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-pyblic 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 -table 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-emmently an editor although[1].. . 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 In'dia, 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 a,. 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 art 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 its 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 archit -ture: Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, Sikh and even Burmese (Burma then being under the Raj); the editorial announced >ie 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 *'Modem 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, *Shilpfl Pushpatijali,* and the children's magazine, *liahk,* both issued in 1885. But by and large, illustrations were conspicuous by their absence; if they appeared at all, their , oor 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 *Bharati*. Unillustrated, they remained in obscurity until recently/ror Ramananda, poor pictures wei\ _ven 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 u*omo universale.* A member of the small group ofliberal 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 experiment were published regularly in in *the Penrose Annual The journal, Process Work and Electrotyping,noted* his importance:Mr.Upendrakishor Ray of culcutta..... 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 Adjust-ing 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 textboks attractively, spoke of Raychaudhuri: 'I had no idea that such good illustration printing. . . could be done in Bengal'.

Half-tone illustrations quickly become the norm in publishing, not least in Ramananda's magazines. The earliest monochrome half-tone plates, were Sashi Hesh's *Puranic* illustration in Pradip (1901)and Ravi Varma's sita in prabasi (1901). Verma's *Woman Playing Saravat in Prabasi* (1902), using the 'Ray Tint Process', captured tor 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, *Prabasi*, 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 *Prabasi.*

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

76 U. Raychaudhun: 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 *Bharati* inaugurated its first full-colour art plate with the orientalist Suren Ganguly's *Hara-ParvatI* The layout and the caption paid obvious homage to Ramananda.[11] Not to be outdone, *Sahitya, Bharati'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. Shi*lpa 0 Sahitya,* 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 Mukhopadhaya founded a new monthly, *Manasi 0 Marmabani,* he was able to draw upon the experience of *Prabasi* and *Modern Review,* to fill his magazine with a rich crop of pictures. The peak was reached in 1913 with *Bharat Barsha,* launched by another literary figure the playwright Dwijendrala Roy. His journal in time rivalled if not outstripped *Prabasi* in popularity. By now, techology had ceased to pose problems; neither was its cost prohibitive. Many of the fledgling publications were not fussy about pirating illustrations, especially from Joreign 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

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 correspon-den'ce, 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 ewre eagerly and *Prabasi, Bharati, Sahitya, Manasi 0 Marmabani Bharat Barsha and* Masik *Basumati are to be found in Bengali homes.*

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

Among journals outside Bengal, few could rival *Kumar* (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.[6]

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 takrn by an artist friend. But his immediate model was *Modern Review,* Brought to his notice by Gandhi's personal secretary,

77 *Left* Cover of *Kumar*

78 Cover of *Vasmi Sadi*

Mahadev Desai. *Kumar* aimed at educating the young in science and artt 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.'[7] i

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, *Bharat 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

fn the last century, the demand for illustrated children's books rose dramatically in Bengal. Education performers 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 *Siksha, Sishu Bodh,* and in 1855 the educationist Iswarchandra Vidyasagar's *Barna Parichay.* This introduction

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.

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 *Pancatantra* and the *Hitopodesa* 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. 1 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 novelis Flora Annie_ Steel who recorded the oral talcs of Punjab at tuple's instance. The volume conntained Temple's copious annotaions 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 Aryari origins of the Bengali stories. He also captured the peculiarly Bengali flavour of these tales of tigers, bandits, goblins, demons, *yaksas* 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 *Thakurmar 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 Upen-drakishore Raychaudhuri's elegant retelling of household tales, *Tuntunir Boi* (The Tailor-Bird's Book).

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. Frobel valued Highly the

80 Priyagopal Das, *Chang Bang*, woodcut, from *Thakurmar Jhuli*, 1907

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.[2]*

Once again, the more liberal elements were in the forefront, especially ' the Brahmos. Some of the leading Brahmos, the Tagores and Upen-drakishore 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 *{lila).* Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* has taught us to appreciate the value of games and of mike-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.

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 trouves.* 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 *Abhijnana Sakuntalam* 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' arc his late illustrations to the traditional poem *Kabikankan Chandi* (Fig. X).[21]

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, *Sakha,* was published in 1883 by Pramadacharan Sen with illustrations by Upendrakisliore. Sen died penniless in 1885, despite the popularity of his magazine, the year the Tagores launched *Balak* with illustrations by

Harish Chandra Haldar. *Sathi* followed *Sakha* in 1893. in 1895, 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 *Sakha. Tuntunir Boi* and children's versions of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* 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.[2ı]*

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

81 U. Raychaudhuri, four illustrations in *Sandesh*

'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]

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 thriirof prehistoric monsters. In the illustration in question,a gigntic brontosaurus lurks above the trees of the Eden Gardens, Calcutta's best-known park, as acricket match takes place. The scale of the creature is brought home by juxtaposing it with a familiar wintersight in Calcutta, After Upendtakishpore'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, skyscapers in America, deep-sea divers, submarines, Big Ben, the nature of the sun, chloroformthe pyramids, the end of the world the stellar system, to name only a few. The striking aspect waTnot soHnujcTTtKaT " Bengali childran 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. Aries in 1062, '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, *Thakurmar 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 chi! ten'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.

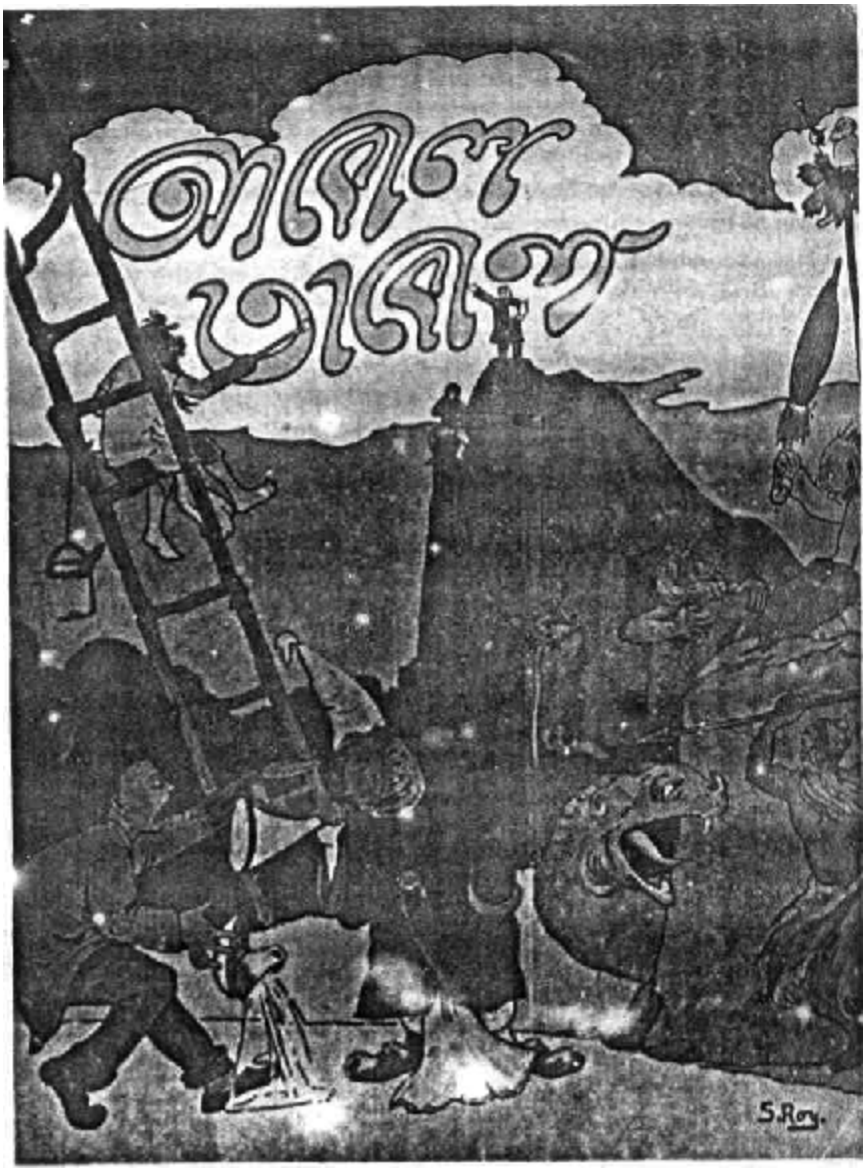
They effectively finished off the earlier lithographs that had enjoyed a virtual monopoly. A comparison between wood-engraved illustrations in *Thakurmar Jhuli* and half-tone pictures in *Sandesh* makes this clear. Just as he tried to popularise science. Upendrakishore sought to bring everyday experience 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 Balarama,* Upendrakishore treats this hero of the *Mahabharata* as a believable human being rather than as a conventional *avatar* of Visnu. 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 . mom 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.*[31] 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 folkioric 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 *jeu d'esprit* he t rued 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.[3]*

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 *Ramayana.* 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.'

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

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



82 S. Ray: Cover of *Abol Tabol*

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 Tabol* (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 'Danpitey' (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 Tabol {The Uncle's Contraption, Tickle-My-Ribs* and *Blighty Cow)*

finest instance is perhaps the 'Dream Song', which forms the closing verse *of Abol Tabol.* 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.""

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 *Abol Tabol* 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 bhadralok culture. That mixture made perfect sense in, the bilingual colonial milieu of urban Calcutta in the eurly decades of this century. In our time, perhaps only Salman Rushdie has attempted a simitar 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 'Blighty 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 z i 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

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 Bazar Patrika,* published its first cartoon in 1872.[44]

One of the earliest cartoons to make a political impact was in *Sulav Samachar* 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 Samdchar* 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.[48] 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 . . .

Parody and distortion for comic effect are the oldest human tendencies, an early Indian example of which is the temptation of the Buddha by Mara 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 chew upon Rowland-son'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]

Cruickshank (1792-1878) in Britain and Charles Philipon's *he 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, Cruickshank, Gillray and Rowlandson, Tenni of *Punch* stood for Victdrian 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.[80]

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.

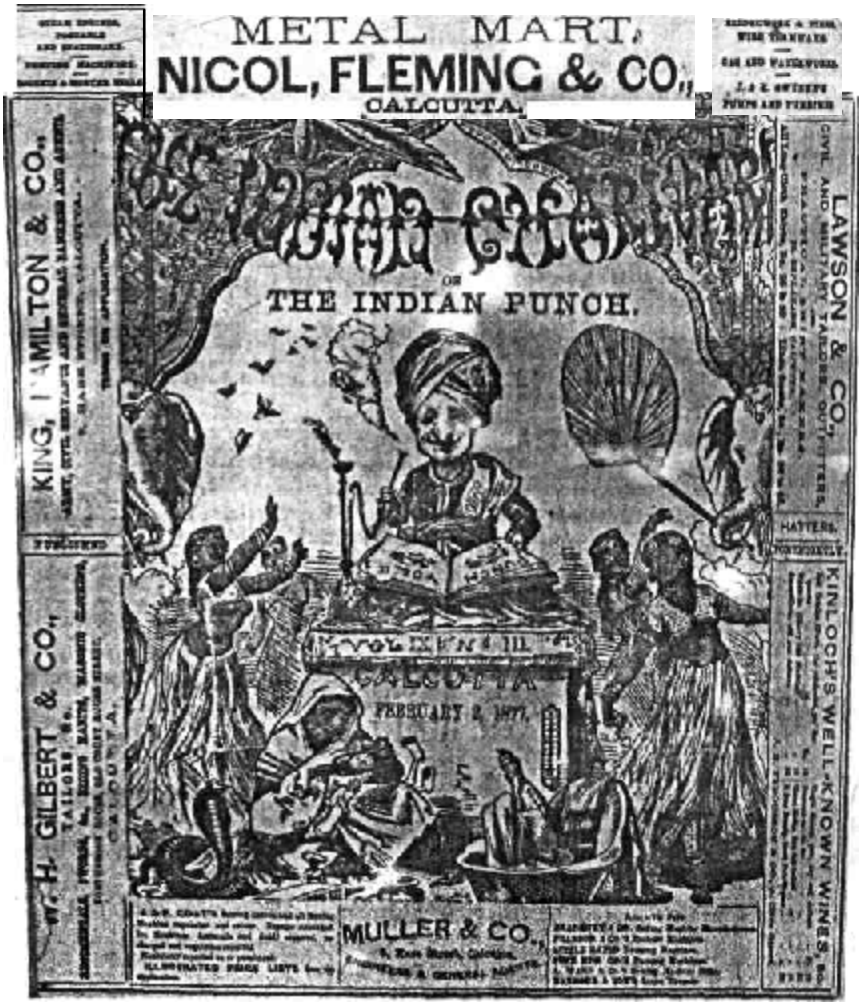
The reasons for the different approaches of British and Indian cartoonists in India were historical. By the 1860s, the imperial bureau-cracy hadiOssifiefd into a benevolent despotism. A racially exclusive British society thrived with its quota of civil and military officials and its paraphernalia of 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 *ntunshi* (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 forma/ 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 sell-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'. 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'. *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* (see Fig. 85). The 1873 cover was often used as here in 1877

readers. The ensign's progress was charted in the manner of Tom Raw the Griffin'.[55] Occasional Indian themes continued the romantic image 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:

85 John Tennicl, *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 . . .

86 *Oudh Punch* cover, 1881

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 but slightly dark in the way of complexion . . .

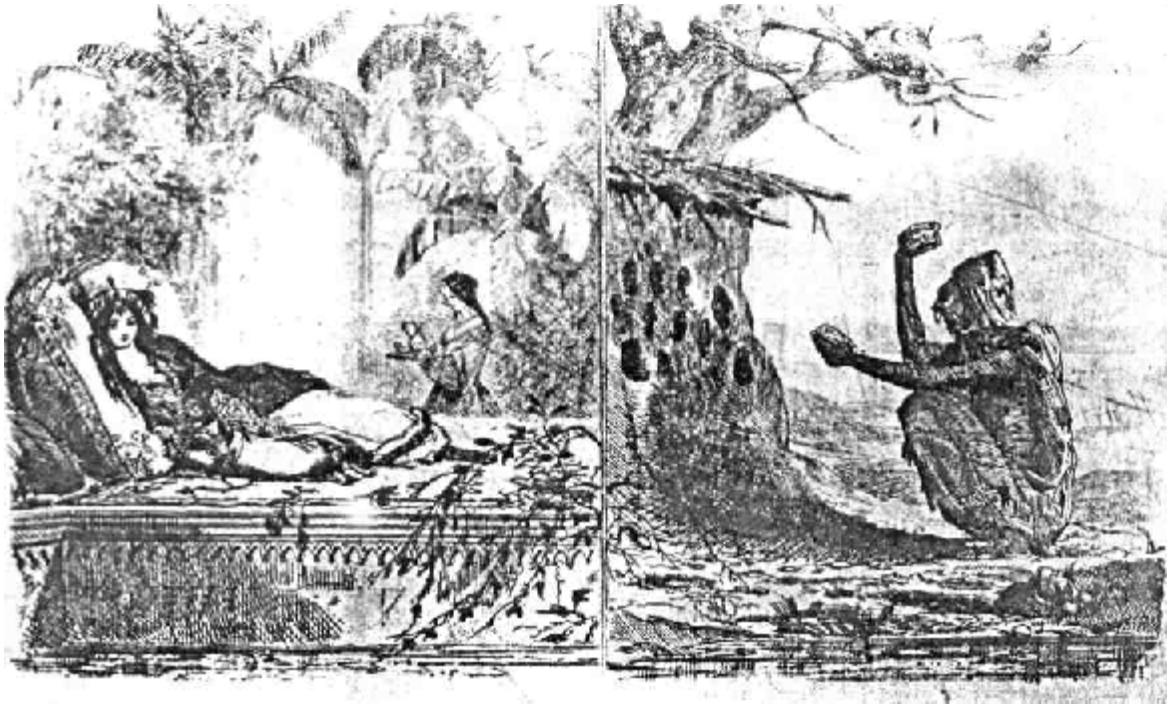
The picturesque shades off into the romantic, suggesting the magazine's

87 *Basantak* cover, 1874

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' (lug. 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 anmong the British as a reflection of the betrayal felt after 1857. While the Rebellion certainly exacerbated

88 *A Lament by One of tin-Deluded, Delhi Sketch Book,* V, 1854



feelings, the hardening of attitudes reflects the growing Victorian ideology of race. . *A*s 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 exposes 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'. 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."[2]

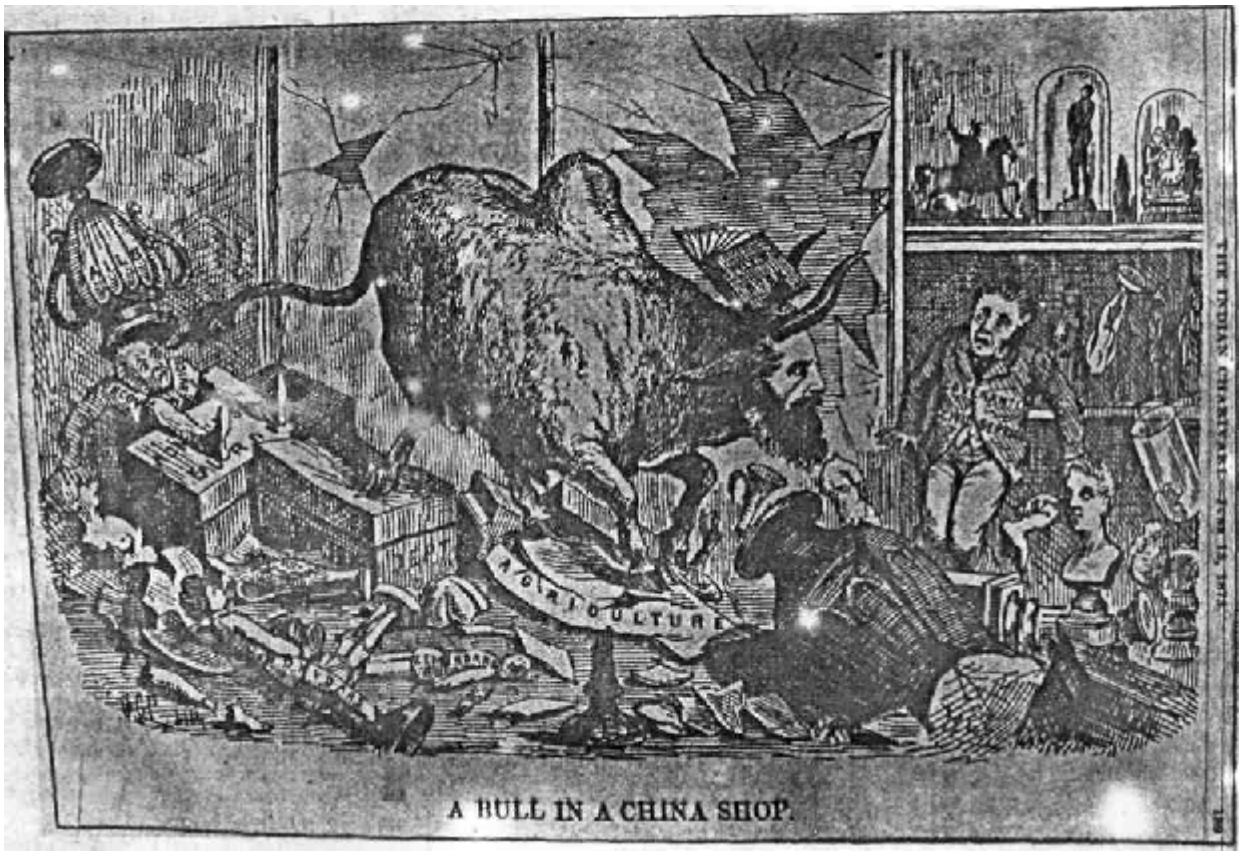
Although it was the caricatures of Indians that *The Indian Charivari* excelled in, it did not hold a uniform view on them. Given that nationalist agitations were on the rise, a special 'Charivari Album' (1875) offered

89 G.F. Atkinson: *Our Ball, 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 1 tionalist 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).

Reformers, whether political or social \ hether 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

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



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