CHAPTER-IV

DHARMANARYAN DASGUPTA (1939-1997): RECOUNTING A LIFE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Dharmanarayan Dasgupta stands representative of the time and the place to which he belonged, and of its characteristic ambience of a modernism. In order to get a broader sense of what had constituted the history, it will be better to go through the trajectory of Dasgupta's own education, career and artistic evolution. Along with the series of paintings that help one to chart the course of his work from the 1960s to the 1990s, there is also a distinctive life history that has to be reconstructed in order to understand each of the different phases. This exploration of the individual life history enables a wider understanding of the social milieu of those decades. It also ably reflected the social conditions and what it took to survive as a professional artist from a non–affluent Bengali middle class. During these years, Calcutta had few opportunities and openings for jobs. There were hardly any avenues for a secured livelihood and promotional platforms that could sustain a professional artistic life were even fewer.

Following a certified art college education/degree, a job as an art teacher in a school was often the best employment option that was available for an aspiring artist. Whether it was teaching in a school or painting signboards, whatever jobs came by hand were taken up. This was because hardly any of them could choose to work on free lance basis for it would mean to fall back on a long probationary period of family support. A couple of group shows in Calcutta and others part of India, perhaps a rare solo exhibition (when a single painting sold for a few hundred rupees would be a cause of elation), and few occasional commissions for commercial design-work or illustrations characterized the average career of an artist in Calcutta through the 1960s and 70s and well into the 80s. (Guha-Thakurta:2000) The dismal situation of art practices of that period had given free rein to mystic

lyricism. The emphasis was on distortion of figures and objects and a total rejection of representation. Consequently, quite the images produced are sketchy, representing the restless mood of the artist and are expressive of feelings of confusion and torment.

The expressionistic approach/ has essentially been a subjective and individualized response rather than being a group activity. The styles in expressionist art, as a result ranges from vague or highly distorted figuration to just points, dashes and squiggles. During the 1980s, there were remarkable radical changes in the outlook of artists. This decade of post-modern art saw development of new insights and manifestations, style and structures. There was an unparalleled emphasis on individual expression and personal symbols. The art was a curious mixture of socio political and cultural aspects, as also of personal fantasy that was often combined with satire or poetic lyricism. (Mago: 2001) Fantasy has been one of the thriving styles of the artists of the sixties and seventies. When the artist intended to reach to a larger truth surpassing the present reality he had to take refuge to Fantasy. Fantasy can be soothing and beautiful or it can be rude, melancholic or agitating. The world of fairytales is basically the world of fantasy. Imagination is not limited there. It moves freely. In such a world of fairytales, myth unveils a world of dream and imagination through fantasy. Here the fantasy is full of positivity and beauty. The world of our folk art also renders a similar ethos, where soothing beauty is entangled with fantasy. In the modern language of art, Jamini Roy pioneered in bringing the form of folk art and applies it in the arena of mainstream art. Although the merits of folk art were not completely neglected at the time, nobody before Roy could successfully transform the positivity of the fantasy world into a modern language of art. By abandoning the naturalistic style and taking inspiration from Bengali folk art, he opened a new vista for modern Indian painting. Abandoning the three-dimensional modulation-i.e. stress on perspective and light and shade- that was distinctive to naturalistic western art, he took to the two-dimensional format of flat colouring and undulated outline of the folk tradition. Jamini Roy created out of the folk mannerism a more sophisticated and harmonious form of painting

which expressed a new kind of simple beauty while retaining a kind of Indianness.

In a society dominated by primitivism, the art which is produced exudes certain boldness. There the art is determined by the crisis of existence against the barriers posed by nature, there is a fear in it. In the case of folk art, that positivity of image which we see becomes the opposite in primitive art. Classical art is generally the fruit of elite mind and wealthy age. Its aim is to reach an ideal beauty. There is a sense of ampleness about life and nature. Nature reaches a new height in the art of a philosophically enriched society. It shines in bizarreness. The classical art including a certain stage of Nandalal Bose's paintings and that of Abanindranath's are cases in instance. Again in a scientific, workaholic society the art is much detailed. Classical Greek art or Renaissance art can be considered as an example. Here they idealize the reality but it's not based on fantasy. In our miniature art, especially in Rajput and Pahari miniature art there is a balanced conglomeration of classical and folk. The element of folk spreads into a kind of fantasy here. In modernism there is an element of skeptic protest. Modern world is a perishing, and broken world. Modern artist observes life and society with skepticism. We can see a varied range of form and styles in expressionism, cubism or surrealism. Sometimes it is bold and sharp, like in the paintings of Edward Munch or Salvador Dali. At times, it is full of beauty, unveiling of a world of dream, like the works of Henry Rousseau or to an extent the paintings of Matisse.

There was a contradiction of dream and broken dream in our reality of sixties and seventies art practice. This contradiction has dominated /defined the creations of the artists of this time. Hence one can experience, not one but a host of expression of fantasy in the works of the contemporary artists. Ganesh Pyne's images are dominated by mythical fantasy; unveiling the world of fairytales. But it is bold, containing the power of modernism. Prakash Karmakar in his paintings reflects the breaking down of human existence. In his work after 80's, however one could notice the soothing light of folk shining through the brokenness, which used to attribute his work. There was also a

negative agitating power in the works of Jogen Chowdhury. From the beginning of 90's, artists' presented in their work a tradition based on positive fantasy mixed with that of negative fantasy. The sense of fantasy in Bikash Bhattacharya's paintings is mostly bold and protesting. In his work, detailed naturalism leads to brokenness. Gradually with time the modernist art practices in Bengal, increasingly came to be marked by subjective concerns. Such subjectivity responded through political consciousness, engagement with social issues, as well as a concern and drive for defining identity especially within a regional aspiration.

Dharmanarayan Dasgupta had experimented with different expression of images over his initial years of 60's and 70's. The 80's finally saw him to emerge with his own style. His paintings present a beautiful marriage of two different styles, of the dreaminess of miniature paintings and the style of Kalighat Painting. Humour or satire dominated the theme of his creations. Sometimes there is a understated sense of pensiveness in that humour. There is an influence of *babu* culture of 19th century in the work. But in the guise of that humour it represents the fault and degradation of contemporary life. In that sense there is also an element of protest in his paintings. His training as an artist in Santiniketan's tradition led him to acquire a rich nationalist sense. The reality of 60's Kolkata influenced him to adapt a style of protest that was however based on western style. In order to experiment with Indian and western style of art, Dasgupta took up Tantra symbol based structural metaphor. From the end of 70's he tried to bring together his sense of nationalism with western influence and eventually evolved his unique style and added a new style in modern Indian painting.

4.2 A JOURNEY TOWARDS SELF IDENTITY

It is always a matter of great awe about how an artist evolves. Even though it might seem difficult to find out the motivation in Dharmanarayan's childhood days which led him to flourish as an artist, there is always a source. As a child, just before *puja*, Dharmanarayan use to visit his village house in East Bengal. Sailing in a boat through a river in spate, under a clear and blue

post monsoon sky, always remained in Dharmanarayan's memory. The awesome feelings of pre *puja* excitement, the sheer delight of seeing the idol of *Durga* being made in some houses of the village brought joy to his artistic self. He used to watch with sheer amazement how a pulp/pile of clay turned out to becomes a complete idol which then becomes lively. Did he as a little boy take the idol makers to be god? Who knows? May be those childhood memories of witnessing the making of such beautiful idols sowed in him the seeds of artistic instincts. The soothing environment of East Bengal and Tripura instilled in him a gentleness. It weaved a dream inside him, which became a part of him, became the source of his art. He used to tell/say, although he had to live in reality, the world of dream is his own world. (Ghosh:1999)

Dharmanarayan Dasgupta was born in 1939 at Dharmanagar, Tripura. Tripura had large forests and hilly terrain, and the quarters provided by the state were situated on the banks of the river. It was amidst this rugged and beautiful landscape that Dharmanarayan grew up. He would roam among the forest trees and watch the river turn riotous during the monsoons. The abundance of wildlife, exotic birds, and swarms of insects peopled his idyllic yet lonely childhood. Very often as a child, Dharmanarayan used to daydream amidst these surroundings. Much later, the scenes from his childhood reveries returned as the unusual imagery in his works. They are in a sense remembrance of things past (Sarkar:2000) Their ancestral house was at a village of Kumilla district of the East Bengal. His father Satyabhushan Dasgupta was an employee of Tripura's *Maharaja*. Owing to his work, his father used to travel to different places. Dharmanarayan spent his childhood and teenage years at Agartala anddid his schooling from there. Dharmanarayan never considered himself to be good in academics or sports. Even though he had no artistic inheritance from his family, he was always known for his drawings. His grandmother use to paint nice/beautiful *alpana* and make *kantha* a lively art form of Bengal which involves embroidery work. His elder brother used to copy paintings with pencil. This is the extent of artistic inheritance to which he can be associated with. The headmaster of his

school used to love him for his painting. When he was in class nine, the headmaster requested him to paint on the historical events of India. On completion, his painting was put up on the wall of the school. He was awarded for it at the end of the session. Dharmanarayan wished to learn painting after finishing his school. But as any the other middle class families, he too did not have the family support. So he took admission in Agartala College for Intermediate. There he got Somendranath Basu as the professor of Bengali literature, who, later went on to become the founder and director of *Rabindracharcha Bhavan*, Kolkata. With his encouragement Dharmanarayan continued to paint during his college days.

Dharmanarayan was only eighteen when he left Tripura. After passing intermediate he went to Santiniketan with a friend. The journey was one he would never forget. The flight to Calcutta on a Dakota aircraft was brief and bumpy, and left him deaf for a couple of hours after landing in Dum Dum airport. Calcutta seemed an unreal city to him. As he travelled from the airport to the railway station, the city, he thought had too many people who made too much of noise. Upon arriving at the railway station, the stench and squalor made Dharmanarayan to wonder whether his decision of leaving home was at all right or not. Bolpur, a small dusty station in those days, did not make him feel any better. The journey through the dry roads, lined with houses whose roofs were either thatched or made of corrugated tin, only added to his dismay. Amidst this dreary scenery, the sight of the Visva-Bharati University was a sudden burst of delight upon the tired and weary Dharmanarayan. It seemed like a dream world, far removed from the unpleasantness and dust he had encountered so far. It was in this dream world that Dharmanarayan was to spend the next four years studying fine arts. (Sarkar: 2000) .He took admission at *Kala Bhavana* in 1957. For the admission test in Kala Bhavana he had to draw on paper a sculpture made by Ramkinkar. In his own words, "*A half educated bangal (people of East Bengal) of Tripura took his second birth in Santiniketan*".(Desh:1399) Santiniketan made him an artist. Ramkinkar's association made him to realize what a true artist is. When he went to Santiniketan, Ramkinkar was busy in making the 'Yaksha-Yakshi'

sculpture for the Reserve Bank in Delhi. The great artist was making maquette one after another for his assignment. While working he use to look like a man in meditation, unaware about the world outside. Dharmanarayan got surprised when he saw the room of Ramkinkar. He wondered how an artist of his stature can live with such frugal resources. He saw an ideal artist in Ramkinkar.

Another artist, who had immensely influenced Dharmanarayan, was Benode Behari Mukhopadhyay. Benode Behari returned to Kala Bhavana towards the last stage of his teaching life. He used to teach art history and aesthetics. But by then he was completely blind. Dharmanarayan often referred to an incident regarding Benode Behari. One day, Dharmanarayan was studying a *Palash* flower when Benode Behari came and asked him to draw it on a paper with a pencil. While Dharmanarayan was painting Benode Behari touched the tip of the pencil and after finishing, told him about the mistakes in his drawing. Dharmanarayan was amazed by the inner artistic sense of Benode Behari which has overruled his physical blindness. Guha Thakurta wrote, "*The Santiniketan training then, still carried certain different markers. In contrast to an academic curriculum, the emphasis was on 'sketching' rather than on step-by-step life and model studies; it was also on indigenous painting techniques like egg tempera fresco , and on a composite four-year training that covered painting, sculpture, graphics and various handicrafts. Most striking of all was lingering taboo on the use and practice of oil painting, a hangover of Santiniketan's non-Western modernist legacy. Dharmanarayan to a Kala Bhavana where Nandalal Bose (master-mashay) had been reduced to a complete invalid, but where his artistic canons survived as a pedagogic formula perpetuated by his son(Biswarup Bose) and other disciples who succeeded him to the helm. Ramkinkar's little house was where some of the students would secretly congregate, risking the displeasure of the Kala Bhavana authorities, to study oil painting, nude model study and also other experimental work. As with generations of students, Dharmanarayan would look back on these Kala Bhavana days- on his friends and fellow- students, on a unique ambience of freedom and creativity,*

on his few direct encounters with Benode Behari , and most of all, on the singular presence of Ramkinkar-as the most formative influence on his career".(Guha-Thakurta:2000) Dharmanarayan had seen Nandalal Bose only from a distance when he was old, weak and mute. But the essence of his creations was all there in Santiniketan . His ideas of education were still persisting in Santiniketan. There was a unique connection between life and art in his *Bhitti Chitras*. And above all there was Rabindranath Tagore. Dharmanarayan got introduced to Rabindranatha's painting after coming to Santiniketan. And those paintings awakened a sense of international aspect of art in him.

Santiniketan's education system aimed to awaken the dreams of a man; Likewise Kala Bhavana's aim was to pave a path for the artist to bloom completely and was not in favor of making experts of particular areas. So they use to teach everything fully. Painting, sculpture, print, mural, ornamentation everything was part of the curriculum. Emphasis was given to study nature. During that time importance was given to the Indian tradition and style and temperas were the main medium. Radhacharan Bagchi went from Kolkata Government Art College teach tempera and still life. Although oil painting was not taught, Dharmanarayan was free of any limitations due to the influence of Benode Behari and Ramkinkar. He was inspired to expand his views from nationalism to international arena from them. During his days in Santiniketan, Dharmanarayan was one of the members of the team of artists including Ramachandran, Nakul Sinha, Sudhirranjan Bhushan, Anandamohan Naik, Binit Roy, Nagalingam, Benu Mishra and some other who later earned fame as artist. He passed out of Kala Bhavana in 1961. During his time spent there, they used to experiment with different styles secretly outside the purview of Kala Bhavana's teaching and in this way could expand their horizon on individual style which often attracted disapproval of the conservatives.

The education of Santiniketan and later his own experience as an artist made him to realize that tradition is an important element of art and hence the importance of Neo Bengal school stands relevant even in

perspective of contemporary art. But he also realized that it is important to keep the mind open. An artist can be made by dovetailing the outer world with his inside imagination. According to him, "*Of course I will love my culture, my tradition. But will keep open the window of my heart. Will see what is happening outside. If necessary, I will take from it too, will work on it*".(Ghosh:1999) The years of his education at Kala Bhavana, and the openness of Santiniketan sowed the seed of unification in him. After completing his education at Kala Bhavana Dharmanarayan returned to Agartala and got employed in a service under Tripura Government. But he realized that he cannot continue his painting at Tripura. There was no environment of serious art practice in the state. So it was absolutely necessary for him to come to Kolkata. But moving to Kolkata was nor affordable, neither had he any connections in the city. However, he somehow managed to come to Kolkata and started writing signboard to earn some money and started his artistic journey without any assurance of success. Once in Kolkata, as he started to get introduced to the art world of the city, not only did he enjoy it but eventually became close to the rising young artists of the city. He noticed that the artists did not support the form of art practice that Kala Bhavana endorsed. Many of them were trying to make the art a weapon for protest and agitation in the context of the contemporary complicated reality.

The end of the 1960s and the early 1970s was a moment of political transition in Bengal. The Naxalite movement and its associated violence, the economic situation and the pressure generated thereby, as well as the imposition of the Emergency with its characteristic censorship of public voices and the media (newspapers, magazines etc) generated the ground for protest-movements. Coupled with the contemporary socio-political disturbances, and a gradual fading through temporal distance from the pre-colonial and colonial memories, was an intense feeling of loss and rootlessness within individuals who had emigrated to this side of the border in Bengal from East Pakistan. Their uprooted status created an atmosphere of aimlessness on one hand, and desperation on the other, to ensure a mere

minimum of subsistence. The sum-total of this socio-cultural situation may well be presumed to have structured the response patterns in the responsive artists. The gloom that characterized the situation continued into and through the 1970s, and reached a peak with the imposition of political Emergency in mid 1970s. Individuality and voices of freedom was threatened even more severely and was put at stake. The visual artist, living in such an ambience, was obviously extremely unhappy with the turn of events, but could not see any immediate way out of the ensuing turmoil and violence. Amidst such a bleak circumstance the visual artist's search for a new language of protest found expression through the modes of formal distortion, satire and pun. In a way the art of the post-60s was characterized by changes that focused more on the regional identity. (Ghosh:2012) Sense of nationalism was subdued while the classical and folk elements were being adapted in the art scene of that period. In this situation Dharmanarayan needed to think afresh about his paintings. He was not confined to the teaching of Kala Bhavana even during his student life. That practice became more expressive here. After coming to Kolkata he worked in a Gujarati school at Polak Street for few days. Then he joined Howrah's St. Thomas School and was married by then. In this school he was to stay for a long thirteen years, from 1966 to 1979.(Guha-Thakurta: 2000) This reputed school was run by the CNI church and was under the charge of three priests from the St. Andrew's brotherhood. The authorities of the school appointed a new administrator. This person tried to run the school with an iron hand and behaved in a dominant manner often making illogical decisions. Under Dharmanarayan leaderships the teachers of the school revolted against a grave injustice and set up the St. Thomas school at Dasnagar, Howrah. The school did not have government recognition and the guardians, teachers and students went through years of anxiety before the school obtained the recognition. These were difficult years for the teachers and employees who took home meager pay packets. Just when Dharmanarayan and his colleagues were about to give up hope, a prestigious board finally decided to grant the school recognition. His wife Merina used to teach at Patha Bavan School. There joint income just sufficed to live a decent life and spent on paintings. But in 1969 Merina lost her job for some unknown

reasons. They had a son. During this period they faced abject poverty and suffering. In 1979 he had to leave his own job too. It was also a tough time for Dharmanarayan. The problems of real life had affected his artistic sense. These upheavals became a part of his paintings. Even through these difficult times, Dharmanarayan did keep in touch with his contemporaries in art world. He would meet them at the 'Soda Fountain' at Dharmatala, a hub for artists and intellectuals since the 1950s. He met some of the city's main artist like Ganesh pyne, Bikash Bhattacharya, Sunil Das, Laloo Prasad Shaw, Suhas Roy at that famous joint. In 1970's he became a member of the "Society of Contemporary Artists", one of the most influential groups in the city since the disbanding of the legendary Calcutta Group. The group used to organize annual exhibitions in the four major cities to display the works of its members. Through these exhibitions, Dharmanarayan's individual style and talent were recognized and appreciated. Veteran artist Shyamal Dutta Ray remembered Dharmanarayan–"*One day in mid seventies Bikash and Ganesh (Pyne) proposed to have a new member in our Society of Contemporary Artists and it was from that day Dharmanarayan became one among ourselves. I met him before during a 'Vasanta Utsav' in Santiniketan when Sukumar Dutta and Sudhirranjan Bhusan introduced him to me. I found a sensitive heart full of sense of humour in him. But I hadn't seen his paintings till then. At the crossing of Lenin Sarani and C.R. Avenue, there was a restaurant 'Soda Fountain' which was sort of rendezvous of Bikash, Ganesh, Suhas, Dharma and Manu Rathod.I also joined them now and then. All of us were then struggling for a way of self expression and the Society of Contemporary Artists was then (as it now also) a platform for struggling artists. The early works of Dharma were deeply influenced by 'Tantra'. Gradually he changed himself and developed a style of his own which is more akin to Indian miniature painting and 'pot'. His human figures in weightless position, the perspective of Indian miniature mixed with a sense of satire opened a new horizon to the world of Indian paintings which may be classified as Fantasy. In 1980 Dharma and I had gone to Bombay with the Society Exhibition. The whole day we had to spend in the gallery. Dharma's sense of humour was*

revealed to me when he went on composing a number of limericks on the ways of Bombay life. This quality was with him always……" (Dutta Ray:1997)

In 1985 he joined the Department of Painting of the Faculty of Visual arts at Rabindra Bharati University as a lecturer. During his tenure there, he went on to become the Dean. He had worked as a school teacher almost twenty three years, struggling to make ends meet. The financial strain had forced him to live in a tiny flat in Kadamtala, Howrah, where the dining room had to be doubled up as a studio between meals. The job at Rabindra Bharati University would finally give him financial comfort, and he immediately bought a larger house in Salt Lake, where he finally had space enough to work in a studio of his own. These were happy years for the artist and his family. The salary from the University was substantial, the prices and sale of his paintings were shooting up. It was during these happy times that misfortune struck once again. Dharmanarayan fell critically ill after contracting Hepatitis-B virus. Though the attack was near serious, doctors treated him successfully, and he was back on his feet within a few months. However Dharmanarayan's workload, as a professor, Dean and as an artist was too much for his weak health condition. He continued with his exhausting schedule and soon faced a relapse. The doctors failed to work any wonder this time. An extremely sick Dharmanarayan fell into coma before passing away in 1997. Veteran artist Shyamal Dutta Ray remembers Dharmanarayan as – "*For the last ten years the intimacy between Dharma and me grew very close, we both being active in the construction of the Artists' Housing Complex in Salt Lake. Those who are now in these flats will never forget his untiring effort behind the completion of the whole project. But the irony is that he stayed there for only one year. For the last ten years we had to face many problems regarding its construction and we had telephone talks almost every morning. Every morning his bass voice greeted me 'Good Morning Boss'! That he is no more is hard to believe and even today I respond to a ring in the morning with the hope of hearing a familiar voice 'Good Morning Boss*". (DuttaRay:1997)

4.3 SOCIAL CRITIQUE THROUGH SATIRE: PAINTINGS OF DHARMANARYAN (ABSTRACTION TO FIGARATIVE)

4.3.1 Early Phase

As an introduction to his work, Dharmanarayan Dasgupta once wrote, "*The world is shrinking. But the geographical features of a country, its climate, the people and their culture remain essentially the same. Upheavals and changes are on the surface. By birth I am what I am, and there are certain things I inherit, so I feel I should have something in my work that distinctively speaks of my own heritage . I live in a world of crisis and chaos. I have not chosen it - a special set of historical and personal circumstances have forced it upon me. My works perhaps reveal my experience of that world through fantasy, fun and satire*.'' (Dasgupta: 1991)The struggle to relate painting with tradition was not only his thought but of many other painters of seventies. This is one of the specialties of the established painters of Seventies. In the case of Dharmanarayan Dasgupta this tradition and modernism has a special significance. He was a student of Santiniketan's Kala Bhavana completing his study in 1961. There was conflict between tradition and modernism in the teaching process of Kala Bhavana. Modernism was complimented by tradition. The teaching of Kala Bhavana inspired him by the thought that the flourishing process of Indian modernism should be rooted in indigenous tradition. Still, when he concentrated on his own creation after completing his education, that tradition had become a problem for him. He observed that he cannot touch all the contemporary sensitivities. He was introduced to the thoughts of Nandalal during his days in Kala Bhavana, similarly he closely met Ramkinkar and Benode Behari. Artist Rabindranath also surprised and mesmerized him. The traits of Nandalal's nationalist thoughts were still there in the educational system of Kala Bhavana. On the other hand the oriental thoughts were expanding through Rabindranath's ideals and the study of Ramkinkar and Benode Behari and the sense of need for adopting occident was also on rise. Just after passing out from Kala Bhavana, Dharmanarayan and many of his contemporary painters faced this conflict about the form.

At that time there was a rise of a new thought in the world of Kolkata's art arena. The analysis of surrounding reality was becoming the subject of the paintings of the young artists who came in early sixties. So for the form they were unable to refuse the adaptation of western modernity. Rather they were keener to find out the limitations of former Indian tradition. But later when maturity came with experience they went for a synthesis of both. But at the beginning their radical consciousness was more attracted by western forms. So when Dharmanarayan came to Kolkata after passing out from Kala Bhavana, Kokata's art arena made him to be more attracted towards the radical modernism. He had to deviate a bit from his schooling in the traditional forms. In his paintings made in 1962-63, he tried to capture~~s~~ that modernity. These series of paintings got exhibited in his first solo exhibition in 1963 at the prestigious art gallery, Artistry House on Park Street. There he found his first buyers and patrons. In the year 1965-67 he made some drawings where the greed and lust of human being was depicted by some distorted figures of human as well as animal. It was a style of expressionism. In his early works he worked with a variety of medium; like water colour, pen and ink. His *scribbled* or *doodled* pen and ink lines and brush strokes with black ink that fill the shapes and forms of faces, figures and things as also the background spaces were appreciated. He harmonises the lines with rare taste and sensitivity. These , pen and ink of grotesque faces(Plate-4.1), a beast like face with a pipe(Plate-4.2), a beast with a wine glass(Plate-4.3), a gigantic woman preening before a mirror(Plate-4.4), or a host of convoluted female and animal torsos(Plate-4.5) were created in an important phase of his career. He was obsessed with the canine form. The use of the canine form was more often than not symbolic. Sex takes on an element of tensions and fear. Contours are traced with nervous sweeps and there are shades that intensify visual sensation (Plate-4.6). At this stage he would let coloured ink rush out and then trace the form that it suggested. Tapati Guha-Thakurta said- "*Laden with associations of the strange apparitions which inhabit the world of Bengali children's stories-reminiscent especially of the characters from Sukumar Ray's 'Abol-Tabol'- these drawings anticipate the artist's keen*

eye for satire and his continuing output of half human, half animal creatures." (Guha Thakurta:2000)

There was a second phase of his experimentation in that particular time frame. This was evident in his colourful compositions. (Plate-4.7) Dharmanarayan seeks to investigate and develop the relationship between his emotions (Plate-4.8) and the medium of communication he employs. In the process, he may disfigure the human form or mutilate the calm landscape. But he replaces aspects of experience that are significant in them and relate to our aesthetic sensibility. The landscape compositions were very near to Santiniketan tradition of landscape. Which are marked by abstract as well as expressionistic features, like Rabindranath, Ramkinkar and Benode Behari (Plate-4.9). In the year of 1969-70 or so he made some structural paintings based on symbols of *Tantra* (Plate-4.10).Here the form is important. There was no stress on the message which is not related to the form. The form developed the main essence of painting (Plate-4.11). Here we see him playing primarily on the element of ornate design and cultic motifs, delving, in one case, into the effects of burning a dark hole into the centre of the ply board (Plate-4.12).The Tantric art form which had become very popular then, however was a field that Dasgupta had not treaded on. He was trying to bring Indian essence by adding some religious archetype and geometric shapes into western style.(Sarkar: 2000) But to him this Indianness was something that was being thrusted upon. He was not feeling that this is a successful combination of tradition and modernism. His search was on throughout the 60's. He couldn't find any unique expression for his paintings. His search was going on in the background of the sense of tradition which was acquired from Santiniketan. He compared his paintings with the contemporary art movement of Kolkata. But till then he couldn't manage to compile tradition with modernism.

4.3.2 Later Phase

He was heading towards it in 70's. The modernism was getting purified in the light of tradition in his works. Fantasy, fun and satire these are the three

elements of the paintings of Dharmanarayan through which he used to speculate a social critique. His images are figurative but they confront the environment of apparent reality. Even they contradict the force of gravity. The men and women, the protagonists of his works, can easily walk or fly in the air, can enter a closed room defying the barrier of the wall, the hutments, trees and other elements of nature can rhythmically move in the air. (Plate-4.13) He thus created a very relaxing and sonorous world of dream. But this apparent grotesque loveliness steadily yields towards a pathetic and melancholic void extracting and analyzing the mysterious contours of reality showing how our existence lacks the firm base and deep root, how we live in a vague world without any force of bondage, without any gravitational integrity. Through apparent melodious fantasy the paintings of Dharmanarayan build up a grave social critique unmasking the socio-psychological void inherent in our survival. Like most of the artists coming to limelight during 1960-70s apart from this social critique he also had a search for indigenous characteristics through assimilation of tradition and modernity, through synthesis of western and indigenous form elements. (Ghosh: 2012) In this search his first guiding force was Indian Miniature painting. He was attracted to the fantasy hidden in miniature painting right from his student life. He studied different types of Miniature paintings during his studentship at Kala Bhavana. He was specially attracted by Rajasthani and Pahari miniature. He tried to implement the traditional asset of miniature painting in his own works. He brought the specialty of representing the human beings or other like it in the backdrop of tree, forest or houses and other structures of Miniature paintings. (Plate-4.14) Tapati Guha-Thakurta said- "*that artist evolution has been tracked in terms of two central influences on his work. First, his fascination with the narrative and decorative idioms of early Indian miniature painting and then his increasing play with the visual vocabulary and subversive potential of Bengali folk art especially the paintings of Kalighat. In between, there would also be a nonstop conversation with the works of a selection of European painters, spanning a range from Henri Rousseau (1844-1910) and Marc Chagall (1887-1985) to Rene Magritte (1898-1967) and Paul Klee (1879-1940).In every case, what Dharmanarayan was*

discovering were new worlds of fantasy, each with their own visual props and devices. The rise of the miniaturist trend in his paintings in the 70s coincided with the fine-tuning of his elaborate tempera technique." (Guha-Thakurta:2000) He tried to bring a bright effect in colour. It doesn't represent the reality rather it exposes an imaginary world. *Tempera* is the finest way to bring that brightness, so tempera became the main source of his colours. At this stage Dharmanarayan suddenly found a medium that helped him come into his own. Both he and Ganesh Pyne (1937-2013) discovered the world of tempera almost simultaneously. Since they used the same medium, were almost of the same age and also belonged to the same circle of artists for a short time, their styles have often been seen as similar. A closer look, however, will prove that each had a distinctly different approach. Though both were attracted to styles of Abanindranath and Paul Klee, their influence is more visible in Dharmanarayan's works. His works have greater elasticity. He tends to allow the coloured blank space to spread beyond the frame. These blank spaces indicate the sky, earth or the horizon-a sense of expansiveness. In that period, artist allowed in his work the trees, flowers, sky, light, rivers, ponds, birds, beasts to arrange themselves into a backdrop. (Sarkar:2000) His archetypes, men-women or the figures of other animals are depicted in this environment. He avoided reality in these figures also. Like the skin colour of a human being can be dark green, deep blue or blood red. The structure of the figures is humorous.

Prannath Mago wrote-"*Dharmanarayan took note of his surroundings, with men and women set in relation to each other and society in a warmly romantic variant of expression. Obsessed with certain specific themes, he emerged as a painter of the fantasy, the poetry and the mystery of life. His marionette-like figures with apparition-like faces are freely placed in the space of imagination in unexpected juxtaposition, deriving impressive effects of strangeness or irony. Curiously they are at once reminiscent of Marc Chagall, Chirico, wash painting of Bengal School and Kalighat paintings*.''(Mago:2001) He used the Kalighat Paintings style of figures in an intelligent way. He was also attracted by the design of folk arts. He built the style of his paintings by

receiving different elements from Indian Miniature painting, Kalighat Paintings and folk paintings. In this was he was returned to the tradition. It took him nearly two decades to return to the tradition which he acquired in his Santiniketan days. But this sense of tradition is never independent of the reality. He was from Tripura and spent his childhood and adolescent years at Agartala. Learnt painting at Santiniketan. Most of his student life was spent there. After that he permanently settled in Kolkata he got to know the poor and sad face of contemporary reality of Kolkata by being involved in the art movement here, during 60's and 70's. He witnessed the corruption in society and politics. The leaders of the society are wearing masks. (plate-4.15) Self alienation was a bitter truth. His disenchantment with political 'Leaders'. Like Ravana, the Leader has ten masks. Seen among these masks are the faces of Buddha, Krishna and Chaitanya. The leader is standing on a pedestal. The life of middle class is overshadowed with greed and high ambitions. People were uprooted from the society and tradition. He became rootless having no connection with the earth. Gravity is not enough to hold him back. So in many of his paintings the people, trees, houses everything float in the air.(plate-4.16) This freeness in gravitation creates a humorous atmosphere in his paintings.(plate-4.17**)** This humour is the main essence of his paintings. A subtle protest was there in this humour. He also tried to represent the void of the lives which were unsatisfied, strangled with high ambitions and consumerism through that humour or satire. Sometimes that humour contains sadness, but generally there is no rudeness in it. Nandini Ghosh wrote-"*The end of the 1960s and the early 1970s was a moment of political transition. The Naxalite movement and its associated violence, the economic situation and the pressure generated thereby, as well as the imposition of the Emergency with its characteristics of censorship of public voices and the media (newspapers, magazines etc) once again generated the ground for protest-movements.Coupled with the contemporary socio-political disturbances, and a gradual fading through temporal distance from the pre-colonial and colonial memories, was an intense feeling of loss and rootless-ness within individuals who had immigrated to this side of the border in Bengal from East Pakistan; their uprooted status created an atmosphere of*

aimlessness on the one hand, and a desperation on the other, to ensure a mere minimum of subsistence. The sum-total of this socio-cultural situation may well be presumed to have structured the response patterns in the responsive artists.The gloom that characterized the situation continued into and through the 1970s, and reached a peak with the imposition of political Emergency in mid 1970s; even more severely. Individuality and voices of freedom found threatened and at stake. The visual artist, as part of the same ambience, was obviously extremely unhappy with the turn of events, but saw no immediate way out of the ensuing turmoil and violence. Amidst such a bleak circumstance the visual artist's search for a new language of protest found expression through the modes of formal distortion, satire and pun, in a way that the art of the post-60s was characterized by changes that focused more on the regional identity."(Ghosh: 2012) At this period another famous work shows a torn bloodstained *kurta* or *Panjabi* hung on a door. This was a commentary on the Naxalite movement. He made a series of work where the *kurta* is hanging from the form of a hook on the wall. Drops of blood are falling from it. On the ground the crows are sucking the blood. Such were the horrified imageries of death and violence. He gradually came out of such dreadful expression to express tragic void out of apparently pleasant fantasy. (Plate-4.18)

Dharmanarayan was greatly inspired by Charlie Chaplin in creating such protest through humour. (plate-4.19) In his homage to Charlie Chaplin, the great actor lies in his grave bedecked with flowers, an innocent smile resting on his lips. The tramp then resurrects him with the same smile to flummox onlookers. He realised that it is a tough job to represent the complicated reality through simple humour which Charlie Chaplin used to do. He also felt that this is the simplest way to reach the people. For this he had chosen this mode. If the style of a painting is complicated it creates a distance from the viewer. It creates a gap in the communication. It was his aim to touch the soul of the viewers by easy and simple style rejecting the complication. This style was very effective.

Not only Charlie Chaplin but other filmmakers inspired him too. In this respect the name of Bergman needs to be specially mentioned. The sense of modern men's loneliness was acquired from him. This loneliness leads to alienation in him. This alienation is a special side of Dharmanarayan's paintings. The films of Kurosawa, Fellini and Satyajit Ray also inspired him. At least it helped him to polish his sense of aesthetics. There is painting of him on scene of Satyajit Ray's *Charulata*. *Charulata* is watching the outer side of her house through a binocular. Everyone can recall this scene. Here the representation is totally different. The room outside or the faraway background scenery, everything is painted in the style of Miniature painting. Rectangular geometric figure made by sharply connected straight lines is divided into few parts. This sharp division brought modernity in Miniature paintings. A simple and soothing beauty has been brought by combining the sharpness of scene from a film and imaginary atmosphere of Miniature painting. There is indirect impact of the paintings of Henry Rousseau in creating fantasy in his paintings. In his paintings there is resemblance of the silence or soothing atmosphere of the sceneries of Rousseau's paintings but in a different way. Rousseau was an armature painter. He was inclined to simple and uncomplicated life and nature. In his paintings there was a romantic milieu blended with pristine vintage. There was an intricate naturalism. It was so deep that it overcomes the reality and creates a silent mysticism. There was subtle surrealism in that mysticism. This naivety, overcoming the logic of reality, can also be found in Dharmanarayan's paintings. But the humorous rhythmic tone of his paintings which was derived from his own tradition, the glorious beauty of Indian Miniature painting and romanticism, the warmth of his time, was naturally largely different from Rousseau's work. Dharmanarayan had a passion for creating a dream world. One retreats into such imaginary worlds when cultures conflict, a fear of the unknown grips the wits and insecurity clouds the psyche. A recurring image in this dream world was the vintage car. He had an almost childlike fascination for these outdated automobiles, and we can afford to view these paintings with a touch of humour as they were neither gloomy nor threatening. (plate-4.20) Sometime Dharmanarayan uses the images of gods like Krishna in his

painting. But these Krishna‘s’ are ‘common people dressed up like the god. E.g. A folk actor of *jatra* dressed up as Krishna and sits on a bench in the park smoking *bidi* (plate-4.21) or Krishna floats like a puppet with a stick and a begging bowl! (Plate-4.22) Some can say his paintings are somewhat surrealist as it overcomes the limitation of the logics in its structure. In one of his painting, we can see a grass hopper in the starry blue sky (plate-4.23).An open door of a house is hanging from its mouth through some strings. Feet of a woman are coming out from the door as if she is sitting. Below there are white lotus bloomed in a half circular blue pond. The scenery of the lotus and pond has the effect of Miniature painting. This is completely an imaginary scene where a grass hopper is flying in the blue sky with a door where a woman is sitting, hiding her face, only her feet are visible. The imaginary world is far from the real one. One can call it surrealism. Again if someone disagree with it that is also acceptable. In a painting of 1988 we see a woman is sitting on the back of a flying tortoise, the tortoise is looking at the woman, as if a teary conversation is going on between them. Heavy rain is pouring down from a piece of cloud. (plate-4.24) and below there are trees and houses of Miniature paintings. In tempera painting, a violet colored naked woman if flying a kite on a roof in a lonely night (plate-4.25).The kite is flying in the bright blue sky; the spool is rolling on the ground. The woman almost in the air is pulling the strings of the kite with her two hands. Half moon has come down almost to the roof near the feet of the woman. There is a room on the roof with yellow walls. A man is sleeping on a bed in that room. Only his face can be seen from the open door of the room. From the painting it can be understood that the woman has come out of her bed in the midnight and flying the kite in the pale moonlight. The woman is in a dreamy hallucination keeping away the reality. This dreamy humour reflects the dream of the artist himself. It is full of mysticism. Sometime in contains the elements of surrealism also.

Thus Dharmanarayan went through a contradiction between oriental and western. When he was in Kala Bhavana he learned that the sense of tradition is the core of art. At his time Kala Bhavana did not even teach the oil

painting. When he started painting after passing out from Kala Bhavana, he realized that the oriental style is not enough to capture the contemporary reality of 60's. Here we can see, and will see in future too, how the form gets ruptured. He depicted the animal instinct in the human beings to show the greed, selfishness and jealousy. He tried to express his protest through this rupture. But he was not satisfied with expression of protest. He tried to connect his paintings with the tradition. He made paintings based on symbols of *Tantra* in late 60s and early 70s. But he was not satisfied with that also. His search was on. He found a way out in Middle age's Indian Miniature painting. He was amazed by its fantasy and rich color of it. He was specially attracted by the simplicity of folk art and Kalighat Pata's human structure, humorous positioning of archetypes and more importantly social issues, description of the incidents and its criticism. Dharmanarayan delighted in debunking the Bengali babu culture (plate-4.26). These babus have wives, lovers and concubines. The humour and satire associated with various artistic and literary expressions of nineteenth century Babuculture of Bengal found expression in his paintings. The lost world of Kalighat paintings of colonial Calcutta is brought home to roost in Dharmanarayan's own middle class milieu, to mock at its new duplicities, frustrations and sexual libido. (plate-4.27). In his painting of this period (late 80s) the images are pink and purple nudes, flying lovers and upside down women who suddenly come upon their partners. There was also a recognisable code of troops of Kalighat painting that he activated in these scenarios of dishonesty or seduction - as for instance, the trope of a woman's hands blindfolding a man. The motif would in time take on an autobiographical note, as those anonymous hands trapped his own eyes in a later work. He meticulously studied the idioms. Through assimilation of the essential features of all these sources he devised his own form, which within the apparent environment of lyrical fantasy reflected his caustic criticism of the existential dilemma. (Plate-4.28) He was also inspired by the simple representation of the crisis of society in Charlie Chaplin's films. He tried to bring together the oriental style and society and contemporary issues in content. Through his work he compiled the tradition with modernity. (Ghosh: 1999) There is always a case to be made for the exclusively Bengali

temperament of his work. But that does not mean consigning the artist to a purely provincial history, and to the regional sidelines of contemporary Indian art. There is a growing need, at this juncture, to question the existing artistic canon of post-Independence India and look beyond what is presented as its key centres and protagonists. If we distinguish that the canon of contemporary Indian art, which has been nationally and internationally propagated over the last decades, is a product of a particular historical intervention of some artists and critics, we also realize this canon always be rewritten. Our sense of the national modern can only be vastly enriched if the likes of Dharmanarayan can in time also claim their place within its history.

In the last phase of his works, again he, at times, captured this tune of melancholy in a larger perspective, independent of anyone. In Dharmanarayan's life as in his paintings the darkness always seemed to be lurking just around the corner. Latent in the black humour that resides deep within his images, that darkness is suddenly resurrected in the mid 90s in the shadow of the artist's impending death. Ironically, his works of these years reflect an even greater lightness and cheerfulness, as they discard with the laborious medium of tempera and switch to the spontaneity of water colours and line drawings (plate-4.29). The leaving of empty spaces and the plain white of the surface in the background reflects the airiness in compositional structure. There was a series of water colour he painted in 1994 onwards. The easy flowing water colour frames his levitating figures and animals with stage curtains or a flowing river, patterned trees and clouds against empty backgrounds (plate-4.30)**.**

4.4 CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF HIS WORKS

In all his works, Dharmanarayan created a world that is personal and intimate. It would be interesting to examine his paintings in light of what we know of his life and views. The imagery in his later phase paintings has narrative elements. It leads us into the world of childhood fantasy and adult reverie-two vital sources of human imagination. Artist like Rousseau and Chagall found respite in similar visions when hemmed in by the complications

of city life. Otherwise typical repertoire of characters and scenes animate his compositions - the mustachioed gentleman in *dhotis* .The ladies draped in striped Bengali handloom *saris*, the acrobatic tigers, the grimacing beasts, the flying tortoise, floating houses and miniature like trees. These are what keep appearing in new permutations and combinations throughout his paintings.

As art historian Tapati Guha-Thakurta wrote-"*Dharmanarayan's imagery can be seen to resonate with Bengali literary symbolisms and with a medley of influences as much of European modern masters as of Indian art traditions*."(Guha-Thakurta: 2000) Lyrical mysticism was his forte - a world known but also unknown, in which our very intimate everyday surroundings and objects turned into unusual poems in each of his paintings, drawings and also in his few recent sculptures. If angle of vision is art, then each of his works contained various angles of vision. A vision which created most unusual compositions with human figures, animals, birds and other everyday objects, each of which transformed into a sort of animated individual from a different existence - although not completely unfriendly. Hence a decorative clock also ticks in his works, a formalized tiger leaves its gruesomeness, and a butterfly sings with a sweet but strange tune, human figures become onlookers with mysterious expressions towards us. All this perhaps explains the inner world where Dharmanarayan dwelt, - a poetic world full of love and compassion towards everybody and everything. He had a mind free from complexities and hated none or nothing. This explains his use of stripes or checks in his paintings –which never created any complications other than texturing a beautiful but strange, rhythmic area. His every work was characterized with veiled humour and spontaneous rhythm. (Kar: 1997)

Dharmanarayan Dasgupta's first solo exhibition was held at Park Street's Artistry House (now destroyed) between 6 and 13 November, 1963. There was a total no of 30 paintings, 8 among them were oil painting while the other 22 were of water colour. There are no options to see those paintings now, so we have to make an idea from the discussion in different papers and magazines. It can be understood that the exhibition got limelight as almost every leading newspaper published news on it. It's not that his unique style

got much acclamation in his first exhibition. In that time everyone has told about the special trend of the artists of Santiniketan. He was appreciated for his attempt to come out of that trend. But the way he experimented with the style that was not recognized by all. *Desh Patrika* (23rd November 1963) wrote, “Today most of the youth artists are of the view to achieve uniqueness in terms of form and style and reckless about it. This artist is also influenced by that. If the aim of painting is to create strange tricky designs by applying color and distorting figures, the Dharmanarayan has successfully reached there. There is no doubt about it”. Although in the next line *Desh Patrika* appreciated his taste of colour and balance, still they asked why he tried to create solidity with the scratch of a fine stick! They mentioned about ‘Trion’, ‘Whisper’, ‘Chaos and Cosmos’, ‘Madhyobitto’ where he tried to depict social issue through the above mentioned forms. About his water colour painting they said “this is like miscommunication due to talking in different languages at the same time.”

Amrita Patrika’s (22nd November, 1963) review was much appreciating. They say, “Artist Dasgupta has shown his talent mainly in oil paintings. As there is no realistic sense in his painting similarly it is not the bearer of his abstract sense of art. The artist has tried to express his message through compiling both divide by geometric figures and applying blunt color. Artist’s sincerity and bold sense of art can be seen in the creation of wonderful background on the canvas, distortion of figures, balanced representation of those and the application of color.”

Anandabazar Patrika (21st November 1963) wrote, “Dharmanarayan’s painting has power. It’s good that this power has expressed as whipping. This whipping is not goes round a definite dimension. So in most of the places it is not used for the prominence of any particular centre... According to our experience this type of work becomes pattern”. Still the critique of *Anandabazar Patrika* agreed that “Dharmanarayan has a depth, it cannot come without a proper knowledge of matter and light, this is hopeful.”

Statesman (7th November 1963) mentioned about the quality of professionalism in some of the paintings of Dharmanarayan. They said that he derived this quality from the teaching of Ramkinkar. They also mentioned that although his water colours do not give any hint of the expansion of colour but it shows that he has the ability to apply colours nicely. About his oil paintings this paper's writing must be considered with special importance: "In his oils, notably Triune, whisper, A Duet, and His Memory, the figurative element, the image is used in the service of a specific idea. He attempts to enlarge and alter our vision of the world in which we move." Again they mentioned that sometimes the artist has been melodramatic or over used the styles.

From the above discussion we can have an idea about the paintings of his first exhibition. The experiment with style and genres was most important there. It is not that he earned much recognition and success in his first exhibition. But there was an urge for searching for the new which had become his main driving force in later days. In the first exhibition his two painting were sold in Rs 250. One of his acquaintances bought it. In the next year in November, along with two other artists Ramchandran and Debiprasad Saha, he hosted his second exhibition at *Fine Arts Gallery*, Delhi. A news paper had described some of his paintings of this exhibition as near to surrealism.

In 1966 along with six other friends he organized an exhibition at *Artistry House*, Kolkata. Others participant artists were Ganesh Pyne, Bikash Bhattacharya, Laluprasad Shaw, Debiprasad Saha and Balaram Murti. In this exhibition it was noticed that the style of Dharmanarayan's work had changed. The paintings were of the genre of drawing. More importance was given to lights rather than lines. The human body became animalistic. As if some animals are fighting among themselves. It was a harsh criticism of human greed.

Amrita Patrika (8th July 1966) said "these are somewhat like Groutex illustration". *Statesman* (9th June 1966) Wrote, "Dharmanarayan Dasgupta has imposed a kind of monumentality on his large paintings notable for their detailed draughtsman ship."

In November 1967, his joint exhibition was organized with Laluprasad Shaw. *Desh patrika* (2nd December 1967) wrote-'There were two types of paintings in this exhibition. Some were based on the faces, which were with the expression of fear. The others were representation of fantasy with bright colours.' *Amrita Patrika* (17th November 1967) said it has some resemblance with Rabindranath's whimsical art. Till then he was trying to adapt the western style. His strong dissatisfaction regarding his surroundings was being reflected in his paintings, in all of his works. But it was becoming clear that he has a great test of rhythm of structure and this sense will become his inner sight in some days. This drove him to experiment with newer styles. In an exhibition in 1969 he presented some new paintings. It can be marked as his starting point of working on Indian thoughts. The paintings are a bit ornamental though. Structuralism got importance here. He tried to bring the Indian thought by using different symbols of Tantra. During 8 to 14th August, 1969 'Santiniketan Ashramimik Sangha' organized a joint exhibition at *Academy of Fine Arts*, Kolkata. The ex students of Kala Bhavana participated in it. Dharmanarayan was one of them. *Ananda Bazar Patrika* (11th August, 1969) wrote, "By the use of Tempera, oli paintings, piece of glass, Bengali alphabets, *Kari* Dharmanarayan Dasgupta has made the designs which are undoubtedly attractive." *Desh patrika* (23rd August, 1969) said, "Indian tradition and modern art has been mixed wonderfully."(Ghosh: 1999) This continued for two-three years. On observing these paintings, his friend at the 'Society of Contemporary Artists' made him a member of the group. But dissatisfaction regarding those paintings was growing in him. He said- "*I think these works are becoming merely designs and repetitive*." (Desh: 1399) From there he started to get back to the tradition. Indian miniature art has attracted him from his student life. Its pattern of figures attracted him. He started thinking about how he can apply those in his own paintings. He tried to adapt Indian *Bhitti Chitra*, sculpture, folk art, Abanindranath, Nandalal, Amrita Shergill. With the influence of all these he started to work with a whole new style from the beginning of 70's. It is during this time that he started making small paintings in Tempera. A dreamy world was getting uncovered. Trees in his paintings look like miniature paintings. In a painting a princess is seen

standing by the window of a palace. A reverse reflection of her is in the water. In another painting a princess is flying a kite, half of her body is outside the window. Butterfly is also seen flying. These were the archetypes he made. He exhibited some of his Miniature painting based temperas in the exhibition held from the last week of the December 1975 to 4th January 1976 at Birla Academy organized by Society of Contemporary Artists. (Ghosh: 1999) Those works were highly acclaimed. Here we can quote from the review by Sandip Sarkar- "*Dharmanarayan Dasgupta has stole the heart this time, have shamelessly taken from Middle age's miniature form of paintings. In his previous paintings he feared us by depicting snake. This time his paintings are bit more happy and satisfied. The flying 'Heroine' or the princess by the window of Mughal palace takes us to the dreamy land, somehow against our will. Have stitched pieces of scenes and created a series. In the middle an adamant fish is kissing mermaid in the water. Surrounding them there are pieces of sceneries like temple, flying bird, forest etc. Has worked hard on it and has made it pleasurable*."(Sarkar: 1976) From this time onwards he adapted a new style. This became more polished and unique in the later days.

In the beginning of 70s he painted a series on old cars. There he entered into the depth of fantasy. It started from a tiny incident. He was walking down towards Connaught Place in Delhi accompanied by his friend and artist Ramchandran. While walking he saw a vintage car in a shop. It was quite decorated and shiny. He thought to himself that the very car used to run on the roads once, but now it does not. It has become a showpiece, he thought of running the car again. On returning home he drew a picture where some butterflies are flying a car. After that he made paintings of old car in Tempera. In one of them we can see an abandoned car in a forest; the car's front is on the ground, distorted. Surrounding it there are trees, flowers or butterflies in miniature style. There is a painting like this at the archive of *Lalit Kala Academy*. (Ghosh: 1999) The paintings from the series of old car paintings were first exhibited in the exhibition held at Kolkata organized by Society of Contemporary Artists' in December 1977. In this exhibition there were three paintings of broken tub and urban people painted in water colour.

(Desh:1978) Two years later he made some painting in Scratch process in the exhibition of Society in December 1979. He made archetype of the skeleton like figure of horse or some other similar animal on black art paper by scratching it with blade (Plate-4.31).

The Statesman (12th December 1979) wrote, these paintings are a diversion from his own style, and probably he will get back to his own style soon. In the next year he returned to his own miniature style based paintings. His success can be seen in the review of *The Economic Times* (28th December 1980) which wrote, “His pictures in general have the same effect as a fire whose flame has gone out but whose warmth lingers.” From that time he has started using Kalighat painting style archetypes with or without Miniature form. Satire about society was becoming its part. In 1980’s exhibition of Society there was a picture named ‘Dashanan’. A statue of a leader resembling *Ravana* placed on a podium in a park. The statue had ten heads. There are some big trees in miniature style. In the annual exhibition of *Birla Academy* in January, 1981 a painting named ‘Leader’ was exhibited. The man of the painting had ten hands. He was holding eight masks in his eight hands and wearing the ninth mask with the help of other two hands. There were flowery trees in miniature style near his feet. From this time his paintings became more focused message on society, reflection of more bold radical consciousness also can be found in the paintings of this time. He had painted a series of paintings on the memory of *Naxalite* movement. It took him ten years to put his thoughts which were built in 1969-70 into his arts. A series was made centering on a blood stained *kurta or punjabi*. Different archetypes were created. The *kurta* or *punjabi* is hanging from hook on wall (plate-4.32). Blood is falling down from the *punjabi*. Some crows are drinking that blood. In another picture a *punjabi* is on the floor of a roof. There was blood on and near the chest, as if a dead body is lying on the floor. The gory reality of death which he witnessed in 1970s came to his paintings as symbol, ten years later. And by using this attire he indicated the identity problem also. Beside protest, satire and humour also became an inseparable part of his work. Sometimes the target of the satire was he himself. In July 1984 a drawing exhibition of the

artists of Society was held. The exhibition was names ‘’Art on Paper’’. There was one drawing of Dharmanarayan. A tortoise is flying in the sky wearing a medal which is hanging through a long rope. In the ground there are miniature style trees, no human beings are there. Dharmanarayan got an award at that time. In this picture he ridicules himself by showing that people fly in the sky whenever they get an award. Amitava Choudhury wrote a limerick on that picture. It was published in Jugantar Patrika on 31 July, 1984 with name “Kurmitolar Kachchap” along with the painting. Followings are some lines:

“Americaye jachche ure kurmitolar Kachchap,
Seikhane jor cholchhe khela Olimpic er mochchob.
Khelar porei medal golaye neme porlo London
Eksho metre doure prothom, sob apobad khondon.”

(Kurmitola’s tortoise is flying towards America, Olympic is going on there. London came with a medal around the neck just after the game ended and became first, all the disrepute has gone.) (Ghosh: 1999) At this time he made some more drawings having intricate detailing and fantasy which made us think about surrealism. A field with lots of holes in it, some bush here and there, butterflies are flying, a frog is peeping out from a big hole. He had made some other drawings on frog, snail, and butterfly. It contained wretchedness along with humour. By then Tempera became his medium. At that time he pastes thick paper on canvas, applies Zinc Oxide on the paper to make the base. Then he mixes colour powder with gum. Previously he used to make colour with egg yolk, but at the mature age he used gum only. A mouth spray was frequently used to produce special tonal effects of colour on the cloth texture; sometimes a final coating of egg emulsions was also applied to the finished painting. All along he experimented with a range of other media like gouache on *Nepali tulot paper*. After finishing work with tempera he used to apply water colour on it. As using tempara is laborious sometimes he used to mix white colour with water colour and paint with gouache. Other than these he seldom used acrylic and oil paint.

In April 1985 his solo exhibition was held at 'Calcutta Art Gallery'. This was his second solo exhibition after 1963. It can be said that in this exhibition Dharmanarayan's own style became fully visible. He evolved a special style of telling deeper truths in the guise of humour. There were fifteen paintings in the exhibition. Nine of them were work of Tempera while six were acrylic on glass. Subject wise it can be divided into two categories. In some of them he represented the life from an angle of beauty and affection. In others social and psychological tragedy was represented subtly and became the embodiment of protest. In the Tempera works this melancholy and void got importance. A man is standing with a magnifying glass. The face is dark red. A woman with blue face is coming down from above. Their hands touched each others. Faces are near to each other. The name of the painting is 'In search of Dialogue' (plate-4.33). In another painting the blue background became reddish in the lower part. A yellow-grayish flying tortoise is seen in the sky and a man with violate hairs, blue eye, wearing green shirt is hanging from the mouth of the tortoise by a string. The name of the painting is 'Flying Tortoise' (plate-4.34). Artist searched for an imagery of an emptiness of the world, from where a charming woman vaporizes into air holding green leaves in hand. In 'Utsav' we can see he has searched for beauty, for the dreams of childhood, for mythical world. A Green elephant is flying in the air. A violet coloured woman is celebrating festival with conch shell standing on that elephant. Her hairs are green. Below in a faraway place a flag is up; all these are in miniature style. The paintings made on glass were depicting the sense of elevation. He has played with colour in these paintings which had surpassed the line between nature and abstract (plate-4.35).

In 1988's 5 to 20th November his third solo exhibition was held at Chitrakoot Art Gallery. His theoretical notions got established in it. 15 painting of the exhibition were of Tempera while 5 were glass painting. Here also it can be seen that at the beginning it amazes the viewers with its pleasurable style. Then it throws him up in a dangerous world of void. The sense of up-rootedness becomes dominant. It attracts with a smile then throws up in a melancholic world, as is seen in 'Bitter Band'. As if cluster of cottages and

small bushes are moving in circular motion in the air on a blue background. The country is floating endlessly in the tide of time. A band player is floating in that tide. He looks smaller as he floats horizontally towards a faraway place. A middle aged woman is in the front, covering a large space. Either she is standing covering her eyes with hands or she also is floating. The woman is disturbed by hearing the far away tune. Time has stopped in her life. There is no future for her; her life has become stand still. In this way Dharmanarayan forces the apparent beauty towards crisis, suffering (Plate-4.36). (Ghosh: 1999)

Dharmanarayan paintings reflect the Bengali middle class and their dilemma, 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 our society. He was 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 he felt that tradition binds everyone to their roots. He handles his personal experiences and the issues at hand with humor, satire and tongue- in- the- cheek mischief. The characters that inhabit his canvases are a bit bizarre. The figures are distorted, they float in the air, and sometimes they are upside down surveying the world with their legs pointed to the sky. His people he paints are distinctive in style, the ladies are buxom and the men are corpulent. Creatures from mythology, animals such as turtles, insects and tigers occupy space among inanimate objects such as clocks, cars and masks. Dasgupta's canvases are filled with bright colors and show the attention he gives to every detail. In some of his paintings, there are things seen in the dream world and had a serene expression. In others his pictorial statements take on a prophetic tone of denouncement. It is at this stage that Dharmanarayan's corpus of work comes to an abrupt end. There would be no end to conjectures as to what new phase he would have taken his art into.

4.5 BIOGRAPHICAL COLUMN

1939 Born in Tripura.

1960 Diploma in Fine Arts & Crafts, Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan.

1966-79 Teacher at St. Thomas Church School, Howrah Maidan,West Bengal.

1979-85 Teacher at St. Thomas School, Dasnagar, West Bengal.

1985-97 Member of Faculty & later Dean of the Department of Paintings, Faculty of Visual Arts, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata.

Solo Exhibitions

1963 Artistry House, Kolkata.

1984 Kala Yatra, Chennai.

1985 Dhoomi Mal Art Gallery, New Delhi; The Calcutta Art Gallery, Kolkata.

1988 Chitrakoot Art Gallery, Kolkata.

1991 Dhoomi Mal Art Gallery, New Delhi.

Participations

1961-63 National Exhibition, All India Fine Arts & Crafts Society, New Delhi; Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata.; Academy of Fine Arts, Kolkata.; West Bengal State Academy.

1964 Exhibition of Three Artists, All India Fine Arts & Crafts Society, New Delhi.

1966 Six Painters, Artistry House, Kolkata.

1967 Arts & Prints Gallery, Kolkata.

1971 Society of Contemporary Artists, Kolkata.

1979 Kala Yatra Exhibition, Chennai; New Delhi; Kuala Lumpur; Kolkata.

1980 Drawing ’80, Chandigarh.

1981 Kala Yatra Exhibition, Ernakulam; Hyderabad; Indian Paintings Today, Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai.

1982 Kala Yatra Exhibition, Mumbai; Bangalore; London; Paris; Manchester.

1985 Karnataka Chitrakala Parishad, Bangalore.

1986 International Book Fair organized by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations at Poland; Germany Contemporary Indian

Paintings, Frankfrut; Book Fair, Frankfurt; Bharat Bhavan Biennale, Bhopal-II Biennale, Havana; IV International Triennial, New Delhi.

1987 XIX Sao Paolo Biennale, Sao Paolo Contemporary Indian Paintings, Indian Council for Cultural Relations, New Delhi; Eight Contemporary Artists, Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata.

1989 Kala Yatra, Bangalore; Bombay Art Society Centenary Exhibition, Mumbai.

1990 Calcutta Through the Eyes of Painters, Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Culture, Kolkata; Mumbai.

1991 Drawings, Lalit Kala Akademi, Chennai.

1993 'Trends and Images', CIMA Gallery, Kolkata; 'Wounds', CIMA Gallery, Kolkata; National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

1995 Joint Exhibition with Lalu Prasad Shaw, Sanskriti Art Gallery, New Delhi; Paintings of Korean, Indian and Japanese Artists exhibited at Korea; Japan and India.

1996 'Highlights', curated by CIMA Gallery at Jehangir Art Gallery, Mumbai; 'Chamatkara', curated by CIMA Gallery at Whiteleys Art Gallery, London; 'Perspecta', New Delhi, Galerie 88.

1997 'Perspecta II', New Delhi, Galerie 88; Perspecta, Mumbai, Galerie 88.

Collections

Victoria & Albert Museum, London.

Chitrakala Parishad Museum, Bangalore.

National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi.

Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi.

Birla Academy of Art and Culture, Kolkata.

In several public and private collections in India and abroad.

Awards

1981 Birla Academy of Art & Culture, Kolkata.

1989 Shiromani Puraskar, Asian Paints.

4.6 CONCLUSIONS

Fantasy, fun and satire these are the three defining elements of the paintings of Dharmanarayan Dasgupta. He used these to present a social critique. His images are figurative but they defy the environment of apparent reality. They even contradict the force of gravity. Men and women, who are the protagonists of his paintings, can easily walk or fly in the air, can enter a closed room defying the solid barrier of walls, the hutments, trees and other elements of nature can rhythmically move in the air. He thus created a very soothing and sonorous world of dream. But this apparent grotesque pleasantness gradually yields towards a pathetic and melancholic void extracting and analyzing the uncanny contours of reality showing how our existence lacks the firm base and deep root, how we live in an amorphous world without any force of bondage, without any gravitational integrity. Through apparent melodious fantasy, the paintings of Dharmanarayan build up a grave social critique unmasking the socio-psychological void inherent in our existence. Like most of the artists coming to limelight during 1960-70s, apart from this social critique he also had a search for indigenous identity through assimilation of tradition and modernity, through synthesis of western and indigenous form elements. As an artist, Dharmanarayan was influenced by different forms of traditional art, especially the Kalighat painting. He was also inspired by the 19th century western ideals of painting and also by elements of the *Babu* Culture which was a legacy of the British colonial artists from the pre-independence days. Bengali *Babu* becomes the signatory motifs of his paintings. The lost world of Kalighat paintings of colonial Kolkata is brought home to roost in his own middle class milieu, to mock at its new duplicities, frustrations and sexual libido. His archetypes, men-women or the figures of other animals are depicted in this environment. He avoided reality in these figures also. For example the skin colour of a human being can be dark green, deep blue or blood red in these paintings. The structure of the figures appears humorous.

In his journey as an artist he experimented in many ways. To reflect the language of his own legacy he had to struggle a lot. At the early stage he

experimented with the *tantrik* imageries. But that did not reflect the contemporary truth. So he neglected the language. Then he explored the form of elements and colour composition of Indian medieval miniatures, particularly *Rajput* and *Pahari paintings*, studied the essential characteristics of *Kalighat* paintings and other folk art forms of Bengal. The humour and satire associated with various artistic and literary expressions of nineteenth century *Babu Culture* of Bengal also appeared to him to contain extensive possibility. He used the Kalighat Paintings style of figures intelligently. He was also attracted by folk art designs. He built the style of his paintings by incorporating different elements from Indian Miniature painting, Kalighat Paintings and folk paintings. In doing this he returned to the tradition. It took him nearly two decades to return to the tradition which he acquired during his Santiniketan days. He got to know the poor and sorry state of contemporary reality of Kolkata getting involved in the art movement in the city, during 60's and 70's. He witnessed the corruption in society and politics. The leaders of the society are wearing masks. Self alienation was a bitter truth. The life of middle class was overshadowed with greed and high ambitions. People were uprooted from the society and tradition. He became rootless having no connection with the earth. Gravity was not enough to hold him back, so in many of his paintings the people, trees, houses everything floats in the air. This gravitation freeness creates a humorous atmosphere in his paintings. This humour or satire is the main essence of his work. A subtle protest was there in this humour. He tried to represent the void of the lives which were unsatisfied, strangled with high ambitions and consumerism. This too was through that humour. Sometimes his humour contains sadness, but generally there is no rudeness in it. Dharmanarayan had a passion for creating a dream world. One retreats into such make-believe worlds when cultures clash, a fear of the alien grips the mind and insecurity clouds the psyche. He carefully studied the idioms. Through assimilation of the vital features of all these sources he devised his own form, which within the apparent environment of lyrical fantasy reflected his caustic criticism of the existential dilemma.

In last few decades the sudden boom in Indian modern art changed the contemporary art practice scenario. But artists like Dharmanarayan never fully entered this upper layer. In his life and in his untimely death, he remained a part of an anterior world where the entity of modern art was still to acquire the glamour, wealth and stature that it now enjoys in certain circles. Removed from national and international limelight, it was a world which fed into itself, into its own local surroundings of Bengali writers and artists, and into its in-grown futuristic culture. In many senses what best defined this milieu was a continuous sense of struggle, marginalization and economic hardship. The sense resounded and repeated itself across a spectrum of the most gifted artists who worked in the city through the 60s and 70s. Dharmanarayan Dasgupta thus spoke for many of his creed when he recounted the battle that was his life as an artist.

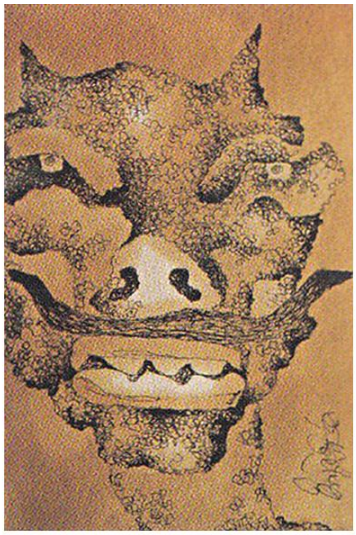

Plate-4.1 : D.Dasgupta ,Head -I, Pen & Ink on paper, 7" x 10", 1965

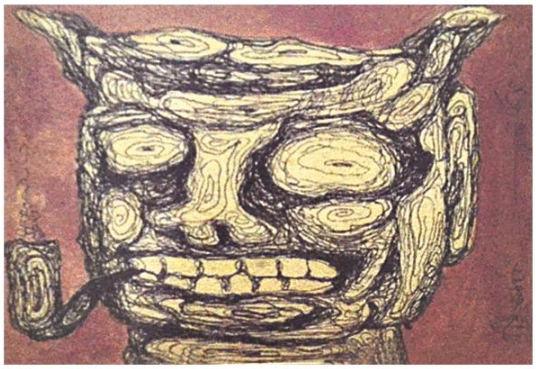

Plate-4.2 : D.Dasgupta ,Head -II, Pen & Ink on paper, 10"x7", 1965

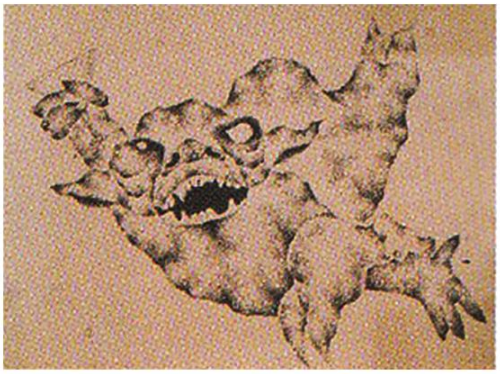

Plate-4.3 : D.Dasgupta, Beast with a wine glass, Pen & Ink on paper, 28"x21", 1965

Plate-4.4 : D.Dasgupta ,Woman with mirror, Pen & Ink on paper, 21"x15", 1965

Plate-4.5 : D.Dasgupta ,Untitled, Pen & Ink on paper, 23"x17", 1965

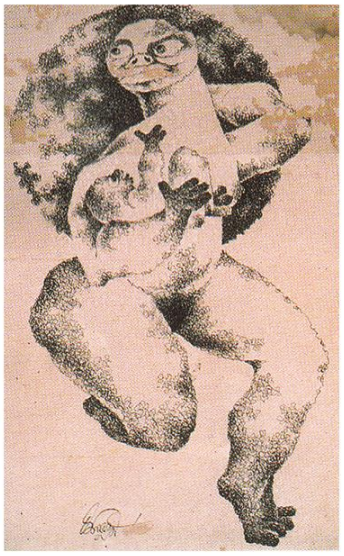

Plate-4.6 : D.Dasgupta ,Mother and child, Pen & Ink on paper, 22"x14", 1965

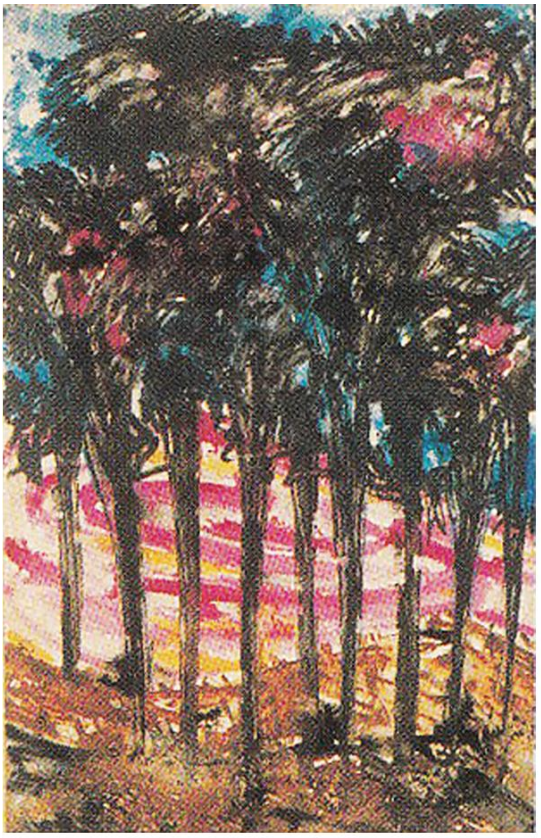

Plate-4.7 : D.Dasgupta ,Landscape -I, Coloured Ink on paper, 22"x15", 1965

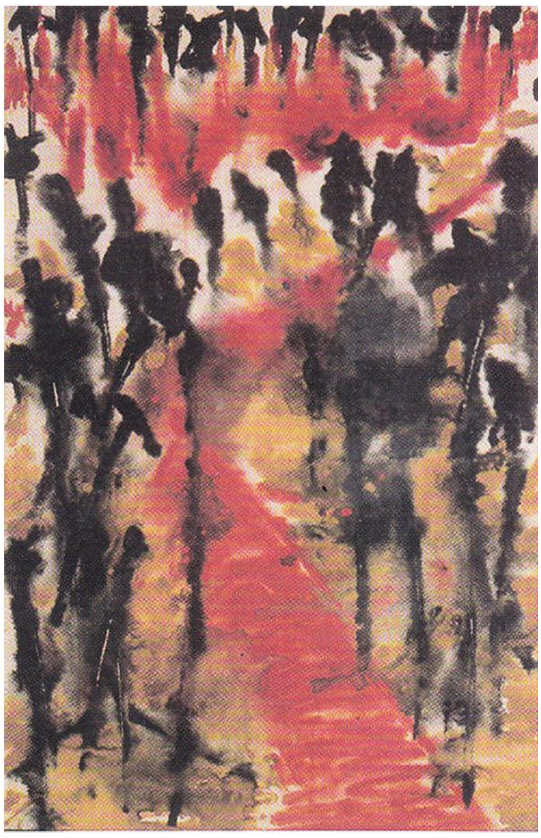

Plate-4.8 : D.Dasgupta,Landscape–II, do, 11"x15", 1965

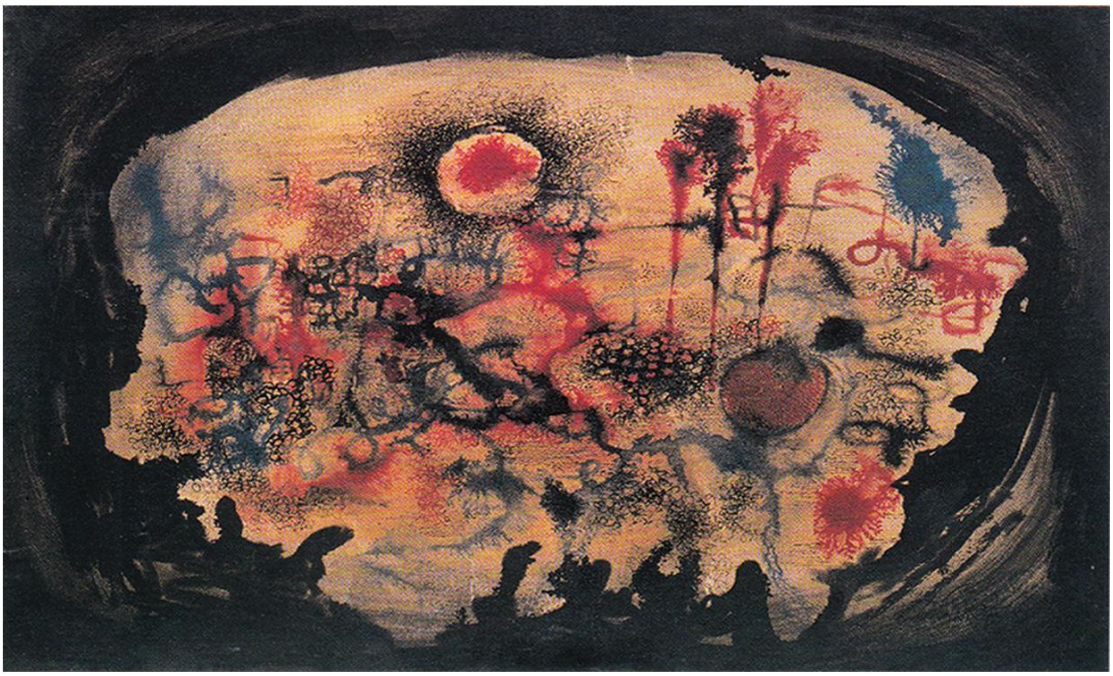

Plate-4.9 : D.Dasgupta ,Landscape – IV, do, 22'x30", 1965

Plate-4.10 : D.Dasgupta ,Tantra series – I, Mixed Media on Ply Board, 24"x24", 1969

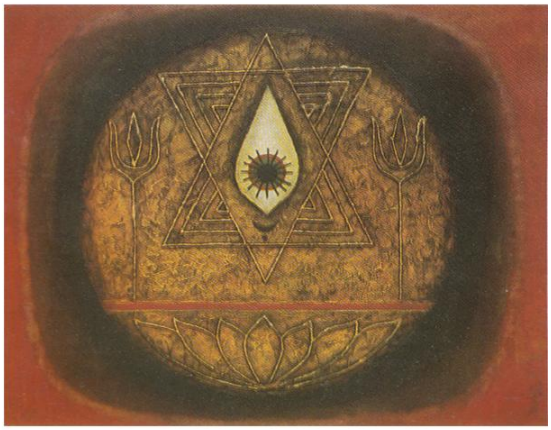

Plate-4.11 : D.Dasgupta ,Tantra Series – II, do, 24"x30", 1969

Plate-4.12 : D.Dasgupta,Tantra Series – III, do, 24"x30", 1970

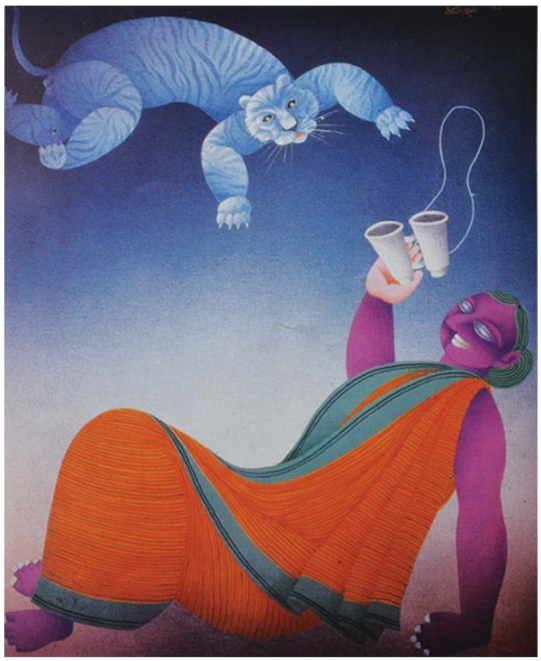

Plate-4.13 : D.Dasgupta ,She, Tempera on canvas, 21"x27", 1987

Plate-4.14 : D.Dasgupta ,Flying Tiger, Etching, 13"x12", 1987

Plate-4.15 : D.Dasgupta ,Leader, Tempera on Canvas, 21"x27", 1978

Plate-4.16 : D.Dasgupta ,Flight, Tempera on canvas, 21"x27", 1989

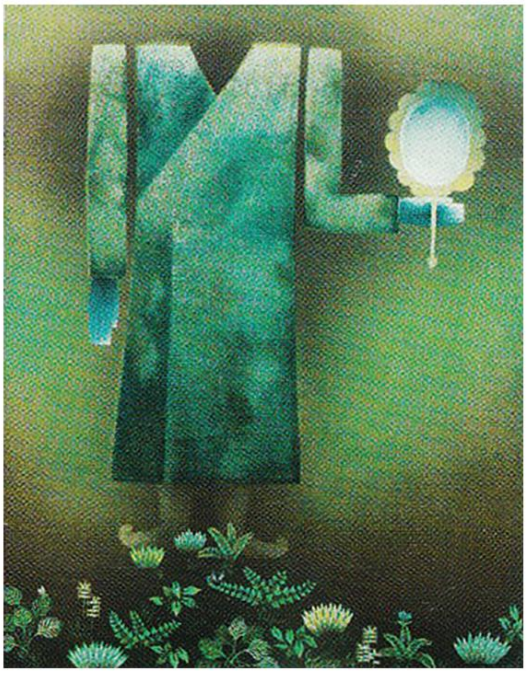

Plate-4.17 : D.Dasgupta,Ruler, Tempera on canvas, 28"x22", 1974

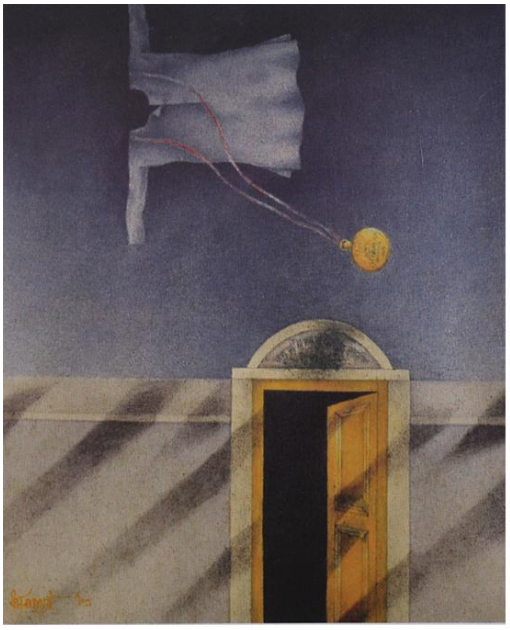

Plate-4.18 : D.Dasgupta ,Medallion, Kurta Series, Tempera on canvas, 17"x18", 1981

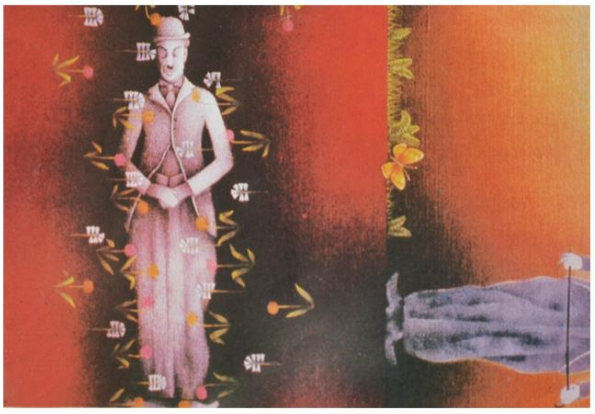

Plate-4.19 : D.Dasgupta ,Under the Grave, Tempera on canvas, 21"x27" 1985

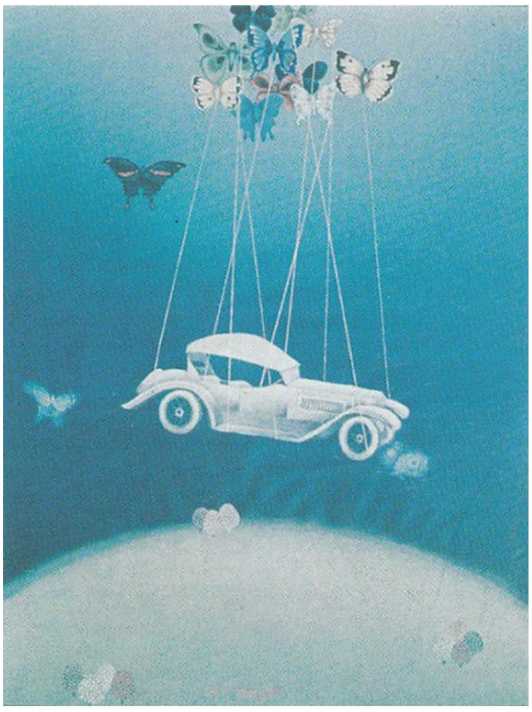

Plate-4.20 : D.Dasgupta,The Flying vintage, Tempera on canvas 21"x27", 1976

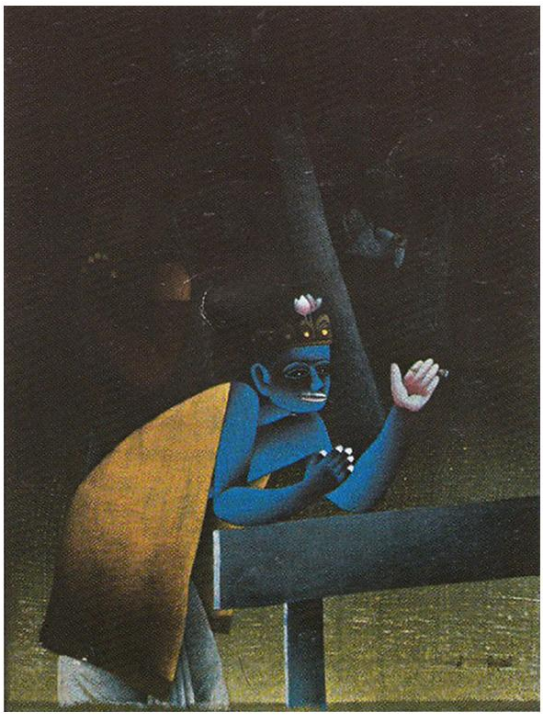

Plate-4.21 : D.Dasgupta ,Krishna smoking a bidi, Tempera on canvas 21"x27", 1988

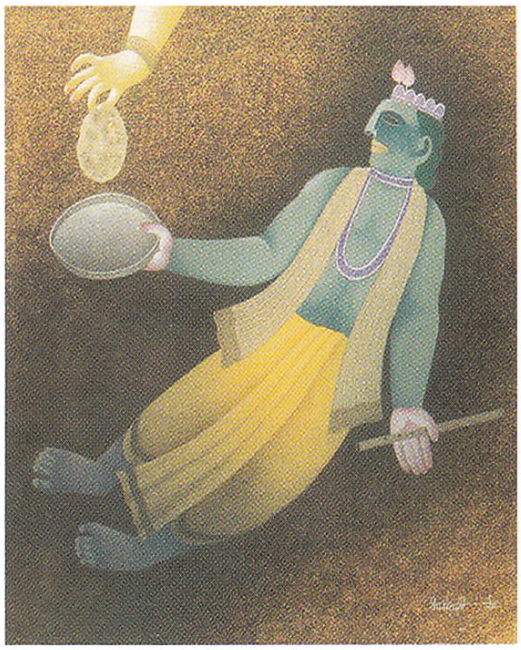

Plate-4.22 : D.Dasgupta ,Krishna with a begging bowl, Tempera on canvas 21"x27", 1995

Plate-4.23 : D.Dasgupta,The Attack Tempera on Canvas, 28"x22", 1987.

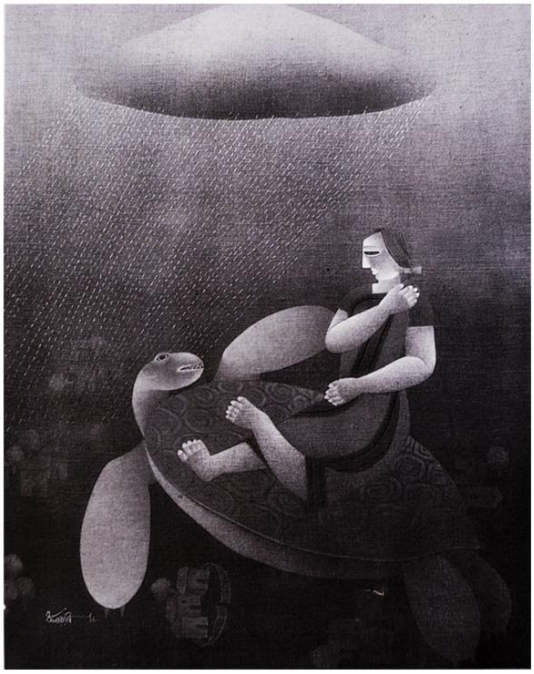

Plate-4.24 : D.Dasgupta,The women and Tortoise

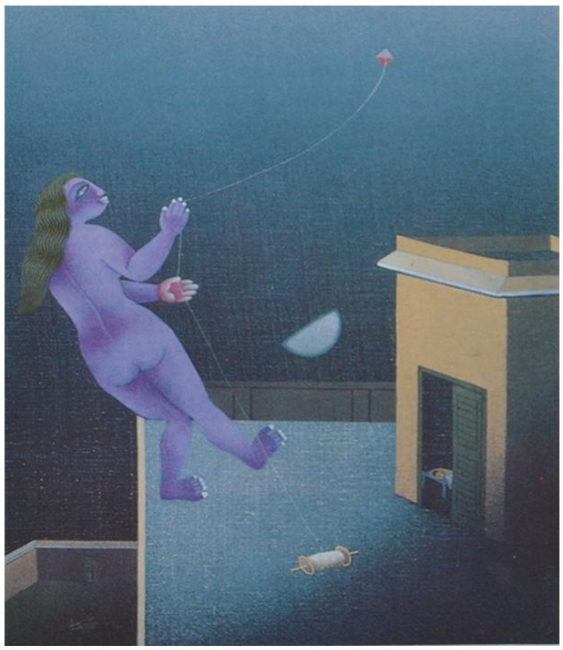

Plate-4.25 : D.Dasgupta ,Midnight Dream, Tempera on canvas,71cms x 56 cms, 1987

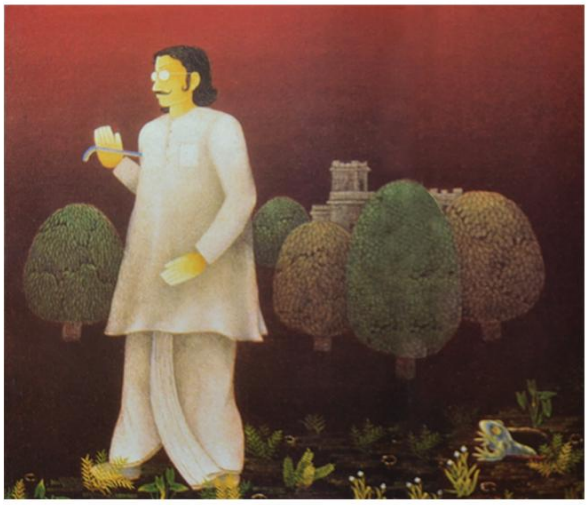

Plate-4.26 : D.Dasgupta,Morning walk, Tempera on canvas, 21"x21", 1982

Plate-4.27 : D.Dasgupta ,Midday Affair Acrylic on canvas, 71cm x 56 cm, 1990

Plate-4.28 : D.Dasgupta ,Tempera on canvas, 27.5"x21.2", 1984

Plate-4.29 : D.Dasgupta ,Untitled, Water colour on paper, 11"x14", 1994

Plate-4.30 : D.Dasgupta ,Untitled,
Water colour on paper, 11"x14",1994

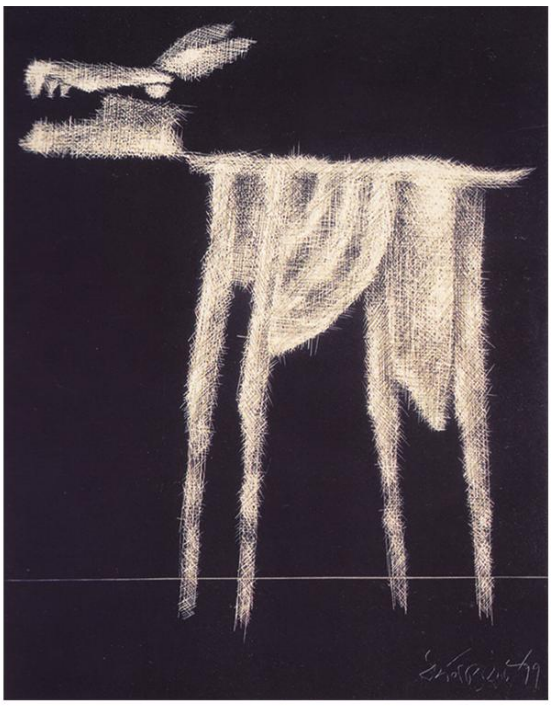

Plate-4.31 : D.Dasgupta ,Animal, Scratch
on Magazine paper, 10"x12", 1977

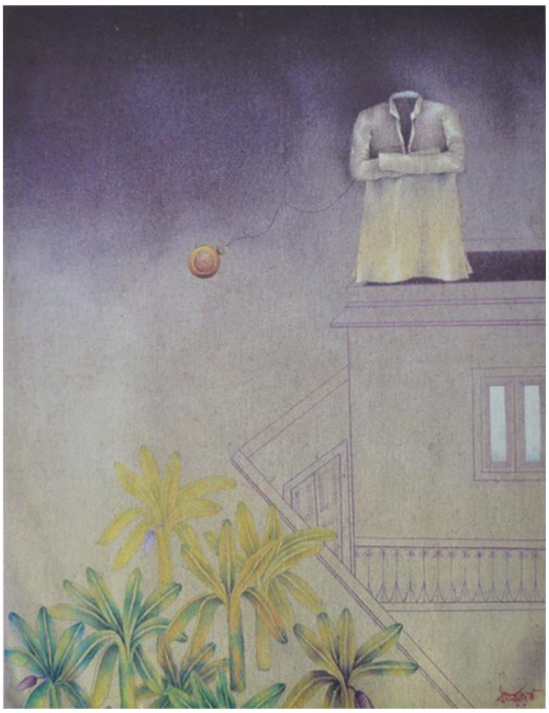

Plate-4.32 : D.Dasgupta ,Kurta Series,
Tempera on canvas, 21"x27", 1981

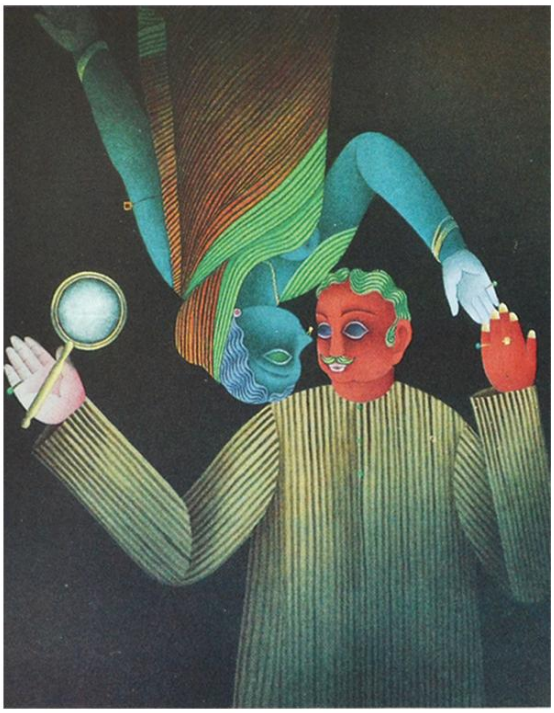

Plate-4.33 : D.Dasgupta ,In search of Dialogue
Tempera, 71cm x 56 cm, 1985

Plate-4.34 : D.Dasgupta ,Flying Tortoise, Tempera on canvas, 21"x27", 1988

Plate-4.35 : D.Dasgupta ,Utsav, Tempera on canvas, 1984

Plate-4.36 : D.Dasgupta, Bitter Band, Tempera on canvas, 1985

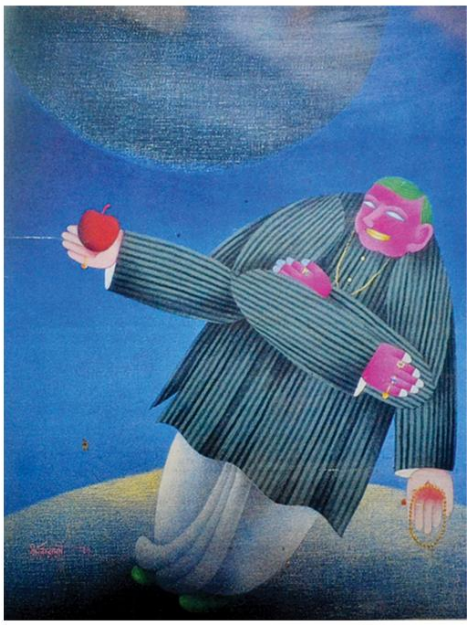

Plate-4.37 : D.Dasgupta, Babu with an Apple, Tempera on board, 72x55.5 cm,1987