



WORKSHOP

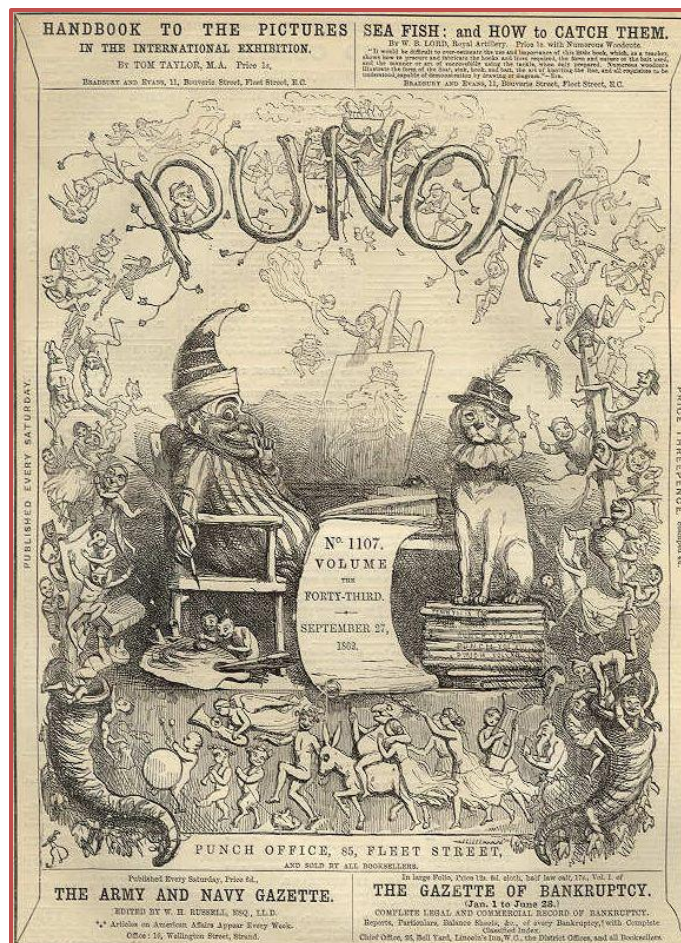
The British Punch Magazine as a Transcultural Format of Satire and Caricature

November 13 – 15, 2009

Organised by Project B1 *Gauging Cultural Asymmetries: Asian Satire and the Search for Identity in the Era of Colonialism and Imperialism* of the Heidelberg Cluster of Excellence on *Asia and Europe in a Global Context: Shifting Asymmetries in Cultural Flows*.

To be held at the Karl Jaspers Centre, Vossstr. 2, 69115 Heidelberg, Germany. For further information please also visit: www.asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de/research/areas/b/projects/b1-gauging-cultural-asymmetries.

For organisational matters, please contact Verena Vöckel (voeckel@asia-europe.uni-heidelberg.de).



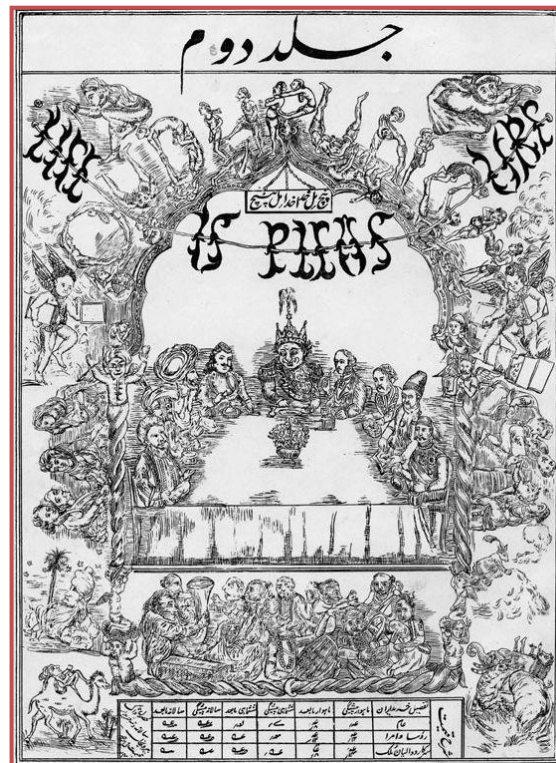
(Cover Page of the British *Punch*, 1862)

Workshop Abstract

The British Punch magazine, appearing for more than 150 years (1841-1992), is quite a unique phenomenon in the history of journal publishing. Its great impact at home is paralleled by its status beyond Britain: the Punch had an impressively wide circulation also outside its home country, both in the British Empire and beyond. What is less known, however, is the fact that the Punch can also be regarded as a proper transcultural phenomenon, directly inspiring satirical journals in various parts of the world. There is, as far as our area of interest is concerned, a large number of Asian journals, first in English and then increasingly in local languages, that took their inspiration directly or indirectly from the Punch magazine. Examples include the Ottoman satirical periodicals *Kahkaha* and *Karagöz*, the Egyptian *Abou Naddara*, Indian versions like the Marathi *Hindu Punch*, the Urdu *Awadh Punch*, the Hindi *Matvala*, the Bengali *Basantak*, etc.; also East Asia had, for instance, local English Punch versions such as the Hongkong *Punch* and the *Japan Punch*, as well as the Japanese-medium *Nipponchi* etc.



(Cover Page of the *Hindu Punch*, 1928)



(Cover Page of the *Awadh Punch*, 1878)

This adaptation, if we can call it thus, of a satirical format is of course part of, and coincides with, the larger phenomenon of a veritable boom in the general production of periodicals in the respective cultures. The dissemination of print industry mostly in the 19th century had enabled this development, leading to the creation of a new type of public spheres and the formation of a reading public (cf. Francesca Orsini, *The Hindi Public Sphere*, 2002; Rudolf Wagner, *Joining the Global Public*, 2007, for Chinese) that

eventually, in many cases, became the nucleus for an equally new kind of nationalist identity formation (Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 1983).

A point at which satirical journals differ from newspapers is, however, that they tend to belong to a superposed textual order in that they usually presuppose the reader's acquaintedness with a particular information or news item and base their oblique presentation on this acquaintedness, using various registers of sometimes culturally specific commonalities to take their message home to the readership.

What strikes us about the dissemination of a *satirical* format such as the Punch, then, is connected with a basic contention underlying our project: namely that satire, or the satirical mode, appears as a particularly apt literary means of tackling cultural asymmetries inherent in colonial and imperial power constellations. The boom of satirical productions that, to a cursory glance, set in during the very inception of anti-colonial and anti-imperial nationalisms, could be accounted for by the high critical potential of satire, and its capability to express cultural asymmetries more pointedly than other literary forms. Ironically, then, we would be faced with a situation in which a prominent means of anti-colonial and anti-imperial propagation was adapted from the metropolitan colonial/imperial centre itself and then turned against it – an irony not uncommon, but rather typical of processes of cultural transfer during the 19th and 20th centuries.



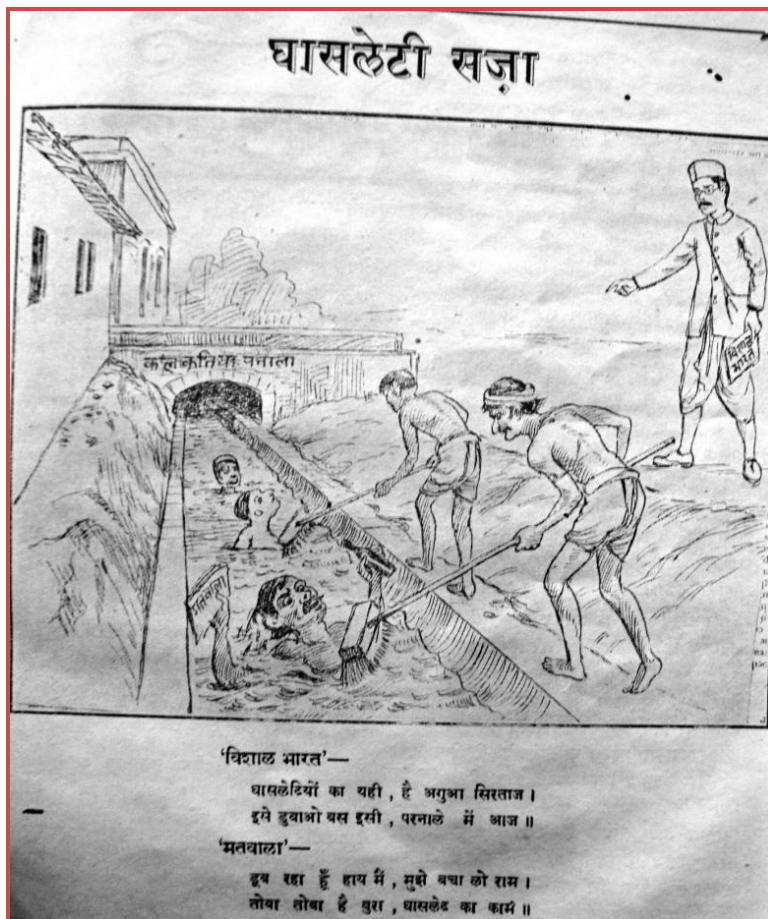
(Cover Page of the Egyptian *Abou Naddara*, 1902)

The aforesaid implies that satire can only work on the basis of certain shared norms and notions. Since these differ from culture to culture, the Punch, or the type of satire connected with it, can be supposed to have undergone a good deal of recontextualisation. For if, on the one hand, the Punch did voice dissenting voices within an imperial centre and thereby granted similar undertakings in the colonies the

opportunity to align themselves with what to them appeared as self-criticism of the imperial masters, the effective adaptation of a satirical format, more often than not, may nevertheless be deemed to have necessitated such recontextualisation.

This basic constellation triggers a number of questions we hope to raise and discuss in our workshop: What kind of adaptations/translations of the Punch's narrator figure do we find, how are they culturally allocated, what are their implications for the *locus* of satire in the respective societies? How important is the transcultural history of the Punch for the international dissemination of the cartoon, is it truly a Punch legacy? Looking at the respective adaptations of the Punch, what evolves for the general transcultural adaptability of satire? How to judge this adaptation process: emulation, translation, recreation, or subversion? How to rate the British Punch's status as a popular or elite phenomenon, and did this status change in the adaptations? Etc.

The Heidelberg Punch Workshop is designed to bring together experts on various Asian versions of the Punch and satirical journals related to it as well as experts on the British Punch. Ours will be a collective and expectedly highly stimulating exercise in comparative literature and publishing history, taking our considerations on the Punch out of their usual context and attempting to position them within a more general transcultural history of satirical expression.



The Great India (=“Vishal Bharat”), represented by the upright man on the left:

“Of scatological literature he is the crown.

Immerse him in the gutter, here and now.”

The Intoxicated (=“Matvala”), represented by the drifting man in the gutter:

“I am dying save me, oh my Lord the Great.

Please forgive me for this literature of dirt.”

(Cartoon from the Periodical *Bhartendu*, 1928, on the conflict between the magazines *Vishal Bharat* and *Matvala*)

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(Cover Page of the Bengali *Basantak*)