁶ Dinesh Chandra Sen, 'As in Knew Him', *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art*, March, 1972.

moral crisis in the country. Thereby Gaganendranath evolved a language extraordinarily subtle form of social criticism that went far ahead of the feeble imitation of the mannerist phase of the Bengal School.

In the language of caricature that Gaganendranath developed within the larger canvas of the celebration of abstract beauty under the Bengal Art School, we can see a resonance of a different conceptualisation of beauty and form. As Ananda Coomaraswamy himself suggested in *Art and Swadeshi*:

Without beauty there can be no true morality, without morality there can be no true beauty. Look around you at the vulgarization of modern India, our prostitution of art to the tourist trade, our use of kerosene tins for water jars, galvanized zinc for tiles, our caricature of European dress, our homes furnished and ornamented in the style proverbial of the seaside lodging houses, with cut chandeliers and china dogs and artificial flowers- our devotion to the harmonium and the gramophone- these things are the outward and damning proof of 'some mighty evil in our souls'.¹³⁷

We see here in the voice of one of the doyens of the Bengal School, a lamentation at the loss of beauty and romance in anglicized India, a culture that had become a mere caricature of the human essence of civilization. This vulgarity or parasitism that Coomaraswamy is seen denouncing was announced in a starker manner in the visual images created by Gaganendranath. The notion of beauty lies fractured even in the words of Rabindranath Tagore. In *The Meaning of Art*, Tagore says:

When we talk of aesthetics in relation to art we must know that it is not about beauty in its ordinary meaning, but in that deeper meaning which the poet had expressed in his utterance; 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty'. An artist may paint the picture of a decrepit person not

¹³⁷ A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Art and Swadeshi*, Madras, 1912, pp. 3-5.

pleasing to the eye, and yet we call it perfect when we come deeply conscious of its reality.¹³⁸

We might ask here as to how was this beauty embodied in the paradigm of Gaganendranath? How did he frame the real in his visual frames? To Rabindranath, art is "...the response of man's creative soul to the call of the real...but the individual mind, according to his own temperament and training has its own recognition of reality in some of its special aspects."¹³⁹ In Gaganendranath's cartoons, the 'real' is encapsulated in the contorted lines and hyperbole of caricature – the creation, so to say, of the 'grotesque', the 'incongruous' and the 'absurd'. It is in these visual economies that Gaganendranath sought to give form to his critical vision of the 'real' around him.

A quest for harmony and synthesis, which had defined the visual worlds of the Bengal School, surfaced in Gaganendranath's "Realm of the Absurd' too, but with a different rhetoric. Gaganendranath seeks beauty in harmony, a negation of the incongruous modernity that colonialism had implanted in society. Harmony and synthesis remain a defining theme in Gaganendranath's visual ideology. It is important to understand this search for the harmonious, to comprehend Gaganendranath's articulation of the incongruous and the grotesque. We might return here to the images where the cartoonist repeatedly shows us images of the mechanical man, the hybrid babu, trying to become the White master, or even the dehumanization through the processes of 'artificial' English education. These are all images of a loss of the self, a rupture with roots, or an alienation, particularly in the elitist urban culture, which appeared absurd to the artist. We see here an echo of the Bergsonian critique of the 'comic automation of the mechanical man', the persistence of a sense of 'dehumanization', which Bergson had protested against in his essay,

¹³⁸ Rabindranath Tagore, *Meaning of Art*, London, 1926, p. 8

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10

Laughter.¹⁴⁰ Bergsonian philosophy upheld 'vitalism' as an explanation of human experience, as against the coarse logic and machinery of the nineteenth century. He saw the comical as something encrusted on the living— "the movement without life." In Gaganendranath's image of puppets being churned out of the 'University Machine'¹⁴¹ or the 'Auto-Speechola' feeding in speeches to the political leaders,¹⁴² we see the imagery of rigidity and repetition being repeated. Interestingly enough, in one of the images, the cartoonist introduces himself in the cartoon, carrying a copy of Bergson's *Laughter*. Gaganendranath's engagement with his perceived 'dehumanization' was looked to larger critique of the colonial modernity. We see him constantly juxtaposing the 'pure' and the 'hybrid', the 'traditional' and the 'anglicised', the 'sublime' and the 'ridiculous', operating largely within the tradition/modernity dichotomy. It would be important here to understand what Gaganendranath meant by modernity, what to him was tradition. In Gaganendranath's images we can perceive a reflection of a revolt against a mindless emulation of the West, which he saw as the loss of a spontaneous impulse, which is original and creative. He saw these as 'deformities', cherished by 'blind habit', 'ugly and vulgar, and therefore abnormal'¹⁴³. It was this deformity that he saw as the lack of harmony, or lack of integration, the graphic representations of which we can see in his contorted lines and misshapen figures. Caricature, here embodies the search for beauty, for harmony; in Baudelairian terms, 'a realisation of beauty in the deformed and the distorted, quest for the sublime in the ugly.

In constructing a binary between the West and the East, between the 'pure' and the 'hybrid', we do see in his cartoons a resonance of a claim to 'pure' tradition, that was being constantly disturbed by the western influences. In that case, which past was he seeing as pure? Can we see his satire as a conservative reaction to

¹⁴⁰ This theme has been discussed in Chapter 1, in an analysis of Henri Bergson's *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, London, 1911.

¹⁴¹ See p.8.

¹⁴² See p. 15

¹⁴³ Gaganendranath uses this term in the Preface to the album, *Birup Bajra* (1917).

westernisation? Was Gaganendranath speaking in a language of a nationalist reaction against the West? In that case how far was he moving away from the Bengal School? The understanding of hybridity is particularly important in Gaganendranath, because his own art took shape by integrating impulses and styles from many foreign influences. The influence of Japanese style and German Expressionism can be seen in the cartoons. In most of his cartoons he seems to offer a scathing critique of modernity that had become coterminous with the westernisation. Emulation that is blind and mechanical became images of the 'absurd' in Gaganendranath's art, not a creative integration of impulses from the West. When he critiques the incongruous, he is attacking the 'imposed', 'mechanical' otherness. The cartoons reflect his discomfort with such superficial impulses. The modernity that Gaganendranath and Rabindranath Tagore were arguing for was basically this sense of a harmonious coexistence of cultures, not a purist assertion of an 'authentic' tradition.

The emotive push is very strong in the images. The cartoons were expressionist in character and intention; the heavily emphasized and contorted line techniques, as well as emphasis on the element of human feeling had a great deal in common with the German Expressionist movement. Vital structure of lines, surfaces and forms become in Gaganendranath's art the prime carrier of his content. Rather than creating forms for their own sake, the cartoons were his attempts at creating values through visual forms, creating an art that synthesises objective reality with his subjective vision. Stylistically they have a rough simplicity, harsh and violent in its results, but full of considerable power. Though the images are done in simplified form, they have a massive physical impact. The space becomes large because the cartoonist is narrating a story. We see in Gaganendranath a narrative cartoon. The artist's tendency in a cartoon is the economy of line, space, size of the cartoon. Gaganendranath sets his cartoons in the style of a painting. We see for the first time, painted cartoons, created in the scale of a large canvas. Gaganendranath heralds the coming of the first individual cartoonist, giving a new visibility to the art at large.

Portrait caricature surfaces for the time, particularly in his political cartoons. The cartoons were circulated at a greater scale, exhibited in Indian and international exhibitions. They were shaped by international currents in satirical iconography, particularly in the creation of the grotesque imagery. Gaganendranath creates the absurd in comic figuration of the Anglicised babu, but his signature style lies his portrayal of what he perceived as the painful and the shocking, in the creation of the 'grotesque'. This surfaces vividly in his Reform Screams (*Naba Hullor*) series, where the impact of the Expressionist movement becomes evident. It is in the creation of this imagery that Gaganendranath's art brings forth a new language in the satirical art of Bengal. In the following section I will try to locate this new language in the larger tradition of satirical imagery in Bengal, and see how the logic and ideology of the embodiment of satire changed in the different genres.

III

Locating Gaganendranath

The cartoons as we have stated earlier were situated at the middle of his artistic career. Nirad C. Choudhuri sees the cartoon phase of Gaganendranath as typically *pièces de circonstance*, products of circumstance, or rather topical statements. Chronologically these are seen by him as a part of the short burst of liberal propaganda in the second decade of the twentieth century. The most lively voice of this, Choudhuri says, was in the well known Bengali magazine *Sabuj Patra*. In mood and in temper they were, according to Choudhuri, the graphic counterparts of the stories with a reforming purpose that Rabindranath Tagore contributed to this magazine.¹⁴⁴ Indeed the cartoons were graphic commentaries on contemporary affairs; yet, it was their artistic rendition that made them commentaries and more. Particularly if we see Gaganendranath's cartoons in relation to the ethos of the Bengal School, we will be able to observe the artist/cartoonist engaging with the

¹⁴⁴ Nirad C. Choudhuri, 'Gaganendranath Tagore', *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art*, March 1938.

same ideals of beauty, synthesis and identity, but through a touch of the satirical vein. In the 1910s, we see Gaganendranath closely tied to the prevalent Swadeshi mood in Bengal. He had identified himself with the national aspirations of his people, and could not but be critical of the social ills, which were impeding the progress of his countrymen, and the pro-British attitude of the members of the Inga-Banga society, whom he saw as totally bereft of a sense of a national self-respect.. His was indeed a dissident voice hitting out at the inconsistencies and the maladies of the society around him, but we need to see how far did he could go beyond this sense of opposition.

The pictorial satire of Gaganendranath comes to us as a point of culmination in the long 'traditions' of graphic satire and caricature in Bengal. The *pats* of Kalighat or the woodcuts of Battala, as well as the printed cartoons of the comic periodicals of the late nineteenth century create multiple shades with the larger mosaic of satirical imageries in Bengal. Each had its own pictorial language and visual politics. However, with the coming of Gaganendranath the language of satire gets a distinct embodiment.

From Kalighat pats to the lithographs of Gaganendranath Tagore, we see transition from the world of pure and earthy form of satire found in the Kalighat pats to a more politically articulated response to the colonial presence. From the world of the dandyish babu in the Kalighat pats or the Battala wood-engravings, the focus and language of satire gets rearticulated around the image of the 'de-nationalised' elite, the education system, more importantly the glaring gaps in the identity and culture of the colonised. In the early twentieth century, political cartooning, lampooning the moderate politics as well as the Raj were very much in vogue at a national level, particularly important being the Hindi Punch, the Oudh Punch etc. In Bengal, however, the cartoons of Gaganendranath created a defining moment. The English cartoons in Bengal did have a tradition of political cartooning, right since the Indian Punch. However, mostly they caricatured the Indian character. In the cartoons of *The Indian Charivari*, it was the 'political baboo', the 'native editor'

or the native aspirants for the Civil Services who become the targets of satire. In the cartoons of Gaganendranath too we see a critique of the political culture, but the target here is the aristocrats, the *maharajas* and the *raibahadurs*, whom Gaganendranath saw as 'denationalised elite'. The question of location is important here. The English cartoons portrayed Indians from an outsider's viewpoint, from a position of supposedly moral superiority, objectifying more the essential 'otherness' of the colonised. *The Indian Charivari*, no doubt, the most accomplished among the English comic magazines, had in its politics a distinct racist overtone, still thriving on a caricature of the Indians, politicians, and social reformers. Its radical ego was sensitive to the native criticism to the Europeans. Thus the 'us' versus 'them' ideology persisted all through, particularly stark in the witty caricature of the Bengali character. The Indian cartoonist, being insiders, particularly in Bengal, offered a penetrating self parody of the elite in the period of nationalist politics. *The Indian Charivari* had directed the satires largely against the lobbying protesting, and petitioning political babu he was visualised as the 'talking machine', that mixed conceit with sedition. Interestingly, Gaganendranath too had used the imagery of the talking machine, however in a different frame, from a different location. The self critical undertow had found a sound articulation in *Basantak*. The introspective mood itself formed various strands within the tradition itself. Though *Basantak* was still preoccupied with ridiculing reform and the Brahmos, it was addressing issues like deindustrialisation, corruption of Calcutta 'civic administration, mismanagement of official famine relief etc. This language of a political critique received a fuller articulation in the works of Gaganendranath Tagore.

Gaganendranath provides an interesting as well as important case study in the history of pictorial satire, because of his own location within the contemporary society. It is both interesting and important here to consider his own social roots that could be seen to play a role in shaping his worldview. Himself a part of landlord family, and yet brought up in the atmosphere of the early industrial enterprise in India, Gaganendranath was conscious of the impact of Britain on India. Though the

Tagores were the landowners, they had been taking a keen initiative in the industry, and were typical of the kind of middle class household, which has risen through English invasion. They were of course attempting a cultural synthesis between Europe and Asia. Far more ardently than any other Bengali family of the time and in this sense they were both the actors in the drama as well as spectators in it. Therefore, the social station of Gaganendranath could be seen as delivering to him, an insider's vision of the inconsistencies of the class. The social location *patuas* of Kalighat was clearly outside the social class they were critiquing. In that sense, in the popular art of the Kalighat and the Battala genre, an 'outgroup' was ridiculing the upper classes, from a different sense of opposition. Gaganendranath however, belonged to a sub-group within this upper class. His perception, politics and art was therefore different. His location cannot be framed in the 'us' versus 'them' binary. Elements of introspection are very strong in the cartoons. We could say that he was painting and designing out of the sense of opposition. In fact, his cartoons are a site for the reflection and articulation of a sense a strong anxiety about the time and its mores.

It would important to explore at this point, as to how these cartoons were received at that time. Who were buying them, how were they receiving the images that can be called a controlled cynicism within the strict economy of the pictorial moment. The cartoons of Gaganendranath used to appear regularly in periodicals like the *Modern Review*. Sources tell us that the cartoons were extremely popular, particularly among the educated middle and the upper middle classes of the society¹⁴⁵. The Tagores had as their friends a number of dignitaries as well as foreign artists. We might imagine that the cartoons as a fresh form of political and social commentary had gained popularity among those people too. Gaganendranath's cousin Rathindranath says in his memoirs, "In the morning Gaganendranath would paint a caricature, the same afternoon would find him transferring it to stone slabs

¹⁴⁵ Rabindranath Tagore, *Pitrismriti*, Calcutta, 1929, Rathindranath Tagore, *On the Edges of Time*, Calcutta, 1956

and then supervising the printing of copies. In this way two volumes of reproduction were published which found a ready sale."¹⁴⁶

The lithographs produced by the Gaganendranath tell us a great deal about the fissures and ruptures within the nationalist elite of the early twentieth century. Compared to the dream world of the Bengal School, there can be no doubt that ideologically and artistically the 'Realm of the Absurd' envisaged by Gaganendranath represented a challenge. Satirical art itself is a product of a certain expression of resistance, manifested largely in the production of negative humour. This gives pictorial satire cutting edge as far as the question of resistance through art is concerned. In satirical frames created by Gaganendranath we can see the resonance of a mood of introspection, of self doubt and self-reflection. By transforming the incongruous into the ridiculous, he attempts to stir his own class. He called his albums 'Pictorial Reviews' of the society,¹⁴⁷ and in the cover page of *Adbhut Lok* (Realm of the Absurd, 1917) he shows a babu smashing his self-reflection in the mirror in a fit of rage. The element of provocation is evident here, and Gaganendranath bypasses confrontation by manipulating and articulating direct action.

The question that arises now is that do we then see an articulation of a language of resistance? Visuality of an image is a weapon that a master cartoonist uses with intended effects. The satire of Gaganendranath had encapsulated within itself a critique of the society, of politics and religion, although it cannot be said that they had a potent subversive content. It was an expression of the artist's discomfort with what he perceived as the absurd. The cartoons of Gaganendranath were intended solely for the upper levels of society, because it is here that he perceived the sharpest tension, almost threatening a rupture. In all the cartoons, the form used by the cartoonist, whether caricature through controlled exaggeration, distortion or

¹⁴⁶ Rathindranath Tagore, 'Cousin Gaganendranath', *Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art*, March 1972.

¹⁴⁷ Gaganendranath described his last album *Nava Hullor* (*Reform Screams*, 1921) as a 'pictorial review of the bygone year'.

juxtaposition, becomes a tool for the effect he wants to create. Thus form truly becomes a carrier of his content. We see in the art of Gaganendranath a curious alliance between form and the content, emotion and introspection, of biting satire and playful comedy. The artist is seen to experiment, true to his style with a new visual language and a new thematic that had till then not entered the exalted domains of 'serious art'. We could trace in his satirical art, two distinct strains; the first is the embodiment of the 'absurd', in the images of the hybrid man or the machine like politician; the second, and perhaps the most significant is his technique of grotesque figuration, through exaggeration and hyperbole, which bring forth the pain that the artist had perceived around him. His was a response from within the class, against the class itself, an internal, introspective critique. Deriving its idiom largely from western currents, the art of Gaganendranath was, however, not quite appreciated in an atmosphere charge with nationalist spirit that found resonance in the medium of the Bengal School. The cartoons, however, gained popularity among the class that itself was the target, the culture of self-parody being a prominent aspect of the humour in Bengali society.

The art of Gaganendranath covered a wide spectrum, creating and evolving out of different genres. Apparently, these phases seem unconnected. However, there is a generic similarity in his art, which runs through all his creations. This was a mood of introspection, a quest for harmony that defined his art. The cartoons of Gaganendranath had reflected his discomfort with the absurd around him. After the cartoon phase, between 1920 and 1930, we see him experimenting with Cubist art. These are different genres, and apparently unconnected. However, both are subjective and introspective in nature. Gaganendranath's cubist art was not a simple fracture of the form, it was a celebration of harmony through fracture of the centre, the elaborate play of chiaroscuro.¹⁴⁸ The cartoon phase and the Cubist phase were

¹⁴⁸ A detailed discussion of the Cubist art of Gaganendranath Tagore has been done by Stella Kramrisch, also extensively by Ratan Parimoo, *The Paintings of the Three Tagores: Abanindranath, Gaganendranath, Rabindranath: Comparative and Chronological Study*, Baroda, 1973

different trajectories explored by the artist to negotiate his quest for harmony. The cartoons, like his Cubist art could be seen as a canvas, where the artist was fracturing the core of the society around him, through exaggeration, disfiguration and juxtaposition of contesting forms, and seeing through this a harmonious whole. In his Cubist art, he celebrates the harmony of the whole, through the collapse of the form.

Located in the milieu of the formalist art of the Bengal School, both the cartoon phase as well as the Cubist and Abstract art that followed, created a form of a quiet subversion, that repeatedly strove to break away from the dominant trajectory, creating a fresh language of 'modern' art. By way of fashioning a distinct language of caricature, Gaganendranath created a method of negotiating social critique through grotesque figuration. Within the brief cartoon phase, what surfaced significantly was the genesis of a method and an 'aesthetic' of caricature, an art of the incongruous and the grotesque. The embodiment of pain in critical satirical imagery develops in the thirties and the forties in the graphic art of a new generation of artist/activists and professional cartoonists. From the stark expressionist images of some of the cartoons of Gaganendranath, the visual satire took on the idiom of protest art. Moving beyond Gaganendranath, we see the embodiment of pain and the grotesque in the caricatures during the turbulent decades of the forties, in the experiences of famine, partition and communal genocide. In that sense, we can locate Gaganendranath not only at a point of culmination in the tradition of satirical iconography since the mid nineteenth century, but more significantly, at the juncture of a new beginning of a caricatural ethic in art.

Conclusion

Culture, as Peter Burke has defined it, is “a system of shared meanings, attitudes and values, and the symbolic forms in which they are expressed and embodied.”¹⁴⁹ Visual embodiments of the complex interplay of socio-cultural experience, perception, responses, as well as meanings and values have been the larger context against which this research has been framed. In Bakhtinian terms, such frames are culturally coded and socially rooted, embodying a dialogue between human beings, their lived experience and socio-cultural perception. Colonial Calcutta, as a text of socio-cultural heterogeneity and transition provided visual metaphors that became embodied in the satirical imageries in the city. These pool of imageries created the culture of ‘visual satire’, which I have tried to read through the images of the *pats* of Kalighat, the *shawng* performances, the printed cartoons in the satirical journals, or in Gaganendranath Tagore’s ‘Realm of the Absurd’. Together they formed what I have seen as ‘framed dialogues’, critical engagements and exchanges between different social groups, classes and castes, in the discursive terrains of ‘little public spheres’ – the loosely knit constellations of power in society.¹⁵⁰

The time span reviewed here sees the emergence of multiple spaces of public discourses, over social reforms, political articulations and cultural expressions. The ‘spaces’ of the public become more ‘visible’, and therefore, the increased significance of the domain of the ‘visual’. In the late nineteenth century two modern innovations, print technology and the process of mechanical reproduction turned Bengal into a society dominated by the visual image. Pictorial journalism became an indispensable part of the literary culture. Combined with the time honoured culture of self parody in Bengal, taking idioms from the satirical metaphors in literature, performance and

¹⁴⁹ Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, London, 1978, p. 11.

¹⁵⁰ C. A. Bayly, *Empire and Information*, London, p.5, discussed in Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society 1778-1905*, New Delhi, 2006.

popular folk iconographies, printed cartoons emerged in Bengal to bring forth a fresh language of visual arts, embodying dissidence and resistance in satirical frames. In this work, I have tried to understand these embodiments, which took shape differently in different genres. They cannot be seen in a monochrome, but as a mosaic of multiple visions, multiple voices. The moods were many - ridicule, introspection, assertion of identity, at the same time a play of anxiety, fear and rejection. It is in this dialogic of negotiation, critique and self reflection that we have to locate the satirical imageries in colonial Calcutta.

The images of satire become visual texts of complex negotiations, of multiple voices and conflicting visions, juxtaposed and counterpoised to each other at the dialogical angle, so as to generate something beyond themselves rather than mere heterogeneity. They represent, "the coexistence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between different epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form."¹⁵¹ What was earthy and bawdy social satire in the *bazaar* art of the Calcutta streets, becomes more politically articulate in the printed cartoons, and by the time we reach Gaganendranath, satirical iconography reaches the spaces of high art.

Throughout the nineteenth century, whether in the *naksha* literature, the *pats* and the woodcuts of Kalighat and Battala, or in the genre of printed cartoons, see certain dominant clichés – the anglicised *babu*, being a recurrent motif. Yet, over a period of more than fifty years, the same motif gets refigured in different spaces, by different 'socio-ideological groups'. From the world of the dandyish *babu* in the Kalighat *pats* or the Battala wood-engravings, the focus and language of satire gets rearticulated around the image of the 'de-nationalised' elite, a shift from the earlier caricature of the *nouveaux riches* that we have seen in the popular caricatural forms of the Kalighat and Battala genres of social satire. In both the *Charivari* and the *Basantak*

¹⁵¹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, p. 291.

we do not see the images of a decadent aristocracy; instead what is upheld is a scathing satire on the native editors, and political elite. The *Basantak* in its claim to introduce the elective principle in the Municipal Council, strongly criticised the old aristocrats or the *abhijatas* and the Justices of Peace, and through its images argued for a transfer of political power from the aristocracy represented in the *zamindars*, to the *madhhyabittos* or the middle class, who consisted of the *grihasthyas* or the ratepayers. *Basantak's* connection with the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* and the India League makes clear its politics against the *zamindar* dominated British Indian Association. In Gaganendranath, this critique of the 'political *babu*' surfaces again when we see images of the Auto Speechola, the machine making political speeches for the aristocracy. In his imageries, we see the 'graduate', the 'mechanical man' produced by the 'University Machine', and the 'Artificial Illumination' of English education, leading to 'Forced Evolution'.¹⁵² The image of the *babu* thus travels through different genres, each time embodying the socio-cultural agency of its producer. By the time we reach Gaganendranath, it becomes a part of a politics of introspection, a critique of the mechanicity of a colonised culture.

From the 1850s to the 1930s, we see the emergence of a political iconography, the burgeoning of visual imageries in the public spaces and popular imagination. In the 1870s, *The Indian Charivari*, though suspicious of the native press, appeared undoubtedly as a staunch critic of the government. Its agency in this regard tends to get overshadowed by its apparent racist humour. *Basantak's* close ties with the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* group was reflected in a nationalist idiom in its imageries. Together these cartoon journals introduced an embodiment of the 'political', 'physiognomizing' public opinion and political critique. In the various images of an impoverished, ailing India, in both the journals, we find one of the earliest pictorial embodiments of the idea of a nation enslaved. The 1870s saw for the first time the emergence of a nationalist political iconography in Bengal, particularly with the

¹⁵² See pp. 118-119 for a discussion of these images.

Basantak, while English owned cartoon journals like the *Charivari* created for the first time satire on governance.

The image of the native woman, traverses different worlds of visual imagination too, though in the satire of the late nineteenth century, whether in the *pats* or in the cartoons of *Basantak*, social reform, leading to the 'emancipation' or women is seen as an impending apocalypse – *ghor koli*. The anxiety around the encroachment of the West in the private space, the westernisation of the traditional Bengali woman was ridiculed repeatedly. Politically, the *Basantak* upheld the pulse of a new political class; but it recoiled in matters of social reform - we see an all pervasive conservatism, particularly against the Brahmos. Women, attired in western clothing, reading novels, or commanding their husbands or clients, are repeatedly portrayed as a threat to the moral order, which colonialism has upset. In Gaganendranath, this iconography is reoriented. We do see him critiquing a disparate emulation of western clothing, but women's issues, particularly dowry deaths surface as one of the first pictorial engagements with social evils. In a way we can say that in him we see the beginnings of a language of humanistic concern and empathy in art.

The caste conflict forms an important dimension in studying the conflict and control function of humour, particularly in reading how through the creation of satirical imagery one community polemicised against the other in the public domain. *Basantak* was also a tool in the curious dialogue between two different caste groups in the city, speaking for a particular group or *dal* of *kayasthas* of North Calcutta, as against the Brahmin aristocracy of the *mofussil*. Mutual slandering and ridicule thus remained the dominant factor in the making of satirical images in the late nineteenth century. In the paradigm of Gaganendranath, pictorial satire reaches a sophistication, which goes beyond caste slandering and ridicule. Gaganendranath's satire is rather introspective in its politics, a perception of the lapses of his own class, a voice from within, distinctly different from the voices in the *shawngs* and the *pats*.

However, while we need to understand this persistence of difference, we cannot polarize these imageries in mutually exclusive binaries of elite/popular or what E. P. Thompson calls the patrician/plebeian binary. The oppositions between coloniser/colonised, tradition/modernity, or private/public get blurred here, and we are often left with images of tension, rather than a dialogue between opposing mutually exclusive categories. While 'popular' can be used as a category for these imageries, one needs to be careful, because in the decades of the seventies, these 'popular' expressions were imbibing in their frames idioms of the *madhhyabitto* or the middle classes, particularly in a shared anxiety about the fallouts of the colonial modernisation. These impulses of critique repeatedly strove to move beyond class. The pantomimes reflect this ambiguity within the popular. It created, so to say a grey zone between the elite and the popular. Also, the colonizer/colonized dichotomy does not hold. In the vernacular cartoons or the *pats* we hardly see satire on the colonizer; the colonial 'other' features only in the political and economic cartoons. Social satirical imageries, therefore, have to be traced back to the native society itself; they were products of an inward looking culture self parody.

In the earliest days of pictorial journalism in Bengal, these much nuanced cartoons need to be re-read, beyond ideological determinisms. As embodied dialogues, they form curious patterns of 'visual and gestural sign systems, cognitive-sensory experience inseparable from the ethical evaluation and action. Aesthetics, Bakhtin says, is not a strict formal cognitive structure, but it describes how relationships between the self and the other, self and the object, and, self and the world are structured. In artistic creation, reality and life interpenetrate with art. The treatment of the visual image in satire can read through the frames of both cognitive and ethical reorganisation of reality.¹⁵³

Coming back to some of the questions raised by Gombrich around the satirical image, how can satirical imageries be used as historical sources? How can

¹⁵³ Bakhtin, *Art and Answerability*, p. 120.

historians deploy them as source materials to enrich the knowledge of the culture and politics of a plural society, its material life and mentalité? Is the image after all such a formidable weapon? Does it influence public opinion? And more importantly, does it add anything that is not already stated in literature? Prints talk to us in many languages; they transmit messages about the status, gender and power relations. The cartoon has much to offer to the historian of public opinion and popular attitudes. Not only can cartoons provide insight into the depth of emotions surrounding attitudes, but also to the assumptions and illusions on which opinions are formed. Cartoons offer the imagery that renders them a fresh immediacy. The resistance it provokes is in a way more subversive because it deconstructs through laughter. Humour, as means of social control, may function to express approval or disapproval of social reform and action, express common group sentiments, develop and perpetuate stereotypes, relieve awkward and tense situations, and express collective and 'sub-rosa approbation of action not explicitly approved'¹⁵⁴. The laughter provides and expresses a feeling of power, however momentary. In exposing real or potential hypocrisy, in stripping away revered political, social and religious guises, satire reveals socially and psychologically empowered figures as powerless. This outburst of laughter, says Baudelaire, is an expression of pleasure and unease, an affirmation of the self, and an apprehension of a threat to the self. This dualism in the comic image converts the products of the fall, which is the comic, caricature and laughter, into the means of redemption, the transfer of ugliness into beauty. In the cartoons of Gaganendranath Tagore we see this transformation through the creation of a caricatural aesthetic.

Gombrich sees the satirical print, like the sermon and other ritual acts, existing to renew and reinforce the ties of common faith and common values, which holds the community together. One can see resonance of the moral-didactic function of satire here, the role of humour as a *corrective* in society. The political and the

¹⁵⁴ Apte, *Humour and Laughter*, p. 123.

caricatural print had made appearance in a limited circle, produced and bought by the politically articulate metropolitan middle classes. It was thus preaching to the converted. They reflected opinion rather than made it. They show us the visual clichés etched on the mind rather than made them. While we cannot overrate the power of prints it would be equally wrong to go to the other extreme and treat them as mere reflectors of pre-existing opinion. We then risk having a disembodied notion of public opinion and political culture. Medium and message cannot be separated, but need to read in a dynamic continuum.

Image creating is opinion creating. The cartoons in the 1870s signified a positive and critical articulation of the political voice of the middle classes. While studying cartoons, we need to keep in mind a more dynamic notion of public opinion. One needs to consider both the medium and the message in a public discourse, because ideas cannot be disembodied, they are contained, conveyed and constructed through imageries, verbal or visual. In this research, social change has been seen through physical metaphors in this research, not as mere illustration, but the text. I have tried to treat medium and message in a continuum. The agitation and mobilisation of the *grihasthyas* or the ratepayers in the 1870s, for instance, in the bid for power in the Municipal politics of the day, was a movement that derived a wider audience largely through the involvement of *Basantak* and the allied newspapers like the *Hindoo Patriot* and the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*. Prints we can say reflected opinion rather than made it—above all they reinforced the tensions, insecurities and aspirations of a nascent civil society. It is unlikely that prints changed many people's minds, their role was rather to confirm prejudices to fan political flames.

In the pool of imageries discussed here, in the *pats* of Kalighat or the *shwang* performances, visuality formed the crucial element in articulating the comic and in forwarding a critique. However, the nebulous articulations of a political opinion that we encounter in the pantomimes, whether it be around the Municipal acts or the Indigo planters get an altogether different embodiment with the beginning of

printed cartoons in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The production of visual images was addressed to reading public already awash in the satirical metaphors, cascading from the cheap Battala farces, the genre of *naksha* literature, from the political diatribes of the pamphlets, treatises, journals, and increasingly from newspapers. Cartoons were above all produced for and brought about by the politically articulate metropolitan middle classes. It was thus preaching to the converted; newspaper readers bought items, which reflected their own pre-existing political views.

Moving beyond Gaganendranath in this study, one could venture into the articulation of political cartooning in Bengal in the interwar years, particularly in the 40s. However, there emerges a tension between studying graphic satire as topical statements on one hand and following the line of socially conscious empathetic art, pioneered in a way by Gaganendranath on the other- after all what does the production of satire in art seek to achieve? The humanist strain Gaganendranath introduced in his art develops in the art of professional artists, cartoonists and political activists from the 40s, particularly in an age of deep fractures that saw famine, genocide and partition, and shaped the articulation of a political art or protest art in India.

Bibliography

A. Chief Sources

1. Picture Archives (Institutions and Private)

Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, Calcutta

H. R. Sanyal Collection, Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta

Rabindra Bharati Society, Calcutta

Rare Book Section, National Library, Calcutta

Personal Collection of Shri Chandi Lahiri, Calcutta

2. Journals & Periodicals: English & Vernacular

Basantak

Desh

Harbola Bhand

Hindi Punch

Josthimodhu

Journal of the Indian Society for Oriental Art.

Lalit Kala Contemporary

Manasi o Marmabani

Modern Review.

Mookherjee's Magazine

Prabasi

Purasri

Rupam

Shanibarar Chithi

The Indian Charivari

The Indian Punch

Vidura

3. Newspapers: English & Vernacular

Amrita Bazaar Patrika

Baenagl Harkaru

Calcutta Municipal Gazette

Sulabh Samachar

The Bengalee

The Englishman

The Hindoo Patriot

4. Books & Articles: English & Vernacular

Apte, Mahadev H., *Humor and Laughter: An Anthropological Approach*, Ithaca, 1985.

Atkinson, George Franklin, *Curry and Rice on 40 Plates, or the Ingredients of Social Life at "Our Station" in India*, London, 1854.

Baeque, de Antoine, 'The Citizen in Caricature: Past and Present', in in Renée Waldinger and Philip Dawson (ed.) *The French Revolution and the Meaning of Citizenship*, Connecticut, 1993.

Bakhtin, Mikhail, *Rabelais and His World*, Cambridge, Mass, 1968.

Bandyopadhyay, Bhawanicharan, *Kalikata Kamalalaya*, Calcutta, 1823.

Nabababubilash, Calcutta, 1825

Nababibililash, Calcutta, 1831.

Bireshwar Bandopadhyay, *Bangladesher Sang Prashange*, Calcutta, 1972

Bandopadyhay, Brajen (ed.), *Sambadpatrey Shekaler Katha*, vol.1&2, Calcutta, 1949.

Bannerji, Sumanta, *The Parlour and the Streets: Elite and Popular Culture in Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1989.

Baudelaire, Charles, *On the Essence of Laughter, And, In General, On the Comic in the Plastic Arts*, London, 1955 (original 1856).

'Some French Caricaturists' (first published in 1857), in *The Mirror of Art: Critical Studies* London, 1955.

'Some Foreign Caricaturists' (first published in 1857), in *The Mirror of Art: Critical Studies*, London, 1955.

Selected Writings on Art and Artists, Translated with an Introduction by P.E. Charvet, New York, 1972.

Bergson, Henri, *Laughter: An Essay On the Meaning of the Comic*, London, 1911.

Bhattacharya, Banikantha, 'Basantak', *Joshtimodhu: Byanga Partika Parichiti*, Baishakh, 1385 (BS).

Das, Sunil, 'Basantak Patrika o Kolkata Corporation', *Purasri*, Year 2, 1, March, 1979.

Dasgupta, Shanti Kumar and Mukhoti, Haribandhu, (ed.), *Iswargupta Rachanabali*, Calcutta, 1381 (BS)

Dutta, Kedarnath, *Sachitra Guljar Nagar*, Calcutta, 1871.

Datta, Mahendranath, *Kalikatar Puratan Kahini O Pratha*, Calcutta, 1983.

Datta, Prankrishna, *Kalikatar Itibritta*, Calcutta, 1981.

Ghosh, Benoy, (ed.), *Samayik Patrey Banglar Samajchitra*, vol. 1-4, Calcutta, 1980.

Selections from English Periodicals of Nineteenth Century Bengal, vol. II, Calcutta, 1980.

Ghosh, Manmathanath, 'Basantak', *Manasi O Marmabani*, Ashwin, 1333 (BS).

Goswamy, Jayanta, *Samajchitre Unabingsha Satabdir Bangla Prahashan*, Calcutta, 1320 (BS).

Gombrich, E.H., *Caricature*, Harmondsworth, 1940.

'A Cartoonist's Armoury', in *Meditations on a Hobby Horse*, London, 1965.

Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation, Princeton and Oxford, 2000.

Lahiri, Chandi,(ed.), *Hutomer Kalikatar Naksha*, Calcutta, 1368(BS).

Mitra, Pyarichand, *Alaler Gharer Dulal*, Calcutta, 1858.

Mullik, P., *Sachitra Kalikatar Itihash*, Calcutta, 1935.

Seth, Harihar, *Pracheen Kalikatar Parichay*, Calcutta, 1934.

Sinha, Kaliprasanna, *Hutom Penchar Naksha*, Calcutta, 1977, first published, 1868.

Sister Nivedita, 'The Function of Art in Shaping Nationality', *Modern Review*, January 1907.

Tagore, Gaganendranath, *Adbhut Lok*, Calcutta, 1917

Calcutta Exhibition of Paintings, Drawing Books, Manuscripts by Gaganendranath Tagore, Calcutta, 1929.

Naba Hullor, Calcutta, 1921.

Humorous Art of Gaganendranath Tagore, Calcutta, 1928, with an introduction by O. C. Gangooly

Tagore, Rabindranath, *Meaning of Art*, Calcutta, 1926.

Tagore, Rathindranath, *On the Edges of Time*, Calcutta, 1956

B. Secondary Sources

Books & Articles: English & Bengali

Archer, M., *Indian Popular Paintings in the India Office Library*, London, 1977.

Archer, W.G., *Bazaar Paintings of Calcutta : The Styles of Kalighat*, London, 1953.

Kalighat Drawings from the B.K. Birla Collection, Marg Publications, 1962.

Bakhtin, Mikhail, *The Dialogic Imagination*, ed. Mikhail Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Mikhail Holquist, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981.

- Benjamin, W., 'The Work of art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', *Illuminations*, London, 1955.
- Berger, J., *Ways of Seeing*, London, 1981.
- Bhaba, Homi, *The Location of Culture*, London, 1994.
- Bhargav, Rajiv and Reifeld, Helmut, (eds.), *Civil Society, Public Sphere and Citizenship: Dialogues and Perceptions*, New Delhi, 2005.
- Bhattacharya, Tithi, *Sentinels of Culture: Class, Education and the Colonial Intellectual in Bengal*, New Delhi, 2005.
- Burke, Peter, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe*, London, 1978.
- Chatterji, Partha, *The Nation and its Fragment*, Princeton, 1993.
- Clark, K. and Holquist, M., *Mikhail Bakhtin*, Cambridge, Mass., 1984.
- Chattopadhyaya, R., *From the Karkhana to the Studio : Changing Social Roots of Patrons and Artists in Bengal*, New Delhi, 1990.
- Choudhuri, S., *The Select Nonsense of Sukumar Ray*, Calcutta, 1987.
- Calcutta: The Living City*, vol.1, Calcutta, 1990.
- Coomaraswamy, A. K, *Art and Swadeshi*, Madras, 1912
- Datta, Gurusaday 'Folk Art of Bengal', *Modern Review*, Calcutta, 1932.
- Feaver, W., *Masters of Caricature: From Hogarth and Gillray to Scarfe and Levine*, New York, 1981.
- Geipel, J. *The Cartoon: A Short History of Graphic Comedy and Satire*, London, 1972.
- Ghosh, Anindita, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society 1778-1905*, New Delhi, 2006.
- Goetz, H. 'The Modern Movement of Art in India : A Symposium : i. The Great Crisis, from "Traditional" to "Modern" Indian Art', *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, No. 1, June 1962.
- Goldstein, Jeffrey H., and Mc Ghee, Paul, (eds.), *The Psychology of Humor: Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Issues*, New York, 1972.

- Green, Nicholas, and Mort, Frank, 'Visual Representations and Cultural Politics', *The Bloch Reader*, London, 1996.
- Guha-Thakurta, T., *The Making of a New 'Indian' Art : Artists, Aesthetics, and Nationalism in Bengal 1850-1920*, Cambridge, 1992.
- Hannoosh, Michelle, *Baudelaire and Caricature: From the Comic to an Art of Modernity*, University Park, Paris, 1992.
- Harper, Graeme, (ed.), *Comedy, Fantasy and Colonialism*, London, 2002.
- Horn, M., *The World Encyclopedia of Cartoons*, New York, 1980.
- Holquist, Mikhail, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World*, London, 1997.
- Jackson, H., (ed.), *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear*, London, 1975.
- Jain, J. *Kalighat Painting: Images from a Changing World*, Ahmedabad, 1999.
- Koestler, A. *The Act of Creation*, London, 1978.
- Kar, A. 'Gaganendranath Tagore', *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, No.6, April 1987.
- Mackenzie, John, *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, Manchester, 1986.
- Malcolm, James Peter, *A Historical Sketch of the Art of Caricature, with Graphic Illustrations*, London, 1833.
- Marx, Claude Roger, *Graphic Art of the Nineteenth Century*, London, Thames and Hudson, 1962.
- Mitter, P., *Art and Nationalism in Colonial India 1850-1922: Occidental Orientations*, Cambridge, 1994.
- Morreal, John, (ed.), *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor*, SUNY: Albany, 1987.
- Mukherji, T. N., *Art Manufactures of India*, first edition 1888, reprint New Delhi, 1974.
- Mukhopadhyay, A., 'Gaganendranath Tagore: The Pioneer of Modern Indian Caricature in Print', *Lalit Kala Contemporary*, No.39, 1994.
- Oesterheld, Christina, and Zohlar, Claus Peter, *Of Clowns and Gods, Brahmins and Babus: Humour in South Asian Literatures*, New Delhi, 1999.

- Parimoo, R., *The Paintings of the Three Tagores, Abanindranath, Gaganendranath, Rabindranath: Comparative and Chronological Study*, Baroda, 1973.
- Paul, A. (ed.), *Woodcuts prints of Nineteenth Century Calcutta*, Calcutta, 1983.
- Ray, R., *Urban Roots of Indian Nationalism*, Calcutta, 1979.
- Roselli, J., 'The Self-image of Effateness: Physical Education and Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal', *Past and Present*, vol. 86, Feb. 1980.
- Sahay, K.N., *An Anthropological Study of Cartoons in India*, New Delhi, 1998.
- Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1985.
- Sanyal, H., 'Sukumar Rai and Chitre Nonsense Club', *Desh*, 53rd year, 44, September, 1986.
- Sarkar, Kamla, *Rupaddhaksha Gaganendranath*, Calcutta, 1986.
- 'Unish Shataker Byangachitra- Samayik Prasange', *Chatushkan*, Magh, 1379 (BS).
- '100 Years of Indian Cartoons', *Vidura*, August, 1969.
- Sarkar, Sumit, 'Kaliyuga, Chakri and Bhakti: Ramkrishna and his Times', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 18 July, 1992
- Sarkar, Tanika, *Hindu Wife, Hindu Nation, Community, Religion and Cultural Nationalism*, New Delhi, 2001.
- 'Nationalist Iconography: The Image of Women in Nineteenth Century Bengal Life', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 21 November 1987.
- Sen, G., *The Calcutta Psyche*, New Delhi, 1996.
- Sen, D.C., 'Gaganendranath Thakurer Smritikatha', *Ananda Bazar Patrika*, 16 March, 1938.
- Shikes, Ralph, *The Indignant Eye: The Artist as Social Critic in prints and Drawings from fifteenth century to Picasso*, Boston, 1969.
- Sinha, Pradip, *Calcutta in Urban History*, Calcutta, 1978.
- Sripantha, *Battala*, Calcutta, 1997.

Mahanto Elokeshi Sambad, Calcutta, 1997.

Thomason, R., *Henri Bergson*, London, 1965.

Welch, Stuart Cary, *Room for Wonder: Indian Painting during the British Period 1760-1880*, New York, 1978.

