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Banerjee, Anavisha. "The Satirical Caricatures of ..." pp. 33-52

## The Satirical Caricatures of Gaganendranath Tagore

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### Abstract

Gaganendranath Tagore is known as the first cartoonist in early twentieth century colonial India. Although his artistic talent ranges from being a landscape artist to a cubist painter, he is best known for his caricatures which were given the status of a work of art rather than be simply seen as illustrations in magazines. The article analyses his satirical sketches from different volumes of his work. The main focus is to look at the satirical representations of middle and upper class Bengali women, *bhadramahila* and anglicized Bengali men, *babus*, within the colonial context. The article will trace the growth of Bengal art and subsequently the colonial influence on art. The impact of the British and Oriental exponents become an important ground in exploring the growth of a new style of art. The rise of nationalist sentiment and Swadeshi movement's role in the revival of the status of Bengal art was an essential feature of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. The above issues will form an important base in underlining the growth of Gaganendranath's as an artist and the themes for his caricatures. The use of bilingual titles will become an important aspect in analyzing his liberal mindedness as an artist.

### Keywords

caricature, satirical, anglicized, *bhadramahila*, *babu*, colonial

Dwarkanath Tagore (1794-1846) was one of the first Indian industrialists and entrepreneurs. He was also the founder of the Jorasanko branch of the Tagore family in Calcutta. Dwarkanath's son was Debendranath Tagore (1817-1905). Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) was Debendranath's youngest son. Dwarkanath's second son was Girindranath Tagore (1820-1854), whose son was Gunendranath (1847-1881). Gunendranath's sons were Gaganendranath Tagore (1867-1938) and Abanindranath (1871-1951) apart from Samarendranath (1870-1951) and their daughter Sunayani (1875-1962). Gaganendranath went to St.Xavier's School, Calcutta for a brief period of time and after the premature death of his father in 1881, he was educated by his mother at home. Gaganendranath became the potential leader of the junior branch of the Tagores of Jorasanko and his mother groomed his interest in drawing and painting. In 1896, the house of Dwarkanath was partitioned and Gaganendranath took over the "outer" house which consisted of the land adjoining the main mansion where Dwarkanath used to entertain his guests and friends.

Gaganendranath Tagore's younger brother Abanindranath flourished as an artist much before him. Abanindranath was initially trained by European teachers but subsequently he was influenced by E.B.Havell (1861-1934,) the British artist and art historian whom he met in 1900 (Parimoo, *Gaganendranath Tagore* 44). Havell played an important role in paving the way towards the Revivalism of Indian art. He came to India at the time of colonial rule and encouraged an Indian style of painting rather than emulating the west. Tapati Guha-Thakurta in her chapter on "Artisans, Artists and Popular Picture Production in Nineteenth Century Calcutta" traces the development of Indian art under the colonial influence and its position in the first decade of the twentieth century, promoted by British administrators like Havell. Guha-Thakurta begins her discussion with the growth of the Kalighat paintings in nineteenth century Bengal. It developed in the Kalighat area of Calcutta and the paintings were called *pat chitra* since they were made on scrolls. Sometimes they consisted of a single image, and at times there were multiple images which formed a story and increased the length of the scrolls. The paintings mainly consisted of Hindu gods and mythological themes. The artists were called *patuas* and they were usually poor artisans who came from different districts of Bengal. Guha-Thakurta terms them "*bazaar artists*" (12). They were displaced by the Company painters who flourished under the British rule in the mid-nineteenth century. The Company painters were Indian artists whose patrons were British. They worked on the European style palette and used water colours instead of guache. Guache is a method of painting using opaque pigments ground in water and thickened with a glue-like substance. The Company paintings consist of a hybrid Indo-European style which blends traditional

elements from Rajput and Mughal paintings with a more western treatment of perspective. The *patuas* became a part of Company painters since they were paid well. However, they were seen as copyists since they were forced to imitate other western Company painters like William Hodges and Thomas and William Daniell. The creativity of the Bengali painters was thwarted since they were instructed to imitate native stereotypes to depict the superiority of the colonial heritage. They were termed “artisans,” to remind them of their inferior status as compared to the European painters who were termed as “artists.”

In the 1860s and the 1870s there was the rise of the *Bat-tala* press which produced cheap paintings and weekly magazines. They had their own publication and did not depend on the European press. A wide range of religious, fictional and adventure stories were published. *Bat-tala* used some of the themes of the Kalighat *pats* which included lampooning the degenerate *babus*, immoral women, demanding mistresses and the colonial influence on Bengalis in general (Guha-Thakurta 18). They catered to the interest of the lower and middle classes, hence they became popular. *Bat-tala* used wood cut and metal engravings as a prominent form of art. However, with the use of lithography in the 1880s, the popularity of the *Bat-tala* publications reduced. Lithography involves printing from a plain surface such as a stone or a metal plate. It makes use of the immiscibility of grease and water. The image to be printed is greased to hold the ink and the blank area is non greasy for repelling the ink (“Lithography”). The lithographic pictures were produced by the students of Calcutta Art Studio and managed by the ex-students of Calcutta School of Art. These schools trained students who belonged to the artisan class such as *patuas* and helped circulate their paintings based on religious and mythological themes. The local elite patronized these painters and tried to bridge the gap between high and low art. They bought paintings based on Indian art along with European style paintings.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, there was a shift from European approaches to Indian art to the appreciation of the Indian styles of painting. Guha-Thakurta in her chapter on “Orientalism and the New Claims for Indian Art: Ideas of Havell, Coomaraswamy, Okakura and Nivedita” traces this development. She discussed that it paved the way for the association of artists from the other parts of the world. Some of the prominent figures, apart from Havell, were A. K. Coomaraswamy (1877-1947) (a Ceylonese Tamil philosopher of Indian art) and Okakura Kakuzo (1863-1913) (a Japanese art critic). These people played an important role in the revival of Indian art because of their “anti-colonial” sentiment. Okakura saw Japanese and Indian art as superior to European art. Coomaraswamy belonged to the literary circle of Rabindranath Tagore and contributed to the *Swadeshi*

movement (1905-170). In the 1920s, he wrote about the history of Indian art and his earlier work traced the difference between Rajput and Mughal painting in the book *Rajput Painting* (1916). However, the earliest contribution towards the revival of the Indian art was by Havell.

In 1896, Havell became the principal of Government Art School of Calcutta. He wanted to make this school a prolific ground for the promotion of Indian traditions of decorative art and set an example for a school of design and applied arts rather than be limited to a Fine Arts Academy. He questioned the distinction between Fine Arts which was associated with a European concept and decorative art was associated with the Indian domain. He valued the beauty of Mughal miniature paintings which was a proof of the rich cultural heritage of India and saw it befitting for the category of Fine Arts. He refused to unite the art section of the European Art Gallery with the Indian Museum because he wanted to preserve the sanctity of the Indian art. In his article in the journal *The Studio* (1902), he mentioned Abanindranath Tagore as the future of the Indian art because of his original style of painting (Guha-Thakurta 155). Havell saw Abanindranath as his protégé and in 1905 he promoted him to the post of Vice-Principal of The Calcutta School of Art, also known as the Revivalist School. Abanindranath had studied European art and its range and technique of painting. He was also interested in Mughal miniature painting and a series of his paintings depicted the life of Krishna in a Mughal style. Later, he incorporated Chinese and Japanese calligraphic patterns in his miniature paintings. Abanindranath's knowledge of the Indian art and his interest in experimentation with different styles of art helped him establish the Indian Society of Oriental Art along with his brother Gaganendranath Tagore in 1907.

Gaganendranath was seen as an important figure of this Society since he played an active role in collecting Indian and Oriental art and artefacts. He also held regular exhibitions to display his collection. The main aim of this Society was to preserve the nationalist sentiment amidst colonial rule. Gaganendranath worked towards the revival of Bengal handicrafts, particularly the silk industry of Murshidabad in West Bengal. The Bengal Home Industries Association was formed by Gaganendranath in 1917 with a grant from Lord Carmichael, the then Governor of Bengal. At a personal level too, the brothers tried to preserve their nationalist heritage. The Jorasanko house became an example of this transformation as the Victorian style furniture (of their grandfather, Dwarkanath's time) was replaced by the Oriental-style furniture (influenced by Chinese and Japanese décor and furniture). The Oriental furniture included divans (a piece of couch-like sitting furniture, usually a long seat laid against the side of the room) and *tatami* mats covered their walls

(*tatami* mats were used in Japan for sitting on the floor, they were made from rice straw). They also had brass lampshades and other indigenous items which reflected their traditional collection. This collection of indigenous and Oriental items became a part of the *Vichitra Club* (Extra-ordinary Club) because of their variety.

The Tagore brothers (Gaganendranath and Abanendranath) had a lithograph machine in their collection and they litho printed their works. As mentioned earlier, lithography involves printing from a plain surface such as a stone or a metal plate. It makes use of the immiscibility of grease and water. The image to be printed is greased to hold the ink and the blank area is non-greasy for repelling the ink. Painting uses colour or paint on a solid surface like paper or canvas. The artist can use oil or water colour as a medium. The main difference is that painting uses a wide variety of medium and lithographic print is limited to the immiscibility of water and oil which produces a print rather than an original paint work. Gaganendranath made paintings as well as lithographic prints. His caricatures were in water colour and later made into lithographic prints.

Gaganendranath had a liberal mindset and experimented with the dress of the men of the Tagore family. He introduced the peaked cap, adopted from the Tibetan style. His uncle, Rabindranath Tagore, was frequently seen as wearing this style of cap along with a long ankle-length flowing gown called *jubba/jhabba*. Gaganendranath was also influenced by Okakura Kakuzo who came to India. Okakura's Bijuitsen School of Japanese painting became well recognized. The main aim of this school was to promote Japanese traditional art. Under the guidance of Okakura, his student, Hishida, was involved in innovating the traditional Japanese style painting which relied heavily on line drawing. Hishida focused on eliminating the prominent lines of the drawings and brought in different colour combinations. Gaganendranath was trained under Hishida and Taikan, the two teachers who were a part of the Bijuitsen School. Gaganendranath's technique of Japanese brushwork is seen in his illustrations for Rabindranath Tagore in *Jivansmriti* (*My Reminiscences*), the first edition of which was published in 1912 (Appasamy vi). The Japanese influence is also seen in Gaganendranath's sketches of portraits and landscapes which began in 1905.

Gaganendranath's painting is divided into five phases (Parimoo, *Gaganendranath Tagore* 48). The first phase (1905- 1911,) it consisted of scenes from Calcutta, Puri landscapes and portraits. The second phase (1911-1915,) also known as Chaitanya series, related to paintings of the spiritual leader Chaitanya and his devotees, this phase also included paintings of pilgrims. The third phase (1915-1921,) also known as *Vichitra Period* consisted of most of his caricatures and the Himalayan paintings. The fourth phase (1921-

1925) consisted of his cubist experiments. The last phase (1925-1930) consisted of post-cubist paintings. I will be focusing on the third phase of his painting which represents his caricatures.

I should like to give a brief outline of the history of satirical caricatures in print in India before discussing Gaganendranath's work. Partha Mitter gives a detailed background regarding the growth of illustrative journals in India in his chapter "The Power of the Printed Image". He states that initially the periodicals were owned by the British colonizers therefore their caricatures satirized the Indians. It was in the late nineteenth century and with the *Swadeshi* movement gaining momentum that some of the Indians took charge of the magazines and satirized the colonizers.

The early periodicals which presented cartoons were owned by the British and they were in English. *Delhi Sketch* book was a monthly periodical launched in 1850 and owned by the British editor, George Wagentreiber. It was published by the Delhi Gazette Press and contained cartoons satirizing Indian religion, kings and generals. The press was burned down during the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 due to its anti-national stand. However, in 1863, it was re-launched as *Indian Punch* by the same editor. One of the caricatures showed Indians placed next to Africans, where, both were represented as savages. There were other periodicals which satirized Indians, such as the *Oudh Punch* and the *Punjab Punch*, and these came from North India (Mitter 138). The *Indian Charivari*, in 1872, was under the editorship of Colonel Percy Wyndham. Although it shared the anti-Indian sentiments of the earlier periodicals, it included mild jokes about English social life too. The vernacular newspapers like *Hindu Patriot*, founded in 1853 and *Amrita Bazaar Patrika*, founded in 1868 criticized the racial attacks against the Bengalis.

*Harbola Bhand* (1874) was the first Bengali cartoon magazine to satirize the British. In the same year it paved way for *Basantak*, which became famous among patriotic Bengalis because of its satiric attack on the British officials and their Bengali allies. Prannath Dutt was its editor and Girindrakumar Dutt was the main cartoonist of the magazine. Its theme revolved around the hedonistic lifestyle of the *babus*, the corruption of Brahmins and the double standards of the colonial officials. *Basantak* satirized Ishwarchandra Vidyasagar's Society for the Prevention of Obscenity. According to them, the Society was formed to further the European ideas of Puritanism by incorporating it within the Indian context (Mitter 165). In one of the caricatures, *Basantak* ridiculed it by reworking the original representation of Goddess Kali, where she wears a garland of men's skulls which covers her breasts and the decapitated hands of men cover her waist and thigh. In the cartoon, the partial nakedness of

Goddess Kali is hidden through her anglicized attire (Mitter 167). She is seen as wearing a blouse and a long pleated skirt and is carrying a handbag while standing on her supine husband, Lord Shiva. His shirtless figure is seen in an English attire of tweed trousers attached with braces. This hybridization is an attempt to reflect male nakedness within the religious context. The satiric depiction of the goddess tried to question the notion of obscenity in terms of the western standards of indecency or crudeness (as Kali is traditionally depicted nude). The iconographies of Hindu gods and goddesses have their own significance within the mythological and religious framework and cannot be judged by western standards. The magazine also shared its anxiety regarding the women's reform movement. The education of women was a major area of their concern because it could challenge the gender hierarchy within the domestic space. In one of the caricatures, the wife relaxes in an armchair reading a book while the husband struggles to light a coal fire in the kitchen (Mitter 171). The wife gets disturbed with the smoke of the fire entering her room and tells her husband to shut the door. The caricature depicts her complete disinterestedness in household chores or even in helping her husband since she gives preference to her reading. The neglect of household duties was not an acceptable norm for the Hindu women of the nineteenth century.

There were other vernacular comic magazines from different parts of India. The Bengali cartoon periodicals included Indranath Bandyopadhyay's *Panchananda* and Surendranath Bandyopadhyay's *Bengalee* and *Bangabashi*. The growth of print technology and mechanical reproduction gave rise to illustrated magazines. Ramananda Chattopadhyay played an important role as an entrepreneur and editor of literary magazines. Gaganendranath must have been familiar with these magazines although his cartoons appeared in the second decade of the twentieth century. Some of his caricatures appeared in Ramananda Chattopadhyay's Bengali literary magazine *Prabashi* (1901) and *Modern Review* (1907). According to Ratan Parimoo, Gaganendranath was aware of the German satirical weekly journal, *SIMPLICISSIMUS* which was regularly published between 1896 and 1926 (Parimoo, *Art of Three Tagores* 370). It was a prestigious illustrated journal and consisted of works on German expressionism.

Although Gaganendranath was anti-colonial, he was open to western influences. In Gaganendranath's caricatures, the overbearing figures of priests, zamindars and *babus* along with their bold outlines resemble the German expressionistic technique. Gaganendranath's caricatures are also compared with the mid-nineteenth century French realist painter, sculptor and pioneer of political caricature, Honore Daumier (1808-1879). His cartoons satirized the French monarch, Louis-Philippe I (1773-1850) and his allies ("Honore Daumier"). Daumier

ridiculed the king and influential people through the bust sculptures and the lithographic prints which he contributed in the journal, *La Caricature*. His most famous caricature in this journal is titled *The Past. The Present. The Future*, printed on 9 January 1834 (Daumier *The Past. The Present. The Future*). It shows a disproportionately huge head of a king or politician and it has two faces on either side. It is a satiric representation of the people in power who exhibit multiple facets in their personality by putting on different faces to impress people who will trust them. The kings and politicians are known for their lack of trustworthiness and the title of the caricature shows that whether it is the past, the present or the future, the kings or politicians will forever be seen as beguiling common masses with the multiple faces that they adorn. The target of Daumier's caricature also included businessmen, doctors, lawyers and the wealthy bourgeois or the middle class.

In nineteenth century France, the bourgeois were known for their hedonistic lifestyle. In another caricature with the English title *Transnonain Street* (1854), Daumier lampoons the bourgeois by depicting an intoxicated man, in a nightgown, lying beside his bed in a half propped manner (Daumier *Rue Transnonain*). In the dark corner of the room, we see a pair of legs (in breeches) of another man lying down along with his partner in the opposite corner of the room. There is dark colour liquid stain on the floor suggesting the spilling of alcohol as the men indulged themselves in merry making. Drinking excess alcohol resulted in a drunken stupor and prevented them from reaching the bed and hence they slid on the floor. The man in the centre of the room has slid on top of another man, whose head and hands are visible from underneath the gown. This caricature lampoons the self-indulgent lifestyle of the middle class.

Gaganendranath may have seen Daumier's political caricatures. The theme and content of Gaganendranath's caricature (especially in his album, *Adbhut Lok*, translated as *Absurd People*,) seem to focus on the same lines as Daumier's representation of the absurd politician. In *Adbhut Lok*, the term *Lok* means "world" as in *swargalok* (heaven) and *mortolok* (hell). Therefore, both meanings are applicable and it can be translated as *Absurd World* too. In this album, Gaganendranath focuses on the hedonistic lifestyle of the *babu* (middle class Bengali,) the rich zamindars and Maharajas, splurging their wealth on selfish interests and the unscrupulous Brahmins exploiting the poor. Gaganendranath's style of representation, especially in the caricature of the corrupt, shows them as disproportionately large as compared to the common men or women who are the victims of exploitation. However, I shall elaborate here on one caricature, *Imperishable Sacredness of a Brahmin* (Lahiri 63), which exhibits a similarity with Daumier's caricature, *The Past. The Present. The*



*Future*. In Daumier's caricature, the man with an absurdly bloated head and having three faces, reminds us of Gaganendranath's caricature of a Brahmin who has multiple hands with which he indulges in greed and lechery. He uses his hands to collect wealth, eat a chicken leg and grab a woman. His head is bloated and with alcohol drooling from his mouth and flies buzzing all around him, he represents the bloated figure of corruption. This reflects the double standard of his religious vocation as compared to an expectation of virtue from priests by the public.

Daumier's painting techniques represented aspects of Impressionism which began as a movement in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. Impressionist painting focused on the accurate representation of reality. However, Daumier experimented with this idea in his cartoons by representing disproportionate shapes to lampoon his subjects. Gaganendranath's caricatures too, try to capture the reality and at times used exaggeration in the representation of his subjects. This technique is closer to the expressionistic painting which started in Germany in the early twentieth century before World War I.

Expressionism reached its peak in the 1920s in Berlin and it is also termed as German Expressionism ("Expressionism"). Ernst Ludwig Kirchner (1880-1938) is a German Expressionist painter. Kirchner's painting represents some unique features of German Expressionism which can be used to discuss Gaganendranath's presentation of caricatures. Kirchner was a painter and a print maker and a key founder of the artists group *Die Brücke* or *The Bridge*. The main aim of this group was to bridge the gap between the past and the present through the use of artistic expression. Kirchner used the older media of woodcut prints and applied it to his expressionistic style of painting. He also used lithographic prints apart from other painting media like water colour, oil painting and tempera. Tempera is a method of painting with pigments dispersed in an emulsion miscible with water, typically egg yolk. Kirchner and his group of painters experimented with different styles of painting and his painting *Marzella* (1909-10) is an example of oil painting with the use of bright colours, typical of Expressionist painters.

Gaganendranath's caricatures represent the expressionistic sentiment in terms of exaggerated figures of the corrupt Brahmins, *babus* and zamindars. However, unlike the wide range of colours used in expressionistic paintings, most of his caricatures are in black and white. Like the expressionists, his caricatures evoke emotions, even though it is through satire. The titles of his caricatures add to the wit and humour which become an effective tool in underlining the shortcomings of the society. Just as the Expressionist painters like Kirchner used lithographic print and bridged the gap with earlier use of woodcuts, similarly

Gaganendranath made use of his water colour sketches and turned some of them into lithographic prints which were a relatively new technology introduced in India with the coming of the British. In terms of themes, Gaganendranath borrowed some of the ideas of the *patua* artists who lampooned *babus* and the corrupt influence of colonialism. Thus, it shows that Gaganendranath Tagore combined Indian themes with Western methods. However, Gaganendranath was much more specific in his representation of characters and situations, since he gave titles to his caricatures and used elements of exaggeration. In his caricatures, the clothes of his subjects become important markers of colonial influence.

Gaganendranath Tagore published three volumes of caricatures. The first volume was *Virupa Vajra (Strange Thunderbolts)*, the second was *Adbhut Lok (Absurd People)*, both published by Indian Publishing House, Kolkata in 1917 (Roy 15). The likely meaning of *Virupa* is “angry” since it is accompanied by *Vajra* or *Bajra* which means “thunderbolt.” The *Bajra* is also seen as Lord Indra’s weapon thus reinforcing the likely meaning of *Angry Thunderbolts*. The other volume of Gaganendranath Tagore, translated as *Nava Hullod (Reform Screams)* was published in “A Pictorial Review at the Close of the Year 1921” by Thacker Spink and & Co. in Kolkata, 1921 (Roy 14). *Nava Hullod* literally translates into *New Tumult* just as *Adbhut Lok (Realm of the Absurd)* literally translates into *Absurd People/Absurd World*, as discussed earlier.

My topic focuses on the anglicized Bengali women in the nineteenth century and I will analyse Gaganendranath’s satirical caricatures from his collection *Adbhut Lok (Absurd People/Absurd World)* and *Nava Hullod (New Tumult)*. For this, I will use the caricatures given in Chandi Lahiri’s book on Gaganendranath Tagore’s cartoons.

According to the art historian and curator Paula Sengupta, *Adbhut Lok (Absurd World/Absurd People)* “was actually conceived by the artist in water colours and published as a lithographic album merely to ensure greater public circulation” (Sengupta 97). Gaganendranath’s lithographic collection of caricatures is a satire on the dishonest Brahmins who exploit of the weaker sections of the society to satisfy their greed and avarice. Another aspect of Gaganendranath’s satire is the superficial standards of some of the *bhadralok* who blindly imitate western customs. Subsequently, I will focus on his representation of anglicized Bengali women (which is limited to a few caricatures) alongside my analysis of the double standards of the upper-class *babus*. The Bengali as well as the English translations of the titles of the paintings, along with some subtitles, is given by Gaganendranath himself. These subtitles make his caricature more meaningful. They contain hidden meanings or double meanings which are left to individual interpretation. The caricatures reveal the

stereotypes and social constructs which are exhibited by capturing different situations. The title *Adbhut Lok (Absurd People/Absurd World)* underlines Gaganendranath's satiric attack on the unscrupulous and materialistic standards of the middle and upper-class *babus* and the rich *brahmins* who represent the absurdity of the social system which is based on arbitrary hierarchy. This hierarchy is dependent on birth rather than merit. These works are depicted through the various slices of life reflected in his caricatures.

I shall focus on three caricatures of Gaganendranath Tagore. In the caricature, *Nuisance of a Wife* (from *Adbhut Lok*), we see a middle aged man (possibly a *babu* figure because of his bulky proportions), traditionally attired in *dhoti* and *kurta*, walking ahead of his wife (see Figure 1). She uses both her hands to carry the burdensome luggage as well as her child who is crying. Although she is lagging behind, the husband doesn't seem to show any sympathy by turning around or offering to help her. At a distance, we see an anglicized *babu*, wearing an English attire of trousers, hat and coat, with his well-dressed wife, wearing jewellery and blouse along with her sari. The daughter is dressed in a frock and is wearing shoes. Together, they stare at the traditionally dressed family passing by. The picture gives a contrasting image of the two families. In the first family, the image of the husband, possibly from the upper class, with a stick in his hand shows that he is a leader and in complete control of his wife and family. His wife lags behind in an attempt to follow him. She is simply dressed with no jewellery and her head is covered, thus reflecting her low economic status and docile nature. In contrast, the wife of the anglicized family seems to be in control of her situation. She has a bold posture with her hand on the hips, although her husband is looking at her, she seems to look away. She is expensively dressed and seems to view herself as an equal if not superior to her husband. The husband of the former family disrespects his wife by ignoring her and sees her as a nuisance, thus highlighting the essence of the title *Nuisance of a Wife*. This title may also apply to the latter pair since the husband seems to treat his wife with respect because of her dominating nature and maybe because he sees her as a nuisance. In this respect, the title does not give a clear indication as to which wife is a nuisance. These are two extreme representations of women, one docile and the other one dominating. One with her head covered, lowered and carrying the burden of family and the other, with her head uncovered, held high and with her hand on her hips. Gaganendranath's caricature seems to mock both these women.

It is interesting to note that the Bengali title given by Gaganendranath is *Pothe Nari Bibarjita* which literally translates into *Woman Abandoned/ Forsaken on the Road/Street*. In this context, it becomes clear that the woman who is abandoned is the docile wife as she is

left behind since the husband sees her as a nuisance. It may be seen that Gaganendranath deliberately does not give a literal translation for the titles of his caricatures because he wants his readers to interpret the possibility of multiple meanings. Another possible meaning in the representation of the two women may be seen in Gaganendranath's attempt to underline the gender hierarchy which is more prevalent in the traditionally attired family as compared to the anglicized *babu* who has a liberal mindset towards his wife. It is important to question if Gaganendranath was painting a favourable picture of the influence of colonial education and the adoption of western cultural standards.



Figure 1: Nuisance of a Wife

Traditionally, nineteenth century Bengali women wore a sari made of one piece of stitched cloth. They wrapped their body with it since they did not wear a blouse. With the growth of women's reform movement and with the coming of Christian missionaries, their dressing style changed. The *bhadramahila* were trained to wear saris with blouses and shoes. It was necessary for them to be appropriately dressed to accompany their husbands for social interactions with the British officials. This anglicized style of sari draping along with its

essentials was known as the *brahmika* sari style. The little girls were also forced to wear a sari. However, with the anglicized makeover, they wore frocks along with shoes and socks, similar to the attire of the British children. Again, this was limited to the middle and upper class Bengali family. The Tagore family played an important role in revolutionizing the dress code of women. Jnanadanandini Devi (1850-1941), wife of Satyanendranath Tagore (brother of Rabindranath Tagore), was a key figure in the emancipation of Bengali women. She travelled to different parts of India with her husband, who served in the Civil Services. In Mumbai, then Bombay, she had to accompany her husband in the British social circles. She improvised on the sari style, based on the way Parsi women in Mumbai wore the sari, since the traditional Bengali style was inappropriate. She let the *anchal* fall over her left shoulder so that her right hand does not remain engaged as it was during the traditional style of wrapping the sari. She also advertised her style in the monthly magazine, *Bamabodhini Patrika* and encouraged women to follow her anglicized manner of sari draping (“Jnanadanandini Devi”).

Gaganendranath Tagore’s caricature, *Ball Room Dance* from the collection *Nava Hullod (New Tumult)*, reflects the essence of colonial interaction by depicting an Indian couple engaged in a western dance (see Figure 2). The caricature is also called “*Waltzing Mahila*” since the couple is engaged in a waltz dance (Parimoo, *Art of Three Tagores* 372). The title *Waltzing Mahila* is a takeoff on *Waltzing Matilda*, Australia’s best-known folk song. It is also called a bush ballad since it describes the habitation of Australia. The title uses the term “waltz” as a slang (derived from the German *auf der Walz* which means travelling on foot) for walking long distances with a back pack known as “matilda” (“Waltzing Matilda”). The original lyrics were written in 1895 by the Australian poet Banjo Paterson and it was first published in 1903. It is unofficially seen as the national anthem of Australia. The term “waltz” (from German Walzer) is a ball room and folk dance. In this caricature, the focus is on ballroom dancing which was seen as a social dance, performed with a partner. These balls and social gatherings were a part of the colonial influence in Bengal and practiced among the *bhadralok*. However, Gaganendranath uses the title *Waltzing Mahila* to focus on the *bhadramahila* since they were specially groomed according to the western standards to please their male counterparts. The hybrid title of both *Waltzing Matilda* and *Waltzing Mahila* bring together two languages, two customs, two habits and two cultures, that of the ruler and the ruled.



Figure 2: Ball Room Dance

The details of the caricature shows a man wearing a formal tailcoat along with a pair of trousers reflecting his westernized attire, an incorporation of the colonial influence. The lady is wearing a sari draped high to allow her the freedom of movement of the legs. However, it also reveals her shoes and ankles. This reflects her westernized style of attire. According to the traditional style of wearing a sari, women were not supposed to expose their ankles or legs. The lady in the caricature is also wearing a blouse and most likely, a petticoat which represents the colonial influence. The English educators tried to westernize and groom the Bengali *bhadramahila* by introducing them to the *brahmika* sari style. This added to her traditional outfit which earlier consisted of a plain nine-yard sari without a blouse and petticoat. In the caricature, the woman is wearing extra adornments like bangles, necklaces, earrings and hair pins, which add to her grace. The caricature reflects the grace and elegance of her waltzing pose and the man's hand on her waist and her hand on his shoulders strikes a pose of physical intimacy. This dancing style reflects the western standards of casualness in publicly expressing their physical proximity which was seen as a taboo in the Hindu society in the nineteenth century. The *sindoor* (vermillion mark that Hindu married women wear)

indicate that she is retaining her Bengali cultural markers of a married woman along with the westernized attire.

If we observe the dancing pair closely, we see that the lady is a Hindu because of her black hair and vermilion mark whereas the man is not. He has ginger colour hair and his skin tone is much lighter. It is evident that the man is not her husband but the casual way in which she is dancing with him shows that she is familiar with him and is enjoying his company. Moreover, the title *Waltzing Mahila*, focuses our attention on the *Mahila*, the woman and not the man. Since the title does not even use the term “couple,” it sends a clear message that the pair is not of a husband and wife but a pair of lovers. The title also focuses on the hybridity of language and culture. Her confidence and boldness shows that she wants to display the outcome of her grooming which has helped her to become an equal match for her westernized male partner. However, it shows that in aping western standards she is challenging the Hindu tradition where a woman was not allowed to be seen in public places and if so, she has to be accompanied by her husband. Even then, publicly dancing with her husband was not appreciated. In this caricature, we see a complete defiance of her culture as she dances in a carefree manner with her English lover.

As mentioned earlier, Gaganendranath Tagore does not give literal translations of his Bengali titles to allow the readers to guess the meaning of the caricature. The possibility of multiple interpretations makes Gaganendranath’s caricatures more interesting. This caricature is alternatively titled *Wrong Cooperation* in Bengali and *Non-Cooperation* in English (Lahiri 76). The English word “wrong” sounds similar to the Bengali word *rong* which means colour, thus emphasizing on the English-Indian dance partners. Since the focus is on the woman, it seems “wrong” that she is dancing with her British paramour. The confluence of East and West in this manner seems to be “wrong.” The title *Non-Cooperation* is not related to the political movement but is an attempt to mislead the reader that the woman has been forced into the dance even though she does not want to cooperate. However, the posture of her body does not show any rigidity or unwillingness, the smile on her face and her direct gaze at her male partner seems to suggest that she is enjoying the dance. The multiple interpretations surrounding the woman make this caricature very interesting especially because it looks at the debates that were associated with women’s reform and westernization.

In the caricature titled *Ini ke? (Who is this?)* a fashionably dressed mother-in-law is asking her traditionally dressed daughter-in-law, whether the man in the traditional attire of *dhoti* and *kurta*, is her father (see Figure 3). The caricature satirizes the Anglicization of women by projecting the mother-in-law as modern through her westernized attire of a frilled

blouse, draping of a sari raised high thus exposing her ankles, high-heeled shoes and stockings . As mentioned earlier, it was seen as a taboo for Hindu women to expose their ankles and legs. Traditionally, the figure of a mother-in-law was seen as strictly following the Hindu cultural codes and enforcing it on her daughter-in-law. However, in this context we see a reversal of the situation since the mother-in-law is oblivious of the Hindu tradition and her daughter-in-law follows it. The mother and wife figures are supposed to symbolize purity, spirituality and guardians of national interest. Here we see the mother figure in a different image. Apart from her westernized dress, she is carrying a ladies handbag in one hand and in the other hand she is holding a stick with a rose at the tip. In contrast, her daughter-in-law represents the picture of a traditional *bahu*, clad in a sari tightly wrapped around her body. She is covering her head with it and it is unlikely that she is wearing a blouse. She has applied a vermilion dot on her forehead along with *sindoor*. This signifies her marital status. She is barefoot and her hand gestures towards her father in an attempt to answer her mother-in-law's surprising question regarding her father's identity. Her father's expression is one of wonder and amusement indicated by his hand on his chin, as he might be tempted to ask the same question to his daughter regarding the anglicized attire of her mother-in-law – “*Ini ke?*” (Who is this?). Gaganendranath Tagore is highlighting the superficiality of her demeanour which is related to her blind aping of western standards. This has also resulted in her (deliberate) forgetting of her traditionally dressed Bengali relative. This caricature humorously depicts the desire to ignore one's culture in an attempt to embrace a foreign one.



Figure 3: *Ini ke? (Who is this?)*



To sum up, art in Bengal began with the growth of the Kalighat paintings in the nineteenth century. The artists were known as *patuas* who painted on scrolls and they mainly concentrated on religious themes. These artists were displaced because of lack of patronage and majority of them became a part of the Company painters whose patrons were the British. This shift was due to the colonial influence since the colonizers wanted the Indian style of painting to reflect the perspective of the colonizers in glorifying the West. The Company artists used Indian themes and they employed a hybrid style that was a mix of Indian and western styles of painting. The *Bat-tala* press in the 1860s and the 1870s tried to counter the colonial influence by forming their own publication which published woodcut prints and a wide variety of printed material. They also produced pictures which lampooned the colonial officials and their Indian allies. The hypocrisy of the degenerate *babus* was one of their major themes. However, the *Bat-tala* press did not last long since their method was outdated and the British patrons of art introduced new methods of painting with the use of oil paints. They also introduced the method of lithographic printing.

There was a rise of the Nationalist sentiment in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century especially with the *Swadeshi* movement gaining momentum. The Nationalist movement aimed to overthrow the colonizers and the colonial influence. It was also seen in the efforts to preserve Indian art. The anti-colonial sentiment was not only among the Indian artists but also among the British colonial administrators like E. B. Havell and subsequently Okakura Kakuzo and A. K. Coomaraswamy. They revived the interest in Mughal miniature paintings and through their art collection and books focusing on the history of the Indian art, they wanted to sensitize the European world about the rich heritage of Indian paintings. Havell helped in the establishment of many art schools, like the Calcutta School of Art and the Government Art School which were set up to train the Indian students. They also provided a ground for experimenting with new styles of traditional painting. Okakura's Bijuitsen School of Japanese painting formed a liaison with the Indian artists and used the style of Japanese art in experimenting with the Indian styles of painting.

Abanindranath and Gaganendranath Tagore were influenced by these developments. Abanindranath experimented with the Mughal miniature style of painting. Gaganendranath was trained in Japanese style. It is seen in his style of painting water colours with the typical Japanese brushstroke. He even experimented with the cubist style of painting. Both the brothers helped in the establishment of the Indian Society of Oriental Art in 1907. The Jorasanko house became the hub of collection of Oriental style art and artefacts and they found their meeting point in the *Vichitra Club*. The club offered a space for intellectual

discussion and to experiment in the field of painting. Gaganendranath purchased a lithograph printing machine as a method of experiment where he transformed many of his water colour caricatures into lithographic prints. His other phases of painting focused on the landscape or on the cubist style. However, he made a mark in the field of caricature because caricature as a subject earned the status of a work of art rather than be seen as illustrations in books or magazines, as was the situation earlier. The titles that Gaganendranath gave to his caricatures allowed them to be interpreted or understood independently rather than be seen as supplementary agents accompanying an article or a story for better understanding. The bilingual titles allowed multiplicity of meanings which allowed the readers to interpret the content in their own way. The three volumes of his caricatures, *Virupa Vajra (Strange Thunderbolts)* (1917,) *Adbhut Lok (Absurd People/Absurd World)* (1917) and *Nava Hullod (New Tumult)* (1921) represents him as the first cartoonist or caricaturist in India.

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## List of Illustrations

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### Figure Source

1. Lahiri, Chandi. *Nuisance of a Wife. Gaganendranath Tagore Cartoon O Sketch* [*Gaganendranath Tagore: Cartoon and Sketch*]. Kolkata: Sahitya Samsad Pvt. Ltd, 2004. 72. Print.
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