ABSTRACT

This thesis aims at exploring satire as a social critique in art of Bengal. Satire is a powerful art form with the ability to depict and point out deficiencies in human behaviours and various social aspects in a way that they become absurd and even hilarious, making it entertaining and apt to reach out to a wide audience. Satire also has the ability to protect its creator from culpability and criticism, because it is an implied rather than overtly visual language, and thus in this way, it becomes a powerful tool for dissenters in difficult or oppressive political and social times. It concerns itself with attacking the ills in society, in order to sanitise it. The use of satire as an artistic weapon is an age-old phenomenon, employed for example by the ancient Greeks and Roman against unwholesome social behaviour. People in traditional societies use folktale songs proverbs and caricature sketch to comment and ridicule human failings and also to attack prevalent social vices. As the work of an artist is able to portray his/her nation, time, political situation etc through his very own point of view, it stimulates new ideas amongst the audiences. In that respect there is always a need to analyze the work of an artist in a new light. On the other hand the messages passed on in the paintings bear different meanings to different audiences at different time zones. This is another reason why a proper assessment and analysis of a particular painting is important. While reassessing a painting in a new light one has to study the curious mind and the artistic journey of the painter as well as, his/her emotions and social understanding. This social understanding gives birth to satire.

The research has been divided into six chapters. The first chapter introduces the subject and also discusses about the satirical impulse in art which has a long history stretching back to various traditions. In the western art Hogarth and his vivid depictions of excesses in the 18th century and even Bruegel and his panoptical townscapes peopled by 'characters' in the 16th century, for instance, come readily to mind. The changing modes of capturing and producing visuality brought about by photography and the cinema; the influence of graphic arts, comic-books which took off in Europe in the 19th century and the presence of influential graphic-caricaturists like Daumier.

Beside the history, the chapter also focuses on major artists Chittaprosad, Paritosh Sen, Shyamal Dutta Roy, K.G.Subramanyan, Jogen Chowdhury of Bengal and Bhupen Khakhar, Amit Ambalal and many others from the rest of India. The base line of the research also examines this artist's immense creativity and melodious fantasy in the paintings that is used to build up a grave social critique unmasking the socio-psychological void inherent in our existence.

The second chapter deals with some essential quarries of origin of satirical impulse in art and activities in 19th century Calcutta. A specific study has been taken to identify the Kalighat painting, Battala prints and satirical journals of this period. Satire has been a part of traditional culture in Bengal since a long time. The various traditional practises like bolan in rahr Bengal, gombhira of north Bengal, jhumur, incorporated in their performances an element of satire. Composing ballads and rhymes based on contemporary events and incidents and presenting them in a satirical manner was a common practice.

The third chapter analyzes the satirical images of Gaganendranath Tagore. His works lashed out and scathingly put forth the social deplorability and political unruliness. His images spoke of the social realities and conditions of the political society. The aggression of westernised lifestyle, depletion of social values, the shoddy education system, the insensitiveness of the affluent towards the deprived, the hypocrisy in garb of religion and all such social issues were addressed equally by the artist through his brush and ink. The existing social evils like the scandalous babus, the irresponsible behaviour of the Derozians, the evil of child marriage are all captured and criticized by Gagaendranath through his caricatures and protested against all.

The fourth chapter highlights on the context of Contemporary art scenario of Bengal and also on the basis of critical study on Dharmanaryan Dasgupta. The chapter has been discussed as according to some sub chapters as growth to be a legitimate painter as whole, individual's experience and journey for creative quest, search for newness and perfection to discover the aesthetic value and artistic uniqueness. Dasgupta is inspired by his own

heritage. According to the artist, although the world is becoming a smaller place, the geographical features of a country, its people and their culture remains the same. The changes in the political or social environment lead to transformations that are only on the surface, because tradition binds everyone to their roots. He handles his personal experiences and the issues at hand with humour and satire. According to Dasgupta, his paintings reflect the middle class and their predicament, a class of people who regularly face disappointments and see their dreams crash when faced with reality. Through his canvases, he paints the sorrow, struggles and the injustices of the bourgeois who do not have a secure foot-hold in society.

In chapter five, the research explores the context of Contemporary art scenario of Bengal on the basis of critical study on one of the most sincere and hardworking artist of Bengal Partha pratim Deb. Deb is an important figure in Indian contemporary art not only for his artistic output but also for his pedagogical input. Partha Pratim Deb needs to be celebrated as a pedagogue of the genre of Abanindranath, Nandalal, Benode Behari, Subramanyan and Somnath Hore, not only by count of number of pupils he has inspired into becoming significant art practitioners, without being followers of his style or schoolmen. His own practice shows how easily and obtrusively he goes into grammatical questions of what to observe in the phenomenal word in tune with one's personal preference. It's very difficult to name Deb's work, give them whatever name you wish, painted sculptures-like, sculptural assemblages, painted junk, retrieved found objects etc. But these are never toys to be played with, even though these are end objects of play, for these do exude meaning; these speak. In the whole chapter Deb's exceptionality has been discussed as according to some sub chapters as creative voyages as an artist, Deb's quest for a language. The Satire in Partha Pratim Deb's work has an anti-orthodox, anti-establishment attitude. In his works the sterilized sanctity of a medium finds no significance. Rather he explores and experiments with the endless repertoire of discards, shifting and recycling them into a pictorial language. Thus he translates his ideas into multiple hybrid forms and interesting metamorphosed images, an approach that often synthesizes the disciplines of painting.

The sixth chapter concludes the study. Efforts have been made to throw light on Kalighat Paintings, Battala Prints, and paintings of Gaganendranath Tagore while discussing the point, 'satire a social critique in visual art'. While discussing the two contemporary artists who are the main subjects of this discourse, it is imperative to throw light on the legacy of satire in Bengal art. References of other artists who have influenced the work of the two artists, who are the subjects of discussion in the thesis, have also been made, through citing examples of their works. This chapter logically summarizes the research findings, conclusions, suggestions and scope for future research.