

4 THE POWER OF THE PRINTED IMAGE

In principle a work of art has always been reproducible . . . Mechanical reproduction of a work of art, however, represents something new.

Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 1955

THE RISE OF PICTORIAL JOURNALISM

Art schools and art societies, the new institutions that helped to establish the supremacy of academic art in Bombay and Calcutta, enjoyed Raj patronage. But there were modern innovations, namely printing technology and the processes of mechanical reproduction, that flourished independently of the government. These means of mass communication made further assaults on Indian sensibility, turning urban India into a 'visual society', dominated by the printed image. They affected equally the elite and the ordinary people: lithographic prints served a mass market that cut across class barriers, while pictorial journalism became an indispensable part of literate culture. The educated enjoyed a rich harvest of illustrated magazines, picture books for children and cartoons. The appearance of high-quality plates lent greater credibility to writings on art. As printing presses mushroomed, these publications reinforced public taste for academic art.

The mechanical production of images opened up endless possibilities for the enterprising journalist. Graphic artists, for instance, served their apprenticeship as illustrators and cartoonists on magazines. For a remarkable flair in blending literary and illustrative journalism we must turn to the brilliant early practitioner, Ramananda Chatterjee. His career coincided with the Bengal Renaissance and the founding of the Indian National Congress in 1885. In 1909, the influential editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, W. T. Stead, paid a tribute to this pioneer:

the sanest Indians are for a 'nationhood of India', undivided by caste, religion or racial differences. A notable representative of this . . . is Ramananda Chatterjee. He [seeks], through the medium of the Press, to

rouse India to a sense of its fallen condition and inspire the natives of the land to help themselves. He is pre-eminently an editor, although ... he has been associated with many reform movements. At present he is the editor, publisher and owner of the *Modern Review*, a high-grade illustrated monthly magazine, published in English, and *Prabasi*, a Bengalee organ.'

From the outset, two interests dominated Ramananda's thinking, art and nationalism; he combined them with a rare success. A thoroughly modern entrepreneur, thrown up by colonial India, Ramananda took pride in professionalism, insisting on the punctual appearance of his journals and the prompt payment of contributors. His career was an object lesson in anticipating emerging trends and steering his ventures adroitly in those directions. Yet, he was not merely a journalist; he was also the most successful one, with an unfailing instinct for backing promising artists. Ramananda moved painlessly from Ravi Varma to Abanindranath, as naturalism gave way to *swadeshi* orientalism. An attachment to liberal values was evident in all his activity. Born a Brahmin, he gave up his Sacred thread under the influence of the Brahmo Samaj. His early endeavours were taken up with children's education and with improving the lot of Indian women. During his schooldays he tried to set up an Evening school for working men. While at university, he responded to the early stirrings of nationalism. But, even though he regularly attended Congress sessions, Ramananda saw his role as a journalist rather than as an active politician.²

Like many an ambitious young Bengali of the period, Ramananda seized the opportunity of a career outside Bengal. Here, as a teacher at the Kayastha College in Allahabad, he conceived his first illustrated magazine, *Pradip* (1897). The opening issue explained its aims: 'If you ask us why another Bengali magazine ... the reason [is] that there is none yet of the kind I like in Bengali which combines pleasure with edification'.³ *Pradip* set the trend in non-specialist vernacular magazines. It provided entertaining reading for the leisured in science, ethnography, archaeology, literature, the arts and other miscellaneous topics. When, following this success, Ramananda was asked to publish an English edition of the *Kayastha Samachar* in 1899, he was able to realise his second dream - to foster national unity through art.⁴

Ramananda's most successful ventures were *Prabasi* and *Modern Review*, to which W. T. Stead referred. The cover of the first issue of *Prabasi* (1901) proudly displayed a cultural conspectus of Indian architecture: Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Sikh and even Burmese (Burma then lying under the Raj); the editorial announced the pan-Indian sentiments of its editor. The issue sold out immediately and had to be reprinted. In time, however, the limited readership of *Prabasi* disappointed Ramananda. His decision in 1907 to launch the English language *Modern Review* carried his nationalist message to English-speaking Indians, besides being a

sound business move. He was convinced that the foreign rulers must be made aware of emergent nationalism. Before *Modern Review* appeared, the ground was prepared with a publicity campaign led by well-known writers.⁵

Modern Review more than fulfilled Ramananda's expectations: it was read nationwide. Much of its attraction lay in its superior illustrations. Not that illustrated magazines did not then exist in India; wood-blocks and lithographs were common in books. In Bengal, lithographic illustrations were an important feature of the art journal, *Shilpa Pushpadnjali*, and the children's magazine, *Bdlak*, both issued in 1885. But by and large, illustrations were conspicuous by their absence; if they appeared at all, their poor reproductions failed to leave an impression. This was all the more serious in articles on art: witness the critic Balendranath Tagore's remarkable essays in *Bhadrati*. Unillustrated, they remained in obscurity until recently. For Ramananda, poor pictures were even more serious. His objective after all was to bring art to the reading public as part of the nationalist agenda. But he stood little chance of success without the new half-tone blocks. This revolution in reproduction, made possible by photography, captured the subtle gradations of light and shade essential for a faithful rendering of naturalism. The process had just appeared in the West in the wake of experiments with the camera. Ramananda saw its potential and immediately replaced the earlier lithographic illustrations, with half-tones.⁶

Ramananda was fortunate in having a friend in Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri, an *uomo universale*. A member of the small group of liberal Brahmos, he was an intimate friend of the Tagores and of the scientist, Jagadish Bose, one of the first Indian Fellows of the Royal Society. Today Raychaudhuri is scarcely remembered outside Bengal, although his half-tone methods were in extensive use until recently (Fig. 76). At the turn of the century, however, he was widely admired as an innovator in photographic reproduction. His experiments were published regularly in the *Penrose Annual*. The journal, *Process Work and Electrotyping*, noted his importance: 'Mr. Upendrakishor Ray of Calcutta . . . is far ahead of European and American workers in originality, which is all the more surprising when we consider how far he is from hub-centres of process work'.⁷ In 1902 he brought out the 'Ray Tint Process', used the following year for colour plates in magazines. By 1913, his own printing press was producing colour blocks, having broken new ground with other inventions that received favourable notices. Upendrakishore's 'Screen Adjusting Process' was singled out as a 'unique method . . . [which] has been supplied to some of the leading technical schools in England where it has been reported on very favourably'.⁸ The Director of Public Instruction in Bengal, seeking ways to illustrate school textbooks attractively, spoke of Raychaudhuri: 'I had no idea that such good illustration printing . . . could be done in Bengal'.⁹

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Half-tone illustrations quickly became the norm in publishing, not least in Ramananda's magazines. The earliest monochrome half-tone plates were Sashi Hesh's *Purdnic* illustration in *Pradip* (1901) and Ravi Varma's *Sitd* in *Prabdsi* (1901). Varma's *Woman Playing Saravat* in *Prabdsi* (1902), using the 'Ray Tint Process', captured for the first time the softer tones of an oil painting, which pleased the famous artist. The next year, the pioneer editor went on to colour reproduction, printing Varma's *Aja's Lament* in three colours. The year after, *Prabdsi*, which always gave prominence to European art, printed full-colour plates of Raphael's *St Cecilia* and *The Knight's Dream*. Around 1907, Ramananda brought out the first biography of Ravi Varma, illustrated with monochrome plates. Soon Dhurandhar, the Bombay artist, became a regular feature in *Prabdsi*.¹⁰

In 1908, when Ramananda moved his press from Allahabad to Calcutta, it became easier for him to make more regular use of Upendrakishore's printing firm. The editor of *Prabdsi* introduced the



76 U. Raychaudhuri:
Illustration from
Rabindranath's *Nadi*

practice of adding a brief description to the 'Painting of the Month', a convention eagerly emulated by other serials. In short, there was gradually created an informed environment for art in which half-tone plates played an indispensable part. In 1909 *Bhdrati* inaugurated its first full-colour art plate with the orientalist Suren Ganguly's *Hara-PdrvatL*. The layout and the caption paid obvious homage to Ramananda.¹¹ Not to be outdone, *Sdhitya*, *Bhdrati*'s arch-rival, followed suit in 1910 with its own art plates of European and Indian salon artists. It had already published photographs of literary figures in 1893.¹² *Shilpa O Sdhitya*, an art magazine which came out in 1908, contained monochrome and colour plates as a regular feature.¹³

Popular Bengali monthlies took note of Ramananda's inspired guess that illustrations enhanced sales. But there were considerable fluctuations in the quality of plates in an explosion of illustrated magazines. In 1907, when the novelist Prabhat Mukhopadhyaya founded a new monthly, *Mdnasi O Marmabdni*, he was able to draw upon the experience of *Prabdsi* and *Modern Review*, to fill his magazine with a rich crop of pictures. The peak was reached in 1913 with *Bhdrat Barsha*, launched by another literary figure, the playwright Dwijendralal Roy. His journal in time rivalled if not outstripped *Prabdsi* in popularity. By now, technology had ceased to pose problems; neither was its cost prohibitive. Many of the fledgling publications were not fussy about pirating illustrations, especially from foreign publications, thereby drastically cutting costs. Sources were seldom acknowledged, since vernacular journals were confined within linguistic boundaries. In this century, Bengal could boast many illustrated magazines and even some of quality. In all of them the half-tone art plates pioneered by Raychaudhuri were the main selling point. Sadly, he himself hardly profited from his inventions, which had no rival until the advent of the offset litho process in 1930.^u

The influence of these illustrated monthlies on educated taste cannot be overstated. Rabindranath once complained that 'the educated had driven the Bengali language into the zenana. English was used for all correspondence, intellectual work and even conversation [among men]'.¹⁵ Only a minority of Bengali women had access to English; social etiquette forbade them from attending public exhibitions. The plethora of vernacular monthlies, whose price was within the reach of the average household, benefited these women. The hitherto closed doors of the cosmopolitan world of art were at last open to them. These magazines were eagerly and regularly bought. Even today, elegant leather-bound back numbers of *Prabdsi*, *Bhdrati*, *Sdhitya*, *Mdnasi O Marmabdni*, *Bhdrat Barsha* and *Mdsik Basumati* are to be found in Bengali homes.

Ramananda's art plates provided the model for magazine publishing in the rest of India. *Prabdsi* inspired an erstwhile colleague of his from Allahabad. In 1907, Pandit Balkrishna Bhatta brought out a well-produced, illustrated Hindi monthly, *Bdlprabhdkar*, from Varanasi.

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Among journals outside Bengal, few could rival *Kumār* (Fig. 77), the brainchild of Ravishankar Rawal, the painter from Ahmedabad, and his colleague, Bacchubhai Rawat. Rawat originally worked for the pioneer Gujarati magazine, *Vasmi Sadi* (Fig. 78), published from Bombay. A magazine of light reading, it carried illustrated features on topics such as photography, the cinema of Chaplin and the life of Jagadish Bose. Occasionally it reproduced Indian miniatures, while its preference in contemporary painting was for Ravi Varma and Dhurandhar. In 1921 it closed down on the death of its owner, Haji Mohammad Allarakhia Shivji. In 1924 *Kumar* became its successor after a chance meeting between Rawal and Rawat.¹⁶

Rawal was convinced that the average educated Gujarati, who went for European prints and Ravi Varma oleographs, needed to improve his taste. Though immensely energetic, Allarakhia was not discriminating. With a quality magazine in mind, Rawal studied the techniques of European art journals taken by an artist friend. But his immediate model was *Modern Review*, brought to his notice by Gandhi's personal secretary,

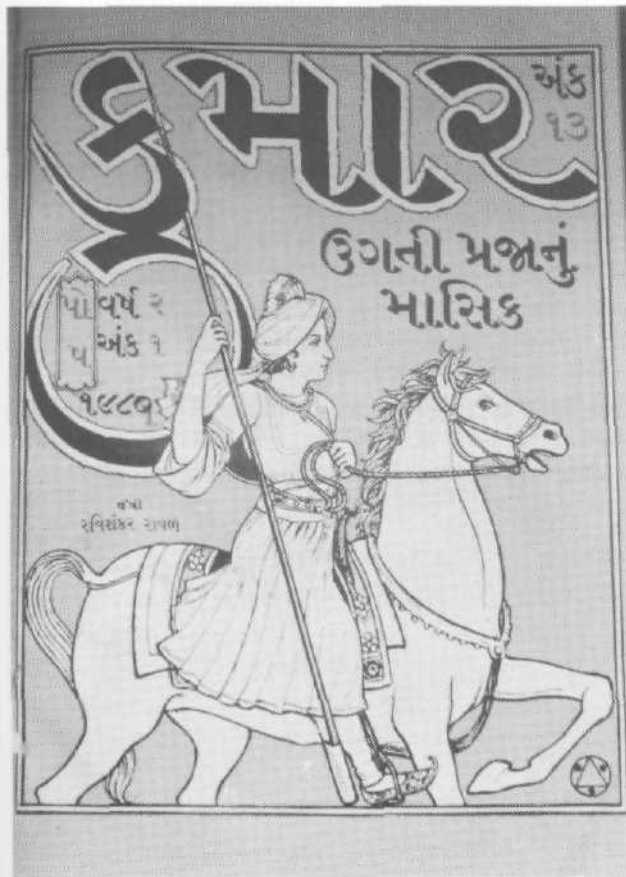
77 Left Cover of *Kumār*

78 Cover of *Vasmi Sadi*

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77 Left Cover of Kumar

78 Cover of Vasmi Sadi



Mahadev Desai. *Kumār* aimed at educating the young in science and art and at providing entertaining literature at an affordable price. The articles were similar to those in *Modern Review*: on physical culture (a nationalist preoccupation), current affairs and on the leaders of cultural nationalism in Bengal. Rawal never underestimated the impact of quality illustrations on the reader.¹⁷

The 1920s saw the appearance of several talented illustrators in Bengal. They skilfully decorated margins and page headings with lunettes and other devices, cleverly blending volutes with voluptuous females. Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac, the Victorian illustrators, inspired them. The most successful exponent of this genre was Satish Sinha, who had a talent for ornamenting title pages with *art nouveau* arabesques and meandering curves. He enjoyed a virtual monopoly in *Basumati* (Fig. 79), which now rivalled older monthlies, though Hemen Majumdar and other well-known painters occasionally supplied designs to the magazine. Before long, *Bhadrat Barsha* engaged the cartoonist and illustrator Jatin Sen to produce similar vignettes.¹⁸ These literary and cultural magazines were an inspiration to adolescents, who produced small-circulation literary magazines elegantly designed and written with beautiful calligraphy.

THE CHILD'S WORLD OF PLAY

In the last century, the demand for illustrated children's books rose dramatically in Bengal. Educational reformers wanted wholesome reading material. They were also keen to counteract missionary influence. It is no coincidence that the field was dominated by Brahmos, who took education to be a moral force and an instrument for change. In 1844, the Tattvabodhini Sabha produced an early Bengali spelling book, followed by other primers such as *Sishu Sikshd*, *Sishu Bodh*, and in 1855 the educationist Iswarchandra Vidyasagar's *Barnā Parichay*. This introduction

79 A decorative design from
Māsik Basumati



to the Bengali alphabet is yet to be superseded. The later editions had recourse to lithographs to enhance their appeal.¹⁹

Even greater scope was offered by children's stories and nursery rhymes. Although it was only in the last century that story books began to be published, story-telling had an ancient tradition in India, each region possessing its own lore of nursery rhymes and fairy tales. Nineteenth-century philologists regarded India as the ultimate source of many European folk stories. Indian compendia such as the *Pančatantra* and the *Hitopodeta* were passed along medieval trade routes to the West. Household tales existed in an oral form, retold by women from generation to generation. In the last century, they were compiled, codified and published. This concerted effort was a worldwide phenomenon. It followed in the wake of the philological work of the brothers Grimm. They were persuaded by Herder to listen to the unadorned voice of the *Volk*. Their researches into Aryan folklore made them appreciate Indian folklore.²⁰

Sir Richard Temple's son, Richard Carnac Temple, an officer in the Indian army, was a folklorist of repute. A member of the anthropologist E. B. Tylor's Folk-Lore Society of England, Temple began compiling stories from different parts of India and analysing them according to the plan formulated by the Society. By 1884, a number of works, *Indian Fairy Tales* (1880), *Old Deccan Days* (3rd edn 1881), *Legends of the Punjab* (vol. I 1883-4), Damant's translation of Bengali legends in the *Indian Antiquary* (1872-8), *Folk Tales of Bengal* (1883) and *Wide-Awake Stories* (1884) appeared in print. The last was by the novelist Flora Annie Steel, who recorded the oral tales of Punjab at Temple's instance. The volume contained Temple's copious annotations and a structural analysis of these 'Aryan' folk-tales.²¹

Temple was also instrumental in the publication of *Folk Tales of Bengal*. Its author, Reverend Lalbehari Day, an influential figure in Bengal, knew the Grimms' work and duly sought to express the Aryan origins of the Bengali stories. He also captured the peculiarly Bengali flavour of these tales of tigers, bandits, goblins, demons, *yakṣas* and various spine-chilling monsters told by Bengali grannies to lull children to sleep on sultry summer nights.²² For the urban child, however, the classic work was *Thakurmār Jhuli* (1907) by Dakshina Ranjan Mitra Majumdar (Fig. 80). The title translates loosely as 'Granny's Treasure-Sack': the fantasy, terror and whimsy inside it kept generations of Bengali children spellbound. The illustrations were woodcuts based on Dakshina Ranjan's sketches. The author, who acknowledged his debt to Day, had traipsed the villages of Bengal compiling rustic women's tales with the help of a primitive 'recording' machine. He was fired by the *swadeshi* urge to preserve folklore. The other outstanding contribution in this genre was Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri's elegant retelling of household tales, *Tuntunir Boi* (The Tailor-Bird's Book).²³

THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

The proliferation of children's literature followed the dictates of the new age. Until the nineteenth century, children were normally treated as miniature adults. The Romantic movement helped grown-ups discover the self-contained world of children, giving rise to the subject of child psychology. Educationists re-read Rousseau, who had urged the natural growth of children. Kindergartens were founded to nurture children's imagination, unfettered by adult constraints. Fröbel valued highly the

ঠাকুরমা'র ঝুলি ।



role of a stimulating environment in the spontaneous growth of a child. This revolution in attitudes towards children reached Bengal as part of the wider changes in sensibility brought about by Romanticism.²⁴

Once again, the more liberal elements were in the forefront, especially the Brahmos. Some of the leading Brahmos, the Tagores and Upendrakishore Raychaudhuri for instance, engaged actively in exploring the 'play' element in Bengali culture. Of course the 'play' element has formed an integral part of Indian culture with Hindu mythology attaching a central importance to divine playfulness or play-acting (*Hid*). Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* has taught us to appreciate the value of games and of make-believe worlds, indeed play or play-acting has psychological significance with physiological roots. But its development in nineteenth-century Bengal reflected the rise of individualism, which for the first time allowed children to be taken seriously.²⁵

The invention of parlour games and brain-teasers to test intelligence and knowledge was a regular part of the Tagore household. We know of pictorial puzzles devised by Rabindranath in his youth. What was new was that these games were not dismissed by grown-ups as mere child's play, but were enthusiastically indulged in. In Rabindranath's case these early pranks laid the foundations of his old-age 'automatic' drawings. Theatre, costume drama and making masks were the Tagores' way of visualising the make-believe world. After returning from Japan, Rabindranath encouraged Abanindranath to take up the art of mask. Abanindranath's masks combined portraiture with elements from Japanese culture. He found playfulness a most congenial way to live. At the very end of his life he produced *objets trouvés* in a spirit of pure playfulness.²⁶

In both Rabindranath and Abanindranath's writings, daydreaming and free play of the imagination recur. One of Rabindranath's most poignant accounts of a child's world is his play, *The Post Office*. Less known outside Bengal are Abanindranath's stories for children. As he confessed, he always felt more at home in their world. The same urge that made him encourage his students to give free rein to their imagination is evident in his early writing for children, *Kshirer Putul* (c. 1896). He had previously published a children's version of *Abhijnāna Śakuntalam* but this was the first instance in which visual and linguistic invention flowed effortlessly from his pen. A charming example of this mixed genre of 'ut pictura poesis' are his late illustrations to the traditional poem *Kabikankan Chandi* (Fig. X).²⁷

From the 1880s, the rapid expansion of journalism in Bengal coupled with educational reforms drew lively minds to children's magazines. They felt it necessary to supplement the *Boy's Own Paper* and other imported literature with Bengali publications. The first such venture, *Sakhā*, was published in 1883 by Pramadacharan Sen with illustrations by Upendrakishore. Sen died penniless in 1885, despite the popularity of his magazine, the year the Tagores launched *Bdlak* with illustrations by

Harish Chandra Halder. *Sāthi* followed *Sakhā* in 1893. In 1895, a prominent Brahmo thinker, Sibnath Sastri, brought out *Mukul*. By the turn of the century, children in Calcutta had a wide choice of illustrated magazines.²⁸

In 1913, Upendrakishore entered the field with a children's magazine that set an example in graceful simplicity. He had the advantages of an excellent printing press and early experience as illustrator in *Sakhā*. *Tuntunir Boi* and children's versions of the *Rdndyana* and the *Mahdbhdrata* were his contributions to children's literature. *Sandesh* was conceived, written, illustrated and edited almost single-handedly by Upendrakishore until his death in 1915. When it was launched in 1913, his son Sukumar was in England studying printing technology. Sukumar joined his father in the project on his return.²⁹

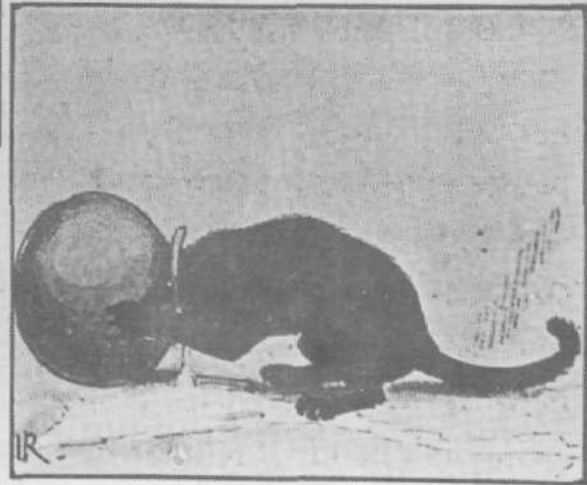
From its inception, *Sandesh* (Fig. 81) was the most attractive Bengali publication for children. Unlike the relatively bland names *Sakhā* and *Sāthi* (both meaning playmate), or *Bdlak* (boy), the name *Sandesh* evoked a very different world. Its sparkling *double entendre* played as much on the illustrations in *Sandesh* Bengali word as on a Bengali weakness (the word has the dual meaning

81 U. Raychaudhuri, four a very different world. Its sparkling *double entendre* played as much on the illustrations in *Sandesh* Bengali word as on a Bengali weakness (the word has the dual meaning



ভাগ্যমন্ত কোনো এক গোয়ালার ঘরে,
দধি দুগ্ধ ক্ষীর-সর আছে থরে থরে ;
দেখিয়া বিড়ালী হলো লোভেতে অস্থির,
কেমনে খাইবে সেই দধি দুগ্ধ ক্ষীর ।
এদিক ওদিক চে'য়ে চোরের মতন,

চাটিতে লাগিল চক্ চক্ মনোস্থখে ।
ক্ষীরের যে ভাঁড় তার মুখ সরু ছিল,
কচুয়েক্টে তার মধ্যে মাথা ঢুকাইল ।
একেত ক্ষীরের গন্ধে লোভে অন্ধপ্রায়,
তাতে আছে চক্ষু ঢাকা দেখিতে না পায় ।



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'news' and a favourite sweetmeat of Bengal). On the cover of the first issue a bearded 'grandad' carried aloft a large earthen pot of delicious *sandesh*. Witty pictures and a unique brand of gentle humour were everywhere. Upendrakishore checked that the contents held a child's attention by studying his own family's reactions.³⁰

Sandesh was distantly modelled on *Boy's Own Paper*, the staple diet of children all over the empire, but several features were noteworthy. Puzzles and word games abounded. A scientist and inventor himself, Upendrakishore loved problem-solving stories. Not only did he and his son Sukumar keep abreast of the latest scientific advances, they made them accessible in simple, lucid language. Their own scientific writings were a model of clarity, interspersed with wry humour and acute observation.³¹



যথাযোগ্য শিক্ষা তারে দিল পরিপাটী
বিড়ালীর কাণ্ড দেখি লয়ে এক লাঠি,
যথাযোগ্য শিক্ষা তারে দিল পরিপাটী ।
অকস্মাৎ বজ্রাঘাত বিড়ালীর মাথে,
ভান্জিল স্নেহের স্বপ্ন ভাঁড় ভান্জা সাথে ।
ভান্জা কলসীর কাণা গলায় রহিল,
উচ্চ পুচ্ছ করি পুসি ছুটিয়া চলিল ।
বহু দূর গিয়া এক বট বৃক্ষ তলে,
বিশ্রামে বসিল হায় পিঠ যায় জ্বলে ।
ক্ষীরের মিস্ততা আর লাঠির প্রহার,
কোনটা কেমন মিস্ত করিছে বিচার ।

ভাবিয়া দেখিনু চিন্তে অসার-সংসার ;
মিছা সংসারের ফাঁদে পড়ে কেন থাকি,
শেষকালে প্রাণপণে হরি বলে ডাকি ।
বৈরাগ্যে আমার এবে পরিপূর্ণ মন,
কলসী বাঁধিয়া গলে যাচ্ছি বৃন্দাবন ।”
শেয়ালী বলিছে—“মাসী পিঠে কেন দাগ ?
মুখে ক্ষীর মেখে কেবা করেছে সোহাগ ?”
বেড়ালী দেখিল সব বুঝেছে শেয়ালী,
খাটিল না খাটিল না মিছা চতুরালী ।
মেউ মেউ করি সেই পিছু পানে হটে,
কথা কাটাকাটি হ’ল দুই শটে শটে ।



In *Sandesh*, the world of science, complex as it was, was brought to life with vivid illustrations. Bengali children, used to the ogres of Hindu mythology, could now discover the thrill of prehistoric monsters. In the illustration in question, a gigantic brontosaurus lurks above the trees of the Eden Gardens, Calcutta's best-known park, as a cricket match takes place. The scale of the creature is brought home by juxtaposing it with a familiar winter sight in Calcutta. After Upendrakishore's death, between 1916 and his own death in 1923, Sukumar ran the magazine and contributed stories and articles about general knowledge. The subjects were as varied as they were informative: the buried city of Pompeii, skyscrapers in America, deep-sea divers, submarines, Big Ben, the nature of the sun, chloroform, the pyramids, the end of the world, the stellar system, to name only a few. The striking aspect was not so much that Bengali children were encouraged to be curious about their environment but that they were also taught to think rationally about it.³²

Sandesh perfected a language that was simple, amusing and accessible. The tradition went back to Vidyasagar's use of a small vocabulary. But Upendrakishore went further. He made reading attractive to urban children by using the everyday language of Calcutta. He belonged to a movement for the de-Sanskritisation of Bengali which had commenced in the previous century in the prose writings of Tekchand Thakur, Kaliprasanna Sinha and others. At the same time, being a supporter of education as a moral force, Upendrakishore was anxious that language in *Sandesh* should retain its innocent quality. 'One of the unwritten laws of contemporary morality', wrote P. Ariès in 1962, 'the strictest and the best respected of all, requires adults to avoid any reference, above all any humorous reference, to sexual matters in the presence of children. This notion was entirely foreign to the society of old'.³³

This concern for children paralleled a wider concern for modern Bengali literature. There had been tensions within Bengali society throughout the last century that had erupted in sporadic conflicts between English-educated liberals and the defenders of older values. In Calcutta, a new morality had emerged in the wake of Victorian evangelism, with the aim of removing the franker aspects of Bengali language and behaviour. It had a profound effect on sensibility and on social conduct. The founding of the Society for the Prevention of Obscenity by Vidyasagar in the late nineteenth century was one of its products. Yet, in 1907, *Thākumdr Jhuli*, meant for children, reproduced folk tales as faithfully as possible. Not only did Dakshina Ranjan preserve the archaic language by then considered indecent, he also retained scenes of sadism and other unpleasant aspects of the oral tradition. His original transcription is now lost but even the bowdlerised version is strong stuff. Upendrakishore, however, who insisted that children's tales be morally uplifting as well as graceful, carefully shielded them from these aspects in his writings.³⁴

What really made *Sandesh* popular were its humorous illustrations.

They effectively finished off the earlier lithographs that had enjoyed a virtual monopoly. A comparison between wood-engraved illustrations in *Thdkurmdr Jhuli* and half-tone pictures in *Sandesh* makes this clear. Just as he tried to popularise science, Upendrakishore sought to bring everyday experience to Hindu mythology and give it an immediate appeal to urban children. His own representational skill stood him in good stead when de-mythologising the gods. In his celebrated *Death of Balardma*, Upendrakishore treats this hero of the *Mahdbhdrata* as a believable human being rather than as a conventional *avatar* of Viṣṇu. And yet he also manages to convey the supernatural element of the story - an enormous many-hooded snake issuing out of Balarama's mouth - all the more convincingly. Other instances show a playful attitude to the gods. A rare appreciation of this quality in Upendrakishore came from Sister Nivedita, an influential figure in the Bengali art world. 'The humour and variety with which the Asuras [demons] are represented here is delightful', she commented on Upendrakishore's mythological illustration, *The Churning of the Ocean*.³⁵ He had shown the gods as vulnerable and human, not mere objects of piety.

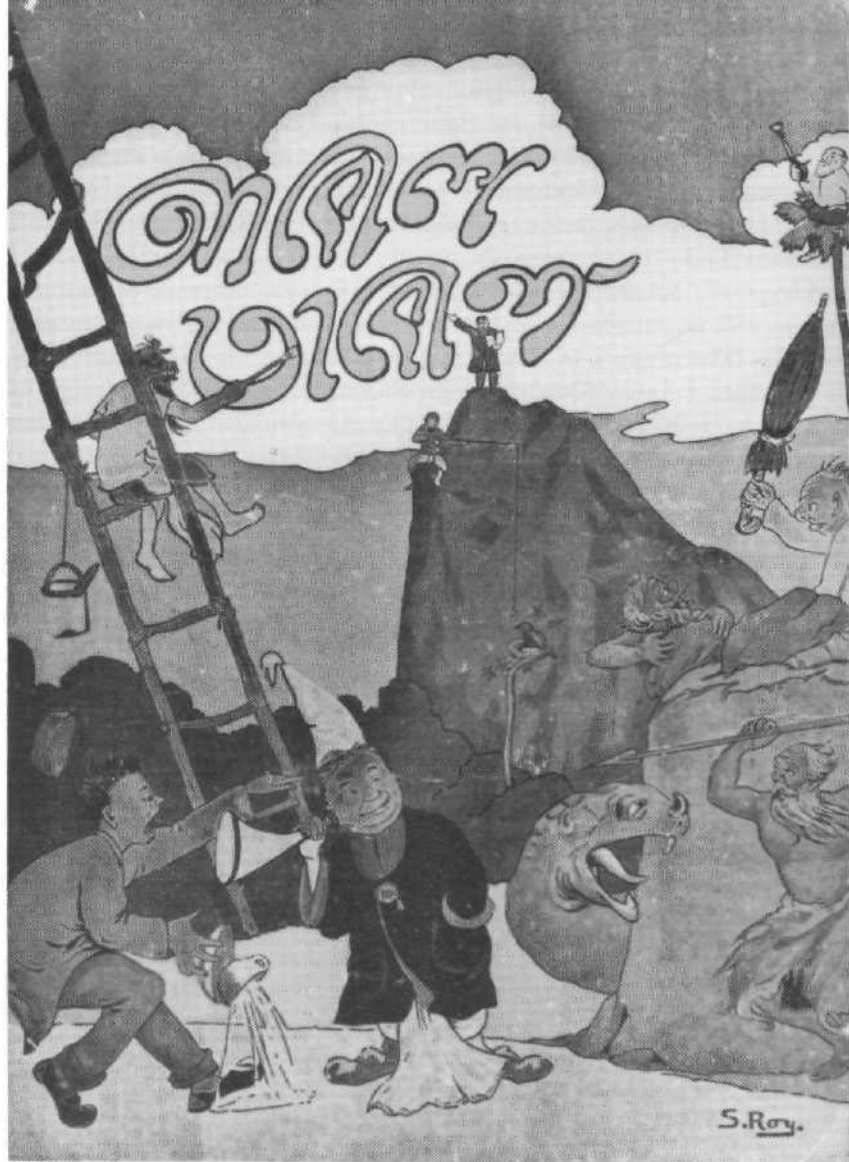
Above all, *Sandesh* became celebrated for the nonsense rhymes of Sukumar Ray, in which the world of play and that of language came together. The genre was already highly developed in Bengali folklore. The Bengali language lends itself to *double entendres* and wordplay. Its speakers have always been captivated by puns, onomatopoeia, alliteration and repetition of sounds. During the Bengal Renaissance, the traditional folkloric rhymes and idioms received a new lease of life and a modern form. Though the Tagores did try their hands at this, the writer most closely identified with it was Sukumar Ray. Few could write nonsense as deftly and effortlessly as he. Irrepressible pictorial and literary humour, first revealed in Upendrakishore's fantasy, 'Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne', found fulfilment in his son. After youthful efforts for the magazine *Mukul*, Sukumar set up two literary societies with his friends — the 'Monday Club' and the 'Nonsense Club'. In a typical jew *d'esprit* he turned the title, Monday Club, into 'Monda' (sweets) Club, an allusion to its members' favourite food. When, as club secretary, he sent out invitation cards to members, he often used the occasion to turn these into little gems of wit and whimsy.³⁶

Sukumar's first farces were staged at the Nonsense Club. Ancient epics were an especially suitable vehicle for his comedy. The germ of one of his best-known farces, 'Laksmaner Saktishel' (Lakshman and the Wonder Weapon) came from the *Rmdyana*. Sukumar's version of it worked on two levels. He chose a mock-heroic declamatory language as in the epic, but treated the gods as modern middle-class Bengalis. The play is full of deliberately incongruous allusions to mores of the day in a supposedly ancient setting.³⁷

With Sukumar Ray we reach the high-water mark of children's

THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

literature in India. He possessed a sixth sense of the absurd and an imagination which could parody almost any serious statement. The Bengali satirist Birbal (Pramatha Chaudhuri) often intimidated opponents by 'name-dropping' intellectuals, especially French philosophers, not much known in India. Once, at a Monday Club session, Sukumar amused everyone by reading out an imaginary letter. His mock-serious intonation left them in no doubt as to whom he was mimicking: 'I have heard that the famous philosopher Bergson has said that whatever else



human beings may survive, they cannot survive if their head is cut off.³⁸ Few satirists in Bengal rivalled his vocabulary of invented words. But the work that best caught his genius came in the final stages of his brief life - *Abol Tdbol* (Fig. 82), a collection of verse from a supreme word-maker.

The readers were also treated to a new form of comic drawing (Fig. 83) that blended fantasy and sharp observation of cultural behaviour. As a child, Sukumar read European humorous publications and he sometimes used them as a point of departure for his work. His poem 'Dānpitey' (The Little Horror), for instance, reminds us of the notorious brats of the American strip cartoon, 'The Katzenjammer Kids'; yet Sukumar's brats are definitely Bengali brats. Heath Robinson's uncle Lubin and his fantastic machines is similar in spirit to Sukumar's poem, 'Uncle's Contraption', though here the resemblance seems coincidental. Robinson's machine solves the problem of eating tricky little items at dinner. Ray's machine enables one to travel great distances fast: the incentive is some mouth-watering food dangling just beyond reach.³⁹

Sukumar knew Edward Lear's limericks. Both of them shared a passion for mingling the surreal with the mundane. Both possessed a flair for standing a perfectly logical statement on its head. Both of them generated funny, gently satirical ideas. Both eschewed sarcasm, malice and ridicule; both left out the cruel and the grotesque. Above all, they were inspired illustrators. And yet their works display significant cultural as well as temperamental differences. Lear's verses are always tinged with melancholy, whereas Ray's topsy-turvy world is full of robust laughter. The

83 S. Ray: three illustrations from *Abol Tdbol* (*The Uncle's Contraption, Tickle-My-Ribs and Blighty Cow*)

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finest instance is perhaps the 'Dream Song', which forms the closing verse of *Ābol Tdbol*. It was composed in the last weeks of Sukumar's life, when he was dying from kala-azar at the age of thirty-five:

The spirits dance in cloudy vaults
Where elephants turn somersaults
While flying steeds their wings unfold
And naughty boys turn good as gold.
A keen primordial lunar chill,
The nightmare's next with bunchy frill —
My drowsy brain such glimpses steep,
And all my singing ends in sleep.⁴⁰

Even if the rhythm and the imagery of the poem lose a lot in translation, as they are bound to, the creative spirit still alive at the approach of death, and the poet's total absence of self-pity, cannot but remind us of other creators in a similar situation, notably Schubert.

In *Ābol Tdbol* the magical met the real in brilliantly matched words and images. But these nonsense poems specialised in Bengali idiosyncrasies. Their 'untranslatability' stems from the fact that the puns and alliterations ingeniously juxtapose Bengali and English. Sukumar Ray plays with the Bengali resonance of certain English words and images inextricably bound to bhadrakalok culture. That mixture made perfect sense in the bilingual colonial milieu of urban Calcutta in the early decades of this century. In our time, perhaps only Salman Rushdie has attempted a similar play with words (using by contrast Indian words within novels written in English). Those who can fully appreciate his work must be familiar with both cultures.⁴¹

The outlandish behaviour of Sukumar's characters amused Bengali readers because hardly anyone failed to recognise the originals. This is not true of, say, Lewis Carroll's *Jabberwocky*. Jabberwock was a purely fantastic creature, an idea reinforced by the meaningless words invented for it; but Sukumar's 'Tickle-My-Ribs' was near to that well-known figure, the dreadful bore, who was oblivious of other people's feelings. He repeated his stock of excruciating jokes and expected people to laugh at them every time. Another set of characters, eternally condemned to portentous solemnity, evoked all sorts of memories, especially of self-righteous humbugs at Brahmo prayer meetings.⁴² The colonial interaction was probably also a target. The maudlin 'Blighly Cow' was manifestly a hybrid that surely only colonialism could have produced. The bizarre 'Law under Section Twenty-One' that prevailed in the land of Lord Siva was likely a pointed allusion to the British Raj; under this law one could be fined Rs 21 for merely tripping accidentally. Sukumar was here exposing the absurdity of the laws passed during the *swadeshi* era but his message was so gossamer-like that it seldom jarred.⁴³

CARTOONS AND CARICATURES

The rise of humorous drawings in India

Sukumar's unique blend of literary and pictorial wit forms the bridge between funny drawings for children and social and political cartoons, the other thriving genre in illustrated magazines. Caricature, which makes an unsentimental observation of human foibles, was part of Sukumar's humour but the element of cruelty or the grotesque used by cartoonists for effect fell outside his dream world. The earliest newspapers to carry political cartoons were the English-owned *Bengal Hurkaru* and the *Indian Gazette* in the 1850s. Within decades, cartoons appeared in papers owned by Indians, as colonial administration became the legitimate target of journalists. The nationalist paper of Bengal, *Amrita Bāzār Patrikd*, published its first cartoon in 1872.⁴⁴

One of the earliest cartoons to make a political impact was in *Sulav Samdchr* in the 1870s. Its message foreshadowed the Ilbert Bill (1882) which sought to abolish the immunity of European offenders to being tried by Indian judges, a government measure fought tooth and nail by the expatriate British. *Sulav Samdchr* put the Indian case forcefully by highlighting a blatant injustice: often poorer sections of the Indians were assaulted by Europeans, leading to their death. If the case came to court at all, the 'enlarged spleen' of the victim was blamed for his death. The cartoon shows a dead coolie with his weeping wife by his side. A European doctor conducts a perfunctory post mortem while the offender stands nonchalantly smoking a cigar. This suggestion of collusion between European judges and offenders did have an impact, if not the intended one. It was among the incriminating evidence that led to the vernacular press censorship of 1878.⁴⁵ The assaults continued as late as 1908, as Upendrakishore's indignant satire in *Modern Review* suggests:

It is almost as natural for a healthy human animal to kick as it is for a horse or a cow. And kicking is a delightful pastime too. But it is deeply to be deplored that Indians should have maliciously . . . developed very big spleens, which are ruptured at the slightest touch of a human animal's boots, so that the possessors of these enlarged spleens die . . . It is sad . . . what trouble and expense the kickers are put to, and how much of the time of the British Indian Law Courts is wasted . . . In order to save kickers . . . trouble and expense in future and to prevent the waste of time of the Law Courts, we have invented the Spleen-protector . . .⁴⁶

Parody and distortion for comic effect are the oldest human tendencies, an early Indian example of which is the temptation of the Buddha by Māra at Sanchi. In the colonial period, Kalighat artists caricatured social types: courtesans and foppish clients, phony Vaisnava mendicants, henpecked husbands and sheepish lovers. European cartoons had a mixed ancestry.

The Carracci brothers, who invented *caricatura*, developed the idea of 'perfect deformity' in their satirical sketches. Hogarth's prints, which attacked moral shortcomings in society rather than individual idiosyncrasies, made the transition from broadsheets to cartoons as an art form. But it was the printing presses in Britain that turned cartoons into pictorial journalism; dominated by the genius of Gillray and Rowlandson. The first comic illustrations by the British expatriates drew upon Rowlandson's cartoons on the Raj.⁴⁷

Humorous drawings, as entertainment rather than as social protest, spread with the rise of illustrated magazines. In India, by the 1850s, the British cartoonist found ample material in the social 'foibles' of his community. The first visiting artist to explore this was Sir Charles D'Oyly. His *Tom Raw the Griffin* (1828) charted the *faux pas* of an East India Company novice and the funny situations in which the lad found himself. The British cartoonists in India as well as Indians learned from D'Oyly and similar artists.⁴⁸

The progenies of Punch

However, no single humorous publication made a deeper impression in colonial India than the English magazine, *Punch*. A riotous procession of its offspring greets us in the second half of the last century: *Delhi Sketch Book*, *Momus*, *The Indian Charivari* (Figs 84, 85), *The Oudh Punch* (Fig. 86), *The Delhi Punch*, *The Punjab Punch*, *The Indian Punch* (two separate publications under the same title), *Urdu Punch* and *Basantak* (a Bengali version of *Punch*) (Fig. 87) in the north and east; *Gujarati Punch*, *Hindu Punch* (a politically radical Maharastran paper proscribed in 1909 for sedition), *Parsi Punch* and *Hindi Punch* in the west; a version of *Punch* from Madras in the south. There was even *Purneah Punch* from a remote town of Bengal.⁴⁹

Cruikshank (1792—1878) in Britain and Charles Philippon's *Le Charivari* (1832) in France were pioneers in comic magazines. But the most enduring comic paper, *Punch: the London Charivari*, was born in a dining club in 1841. It gave birth to the word 'cartoon' in English, while its whimsical gentlemanly humour provided the model for English-humour magazines from London to Melbourne. Unlike the iconoclasts, Cruikshank, Gillray and Rowlandson, Tenniel of *Punch* stood for Victorian respectability, a respectability emulated by the British comic magazines in India. Indeed, the comic magazines in India were as clear an index of imperial mentality as *Punch*, the emblem of Victorian self-confidence.⁵⁰

British cartoons in India, initially on Anglo-Indian lifestyle, eventually turned to Indians. As such they offer us revealing glimpses of colonial attitudes. On the whole, the most amusing cartoons, English or Indian, were on the Indian character. Yet the differences in their respective

outlooks were significant. The English-owned magazines viewed Indians from the lofty heights of Victorian moral certainty. Indian cartoonists, instead of turning the new weapon towards the ruling race, probed their own society. Secondly, the English cartoonists portrayed Indians from the outsider's viewpoint, while Indian cartoonists, being insiders, especially in Bengal, offer us a penetrating self-parody of the elite in the period of nationalist politics. In Bengali cartoons the exposure of social mores attained the ruthless candour of Gillray and Rowlandson.

The reasons for the different approaches of British and Indian cartoonists in India were historical. By the 1860s, the imperial bureaucracy had ossified into a benevolent despotism. A racially exclusive British society thrived with its quota of civil and military officials and its paraphernalia of cantonments, bungalows and social clubs. In *Curry and Rice or The Ingredients of Social Life at Our "Station" in India* (1859), G. F. Atkinson offers an affectionate burlesque of British life and manners to counteract the trauma of 1857. The elements that make up a typical station are the local judge, magistrate, deputy magistrate, padre, the foreign missionary, the sporting griffin (as in *Tom Raw*), the native *munshi* (interpreter), the doctor, as well as the mall, the band, the coffee shop, the public bath, the racecourse, the tiger hunts, the dinner parties, the formal balls and the amateur theatricals, not to mention the local potentate eager to ingratiate himself with the ruling race.⁵¹

What kept Britons together was a tacitly shared ideology of the imperial calling that permeated the self-image of the Victorians and threw into bold relief the essential 'otherness' of the colonised. The clearest expression of British attitudes was the popular literature of the period glorifying the empire's 'civilising' mission. If such mentality informed the British view of the 'Oriental', the Indians further suffered from the racial acrimony that attended the Uprising of 1857. British public opinion, both at home and in India, fed on the events of 1857. The stereotype of Oriental behaviour went as much into the making of *Punch* as the English cartoon magazines in India.⁵²

Political reality lay behind the consensus among British cartoonists at home and abroad. To put it simply, a vast territory such as India could only be ruled with the consent of different groups. While neither of the two main parties questioned the legitimacy of British rule, there were differences between them, and between Whitehall and the Viceroy, on which Indians to encourage. The Tories were for stability under a firm paternal rule. They held on to the myth of unchanging India to counter new political demands. The welfare of the peasant was the cornerstone of their policy, while the aristocracy was seen as natural allies after 1857. Upholder of stability, *Punch* championed the Maharajas, an attitude taken up by English-owned comic magazines in India. The Liberals aimed to secure the British Raj on the consent of the western-educated. These conflicts of interests can, for instance, be seen in the Vernacular Press Act

(1878). Lord Lytton, a Tory, passed it to curb vociferous journalists. The Liberal Viceroy who repealed the unpopular measure was remembered in Congress resolutions as 'our beloved Lord Ripon'.⁵³ However, Liberal concessions were often stymied by the formidable Anglo-Indian lobby. In short, rather than being a smooth monolith, the Raj represented a complex dialogue between different British and Indian pressure groups, a complexity reflected in the comic magazines.

The first Anglo-Indian magazine inspired by *Punch*, *Delhi Sketch Book* (1850), was owned by *The Englishman*, the leading newspaper. This, 'Mr Punch Junior', opened with a disclaimer: essentially a 'sketchbook', its caricatures were to amuse; it did not presume to emulate *Punch*, nor wish 'to be coarse, impertinent or insulting'.⁵⁴ *Delhi Sketch Book* poked gentle fun at British social life, as private jokes to be shared among its English

84 The Indian Charivari cover **with** dusky Oriental maidens in the manner of **Punch** (sec Fig. 85). The 1873 cover was often used as here in 1877

STEAM ENGINES,
FURNACE
AND STATIONARY.
TOMBS MACHINERY.
SUGARS AND MILLING.

METAL MART.

IMICOL, FLEMING & CO.,

CALCUTTA.

BRIDGEWORK & FERRIS
WIRE RAILWAYS
GAS AND WATERWORKS.
J. & H. OWEN'S
PUMPS AND TURBINES

KING, HAMILTON & CO.,
AGENTS, CIVIL ENGINEERS AND GENERAL BUILDERS AND ARCHITECTS.
7, BEAUFORT STREET, CALCUTTA.

OR
THE INDIAN PUNCH.

LAWSON & CO.,
CIVIL AND MILITARY TAILORS, OUTFITTERS,
1, TRAVELERS' STREET, CALCUTTA.

H. GILBERT & CO.,
TAILORS & C.
RESIDENTIAL STREET, 62, LONDON ROAD, CALCUTTA.

MULLER & CO.,
ENGINEERS & GENERAL AGENTS
5, RAJAH STREET, CALCUTTA.

KINLOCH'S WELL-KNOWN WINES, &c.
2, 11, PRINCE STREET, CALCUTTA.

THE POWER OF THE PRINTED IMAGE

readers. The ensign's progress was charted in the manner of 'Tom Raw the Griffin'.⁵⁵ Occasional Indian themes continued the romantic image of the Hindus as well as voicing a new disenchantment. A poem on 'The Suttee' (1852) dealt with a tender episode, the rescue of a young Hindu widow by the Mughal prince, Murad. The Indian crowd at the immolation scene gave the poet a chance to display his skill with the picturesque:

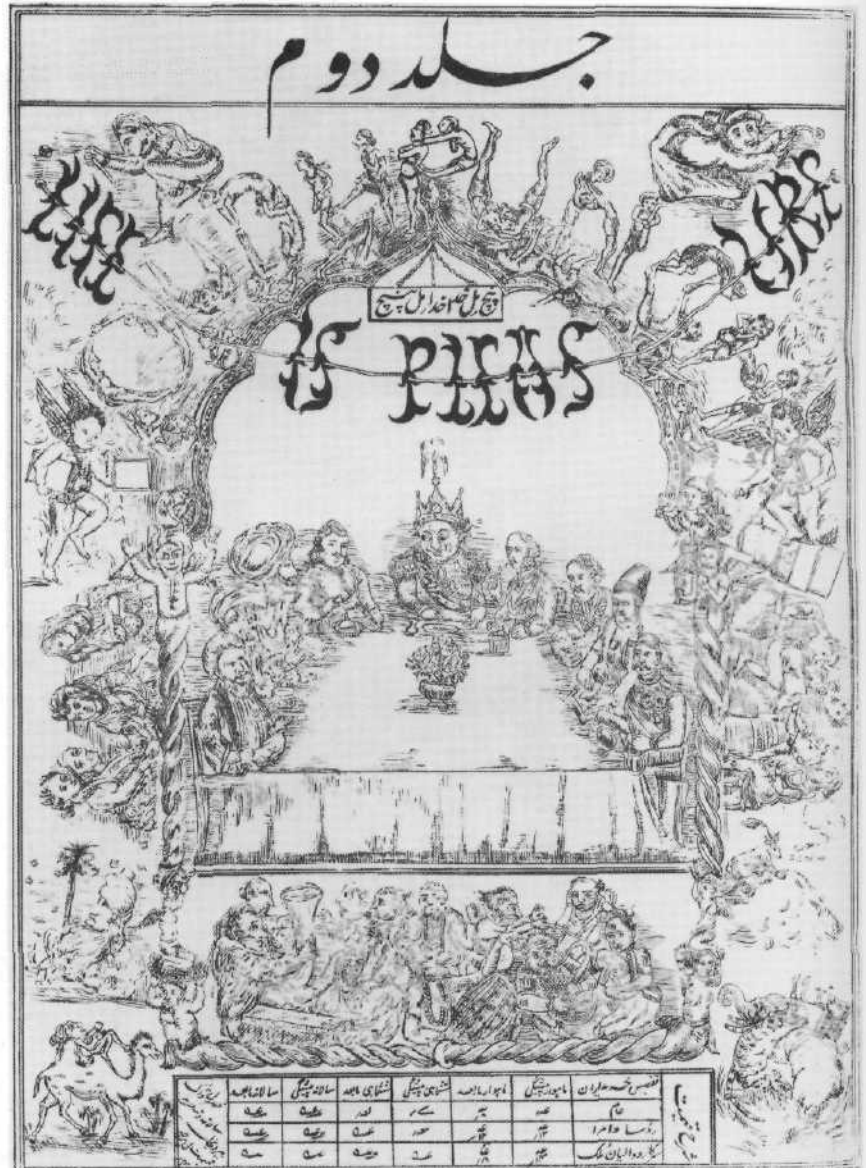


“PERSIA WON!”

XASSR-EB-Dm. "EXJOYED MY VISIT, DEAR MADAM?—EXCHAKTED 'CHARMED I AND-BY THE QEAED
OF THE IKOPHET—VUC MAY KEST ASSURED I WILL ALLOW NO TRESPASSERS TO CROSS MY GROUNDS
WHO YOUlt CHILD IKDIAXA'S GAEDESI IISMILLAH!" [Eat.

85 John Tenniel, *Persia Won*,
Punch, 1873. Persia is a dusky
Oriental maiden here

. . . Every one knows an English crowd,
 With its jibes and mocks,
 Pugilistic shocks,
 Hisses and yells,
 . . . All that can raise
 An uproar most infernally loud;
 So strange indeed must appear to us
 A mob so remarkably decorous . . .



The poem's mixture of longing and regret for the child victim was in a tradition that went back to travel accounts of the past:

. . . But when a young girl, not quite sixteen,

Lovely in mien,
With eyes that might melt a stone to affection,
And hut slightly dark in the way of complexion . . .⁵¹

The picturesque shades off into the romantic, suggesting the magazine's



sympathy for the Orientalism of Jones, Munro and Elphinstone and its distrust of meddling liberals bent on 'civilising' Hindu society. In another cartoon, a high-handed British court dispenses justice to a bemused peasant who cannot comprehend its 'benefits'. However the earlier romanticism had by now developed an ambivalence evident in 'A Lament by One of the Deluded' (Fig. 88). There are also the first signs of hostility to westernised Indians. The magazine was barely seven years old when the upheaval of 1857 closed it down. After order was restored, its owner launched its successor, *The Indian Punch*. To efface painful memories the office moved to Meerut. Referring to the 'sad events', the chastened editor added, 'we have learned not to ridicule our best friends, "The Royals" [officials]'.⁵⁷

When *The Indian Punch* returned to Delhi in 1863, the mood had turned sour, with deep suspicions of the westernised Indian and his mouthpiece, the nationalist journalist. Conventional wisdom views the growing anti-Indian feeling among the British as a reflection of the betrayal felt after 1857. While the Rebellion certainly exacerbated

88 A Lament by One of the
Deluded, Delhi Sketch Book, V,
1854

mouthpiece, the nationalist journalist. Conventional wisdom views the growing anti-Indian feeling among the British as a reflection of the betrayal felt after 1857. While the Rebellion certainly exacerbated



INDIA IN THE DBY.

INDIA IN PEAGTIGE.

A LAMENT BY ONE OF THE DELUDED.

feelings, the hardening of attitudes reflects the growing Victorian ideology of race. As early as 1853 the word 'nigger' occurs in *Delhi Sketch Book*. *The Indian Punch* cartoons, which placed the Indian next to the 'the savage African', underlined the low ranking of non-Europeans on the evolutionary ladder. The influential *Curry and Rice* (1859) remarked on the Indian's peculiar habit that he shared with the ape and the kangaroo. He could stand erect only on occasions, but if left alone, he immediately sank to the ground in a squatting position.⁵⁸ A more specific hostility to the educated Bengali was expressed by *The Indian Punch* in 'Native Charity', where he was held up as a devious hypocrite. Elsewhere he was prize meat, 'fattening up for the forthcoming agricultural and cattle show in Calcutta'.⁵⁹ This vividly contrasted with the indulgent treatment of English behaviour.

For witty exposés of Anglo-Indian manners, none could rival *Curry and Rice*, whose caricatures were also a yardstick of racial rancour. No doubt, its avowed aim was to squeeze maximum humour out of 'human imperfections'. The British were pretentious snobs while the German missionary laboured a ridiculous English accent. Yet, in the post-1857 atmosphere, what better examples of 'human imperfections' than Indians? Whether Atkinson reflected his own views or his wish to play to the gallery is not clear. The Indian servants, jokingly called 'slaves', were the silent witnesses to life at the 'station'. They were spared the ridicule reserved for the western-educated. Remarks about the latter were routinely interjected with the refrain: 'Niggers - ten thousand pardons, no, not niggers, I mean natives, Oriental gentlemen'. It mocked the English major invalidated out of the army, who failed to find a European bride. Atkinson dwelt at length on his Indian wife, 'a "darkie", a pure and unmitigated specimen of the pure Hindoo, one of those dusky daughters of the East that roll their effulgent orbs', and their black offspring. The same cultural hauteur was expressed with regard to Indian music, Indian residences, the nautch (idiotic, but graceful to the eastern eye), hideous little idols and sweets sold in the 'pigsty' of a bazaar. Yet there was much in the work that was witty and enjoyable. One of the most effective plates was of 'Our Ball' (Fig. 89), with its clever use of cultural contrasts:

gentle Barbara, her orbicular face radiant with delight, and plunging about like a dolphin in blue ... and there ye Gods! look at that intruding Oriental, unadorned with over-much drapery, and with a soul set upon punkahs [fans], stalking complacently across the arena.⁶⁰

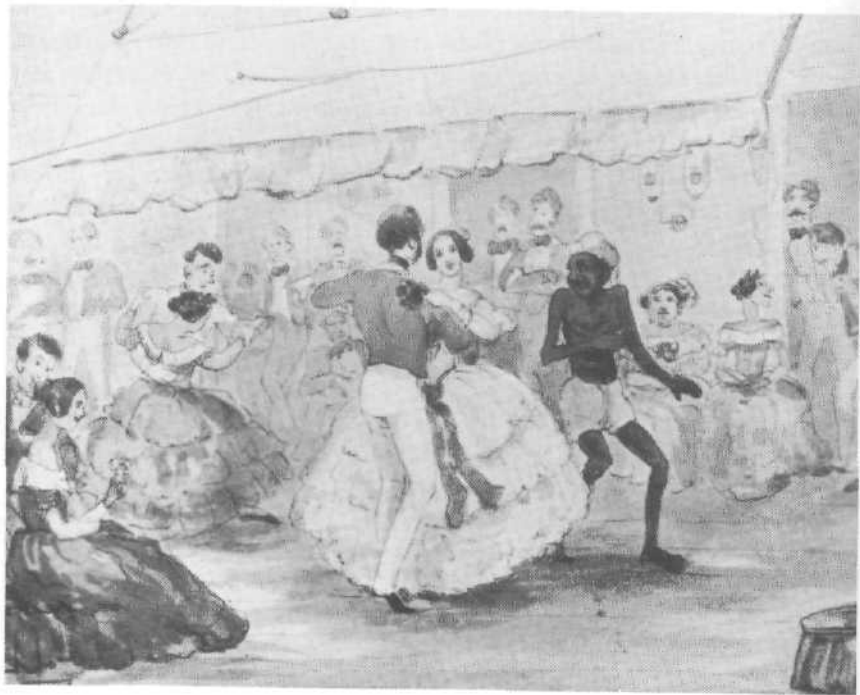
Of all the English comic magazines of the period, *The Indian Charivari* was the most accomplished. It appeared in 1872 complete with an Indian version of Richard Doyle's famous *Punch* cover. The turbaned Mr Punch of Calcutta smokes a hubble-bubble while being entertained by dusky maidens in scanty clothing. The cover includes baby Punch being fed pale ale by an Indian nanny. Colonel Percy Wyndham, the owner of *The*

Indian Charivari, explained its appearance: 'even amongst the private community, Native and European, how often circumstances occur which present themselves in a most ludicrous light. It is our purpose . . . of supplying once a fortnight an Illustrated paper, reviewing current topics and matters of interest in a light playful spirit'.⁶¹ Able artists, he claimed, were engaged but amateurs too were welcome. Since wood-engravers were in short supply, the magazine had resorted to lithography.

The Indian Charivari shared mild jokes about English social life with expatriate readers. Art exhibitions and other topical issues, treated in the style of *Punch*, were also included. One fails to discern any political consistency of the paper other than a general conservatism. It took a protectionist line in its cartoon of the Viceroy, Lord Northbrook, a Liberal and supporter of free trade. He is depicted as a menacing bully who keeps India, a comely young woman, manacled. The semi-nude female personifying India, had its precedent in *Punch*; symbolic figures and personifications were the mainstay of political cartoons in the West. Other cartoons of Northbrook the bully include him dragging a reluctant Indian Nawab to be presented to the visiting Prince of Wales. *The Indian Charivari* also took over the *Delhi Sketch Book* practice of publishing witty poems based on Sanskrit literature.⁶²

Although it was the caricatures of Indians that *The Indian Charivari* excelled in, it did not hold a uniform view on them. Given that nationalist agitations were on the rise, a special 'Charivari Album' (1875) offered

89 G.F. Atkinson: *Our Bali*,
Curry and Rice, 1859

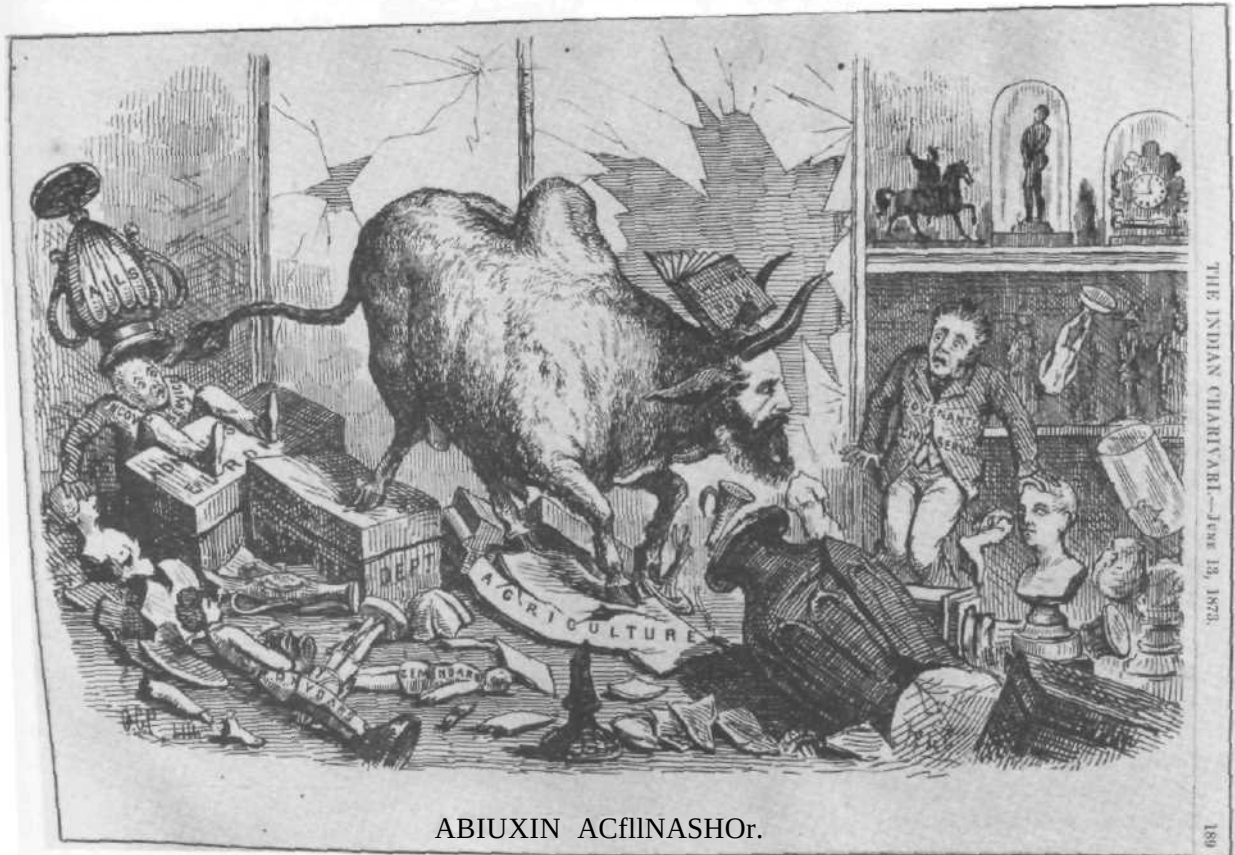


profiles of prominent loyal Indians, including Sir Salar Jung, the pro-western adviser to the Nizam. *Punch* endorsed the sentiment in 1876, with its own compliments to the Maharaja of Burdwan as a valued friend of the Raj. *The Charivari Album* displayed a soft spot for the controversial Rajendralala Mitra, despite his nationalist feuds with the indigo planters. The admiring profile may be explained by Mitra's close connection with the British Indian Association, dominated by the landed nobility. On the other hand, Sir Richard Temple, intensely disliked by the paper, was portrayed as a careerist. A mad bull in a china shop, he was wilfully destroying the racial equilibrium under Pax Britannica with his westernisation projects (Fig. 90).⁶³

Reformers, whether political or social, whether English or Indian, bore the brunt of its sarcasm, although *The Indian Charivari* could not quite make up its mind about social reform. It sympathised with Keshab Sen. The leader of the Naba Bidhan (Progressive) Brahmo movement enjoyed a high reputation among Europeans. On the fierce controversy between the Adi (Original) and the Progressive Brahmos, the journal took the side of the latter. Likewise, women's emancipation, advocated by the Indian

the Adi (Original) and the Progressive Brahmos, the journal took the side of the latter. Likewise, women's emancipation, advocated by the Indian

90 A Bull in a China Shop, The Indian Charivari, 1873



THE INDIAN CHARIVARI - June 13, 1873.

THE AGE OF OPTIMISM

Reform Association, received its support. Yet on another occasion, reform attempts by Brahmos and their English allies were presented as at best misguided and at worst hypocritical (Fig. 91). Mary Carpenter was sympathetic to the Brahmo cause. Her condemnation of the purdah system during her visit to Bengal in the 1860s unleashed a vicious attack. A cartoon purported to show a black baboo keen to wed her. He held in his hand a wedding ring the size of a door knocker with the inscription 'with this ring I thee wed'. The caption explained: 'brother Ramdoss was delighted at the prospect of another visit from the philanthropist Miss Carpenter to find out about female education which amounted to



91 **The Modern 'Krishna',**
The Indian Charivari, 1875.

Modern Kṛṣṇa seduces women by playing the magic tune 'education'. The cartoon cleverly uses the traditional iconography of the god

nothing. But Ramdoss had other hopes. Since she was so interested in Indian women he hoped her to take an interest in Hindu men. So he offered himself to be taken for better or worse'. The cartoonist hoped that he would succeed, for Miss Carpenter would then be confined once and for all to a zenana instead of meddling in other people's business. At the same time, *The Indian Charivari's* racial ego was sensitive to native criticisms of Europeans. When the Bengali journal, *Saptdihik Paridarshan*, denounced European women as immodest in response to Annette Akroyd's work for female education in India, *The Indian Charivari* recommended that the magazine (its editor?) be horsewhipped.⁶⁴

In the final analysis, the cutting edge of cartoons in *The Indian Charivari* was racial malice. Caricature thrives on consensus, on a shared culture: us versus them. The joke is shared and so is the hostility. Of two kinds of European caricature, lampoons of public figures or parodies of national characteristics, where the recognition of the individual is not involved, the cartoonist seizes upon stereotypes, or 'condensed' images of class, gender or race. The most memorable cartoons abbreviate, compress and fuse their material in order to make striking visual statements. The arresting quality of *The Indian Charivari* lay precisely in witty caricatures of the Bengali character. Many of its cartoons were clever, funny and a few were even brilliant. But the English magazine did not invent these stereotypes; it simply exploited the existing ones of the educated Bengali. These were so widely diffused among the English that their purported universality was expected to be enjoyed even by their victims. When some Indians failed to see the joke and withdrew their subscription, the magazine complained that 'an excessive thinness of skin is apt to be accompanied by excessive thickness of head'.⁶⁵

The overtly racist cartoons, inspired by Darwinism, such as 'The English Lion and the Bengali Ape', were not so original. Although Africans were the prime candidates for the category of ape, it was successfully deployed against other groups such as the Irish. They were the English cartoonist's favourite Darwinian 'missing link', though 'The British Lion and the Irish Monkey' appeared in *Punch* in 1848, long before *On the Origin of Species* (1859). As the threat from the Sinn Fein intensified in the 1880s, Tenniel mirrored English public feeling in drawing the Irish as apes. *The Indian Charivari* cartoon may well reflect the fact that the Bengalis, vociferous like the Irish, were seen as a threat to Pax Britannica. It is next to impossible for a native of Bengal to look pleased because he always looks black', complained *The Indian Charivari*.⁶⁶ Race is also the topic of the cartoon of the dusky wife reeking of ghee and garlic, which marks the end of the age of the *Delhi Sketch Book*, yielding place to *Curry and Rice*. *The Indian Charivari* perorated on the horrors of marrying natives for the benefit of its women readers: to some Englishwomen, the Indian Princes might appear as a romantic catch, but once married, they would reveal their true uncouth and 'male chauvinist' nature.⁶⁷

However, unlike the 'simian' Irish, the Bengali baboo was more a buffoon with touching cultural pretensions. In *Baboo Jabberjee B.A.* (Fig. 92), published in *Punch* (1895), F. Anstey unfolded the drolleries of a westernised Bengali. Jabberjee was 'head over heels in love with Art, and the possessor of two magnificent coloured lithographs, representing a steeplechase in the act of jumping a trench, and a water-nymph in the very *decollete* undress of "puris naturalibus"'. Although Anstey had never met a real baboo, he used the 'baboo-language' with its malapropisms, confusion of English and Bengali syntaxes and bombastic phrases, to comical effect. In 1874 *The Indian Charivari* had created the quintessential baboo in Bhugvatti Bose M.A., whose purported 'letters' appeared in the magazine; these cleverly exploited the Bengali habit of translating a Bengali idiom literally into English. For example, when Bhugvatti mentioned someone taking 'lessons near me', what he actually meant was 'taking lessons with me'.⁶⁸

The resentment against educated Hindus, especially the bhadralok, was deep-seated. The welfare of the Indian peasantry fitted in well with Raj paternalism, while the bhadralok formed a competitive and disaffected intelligentsia. Queen Victoria's proclamation of 1858 promised equal treatment to all subjects which spurred the Bengali elite to compete for higher positions in the imperial bureaucracy. Surendranath Banerjea was one of the first Indians to challenge the English monopoly of the Indian Civil Service. Having entered the ICS in the teeth of Anglo-Indian opposition, Banerjea was soon dismissed on a flimsy charge. When he was forced to resign in 1874, *The Indian Charivari* joined in insinuations about his honesty and competence. 'The Baboo Ballads', published in the same year, wove its theme around the ambitions of educated Bengalis of competing for the ICS examination. Jabberjee in *Punch* demanded that not only the ICS but also the Poet Laureateship be thrown open to Indians.⁶⁹

The Indian Charivari took pot shots at nationalist papers that attacked the British monopoly of the ICS. It systematically impugned the character of the bhadralok, their lack of integrity and crass incompetence. The bhadralok values were at serious odds with the English public school ethos of manliness and sportsmanship (Fig. 93). Macaulay offered his verdict, 'The physical organisation of the Bengali is feeble even to effeminacy. He lives in a constant vapour bath. His pursuits are sedentary, his limbs delicate, his movements languid'.⁷⁰ Kipling's Bengali District Officer was not only incompetent but a coward to boot. Only British guardianship, and not educated baboodom, was capable of holding the warlike communities in India at bay. The Viceroy Lytton spoke his mind on this:

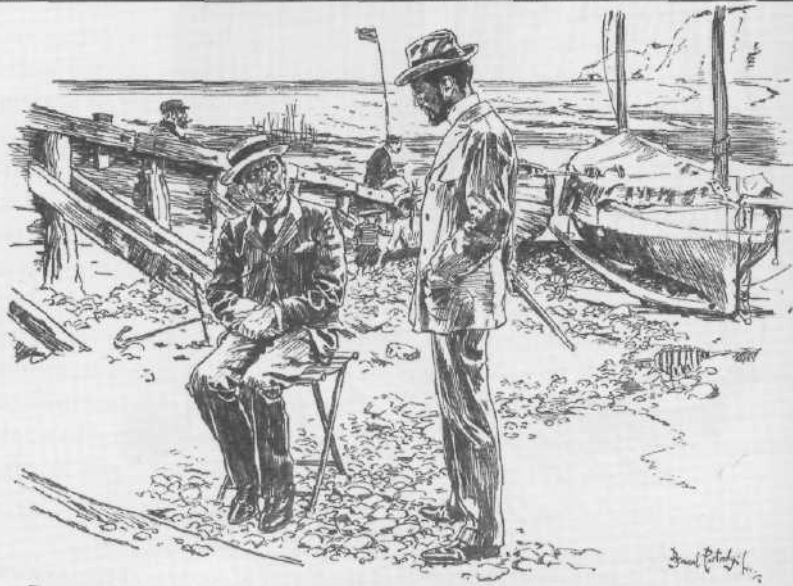
The Baboos, whom we have educated to write semi-seditious articles in the Native Press... really represent nothing but the social anomaly of their own position ... For most forms of administrative employment [they appear] to me quite Unfit . . .⁷¹



As he made it clear: 'It is one thing to admit the public into your park, and quite another thing to admit it into your drawing room ... Already great mischief has been done by the deplorable tendency of second-rate Indian officials, and superficial English philanthropists to ignore the essential and insurmountable distinctions of race qualities, which are fundamental to our position in India . . .',⁷² Anstey portrayed Jabberjee as a cowardly knave in the confidence that he gave no offence to the Indians who mattered.

From the 1870s, Bengali journalists began to combat British taunts by making counter-claims of cultural superiority. Recently India's Aryan connection had been publicised by no less a person than Max Müller, Professor of Sanskrit at Oxford. *The Indian Charivari* dismissed such claims with ridicule. The figure of Muddle (Madan?) Baboo, the Aryan brother of Mrs Malaprop, was conjured up. 'We may have Brute Force on our side, but Mind belongs to the "Oppressed"', it sneered. It mimicked the *Hindoo Patriot* and other Bengali papers with, 'how empty are the boasts of Western civilisation'.⁷³ 'We all know that the Baboo is our superior in intellectual power', mocked the editor, comparing 'the truthful Bengali and the Deceitful Anglo-Saxon', in an allusion to the stereotype of the dissembling oriental.⁷⁴

Bhugvatti Bose was a harmless clown, but it was the lobbying, protesting, petitioning, political baboo who drew *The Indian Charivari's* ire. On the occasion of the Vienna International Exhibition of 1873, the



First Hindoo. "HIVE IOU IVKIL BEEN FOR A BOAT-SAIL?"
 First Hindoo. "How DID YOU ENJOY IT?"

Second Hindoo. "OIL, ^-E!"

Second Hindoo. "I ?!!? Bor LIKE 11 j 11 is TOO HORRIBLE. THE BOAT IS GOING
 UPDR BSD EUH-ellie, ANH YdTB I BUIDE 11 j 11 15? HDE AND OUTSIDE."

Small signature or mark in the bottom right corner of the illustration.

93 Two Hindoos, Punch,
 1899, on Hindu lack of
 manliness

magazine proposed sending a live baboo as an exhibit. A 'talking machine' that mixed conceit with sedition, he took pleasure in vilifying his rulers to whom he owed his existence. The Bengali confused cheek with allowable independence. Unless corrected early, it led to intolerable results in the fully developed patriot: 'because they can talk broken English, they [think] they are as good as if not a great deal better than Englishmen'.⁷⁵ A hostile verse captures the lilt and accent of English spoken by Bengalis:

Bapre! this time you have made too beautiful picture of me,
 Charivari Bahadur, isquatting on branch of the tree;
 Very fine creature; don't know where you are finding its match;
 Beautiful tongue to iscreech, splendid nails to iscratch!
 Patriot calls himself, and newspaper business make,
 Telling that all Bengal was made for zamindar's sake,
 First got caught by Sarkar, then wrote in Native Press,
 Plenty *gali* [abuse] of Shaheb, and meet with great success,
 Setting up lots newspapers, *Patrikas*, *Patriots*, *Duts*,
 Daily write Baboos are Angels, Anglo-saxons are brutes.
 Always told that poor Bengalees cruel oppressed,
 This way making Cockney *shaheblogue* much distressed;
 Told that I too patriotic, don't want to pay any tax,
 Poor native country ruined, plundered of lakhs and lakhs;
 Why not giving to Baboo all good posts and good pay?
 Give whole Bengal to Editor-Baboos, and then go away!
 Too much education you give? Then more fool you —
 Cannot expect the gratitude from parrot-monkey Baboo.
 Therefore I sit on branch and show to Sarkar Bahadur 'ill-will',
 And make the talk to deny it, and all the same show it istill;
 Write too much eloquent article, hatred of *Shaheblogue* preach,
 The patriot-Baboo business - to make the iscratch and iscreech.⁷⁶

Nothing made the comic magazine more livid than the relentless complaints of the highly articulate Indian newspapers, *Hindoo Patriot* and *Amrita Bāzār Patrikd*, wittily christened the 'Hindoo Howler' and 'Scurrilous Bazar Patrika'. *The Indian Charivari* felt especially proprietorial about *Punch*:

There is perhaps no objection to the Hindoo Patriot publishing weak pieces of buffoonery if it finds it pays it to do so, but it has no right to desecrate an honoured name heading them 'Punchiana' - at least as long as it considers it the correct thing to embellish pages with indecent *post mortems* fished out of other papers for the gratification of that refined Baboodom of which it is - fitting representative.⁷⁷

Mookerjee's Magazine (1872) engaged precisely in such post mortems. *The Times* (London) and the Anglo-Indian presses were highly incensed by its campaign against Lytton's Dramatic Performances Bill (1876), aimed at curbing inflammatory material. The paper had also backed Rajendralala

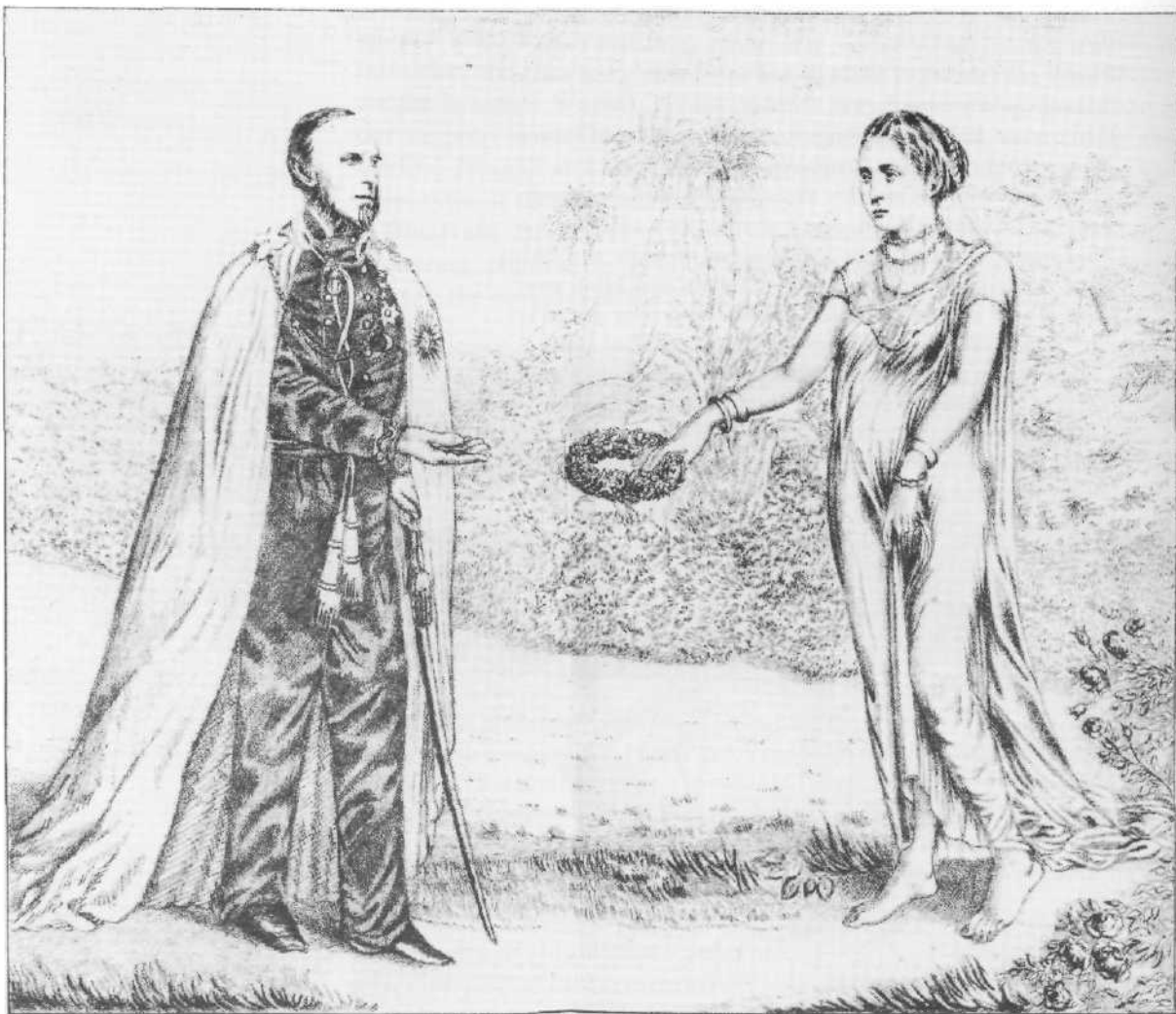
Mitra against Albrecht Weber, when the Indian challenged the Orientalist's claim that the *Rdmadyana* had derived its inspiration from Homer. *Mookerjee's Magazine* was one of the earliest Indian-owned magazines to contain lithographic cartoons, such as 'India Presenting a Coronal to Lord Northbrook on the Abolition of the Income Tax' (Fig. 94), 'A Modern Avatār' and 'A Phantasmagoria'. But these elaborate political allegories by D. D. Dhar did not match the verve of the editorials.⁷⁸

Mookerjee's Magazine soon perished. When glancing at these 'serio-comic' papers we cannot fail to notice that cartoons do not always make us laugh; they, as often with *Punch*, simply offer political comments. The topical allusions that meant a lot to the contemporaries have long ceased to matter. Hence it is difficult to tell how influential they were.⁷⁹ Unlike

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94 India Presenting a Coronal to Lord **Northbrook**, *Mookerjee's Magazine*, II, 1873



most of the comic magazines, *Hindi Punch* (1878-1930), enjoyed a long life. In response to demand, every year a selection of its cartoons was reprinted in an album. Founded as *Parsi Punch* by N. D. Apyakhtiyar, it was taken over at his death by Barjorjee Naoroji. He renamed it *Hindi Punch* and gave it his unique stamp. In 1905 the *Manchester Guardian* found it to be as familiar as Tenniel and yet strange, its humour forceful though moderate. If 'these cartoons appeal to the average Hindu', wrote the paper in compliment, 'he must be credited with a sense of humour and quite average intelligence. It is possible that if such an annual were distributed among MPs the India budget might find an unwontedly full and decently interested House'. The *Melbourne Punch* welcomed the 'queerest publication' and 'Panchoba' - a cross between Punch and a Hindu deity.⁸⁰

'Panchoba' and 'Hind', which stood for India in *Hindi Punch*, were often used in conjunction with public figures to comment on current political situations. In 1898 India was depicted as a holy cow in 'Patience on a Monument'. In addition to Ptmc/j-inspired drawings, the paper also cleverly adapted popular prints such as those of Ravi Varma. To take an example here, Lord Curzon is Sarasvatī, the Hindu goddess of learning, in a parody of his address to the education conference at Simla (Fig. 95). As also Fig. 96 shows, Curzon had the distinction of being deified by *Hindi*

95 Left On the Heights of Simla, *Hindi Punch*, 1905. Curzon's inflated self-image is caricatured as Sarasvati, the Hindu goddess of learning. The iconography is that of Ravi Varma (see p. 217) whose popular prints inspired a number of cartoons in the magazine

96 Propitiating Shri Ganesha, Curzon the victim of another cartoon which shows him as the elephant-headed god of good fortune who needs to be propitiated (from H. A. Talcherkar, *Lord Curzon in Indian Caricature*, Bombay 1902)



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Punch. In the West, the use of visual metaphors for making a political point was a cartoonist's stock in trade.⁸¹

Before World War I, *Hindi Punch* seldom covered world events, with¹ the rare exception of Japan's defeat of Russia in 1905, when it shared its elation at the Asian victory with other Indian nationalists. The paper showed a unity of style and purpose throughout its existence, faithfully covering the annual resolutions of the Congress and its evolution into a political force. The first fifteen years of the Congress (1885-1900) were dominated by Moderate nationalists who were loyal to the empire, a sentiment shared by the magazine. Their main demands were for greater consultative powers within the Raj and wider opportunities in the ICS. In other words, at this stage they had neither the means nor the desire to overthrow the imperium but sought to make it more sensitive to public opinion. Above all, they wished to demonstrate their worthiness for democracy by espousing institutional politics. To reassure the government of its moderate intentions, a copy of the magazine was sent to the India Office. Naorosji received its guarded approval with the comment that the paper was necessarily one-sided.⁸²

The very first cartoons (1887-9) gingerly broached India's right to political representation, informing Queen Victoria of the birth of the Congress and of Indian public opinion. On Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, professions of loyalty were made at the twelfth session of the Congress: *Hindi Punch* marked the occasion with the cartoon, 'Before Her Ever-Affectionate Mother', in line with Victoria's maternal image throughout the empire. A major platform of the early Congress was to appeal directly to the fairness of the British public and force concessions by lobbying in London. Dadabhai Naoroji took up residence in the city. In 1888, standing on a Liberal ticket in Finsbury Central, he became the first Indian Member of Parliament. Lord Salisbury, leader of the Conservative Party, opposed Naoroji's nomination, confident that British voters would not return a black man; to him, the Irish, the Orientals and the Hottentots were inferior species. In his reply, Gladstone characterised the Marquis as 'blacker' than the Indian. *Hindi Punch*, too, felt offended by the slur, promptly issuing the cartoon, 'Save Us from Pollution'. In 1889, 'A Wholesome Diet' (Fig. 97) depicted a cow being milked by a young woman. Britannia wondered if the milk (Indian nationalism) was wholesome. The milkmaid reassured her: yes, it would agree with her constitution.⁸³

At the end of the century, Moderates were challenged by Extremists in the Congress over social reforms. The controversy took precedence in the magazine. Unlike the Moderates, Tilak (1864-1920) and the Extremists saw the British as disrupting perennial Hindu values. Such *sentiment* coincided with burgeoning Hindu national identity. Reforms stirred up deep passions. 'The Patent Incubator' complained of the slow results of the Social Conference, the adjunct to the Congress sessions. *Punch's* Indian

'cousin', Panchoba, encouraged both the Congress and the Social Conference, in keeping with the magazine's liberal sympathies. In 1891 these conflicts came to a head over the age of consent issue. Moderates under Gokhale (1866-1915) wished to raise the marriagable age of Hindu girls from ten to twelve; the Extremists, who were for the status quo, lined up behind Tilak. A cartoon showed him with a sandal-paste mark on his forehead to ward off the evil eye, an ironic(?) reference to his role within the Congress. *Hindi Punch* however disapproved of the in-fighting itself, scolding the two factions as 'Bellicose Goats'. Among other early sketches, Ripon the Liberal Viceroy appeared as an angelic *putto*, while the mounting army expenditure which allegedly fell on Indian peasants was likened to a pelican devouring fishes. The comic magazine never lost its admiration for the social reformers: in 1900 the judge and reformer, Ranade (1841—1901), was a clever coppersmith in his efforts to weld ancient and modern India together; in 1904, Phirozeshah Mehta (1845—1915), the Moderate Congress President, was shown bearing 'The Lion's Burden'. Naorosji also praised the social reforms of the Gaekwad of Baroda.⁸⁴

The rift within the Congress became irrevocable after Curzon's Partition of Bengal in 1905. *Hindi Punch*, drawn into the crisis, printed 'The Great Partitioner of India'. In keeping with its liberal sympathies, the paper blamed caste as the 'partitioner' rather than Curzon's unpopular measure.⁸⁵ The Viceroy's address to the Calcutta University immediately



A WHOLESOME DIET.

Britaneia-T.eh me see,—roust teat its quality first: hope it won't disagrtw with me.

Me rengthening : will agree with

youi- constitution M... .., in'am.

[Hindi Punch, Jan. 1889]

97 A Wholesome Diet, Hindi Punch, 1889. An early cartoon reassuring the Raj of the peaceful intentions of the Congress

before the Partition had rekindled the unrest that had been smouldering since his measures against the University and the Calcutta Corporation:

I say that the highest ideal of truth is to a large extent a western conception . . . Undoubtedly truth took a high place in the moral codes of the West before it had been similarly honoured in the East, where craftiness and diplomatic wile have always been held in much repute . . . ,⁸⁶

Hindi Punch joined in the uproar following the speech, producing several cartoons against the calumny. Introducing truth to India, it said in a cartoon dated March 1905, was like carrying coals to Newcastle. By now the Viceroy had become thoroughly unpopular with the intelligentsia, many of whom were behind Kitchener in the famous Curzon-Kitchener controversy. *Hindi Punch* was no exception.⁸⁷

The worsening political situation did not diminish the moderate magazine's loyalty to the Raj. It treated gently the reception given to the visiting Prince and Princess of Wales by the ladies of Bombay. In another sketch, 'Reading the Horoscope', India personified predicts the political future before the visiting royalty. *Hindi Punch*, as in 'The Ear-Opener', continued to believe in the need to 'reach the ears and touch the hearts of the great English people', as opposed to Raj officials. A village barber takes the wax out of John Bull's ears, which would let him hear the Indian demands better.⁸⁸

As the nationalist movement entered a phase of widespread unrest and terrorism, *Hindi Punch* fell out of step with mainstream politics. It lived on beyond Mahatma Gandhi's *satyāgraha* movement in the 1920s, but the mass upheaval did not inspire any powerful cartoons. The mirror of another era, *Hindi Punch* had outlived its usefulness.⁸⁹

Cartoon traditions in the vernacular

The Oudh Punch, in Urdu, was a pioneer comic magazine of north India. In 1881, when Archibald Constable published a selection of its cartoons, he reassured himself that the profusion of comic magazines in India dispelled the myth that orientals were devoid of humour. Muhammad Sajjad Husain of Lucknow, who preferred independence to a desk job, brought out the magazine in 1877. By 1881 its sales figures had reached the 500 mark. Many of the lithographic cartoons were copied from *Punch*, *Fun* and other English magazines. But the most interesting ones were clever modifications of the English cartoons as well as original drawings. Its regular cartoonist, Ganga Sahai (pen-name Shauq, a Hindu artist) designed the cover in imitation of *Punch*. He contributed as a draughtsman at the Exhibition of Industrial Art in Lucknow (1881).⁹⁰

The Oudh Punch focused not only on politics but also on special problems and dealt even-handedly with Hindu—Muslim riots over cow

slaughter. It used literary allusions as in the West; a clever one, namely, Rāma bending Śiva's bow to win Sītā's hand, parodied Lord Lytton's Afghan expedition of 1878-80. 'Rebellion Had Bad Luck (1881)', paraphrasing Tenniel's cartoon in *Punch* (16.12.1865), drew an analogy between British treatment of Indian and Irish nationalists (Figs 98, 99). The cartoon, which alluded to an incident at the engineering college in Bengal, portrayed the Director of Public Instruction of Bengal as John Bull; he had sent down the student leaders after a political demonstration at the college.⁹¹

Of cartoons that make human follies an object of amusement, few were more striking than the ones from Bengal, the earliest of which appeared during the Bengal Renaissance. Satirical papers existed in Bengal prior to the 1870s, but illustrated ones appeared close on the heels of *The Indian Charivari* (1873). Though Bengali artists learned from it, they were closer in spirit to Gillray and Cruikshank than to *Punch*. If they happened to choose the same victims as *The Indian Charivari*, the western-educated Bengalis, their purpose was very different.

Bengali cartoonists embarked on a savage and yet playful game of self-mockery. Wit and innuendo, used in caricature to expose pretension, are symptoms of heightened individualism. Caricature, a prime device for parodying contemporary manners, gave this lively, self-absorbed milieu a new weapon to turn on itself.⁹² The cartoons inherited an earlier tradition of literary parodies; they were the pictorial equivalents of *Naba Bdbu Bilds*, *Naba Bibi Bilds*, Kali Prasanna Sinha's brilliant *Hutam Penchdr Nakshd* and similar satirical works. This self-critical undertow existed throughout the Bengal Renaissance: the 'alter ego' of the westernised bhadrak. Significantly, criticisms of modern ideas emanated not from traditional groups, but from within the urban elite itself. Social satires and cartoons exposed the ambiguities of the love-hatred relationship that characterised bhadrak society - an exclusive and yet divided group, divided because traditional signs of status were no longer sacrosanct. And yet the insults and the ridicule heaped upon bhadrak values by the satirist were a token of his commitment to his literate culture. When the Bengali cartoonist pilloried his countrymen he was in fact taking them into his confidence. His victims were invariably his most appreciative audience.⁹³

Harbola Bhdnd (1874), one of the first comic magazines, exposed furtive drinking among the westernised. Their conscience, insinuated the cartoon, was salved by pretending that the brandy bought from the chemist had medicinal value.⁹⁴ The short-lived publication made way for the famous *Basantak*, inspired by *Punch*. An obscenely fat Brahmin — Punch transmogrified no less — leers out of its cover, while the scenes around are of the utter depravity to which Calcutta had sunk: 'biḥ'endum' baboodom and courting English couples. This scurrilous, irreverent paper, edited by Prannath Datta (1840—88), lasted two years. From a leading Calcutta

98

readers to spot the real author. *Basantak* targeted



Irish (sec Fig. 99)

colonial officials and their Indian allies, presenting public men in the guise of mythological figures. The humour rested on allusions to the divine lovers, Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, for instance: the love of high British officials for their Bengali allies, *Basantak* implied, displayed similar intensity. There was a coarse immediacy in his nephew Girindrakumar's drawing that suited Prannath's savage invective. Hard-hitting satires included crushing of the Indian **handloom** by Manchester textiles, the corruption of Calcutta's civic administration and the mismanagement of official famine

PONCH. OR THE LONDON CHABIVASL—BBCEBHKE !«, 1865.



"REBELLION HAD BAD LUCK."

JOHN BUM. "THERE, GET OUI! BOVI LET ME SEE YOUR UGLY FACE AGALV TOR TWENTY YEARS; AND
THANK YOUR STASS YOO WERE STOPPED IN TIME!"

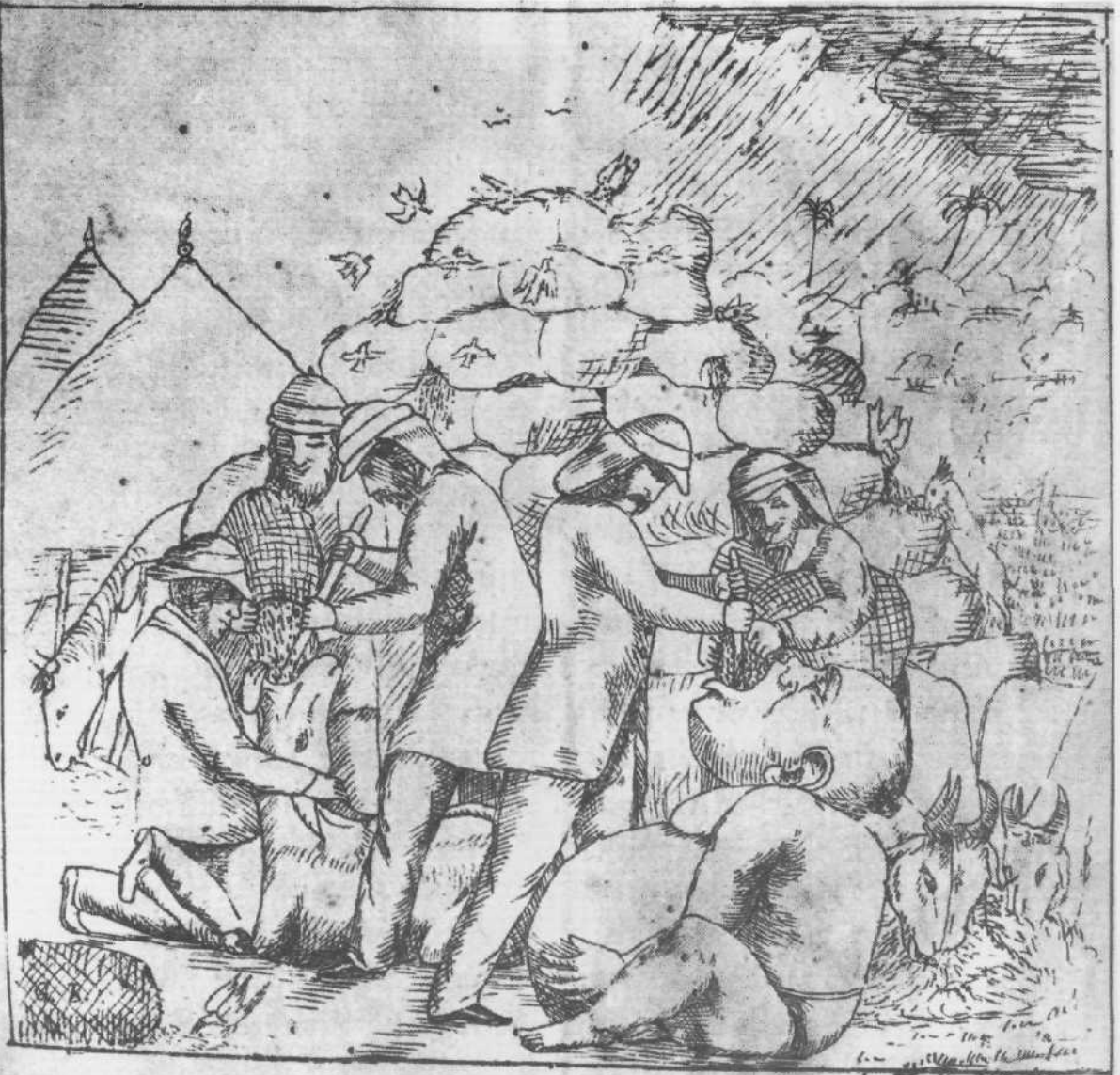
99 John Tenniel: *Rebellion
Had Bad Luck, Punch, 1865*

relief. In '23rd special dispatch from the Famine districts' (Fig. 100), English officials force-feed overfed candidates, while the rest of the population starves. The caption reads: 'Beggar: Your honours, I really can't manage any more. Their Honours: We are afraid that won't do, someone must finish so much rice'.⁹⁶

100 The 23rd special dispatch,

Basanlak

Basanlah became embroiled in political factionalism around 1875, as



28fd Special dispatch from the Tamiae district*.

part of emergent nationalist politics. In the last century, the *bhadralok* population of Calcutta was divided into the leading families (*abhijdt*) and ordinary householders (*grihasta*). The Calcutta Corporation was run by a government-appointed chairman who also happened to be the Police Commissioner. In 1863 the system was slightly Indianised with the nomination of Indian aristocrats as Justices of the Peace. With the growth of public opinion in the 1870s, the 'householders' consisting of small landholders, clerks, schoolteachers and journalists began to tire of their political impotence. Their chance to challenge the zamindars came with the elevation of Temple to the Lieutenant-Governorship of Bengal.⁹⁷

In 1875, keen on the spread of western institutions, Temple was prepared to defuse Bengali demands with limited political rights. The *grihasta* were offered a share in local government; as an elected body, they would more willingly pay taxes, urgently needed for modern amenities in Calcutta. The 'householders' warmly welcomed Temple's proposal, since they now had a chance to replace the conservative lobby with radical elements. The Europeans in Calcutta, too, wished to replace the control of the landed magnates with an elected body. Unexpectedly, they allied with the 'householders', as *The Indian Charivari* joined hands with *Basantak*. *The Indian Charivari* depicted two prominent English members of the Municipal Corporation, Roberts and Hogg, as a Muslim and a Brahmin. They relaxed with a hookah, while their supporter Wilson, the editor of a local newspaper, fanned them, and the pro-zamindar Kristo Das Pal served them with betel.⁹⁸

The battle lines were clearly drawn. *Basantak* claimed to defend the interests of the ordinary citizen of Calcutta against the officials, the landed magnates and their mouthpiece, the *Hindoo Patriot*, edited by Kristo Das Pal. A defender of the *grihasta*, it waged relentless war against the modernisation projects of the Corporation, since improvements, such as covered drains, tramways, a modern market and other amenities, were to come out of the ratepayer's pocket. It sided with the 'man in the street' when the laying of covered drains caused discomfort to the pedestrians: one of them is shown using his umbrella to shelter himself against the mud splashed by a passing carriage. In one cartoon, Sir Stewart Hogg, Chairman of the Corporation and Police Commissioner, is a trickster who makes millions vanish in the name of improvement. In another, he is the Boar Incarnation of Visnu (Fig. 101). In this satirical version of the Hindu pantheon, the tusks of the deity holds up various boons: tramways, drainage, a modern public market; while one of his arms wields the rod of authority, the police. He tramples underfoot Calcutta citizens as he receives worship from a sycophantic Bengali Justice of the Peace. The synonyms, 'boar' and 'hog' (Hogg), did not escape the readers.⁹⁹

The Bengali Justice of the Peace here was a zamindar. Their spokesman in the Governor's Council, Kristo Das Pal, fought the extension of franchise to the 'householders'. As politics became more complex, the

zamindars chose Pal to represent them. Of humble origin, Pal was a brilliant speaker and journalist, who edited the *Hindoo Patriot* from 1861. He rose to be a Justice of the Peace and Commissioner of the Calcutta Municipality, eventually joining the exclusive Governor's Council. On his death at forty-one, a statue in his honour was erected with public subscription. Pal's opposition to the *grihastas* drew out **Basantak's** sharp claws, which branded him as a government 'collaborator'¹ — Temple's pet hound, no less {Fig. 102}. Interestingly, political enmity did not tarnish personal amity. Pal is said to have asked Datta in jest, 'Do you always empty your inkpot when drawing me?'¹¹¹



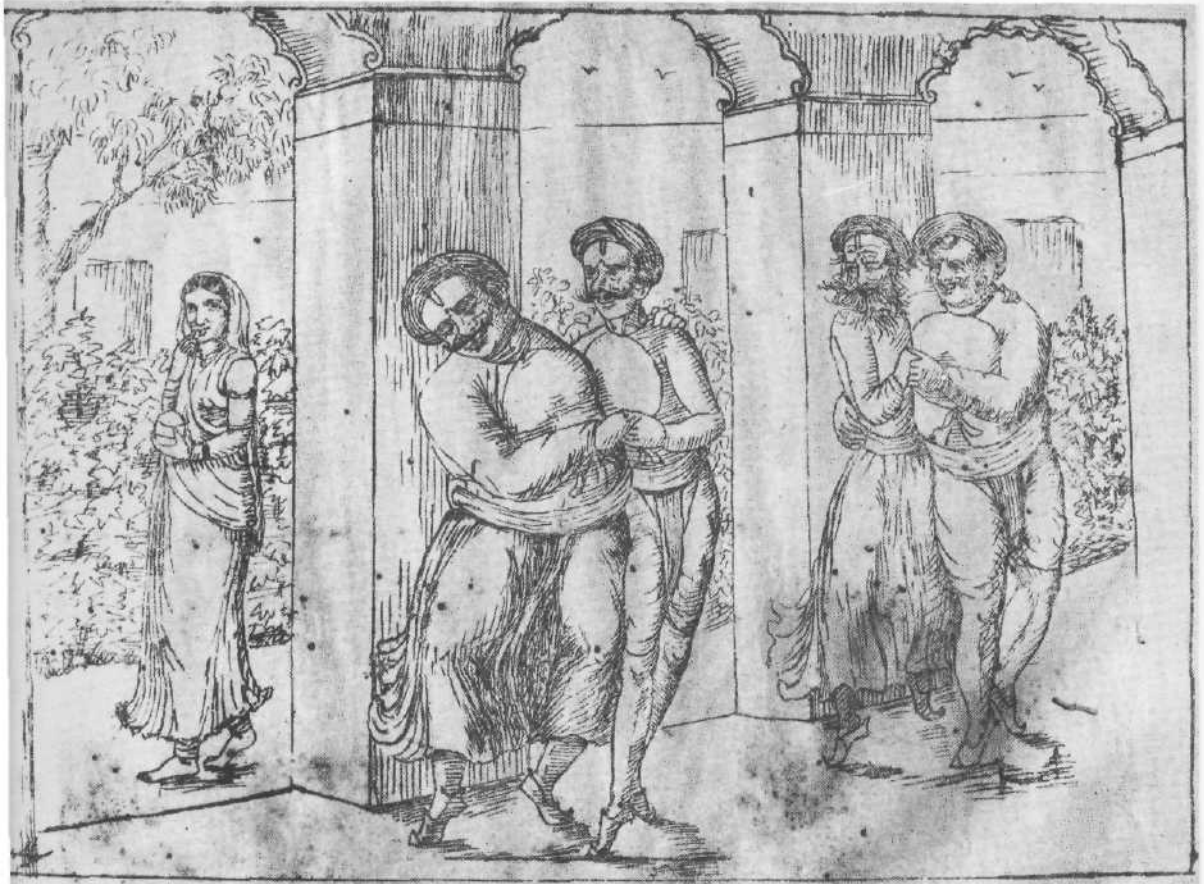
Basantak reserved its most lethal barbs for the westernised, in satires reminiscent of Kalighat. In 'Native Preparations for jaymangal Singh's Ball' (Fig. 103), two pairs of *bania* (merchant) men practise the waltz, while a veiled woman looks on, bemused. Datta's targets included Vidyasagar's 'Society for the Prevention of Obscenity' (Fig. 104), purporting to celebrate the change that had come about. In conventional iconography, the naked goddess Kali with dishevelled hair stands on the god Siva. Here she wears a blouse and a modest, pleated, full-length skirt in deference to the reformer. She also carries a lady's handbag. Her supine victim sports a pair of tweed trousers with braces. The cartoonist makes fun of both the campaign for modest female attire and the prevailing fashion in Victorian clothes. But Datta admired Vidyasagar. His *The Bull and the Frog* mocks the foremost novelist Bankim Chatterjee's presumed



challenge to the great reformer. Filled with hubris, **Bankim** bullfrog tries to inflate to the size of Vidyasagar, the majestic bull, with the danger of bursting. Nor did *Basantak* spare the bhadrakok indulgence in western food and drink, a focus of satire since Iswar Gupta, the noted poet (1812—59). It parodied the Christmas celebration of the *babus*, which was an excuse for overeating forbidden foods, for getting drunk on sherry and champagne, and for debauchery. Conservative *Basantak* never forgave Jagadananda Mukherjee, who had allowed the Prince of Wales to be received by the woman of his family.¹⁰¹

The most popular Bengali cartoons were social. The magazines *Prabasi* and *Bharati* had occasional cartoons, but in *Manasi O Marmabani*, *Bhadrat Barsha* and *Masik Basumati* they featured regularly. The stock Bengali characters - hypocritical zamindar, henpecked husband, pompous professor, obsequious clerk, illiterate Brahmin - were the cartoonists' favourites. Characteristic behaviours and typical situations, such as the plump head-clerk returning from the bazaar with his favourite fish or the thin schoolmaster with stick-like arms and legs were well captured.¹⁰² The

103 Native Preparations for
Jaymangal Singh's Ball,
Basantak



ubiquitous umbrella was not only a protection against the fierce Bengal sun but also the all-purpose weapon of the Bengali hero.¹⁰³ The painter Abanindranath Tagore tried his hand at caricatures of favourite Bengali characters at various times in his career (Fig. 105). They were lively though never attaining the brilliance of his brother Gaganendranath's cartoons (see p. 174-5).¹⁰⁴

From 1917, **Jatin** Sen featured regularly in *Mdnasi O Marmabāni* and *Bhadrat Barsha*, and occasionally in *Prabdsi*. Sen's observation of Bengali physiognomic types, blending individual idiosyncrasies with national peculiarities, was unmatched for the period. The works of Jaladhar Sen, Charuchandra Roy, Apurba Krishna Ghosh, Benoy Ghosh and Chanchal Bandopadhyaya seem coarse by comparison. A student at the art school, Sen turned to cartoons, graphic art and cinema hoardings after failing to make headway in oriental art (see ch. 8). A chance meeting with a literary genius, Rajsekhar Bose, led to Sen's prize-winning graphic work and posters for Bose's chemical firm. Sen joined Bose's literary circle, while his cartoons inspired Bose's brilliant satirical works, *Gadddlikd* (1924) (Fig. 106), *Kajjali* (1927) and *Hanumaner Sivapna* (1937). These remain the **most** inventive parodies of Bengali life, with their keen eye for the ridiculous in social behaviour. What Sukumar Ray did for children Bose did for adults. In the



104 Society for the Prevention of Obscenity, *Rasuntak*. Kālī, who in conventional iconography (see Fig. XII) is naked, is draped here in deference to the new morality

Bengali mind, Sen's witty sketches became inextricably linked with Bose's text.¹⁰⁵

Not only Sen but other cartoonists too loved to dwell on the affectations of the young - their exotic coiffure, outlandish sartorial fashions, and partiality to **gold-rimmed** pince-nez and other spectacles *à la*



105 Abanindranath Tagore:

A Comic Character (inspired by plays produced at the Tagore home)

mode. The cartoonists juxtaposed two types of Bengali youth: the rugged, salt-of-the-earth, masculine young man and the languid, *jin-de-siède*, Oscar Wilde type. The second read poetry, spent his time on personal grooming, and fainted at the sight of any anti-aesthetic unpleasantness. The classic stories of these types are Rajsekhar Bose's 'Rātārāti' (Overnight) and 'Kachi Samsad' (The league of youth). The loss of manliness in the colonial era weighed heavily on the Bengali mind, just as it regarded the emancipated woman with unmitigated horror. Nowhere were the cartoonists more brilliant than in their portrayals of dominating, domineering women. This ambivalence of bhadralok society is first seen in the art of Kalighat, with its images of viragoes (wife or mistress?) trampling masochistic *babus*. Woman as a burden or a disruptive force was a refrain of cartoons — the old man as a slave to his young wife, the graduate hampered by an illiterate spouse with whom he cannot make intellectual conversation."'''

The movement for improving Hindu women's condition gathered force in the nineteenth century. *Satt* was abolished, but there remained other disabilities, such as a low level of education and infant marriage. The



মরছি টাকার wiw, mi it<tft বলচেন c^wr-ī.*m ?

first women in Bengal to be emancipated, and many of them were Brahmos, became the butt of the cartoonist's pen, such as in *Basantak*. One cartoon that shows a well-dressed woman inside a peep-show box, has this explanation: 'Comeeakhuggand view at last a Hindu wonian whose veil has been lifted'. Two «sahibs gaze at her, one of them reaching inside his pocket for money. The implication is clear: a woman who can show her face to a strangler without shame can also sell her body.¹⁰⁷

Women's emancipation was an obsession with Bengali cartoonists, who played on men's subliminal fears. Once women were educated, they would neglect hearth and husband for the glamour of the outside world. The nationalist, who supported women's education, expected her not to demand equal rights with men but to be an inspiring mother. A widespread anxiety informed a society where reforms had only scratched the surface, where child marriage and dowry were still part of everyday life. Rabindranath observed, 'one group of people deny that there is any need for women's education, because men suffer many disadvantages when women receive education. An educated wife is no longer devoted to her husband, she forgets her duties and spends her time reading and in similar activities'.¹⁰⁸ Early on in *Basantak* the consequences of marrying an educated woman are made chillingly clear. The wife relaxes in an armchair with a novel while the poor husband tries to light the coal oven in the kitchen. As smoke enters the room, the wife, engrossed in the book, says in irritation: 'Can't you close the kitchen door while lighting the fire?' (Fig. 107).¹⁰⁹

Jatin Sen and Benoy Ghosh portrayed liberated woman in various guises, appealing to men's fear of emasculation. In 'Women's Revolt', a young lady is dressed in men's clothes. In another cartoon (1924), the wife is going for a spin with her gentleman friend (Fig. 108). Unlike the 'unemancipated' husband, she and her friend are fashionable. She wears dark glasses; he sports a monocle and drives a latest model convertible. She instructs her husband to 'give the baby a bottle'. Since he is not endowed by nature to breastfeed, the husband laments, he has no choice but to give it a bottle. The prickliest area was employment: highly placed women as judges, police superintendents and office executives would encroach into the men's world with impunity, symbolised by puny clerks working under powerful women bosses. The cigar-smoking lady represents the final collapse of man's domain (Fig. 109).¹¹⁰

The erosion of social values under the impact of the West remained the favourite topic of Bengali caricature. In this no one matched the unsentimental eye of Gaganendranath Tagore. His brilliant sketches, lithographed by a Muslim artisan, appeared from 1917 onwards in three volumes, *Birup Bdjra* (Play of Opposites), *Adbhut Lok* (Realm of the Absurd) and *Naba Hullo* (Reform screams). As Nirad Chaudhuri argues, 'the only expression in art ever given to Hindu liberalism, [was]... a set of lithographs after drawings by Gaganendranath Tagore . . . The cartoons

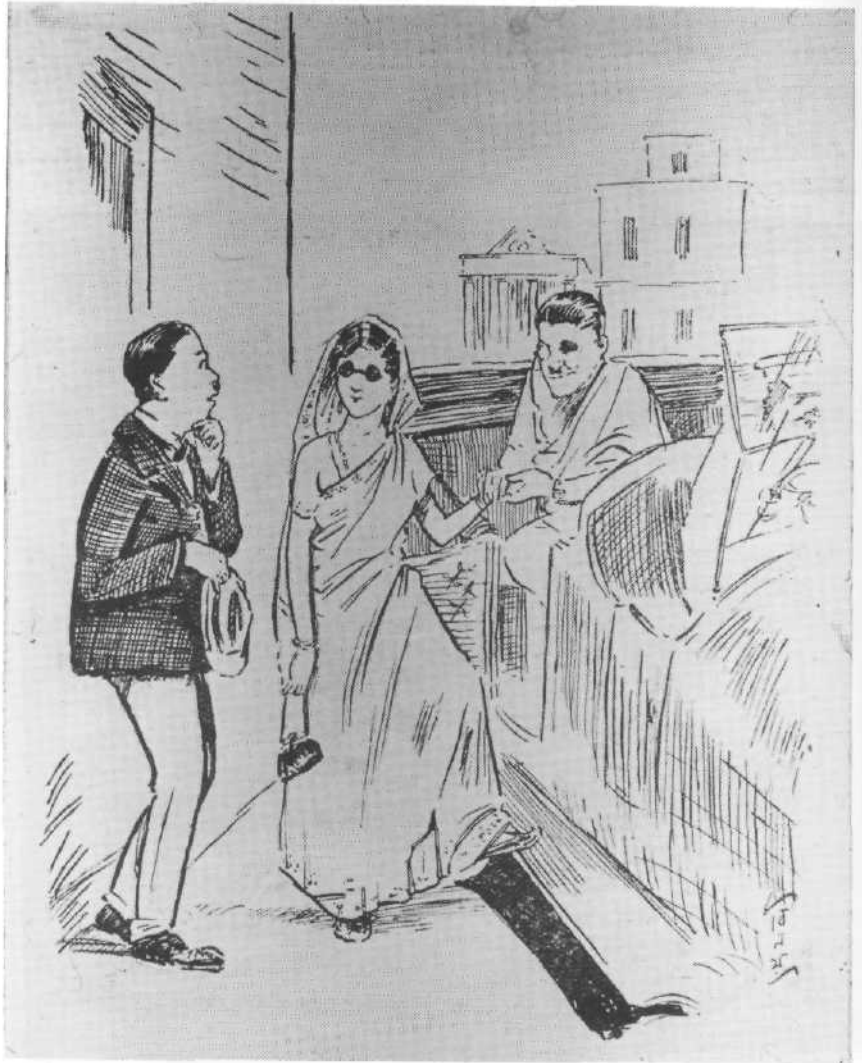
would not suffer by comparison with those of DaumierV" Gaganendranath produced some sharply observed political cartoons, but by far his most original ones were social satires. If he continued with the economy of Kalighat, his ferocity also bore an uncanny resemblance to German Expressionism, the cartoonists of *Simplirissimus*, Bruno Paul and Rudolf Wilke (Figs XI; no, i n , 112). The German comic paper was founded in 1896 with a distinct style—strong line, grotesque figures and faces, and flat areas of grey or beige. It is likely that the combination of bold lines and large flat surfaces in the *Sitnplirissimus* and in Gaganendranath ultimately went back to Japanese prints. The Bengali artist's admiration for Japanese art is known from other contexts."²

The brunt of Gagan's satire was borne by the westernised, whom he mocked for trying to be more English than the English. His cartoons with their bloated figures have a savage intensity, dwelling on what he saw as the hypocrisy, cant and double standards in Bengali society: the Brahmin paying lip service to the Vedas whilst taking graft for keeping whores (Fig. XI); Bengalis masquerading as black sahibs; the suffering wife



107 **Wife:** Can't you dose the door while Sighting the fire?, Hasantak

waiting for the *babu* who visits the *demi-monde* {Fig. 112). Gaganendranath's lithographs were the culmination of the tradition of self-parody in Bengal. They pleased the English press no end. *The Englishman* wrote gleefully on the 'merciless satire not altogether undeserved, on some of the modern tendencies of the artist's countrymen'.³ What they failed to appreciate was that with these cartoons the artist was engaging in a long-standing game, a game that continued the unresolved internal debate among Bengalis on cultural identity. Gaganendranath stood last in the line of such critics of the *bhadralok* society.



SALON ARTISTS, MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION AND PEOPLE'S ART

The main thrust of the previous chapters has been to show the rise of colonial artists and patrons, widely seen as a triumphant vindication of Raj education policy. So what about the ordinary people who had hitherto been served by traditional artisans? At first glance they appear to



109 Jatin Sen: A
Cigar-Smoking Lady, *Manasi* 0
Marmabāni, 1326 (1919)

have been left out of the equation, as elite and popular art took different paths. Yet, in a curious twist of historical circumstance, the divide between the two was bridged by the elite artists when they took over printmaking from artisans. These mass prints had a profound impact on society, an art form that became universally accessible regardless of wealth and class.¹⁴

While cheap prints circulated in India from the last century, late in the century technically advanced German prints began flooding the Indian market. Some of the earliest ones were produced by south German firms specialising in Roman Catholic subjects. If one type of German oleograph provided for the devout in India, another catered for the prurient. Nor were local presses slow to learn. Lithographic presses mushroomed in Maharastra, with prints ranging from crude engravings to polychrome compositions. The lion's share was exacted by the Poona Chitrasala Press from 1888, if not as early as 1885 (Fig. 113); the steam press pioneered oleographs in India.¹¹⁵

If originally Bat-tala ('the Grub Street' of Calcutta) had made a large dent in the Kalighat monopoly of religious pictures in Bengal, art school

no Gaganendranath Tagore:

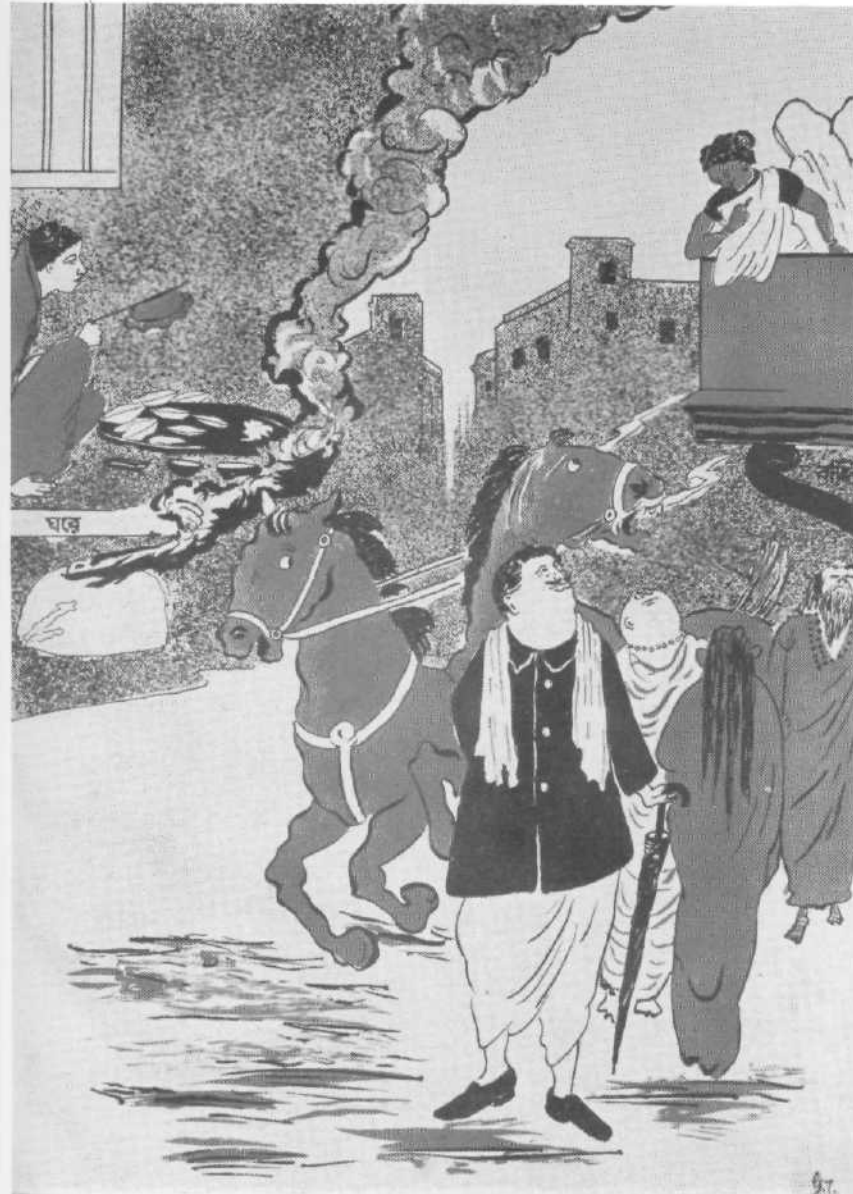
A Modern Patriot, hand-coloured lithograph. A caricature of westernised babus. The style with its use of lines and large flat areas is slightly reminiscent of Bcerbohm's cartoons but its savagery is that of Bruno Paul in the *Simplicissimus*, Fig. 111



III Right Bruno Paul:
cartoon from the
Simplicissimus



graduates soon secured a virtual monopoly in them. An **official** report of 1888 states that 'cheaper coloured [lithographs] of Gods and Goddesses turned out by the ex-students of the **Calcutta** School of Art' spelt the end of Kalighat.¹¹¹ The early rivals of Kalighat included Nrityalal Datta and Charuchandra Roy, who specialised in metal-plate prints, and Kristo Hurry Doss, the illustrator to J. M. Tagore's lavish volume, *Six Principal Ragas*. But the Calcutta Art Studio overshadowed the rest in popularity.



112 Gaganendranath Tagore: *A Wayside Distraction*, hand-coloured lithograph. While his faithful wife waits at home, the babu is distracted by other women (a play on the Sanskrit **sloka**: **Pathi** NūrT **Vivarjita** or strange women encountered on the way should be avoided for obvious reasons)

The multi-purpose Studio, set up around 1878, was Annada **Bagchi's** most successful financial venture. Since the nineteenth century, claimed his biographer, it had supplied pictures for decorating Bengali homes."⁷ The success of the Studio owed to two of the partners, Nabakumar Biswas and Annada Bagchi, whose designs were superior to those of previous engravers. The publicity received at the exhibition of 1883 boosted their confidence. Locke reported that they could "hold their



113 **Poona** Chitrashala Press:
Narasinha, lithograph of a
Hindu deity III a
conventional pose

own in their own lines against all comers" and the architectural lithographs of the last mentioned student [were] excellent'.¹¹⁸ The studio thrived between 1878—1920 mainly as a lithographic press and continues today as a printing concern (Figs XII, 127, 128). The popularity of its religious chromo-lithographs encouraged European entrepreneurs to enter the market. The Studio made Bamapada Bandopadhyaya aware of the market in popular prints. His works printed in Austria and Germany sold in Calcutta (Fig. 114).¹¹⁹



114 Bamapada
Bandopadhyaya: *Sakuntala*,
lithograph (printed in
Germany)

Bagchi soon left the Studio, as his teaching commitments increased and a clash of interests between the partners surfaced. When the Studio was auctioned off in 1882, Nabakumar Biswas bought it up. During his regime the Studio not only undertook lithographs on a large scale, but added oil and photographic portraits to its repertory, once again blurring the distinction between elite and popular art. A convenient outlet for the prints was the shop owned by Nabakumar's brother Prasanna in the Tiretta Bazaar. The hand-tinted lithographs, which fetched a rupee or two, managed to hold their own against competition until they were superseded by Ravi Varma's oleographs in the 1890s.¹²⁰

The Studio iconography was traditional but the Classical postures of Hindu deities, especially goddesses, who sported disconcertingly muscular limbs, were inspired by the art school casts of Apollo, Artemis and Aphrodite, and above all by Renaissance paintings. The Studio swiftly won the hearts of urban Bengal, but failed to please discerning critics. Balendranath Tagore, for instance, preferred Ravi Varma to what was increasingly seen as the garish colour schema of the Studio.¹²¹ The Studio sold prints on the Bengali theatre and brought out monochrome portraits of eminent Bengalis, popular among the bhadralok. It printed political topics, such as the intriguing lithograph, *Begging India back from Britain*. But its most striking political icon was originally religious. *Kail* (1879) (Fig. XII) was later used to market a 'nationalist brand of cigarettes'; the print of the dread goddess wreaking vengeance was scoured for a hidden political message by the government. The print was adapted by Maharastran revolutionaries as a nationalist icon. *Kali* WAS widely plagiarised. The Bhau Bui Company of London released another version printed in Germany; *Kalx* provided the 'logo' for safety matches.¹²²

The last three chapters dealt with the different facets of westernisation that helped create the taste for naturalism in colonial India. They centred on the high point of academic art, between the closing decade of the last and the early years of this century. This was when the ground rules of academic naturalism were set and patterns of patronage established. In this selective overview, many artists' lives remain unsung. But that does not mean that they did not share the new values and ambitions. The main feature of this period was the rise of the self-conscious artist, whose high social standing and professional kudos were linked to modern networks, institutions and means of communication. And yet, even though the gentleman artist mainly catered to the elite, his concern with mechanical reproduction forced him to enter the competition for the hearts of the people. The colonial artist who was brilliantly successful in both elite and popular spheres was Ravi Varma. I have gone beyond his period in order to set his achievements against the general phenomenon of colonial art. We now retrace our steps to examine this remarkable painter.