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-  
For Rajatbabu (Rajat K. Ray)  
and  
Bhaskarbabu (Bhaskar Chakrabarty) – their  
classes where we learnt the  
'mutiny'.  
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Sharmistha Gooptu, Boria Majumdar

*Toronto, 2007*

## Introduction

■ SHARMISTHA GOOPTU AND BORJA MAJUMDAR ■

The class on the Mutiny/Revolt of 1857 was the first BA class both of us attended in our respective years at Presidency College, Calcutta. Or, at least it is what we really remember as our 'first' class after so many years, perhaps because it also introduced us to Prof. Rajat K. Ray, who needs no introduction to South Asian historians, and has taught 1857 for more than twenty years at Presidency College. The class was an unconventional rendition of 1857. In no textbook have we come across the map Prof. Ray had scribbled on the blackboard, to map the course of events in 1857, which had hugely impacted the fortunes of British India. A high point of the class was Prof. Ray's recital of the mutiny couplet, '*Na Iran ne kiya na Shah Russ ne ... Angrez ko tabah kiya kartoos ne*', which, striking for its sheer passion was also plain amusing for Prof. Ray's animated rendition. It added to the charm of the exercise, profoundly different from the routine note taking in most other classes. Another high point of the class was Prof. Ray breaking a piece of chalk and saying, 'Look at this broken chalk. This is what a rebellion is. Not everything of the previous order has changed with half the chalk remaining intact.' He went on to invert the chalk thereafter and suggest, 'This is what a revolution is – when the entire order has been transformed. 1857 allows you to best understand the distinction between a rebellion and a revolution.' It had imprinted '1857' in our minds, and when we decided to put together this collection of essays, it was not so much because we

claim any specific expertise on the subject of the Mutiny/Revolt of 1857, but rather because our learning of 1857 was so instrumental in shaping our ideas of history and history writing.

This collection of essays does not engage with the conventional concerns of 1857 scholarship. So much has already been written around the event of 1857, that as non-specialists we did not feel we had very much new to contribute to the established historiography on 1857. At the same time, we did not actually wish to undertake yet another study of the 'nature' of the event of 1857, or build our project around the archetypal question of Mutiny versus Revolt, its antecedents and outcomes. This question, answered in Calcutta University BA examinations for years now, has in many respects stunted the historical imagination on 1857. Trapped in its fold, students and scholars have ended up probing the uniform question on the nature of the outbreak, which, while no doubt relevant, obfuscates other interesting inquiries relating to 1857. The question relating to the nature of the events of 1857 is so overpowering that there is a joke in university circles about students inevitably commenting on whether it was a revolt or a revolution, a simple mutiny or indeed the First War of Indian Independence, irrespective of what the actual question was!

The essays in this collection are not primarily concerned with what 1857 really was – mutiny, feudal revolt, or a full-blown war of independence. Whatever its nature, and there can be no unanimity on the point, thousands of lives were lost and the foundations of the British Empire and many of its convictions were severely shaken. And ever since, 1857 has been a watershed in Indian history. As a writer in the *Times of India* recently remarked, 'For far too long, 1857 has been trapped in a debate about what it really stood for – mutiny, feudal revolt, or a full-blown war of independence. In the year of its 150th anniversary, what is certain is that 1857 represented the most serious and bloody armed struggle by Indians against the most powerful empire of the time.'<sup>1</sup> The reorganization of the British Indian Army, the transformation in British policy towards

the landed aristocracy, the transfer of power from the East India Company to the British crown were the direct or indirect results of 1857. Years later, the outbreaks of revolutionary terrorism and subsequently the Quit India movement also brought back debates over 1857 into the public domain. Such was the impact of 1857 that Peter Marshall suggested the division of British Indian history of the 19th century into two halves, 'separated by the great watershed of 1857: an age of ill-considered reform, followed by an age of iron conservatism. Conservatism was eventually to provoke a different form of reaction, the nationalism out of which modern India was to be born.'<sup>2</sup>

Yet, whatever its contemporary implications, 1857 was fundamentally transformed in 1957, when it was resurrected in its hundredth year as an event of 'nationalist' significance. The 1957 project centring 1857, fuelled by the imaginary of the post-colonial state, had the effect of telescoping the discussion on 1857 into the debate on its 'nature', i.e. the question of mutiny versus revolt/nationalist uprising. 1957 forever transformed the 'history' of 1857, inscribing its significance for post-independence generations. To cite an instance: from 1857 right up to the day India became independent in 1947 a Union Jack had been flown night and day from one of the Residency's towers in Lucknow. Since 1957, however, there has been a Martyr's Memorial directly opposite the Residency. It was opened in 1957, the 100th anniversary of the Mutiny. The reconstruction of 1857 was fascinating for its generation of a public discourse at varied levels, through popular performance, press reportage or more academic exercise. As pointed out by Shahid Amin, there followed 'a whole crop of histories of the Ghadar in different districts and regions written in the medium-sized university towns in North India', where 1857 had the greatest political currency.<sup>3</sup> The 1957 celebrations made 1857 a nationalist event in the collective psyche. It is instructive that Sohrab Modi's magnificent historical *Jhansi ki Rani*, released in 1953, though stamped with kind of symbolism and

moralist perspective that was particularly relevant to a newly independent India, failed at the box-office. It was a few years too early, before 1857 had been systematically appropriated into a statist imaginary, making it 'relevant' to the post-independence generation.

Today, given the defining role of the media in South Asia, there has been a reorientation of the erstwhile debate over the nature of the 1857 uprising. Ketan Mehta's *Mangal Pandey: The Rising* (2005), based on Mangal Pandey's rebellion of March 1857, became the focus of a debate between 'academic' and 'popular' history, with academics and intellectuals raising questions about the validity, and implications, of a 'popular' cinematic rendition of history. As one of us has argued elsewhere, a large part of this debate had to do with the selling potential of 'Bollywood', its currency as an international brand, and the lure of the new media,<sup>4</sup> which has re-configured the academic as 'public-intellectual'. In the process, however, it has also put the academic in greater conversation with other contemporary arbiters of history – the filmmaker, for instance, who is now more present in the fray over 'history'. One of us therefore acknowledged in the article referred above, 'For the historian, the more acceptable version may well be that of Mangal Pandey as the foolhardy sepoy, too intoxicated to know where he was going. Pandey, evidently, had no sense of nation – there was no "India" in 1857. However, it would be ridiculous for the economic logic of Bollywood to make a film on Mangal Pandey and to show the climax as being nothing but Pandey high on "bhang"!'<sup>5</sup> When Satyajit Ray made *Shatranj ke Khilari*, a film set against the annexation of Awadh in 1856, which has been cited as one of the causes of the uprising in Awadh – a film now regarded a Ray masterpiece, it had made next to no imprint in academic discourse. The film did stir a debate on the authenticity of period portrayal, but its critics and commentators were principally journalists and critics for the trade presses. Acceptably, the discipline of cinema studies had not evolved in India, but it is also true that no professional historian actually produced a perspective on the

film, which produced some debate at the time of its release. By contrast, a large part of the public debate on *Mangal Pandey: The Rising* was produced by qualified historians and involved an overwhelming invocation of the academic discipline of history. It was marked by seepage of historian voices into more mainstream public discourse, and their engagement with a more 'popular' history. Given this new space for conversation between the academic discipline of history and 'other' histories, as in the very complex invocation of myth and recorded history in *Mangal Pandey*, there has been created more room to move beyond the conventional academic discourse on 1857.

Coming from a range of historical fields, the contributors to this volume have sought to open up 1857 to other questions and concerns, looking beyond the actual events of 1857, and trying to understand 1857 as a more varied complex in terms of myth, memory or popular cultural practice. Considering the work done on the Mutiny/Uprising till date, it is clear that the events of 1857 as a whole defy categorization, and as regional studies by Eric Stokes, Rudrangshu Mukherjee and Tapti Ray have proved, there were multiple uprisings sparked by a range of factors, which were specific to regions and even localities. As William Dalrymple puts it in his recent monograph on Delhi during the uprising of 1857, 'scholars are still arguing over the old chestnut of whether 1857 was a mutiny, a peasant's revolt, an urban revolution or a war of independence. The answer is that it was all of these, and many other things too: it was not one unified movement but many, with widely differing causes, motives and natures.' And it has had other lives – in literature, painting, cartoons, photography, film or comic books, which have remained excluded from the pale of 1857 scholarship. We have tried to access 1857 through accounts of cricket matches between the Indian sepoy and British officers, ballads, pictorial genres, comic books and filmic renditions; the opening up of newer fields and related archives in South Asian studies in more recent years bear some account in the essays collected in this volume. In

the process, the understanding of a historical event is no longer frozen in historical time, but also becomes extended to its subsequent trajectories, making 'history' more 'active'. Nalin Mehta's essay, for instance, is revealing for its analysis of the Mutiny/Revolt in the Amar Chitra Katha Comics. As Projit Mukharji writes, 'by deploying post-colonial tools of analysis on metropolitan cultural forms, we hope, it may be possible to get beyond the trenchant celebrations of nationalism, on both sides, in the various studies of the events of 1857.' Here it would be worthwhile to draw attention to a short commentary by Hugh Tinker, where he had pointed out some of the living legacies of 1857 that needed to be detached from the overwhelming concern with the 'nature' of the event, among both British and Indian historians.<sup>6</sup> He noted, for instance:

In 1841 the East India Company in Leadenhall Street had laid down a policy of 'just and honourable accession of [princely] territory, and from that time there was a very rapid absorption of the Indian States and an extension of the regular system of British administration; had that policy gone on, within fifty years or so the whole of India would have become one unit. Instead, as a result of 1857 there was a complete standstill, no further annexation whatsoever; indeed, in 1881 Mysore was even returned to princely rule after fifty years under British administration. At the time this might have seemed to Indians to be a concession to the Indian point of view, but in the long run one can see that it was reactionary. The perpetuation of princely states first of all had the effect of ruining the federal solution to India's constitutional problems in the 1930s, and, after independence, necessitated a sort of surgical operation, leaving, of course, the legacy of Kashmir.<sup>7</sup>

We too, felt the need to relate 1857, its legacies and other lives. In the process have emerged some 'missing' imprints of 1857, which had thus far escaped scholarly attention and scrutiny – whether the case of the 'missing Mutiny' in educational histories of the Raj, or

the untold stories of Scots and Irishmen in the British Indian Army and of the sepoys who beat their officers on the cricket field. This is, thus, an attempt to add to existing scholarship new lenses to scan 1857.

## NOTES:

- 1 *Times of India*, 19 March 2007.
- 2 Peter Marshall, British India and the Great Rebellion, [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/indian\\_rebellion\\_05.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/indian_rebellion_05.shtml). Accessed 10 April 2007.
- 3 Shahid Amin, 'Of Many Pasts: The 1857 celebrations raise questions Indians must confront', *The Telegraph*, 13 July 2006.
- 4 Sharmistha Gooptu, 'Mangal Pandey: Is History Important', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 27 August 2005.
- 5 *Ibid.*
- 6 Hugh Tinker, '1857 and 1957: The Mutiny and Modern India', *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944), Vol. 34, No. 1 (Jan., 1958), pp. 57-65.
- 7 *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

**Reading 1857...**

**Popular History versus Academic History: William Dalrymple,  
*The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857***

• DAVID WASHBROOK •

The star of William Dalrymple's dazzling *The Last Mughal* is less Bahadur Shah Zafar II, the last Mughal Emperor, than the city of Delhi and the court culture, which it sustained in the first half of the nineteenth century. Somewhat nobly, Dalrymple likens Zafar to King Lear. But a stricter literary analogy might be to Don Quixote: throwing in one's lot with desperate mutineers and jihadis, to restore the glories of the Timurid dynasty in the middle of the 'British' nineteenth century, comes close to a definition of tilting at windmills. It was a mistake that Zinat Mahal, Zafar's senior wife and an intriguing presence behind events, would not have made and which Zafar, himself, soon came to regret. But it was a mistake, which cost the Mughal dynasty its final symbols of authority, and the city and aristocratic culture of Delhi very much more.

As in his previous works, *City of Djinns* and *White Mughals*, Dalrymple shows himself entranced by the artistic style and cultural pluralism of the Mughal court into which the scions of early East India Company rule fitted comfortably. Although the emperorship had been stripped of the substance of power for almost a century, Zafar – who owed his succession to British contrivance – used whatever few resources were left to him to sustain its cultural activities, patronizing poetry and scholarship. A poet of no mean ability himself, he built around him a group of authors who contributed to a thriving Urdu and Persian culture of letters. British

'Orientalism' added its own contribution through the Delhi College, whose Persian and Urdu teachers achieved an outstanding reputation. However, change was already on the horizon as early as the 1830s. The initial 'Mughlai' style of Company rule – symbolized perhaps by Sir David Ochterlowny and his thirteen Indian wives – gave way to harsher and more distanced positions, influenced by Evangelical Christianity and intoxicated by the seemingly limitless power which industrial civilization was giving Britain in the world. Relations between British overlords and the Mughal court deteriorated, and became fraught over a much wider terrain of society, including the Company's Bengal Army which exploded into revolt in 1857.

The bulk of *The Last Mughal* is taken up with a (literally) blow-by-blow account of the siege of Delhi, which Dalrymple sees as the high point of the 1857 Uprising. Utilizing Urdu records from the Mughal court, which have not figured in any previous histories, he paints an interior portrait of the 'old' city during what proved to be its final weeks of agony. As military mutiny spread from Meerut down the Ganges valley, thousands of sepoys arrived in Delhi to proclaim the Emperor restored and bring Company Raj to an end. Soon they were joined by Muslim jihadis, seeking a rather different millennium but one from which Christian firengis were no less excluded. Hesitant at first, Zafar eventually decided to accept the greatness being thrust upon him as leader of the revolt, but soon came to regret it. While regarding with apparent equanimity the mass slaughter of Christians, which followed the sepoys' arrival, he became increasingly restless with the general looting of the Delhi populace, which subsequently took place. He was also unnerved by the jihadis who, betimes, proposed turning on their fellow Hindu insurrectionists and who openly criticised the pluralism of his own court. Meanwhile, on the ridge overlooking the city, a tiny British military force – as much besieged as besieging – served as a reminder that the Empire of Queen Victoria, while temporarily displaced, was far from destroyed.

Dalrymple superbly recounts the day-to-day struggle for the ridge, where all the military advantages lay with the forces (notionally) loyal to Zafar. However, disorganization and internal dissension prevented them from being taken and a military stalemate developed. Nonetheless, the siege progressively tightened, thanks mainly to the Gujjar dacoits who grabbed the opportunity to rob and loot both sides and to cut off the city and the ridge from outside supplies. An image which recurs in Dalrymple's narrative is of two embattled 'civilizations' facing each other in arms, but surrounded by an untamed and predatory wildness which eventually has the final say. And the final say was brutal indeed, and brutal beyond the imagination of any Gujjar dacoit. Eventually, reinforcements arrived to relieve the 'British' position (albeit that they consisted mainly of Sikh and Pathan regiments) and a terrible revenge followed, not only on the 'rebels' but on the city of Delhi itself. Captain Hodson's notorious execution of three naked Mughal princes was but one tiny part of it. The streets ran far bloodier than when Delhi's Christian population had been slaughtered and little care was taken to distinguish between 'mutineer' and 'citizen'. For a moment it seemed as if the entire city might be destroyed and centuries of Indian imperial tradition wiped out at a stroke. Fortunately, wiser counsels prevailed and something of the past was left. But it did not include Zafar who, after a farcical trial in which he was accused of treason against his own subject (the East India Company), only escaped the noose to be bundled into exile in Burma and to die as the last of his Timurid line. Meanwhile, the British search for vengeance against all and any who had dared to challenge them spread ever farther across northern India, reaping a murderous harvest.

Dalrymple tells a dramatic story with full attention to the drama. Particularly impressive is his command of detail and the wide array of characters whom he introduces, whetting our appetite for more knowledge. There is the wily Zinat Mahal; the brilliant but frustrated rebel commander, General Bakht Khan; the English

convert to Islam, 'Sergeant Gordon', who fought with the 'mutineers'. Dalrymple's access to the Mughal court's Urdu records enables him to paint a far more sympathetic and nuanced picture of the 'rebel' position, and life inside the besieged citadel, than we have possessed before. It rescues 1857 from the hands of imperial apologists and nationalist hagiographers alike and represents a major contribution to our historical understanding.

But to what kind of 'history' does it contribute? The question is provoked by remarks which Dalrymple makes in the book, and even more in publicity surrounding its publication, seeking to distinguish the 'popular' history – which he sees himself writing – from the 'academic' history – which, presumably, 'licensed' professionals write and which he sees as being principally for themselves. However, the distinction is not easy to grasp. Dalrymple certainly speaks to fellow historians to the point of providing elaborate references to archival sources, which his 'popular' audience would struggle to gain permission to consult, even if they had an interest in doing so. But, equally, the writings of at least a few academic historians have enjoyed very large sales (not to mention sumptuous pre-publication advances) and have clearly caught a popular imagination. The issues may turn, in part, on what makes history 'popular'; and, in part, on what wider purposes historical inquiry might be thought to fulfil.

So far as popular history is concerned, if Dalrymple's *The Last Mughal* is an example of it, a number of lessons can be drawn. It should deal with events which have a place in folk memory, casting long shadows, which can be widely recognized but which time and/or latter day propaganda have rendered indistinct. Also, it requires a strong narrative framework, sharply drawn and provocative characters and a fluent literary style. *The Last Mughal* possesses all of these in abundance and is nothing if not a 'jolly good read'. However, as Simon Schama (both an academic and a popular historian) has noted, being a 'jolly good read' takes a work of history very close to the frontiers of literature, raising questions

about the relationships between history, biography and fiction. All three genres involve imaginative reconstruction and seek to reveal their own forms of truth. How far do those forms differ: should *The Last Mughal* be seen as qualitatively different from, say, J.G. Farrell's *The Siege of Krishnapur*? Perhaps, at this level, the distinction does not really matter. The purpose of both is to make the familiar seem unfamiliar, to evoke a distant age for people living in the present, to provoke a re-appraisal of the reader's own values and sense of place. Both works accomplish this very successfully and, it is to be hoped, kindle interests in the past, which otherwise would have lain dormant.

But is this the only purpose for which history can be written? Those of us who study and teach history for a living would like to think that there are others – albeit that they involve the term 'analysis', which some historians (not least, Simon Schama) have attempted to bring into disrepute. However, it is a long time since I imagined that the contents of the lectures which I give in Oxford would stick long in the minds of the unfortunate students who have to attend them, beyond their final examinations and rapid passage through the portals of an investment bank. Rather, my hope is that the methods by which the contents were put together and the conclusions reached would have a more lasting impact: the criticism of evidence; the comparison of authorial 'positions'; the unravelling of arguments. The academic study of history is as much about acquiring skills and disciplining the mind as it is about learning facts and dates. But, as with any refined set of skills, it cannot be learned quickly and requires an accumulation of knowledge to be meaningful. It does not provide the kind of instant gratification that can be gained from a novel, but it may not be less valuable for that.

Equally, a second function of 'analysis' is to set significant events in the wider contexts which provide them with their significance – often asking if they deserve to be seen as so significant; or, indeed, to signify anything very much at all. Again, this task requires a broad knowledge of contexts, which may not be

available beyond limited circles of 'experts'. It would be hard, for example, to seek to evaluate the causes of the 1857 Uprising for an audience, which knew little of the circumstances of Indian society in the first half of the nineteenth century. But should that be taken as a reason for not attempting it for an audience, which possesses the necessary 'expertise'? 'Popular' history and 'academic' history fulfil different purposes – and it is only, perhaps, a current fashion to deride the long-term and often painful acquisition of 'expertise', which seems to bring them into collision.

However, and that being said, it may still be important to note that they are different and that, splendid as it is in its own terms, Dalrymple's *The Last Mughal* leaves many questions open, which would need to be taken up in the classroom. For example, he disparages what he sees as revisionist 'socio-economic' interpretations of the Uprising, seeking instead to emphasize the primary role of religious confrontation. Evangelical Christianity threatened Hindu beliefs and provoked its own nemesis in Islamic *jihād*. This restores an older understanding, which the British at the time certainly possessed themselves. Many regarded themselves as 'victims' of Islamic fundamentalism and distanced themselves from the Muslim community, whose aristocratic elements at least they had previously supported. Yet few historians have ever sought to deny the significance of religion in the events surrounding Delhi. Rather, the principal field in which socio-economic explanations have been advanced concerns the peasant rebellion, which attended the mutiny in many rural areas and with which Dalrymple does not deal. Also, the military 'mutiny', while sparked by religious controversy over the origins of the grease used in the operation of the new Lee-Enfield rifle, may have had wider causes.

As Dalrymple hints, relations inside the military – especially the Bengal Army – had a long history of tension, reflective of a curious contradiction in British military policy. On the one hand, from at least the 1810s, attempts were made not only to 'racialize' authority inside the army, with the officer corps becoming ever

more exclusively European, but also to 'modernize' it: to turn the army into a fighting force geared to utilizing the latest military technologies (especially of disciplined infantry warfare) and to fighting on command against anybody, anywhere, any time. Such 'modern' fighting forces had developed first in Europe, among armies recruited from 'the scum of the earth', in the Duke of Wellington's famous phrase: men from the lowest classes who could be bullied, flogged and drilled into subordinating their humanity to the rhythms of the gun.

But, on the other hand, in India (or at least Bengal) British class prejudices created a preference for recruiting sepoys from high-caste warrior communities with traditions of independence and martial dignity, who did not take easily to being treated like 'scum'. Resistance to conventional British military discipline was commonplace, creating for a time the extraordinary regulation – for a colony – whereby European enlisted men could be flogged, but not the Indian sepoys. But the flogging of 'inferiors' was too deeply engrained in the British upper-class psyche to be abandoned for long and soon made its return along with innumerable other indignities associated with the exercise of colonial authority. The issues of pig and beef fat, and threats of forcible conversion to Christianity, may have been the sparks to light the fuse, but the powder-keg of resentment was already deeply and closely packed. It was British class and racial arrogance carried to the point of strategic imbecility, as much if not more than Evangelical Christianity, which lay at the root of the Mutiny, making it in retrospect an accident which was waiting to happen.

But it was also an accident from which the British learnt, and *which was not to happen again, at least until the very different circumstances of the Indian National Army after 1942. Nor did those elements of armed civil rebellion and of Islamic jihad, which also figured in the Uprising, recur strongly over the next three-quarters of a century.* If Dalrymple's book lacks anything it is a longitudinal conclusion assessing the broader implications of 1857

for the subsequent development of colonial rule and of Indian society. However, in part this may be because the principal meaning he takes from the Uprising appears to terminate with the fall of Delhi itself. It is the destruction of the multicultural, multiracial world of the late Mughal court before the insistent forces of religious fundamentalism, Christian and Islamist alike, which draws his greatest ire. Indeed, here he even introduces aspects of class analysis, somewhat at odds with his aversion to 'socio-economic' explanations elsewhere. He firmly anchors the disruptive intrusion of jihadist elements in the patronage of Punjabi merchants, who were long moral enemies of the 'loose-living' Mughal court; and who stand as counterparts to the sober workshop- and warehouse-owners, who fostered Evangelical Christianity's intolerance inside the British Empire. In a sense, *The Last Mughal* is a requiem for the aristocratic, pluralist, highly-cultured society of the Nawabi and early Company eras, brought down by the triumph of 'bourgeois' civilization and the pious ethics of the merchant, both Christian and Muslim alike.

But do Nawabi culture and the supposed cosmopolitanism of the early Company state deserve quite the romantic construction, which Dalrymple puts upon them? The Mughal state reflected a predatory form of warrior society, whose undeniably great artistic and cultural achievements rested on an apparatus geared to the extraction of loot. In this context, it may be no surprise that the early Company state, whose own purposes in India were little short of brigandage, should have fitted so easily into its style. But the debilities of that ruling style were clearly on show in Delhi in 1857 when authority progressively disintegrated and the populace was left at the mercy of the strongest sword-arm available. In the desperate context of our own times and the continuing clash of religious fundamentalisms, it is no doubt tempting to look nostalgically towards multicultural and multiracial pasts. But there are risks, then, that we overlook their several other vices.

And was the early Company era quite so multicultural and

multiracial? The intolerance associated with Christian monotheism did not begin in 1857 nor even the 1830s. Charles Grant, who demanded virtually the forced conversion of India, began his career in the Nabob Age; and Cornwallis had excluded Eurasians from service in the Company before the nineteenth century even dawned. While, in remote stations such as Delhi, the likes of Sir David Ochterlowny may have been able to preserve a Mughlai lifestyle into the second quarter of the new century, Calcutta was becoming a 'white man's' city at least two generations before that. Moreover, if issues of gender are considered, distinctions between multiracialism and multiculturalism may need to be drawn more carefully. English Nabobs may have produced children with Indian women and sent them home to Britain to be brought up as recognized kin. But this upbringing was definitively as Protestant Christians. And what of the mothers who had to give them up and who remained remarkably anonymous in most accounts of the era? What did an Ochterlowny wife think of being one of thirteen? The sacking of Delhi was violent, bloody and an outrage to the principles of justice, which the British preached but rarely practised. However, not everything that passed with the old city may have been equally worthy of regret.

## Contesting 1857: Indian Historians and the Debate over the Uprising

■ RONOJOY SEN ■

But, I said, and I think I have shown, that the condition of things was this – that the people of India were only waiting for an occasion and a pretext. That occasion was soon furnished, and that pretext was soon devised.

– Benjamin Disraeli

Were the events of 1857 a mutiny or a war of independence? That is one of the questions that undergraduate history students of Calcutta University still have to contend with. This question remains one of the enduring puzzles of Indian history, one that continues to get historians into a tizzy. Indeed how to label 1857 – mutiny, war of independence, revolt, or feudal uprising – has been a basic, but thorny issue confronting anyone wishing to embark on a study of events of that momentous year. The question of labelling 1857 is often seen as a sterile debate among Indian historians set against the backdrop of situating the events of 1857 in the context of Indian nationalism and the nation-state. But in reality, getting a fix on 1857 began soon after the first fires of revolt broke out across northern India.

A little over two months after the sepoy mutinied in Meerut, Benjamin Disraeli spoke at length on the events of 1857. Addressing

the House of Commons for three hours on 27 July 1857, Disraeli asked, 'Is it a military mutiny, or is it a national revolt? Is the conduct of the troops the consequences of a sudden impulse, or is it the result of an organized conspiracy?'<sup>1</sup> The same year none other than Karl Marx wrote a series of articles on the Indian situation for the *New York Daily Tribune*. His analysis of 1857 was unequivocal: 'By and by there will ooze out other facts able to convince even John Bull himself that what he considers a military mutiny is in truth a national revolt.'<sup>2</sup>

The search for determining the causality and the precise nature of 1857 would soon become a full-blown industry. Every historian of 1857 could not but help wading into this debate. For the early English chroniclers, the events of 1857 represented a military mutiny – 'a struggle between the Government and its Soldiers, not between the Government and the People.' J.W. Kaye would set the trend with his epic *History of the Sepoy War*, which others would follow. Contemporary Indian accounts tended to follow this line of thinking. Syed Ahmed Khan, who published a pamphlet on the uprising in 1858, felt that over time 'a vast store of explosive material has been collected' to which a 'match was applied by the Mutinous army.'<sup>3</sup> But Khan was clear that the events of 1857 were not the result of a planned conspiracy: 'The manner in which the rebellion spread, first here, then there, now breaking out in this place and now in that, is alone good proof that there existed no widespread conspiracy.'<sup>4</sup> He also reasoned that the uprising was not caused by 'national hatred' since if that were the case, a rebellion would have occurred when the power of the British was weaker.

The Bengali *bhadralok*, too, had little sympathy for the rebels of 1857. There was even a pamphlet published by Sambhu Chandra Mookerjee in 1859 titled, *The Mutinies and the People or Statements of Native Fidelity Exhibited During the Outbreak of 1857-58*.<sup>5</sup> There were several meetings held and resolutions adopted in Calcutta during that period to condemn the rebels. Journalist Kishori Chand

Mitra's pamphlet was fairly typical of the *bhadralok's* mindset. 'The insurrection is essentially a military insurrection. It is the revolt of a lac of sepoys ... It has nothing of the popular element in it. The proportion of those who have joined the rebels sinks into nothingness when compared with those whose sympathies are enlisted with the Government. While the former may be counted by thousands, the latter may be counted by millions,' he wrote.<sup>6</sup> However, there was also the realization that the events of 1857 might represent something larger than a mutiny of sepoys. The *Hindu Patriot* of 21 May 1857 commented: 'It is no longer a mutiny, but a rebellion. Perhaps, it will be said that all mutinies, when they attain a certain measure of success rise to the dignity of a rebellion. But the present mutinies of the Bengal Army have one peculiar feature – they have from the beginning drawn the sympathy of the country.'<sup>7</sup> However, later Indian historians – who are the primary focus of this essay – would become fixated on the presence of nationalism or the lack of it in 1857. Their main concern was how to fit 1857 into a narrative of Indian nationalism. This chain of thinking was triggered to a large extent by V.D. Savarkar's *The Indian War of Independence*, the first full-length book on 1857 by an Indian. This construction of 1857, written without any mention of sources or footnotes, no doubt contained much that was unsubstantiated and was liberally peppered with Savarkar's flights of fancy. But it helped in creating an inspirational narrative around 1857, which future professional Indian historians had to perforce contend with.

#### THE BINARY

The title of Savarkar's book, published in London in 1909 (it was originally published in Marathi in 1908) under the anonymous authorship of 'An Indian Nationalist', is itself a giveaway of Savarkar's take on 1857. G.M. Joshi in his introduction to the 1947 edition of the book writes that Savarkar had explained in an article, that 'his object in writing this history was, subject to historical accuracy, to inspire his people with burning desire to rise again and

wage a second and a successful war to liberate their motherland.<sup>8</sup> Though Savarkar's work was dismissed by some professional historians, he saw himself as correcting the prejudices of earlier British chroniclers: 'The history of the tremendous Revolution that was enacted in India in the year 1857 has never been written in this scientific spirit by any author, Indian or foreign.'<sup>9</sup> In his introduction, Savarkar writes that when he took the 'searching attitude of an historian' to study the events of 1857, he found to his 'great surprise the brilliance of a War of Independence.'<sup>10</sup> For Savarkar, the most commonly cited cause of the sepoy revolt – cartridges greased with the fat of cow and pigs – was just incidental. He asks: 'What then, were the real causes of this Revolution?'<sup>11</sup> The answer, according to Savarkar, was love of one's religion (*swadharma*) and love of one's country (*swaraj*). Savarkar's work was thus an exercise to show that events of 1857 were not something caused by a 'flimsy and momentary grievance' but a planned uprising with an identifiable cast of heroes.

Central to Savarkar's book was the idea that the uprising was a planned event – the conspiracy that Disraeli talked about and later expanded by one of the early historians of 1857, G.B. Malleson – where the principal figures were Nana Sahib, Azimullah Khan, Tatia Tope, Rani of Jhansi, Kunwar Singh, and Bahadur Shah Zafar. In contrast to Savarkar's later book on *Hindutva*, in his history of 1857 he is at pains to present the idea of a movement where Hindus and Muslims are equal participants. Nana Sahib, according to Savarkar, felt that the meaning of Hindustan was a 'united nation of the adherents of Islam as well as Hinduism.'<sup>12</sup> He writes, 'In short, the broad features of the policy of Nana Sahib and Azimullah were that the Hindus and the Mahomedans should unite and fight shoulder to shoulder for the independence of their country and that when freedom was gained, the United States of India should be formed under the Indian rulers and princes.'<sup>13</sup> Savarkar devotes an entire chapter to the 'secret organization' of the uprising where he describes how sepoys would call meetings in the dead of night and

pass resolutions. He also writes of agents of Nana Sahib travelling from one princely state to another to sow the seeds of revolt. But according to him, the secret messengers of revolution were the *chapattis* that were being widely circulated across north India in 1857 and were the subject of much speculation by the English. Disraeli in his address to Parliament spoke of the circulation of 'mysterious cakes' and lotus flowers several months before the outbreak as 'outward and visible signs of confederacy'.<sup>14</sup> Savarkar concurred with this view and goes on to ascribe a mystical significance to the circulating *chapattis*: 'Whenever the work of Revolution was started, these agents – *chapattis* – have as a rule done the work of carrying the errand far and wide in the land ... These angels with unseen wings were flying through every secret corner of the country, setting the mind of the whole country on fire by the very vagueness of the message. Whence they came from and whither they went, no one could say. To those alone who were expecting them these strange symbols carried the exact message and spoke with limited significance; as for those whom they took unawares, illimitable was the conversation they carried on!'<sup>15</sup>

A little less than fifty years after Savarkar wrote his book, his analysis would be vigorously contested. Conflicting interpretations of 1857 occupied centrestage in the centenary year of the event. There was a flood of books on the uprising in 1957 and there was a whiff of controversy attached to at least one – stalwart historian R.C. Majumdar's *The Sepoy Mutiny and Revolt of 1857*. Majumdar's book, which was meant to be published by the Indian government, ran into trouble after he had a falling out with the secretary of the board of editors. According to Majumdar, the secretary, a Congressman, wanted the proposed work to establish that 'in 1857 an organized attempt was made by the natural leaders of India to combine themselves into a single command with the sole object of driving out the British power from India that a single, unified politically free and sovereign state may be established.'<sup>16</sup> However, Majumdar's views differed radically from the official line and he

pulled out his book deciding to bring it on his own. In the preface to his book, Majumdar recounts how the secretary would regularly announce important 'discoveries' about 1857 to the Indian press. Among these were the discovery of a diary of Azimullah and a letter written by the Rani of Jhansi to a *panda* (priest) in the temple of Jagannath. Unsurprisingly Majumdar dismisses these as forgeries.

Majumdar's book was in many ways a direct rebuttal of Savarkar. He was categorical that 'nothing in the conduct or behaviour of the sepoys which would justify us in the belief, or even assumption, that they were inspired by love of their country and fought against the British with the definite idea of freeing their motherland.'<sup>17</sup> He is unwilling to regard 1857 as 'either national in character or a war of independence'. Regarding the heroes of 1857 so glowingly described by Savarkar, Majumdar says they 'were smarting under grievous injury done to them by the British'<sup>18</sup> but there is no evidence to suggest that they were inspired by patriotism. The contrast between Savarkar and Majumdar is most apparent in their depiction of the key figures of 1857. Savarkar constructs an elaborate mythology around these 'patriots'. According to Joshi, 'This history has literally resurrected from continuing to be entombed the spirits of the bravest of the leaders, warriors and martyrs who fell fighting in 1857, and taught us to pay our admiring and loyal tribute to Nana Sahib, Bala Rao, Kumar Singh, Mangal Pande, Ahmad Shah, the Queen of Jhansi, Senapati Tatia Tope and hosts (sic) of our warriors.'<sup>19</sup>

In Savarkar's narrative, Nana Sahib, Tatia Tope and the Rani of Jhansi were playmates in their childhood. He, thus, writes that when they were young 'Nana Sahib and Tatia Tope had read the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* together; they had read together the accounts of the war-like deeds of the Marathas, and their young hearts had throbbed together at the noble inspiration which the stories of Hindi heroism awoke.'<sup>20</sup> Compare this to Majumdar who presents evidence to argue that Nana had 'nothing to do with the mutiny of the sepoys and was forced to join them much against his

will.<sup>21</sup> Savarkar is at his eloquent best when he describes the feats of Lakshmibai of Jhansi: 'One such life vindicates the whole existence of a nation! She was the concentrated essence of all virtues ... It is very rarely that that a nation is so fortunate as to be able to claim such an angelic person, as a daughter and a queen.'<sup>22</sup> Majumdar, too, regards the Rani as a 'brave and high-souled' woman, but argues 'nothing can be more erroneous than to associate her name with a struggle for independence, either of Jhansi or of India.'<sup>23</sup> Indeed his objective in some ways is to tear away the rose-tinted spectacles through which the 1857 heroes had been traditionally viewed: 'I have tried to draw a faithful and realistic portrait of Bahadur Shah, Nana Sahib, Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi, Kunwar Singh and the sepoy, among others, whose images in popular minds are the products of romantic and patriotic sentiments rather than of an objective study of historical facts.'<sup>24</sup>

In Savarkar's hands even the infirm Bahadur Shah Zafar becomes a key conspirator in 1857. In most accounts though the Mughal King is regarded as an unwilling participant in the uprising. Shortly after the sepoy from Meerut arrived in Delhi, the 82-year-old emperor wrote to his son Mirza Moghul: 'My son, let it be known that when the sepoy first came to me, I told them plainly that I possessed neither soldiers nor money to help them but that I would not hold my life dear if it were of any use to them ... On account of old age and feebleness I cannot bear all the loads on my shoulders. It is no easy matter to rule a people and at the same time to keep an army under control.'<sup>25</sup> But according to Savarkar, it was in the 'Dewan-i-Khas of Delhi, more than in any other Durbar, that the seeds of Revolution began to take root ... The Emperor, though reduced to such an extremity, and Zinat Mahal, the beloved, clever, and determined Begum of the Emperor, had already decided that this last opportunity of regaining lost glory should not be allowed to go by, and if dying was the only recourse, then they should die the death which would only befit an Emperor and an Empress.'<sup>26</sup> A striking aspect of Savarkar's account – considering that he was one

of the leading ideologues of Hindu nationalism – is his emphasis on Hindu-Muslim amity during 1857. In this he was ironically one with standard Congress interpretations of 1857. Abul Kalam Azad, for instance, writes, 'India faced the trial of 1857 as a united community.'<sup>27</sup> But Majumdar debunks the theory of Hindus and Muslims jointly fighting the British, 'saying it lacked 'that real communal amity which characterizes a national effort.'<sup>28</sup> In addition, the fact that most native rulers as well as the English-educated classes kept aloof from the events of 1857, according to Majumdar, detracted from the claims that it represented a national movement. His famous last words on 1857 were: 'The miseries and bloodshed of 1857-58 were not the birth-pang of a freedom movement in India, but the dying groans of an obsolete aristocracy and centrifugal feudalism of the medieval age.'<sup>29</sup>

#### CENTENARY PUBLICATIONS AND AFTER

If Savarkar and Majumdar represented two ends of the spectrum on interpretations of 1857, there were several other historians who offered their own theories in the centenary year. Next to Majumdar's book, perhaps the most important publication of that year was S.N. Sen's *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*. It was a government-sponsored book but Sen was at pains to show that, unlike Majumdar, there was no pressure on him to write an 'authorized' version: 'I was particularly encouraged to undertake the task by the liberal attitude of the Government of India. They recognized that a re-examination of the history of 1857 can be justified only if it is purely objective and scrupulously impartial and the investigator be conceded complete liberty to state his conclusions fully and freely without any fear of official interference.'<sup>30</sup> This theme was stressed by then minister of education Abul Kalam Azad in his foreword. He wrote that hundred years after the uprising 'the events of 1857 can be studied dispassionately and objectively.'<sup>31</sup> Unlike Savarkar, Azad believed that the uprising was not due to a conspiracy of a few individuals. Like Jawaharlal Nehru – who wrote in *Discovery of India*

that in 1857 nationalism of a 'modern type'<sup>32</sup> was missing – Azad felt that the events of 1857 could not be described as a nationalist upsurge since 'patriotism had to be reinforced by religious passion'.<sup>33</sup> But Sen actually took a slightly different view and concluded: 'What began as a fight for religion ended as a war of independence for there is not the slightest doubt that the rebels wanted to get rid of the alien government and restore the old order of which the King of Delhi was the rightful representative.'<sup>34</sup> He felt that the uprising was 'inevitable' since no dependent nation can 'reconcile itself to foreign domination'.<sup>35</sup>

Sen's conclusion was echoed by S.B. Chaudhuri who felt that the uprising represented 'at least in a vague and inchoate form, the elements of a national resistance movement against an alien imperial rule.'<sup>36</sup> Chaudhuri's primary purpose was to show that the uprising involved civilians as much as sepoys. He writes, 'The rapidity with which the revolt developed, the preparedness of the villages to accept rebel authority, and the extensive plundering of many places suggest a readiness for revolt, the rebellion of a united people against the state.'<sup>37</sup> This approach was lauded by then president of India, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, who wrote in his foreword to the book that Chaudhuri's conclusion that the 'movement expressed a profound desire for freedom on the part of the people of India and that it was not merely a feudal movement but had within it the germs of progress, seems to be fully sustainable.'<sup>38</sup> The other book to come out on the occasion of the centenary was a collection of essays edited by P.C. Joshi. In his essay, '1857 in Our History', Joshi uses Marx's analysis of British imperialism to argue for a nationalist interpretation of the uprising: 'The central aim of the 1857-58 insurrection was to destroy the British State in India and establish an Indian State in its place ... If this does not make this uprising a national revolt, what else will?'<sup>39</sup> There were, of course, interpretations that tallied with Majumdar's. Haraprasad Chattopadhyay, for instance, wrote: 'Neither the revolted sepoys nor the rebels from the civil society had the common and positive ideal

of realizing their political self-determination. The motives with which they were actuated to rise in revolt during the Mutiny were selfish in nature.<sup>40</sup> In words reminiscent of Majumdar, Chattopadhyay remarked that 1857 represented the 'attempt of the dispossessed Muslim ruling class to restore the Mughal Empire.'<sup>41</sup>

It was not unnatural that Indian historians continued to tussle with the question of what 1857 represented in the centenary year, coming as it did soon after independence. Subsequent studies have, however, tried to move beyond the binary of mutiny versus war of independence. Rudrangshu Mukherjee's work is a study of the uprising in Awadh where through his analysis he shows that 1857 was the result of a combination of several factors: 'Here was a military mutiny, sparked off by certain fears about caste and religion, merging itself with disaffection created by interventions in the traditional rural world of Awadh, using the loss of land, loss of a king and threats to religion as a rallying cry, seeking its identity in the traditions of a former despotism and finding its popular base among a rural confraternity held together by bonds of mutual interdependence.'<sup>42</sup> Mukherjee prefers to characterize the revolt in Awadh a 'popular rejection of an alien order'<sup>43</sup> where both Hindus and Muslims had equally to lose or gain.

A more recent analysis of 1857 by Rajat Kanta Ray in *The Felt Community: Commonality and Mentality before the Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, focuses on the role of religion and how it brought together Hindus and Muslims in a common cause against the British, but makes a plea for looking beyond the 'war of religion' construct: 'The pervasive religious fervour of the Mutiny, then, seems on the surface to preclude the people's awareness of themselves as a political nation. We must, however, look below the surface. Unless we do so, we shall not plumb that inarticulate unconscious in which a nation was in the making, nor shall we interpret correctly what lies behind the signs of religious symbolism.'<sup>44</sup> The war of religion, in Ray's interpretation, becomes one 'consisting of two communities striving to construct their

respective sacred realms by ousting the common enemy, and at the same time profoundly moved by a sense of the land as one indivisible whole.<sup>45</sup> He points to Bahadur Shah Zafar's celebrated proclamation in 1857 where the English are labelled the common enemies of both Hindus and Muslims, and are exhorted to unite in slaughtering the British: 'All you Hindoos are solemnly abjured, by your faith in the Ganges, Tulsi and Saligram; and all you Mussalinans, by your belief in the God and Kuran, as these English are the common enemy of both, that you unite in considering their slaughter extremely expedient, for by this alone will the lives and faith of both be saved. It is expedient, then, that you should coalesce and slay them.'<sup>46</sup> A similar appeal was made in a pamphlet, *Risala Fath-i-Islam*, that appeared in 1857 asking Hindus and Muslims to 'prepare themselves for the slaughter of the English in order to protect their din and dharma.'<sup>47</sup> Ray's final analysis is: 'The emotions going into the making of Indian nationalism had a palpable presence in 1857, although still devoid of the conceptual form imparted by the modern political nation.'<sup>48</sup> Here we see once again the need to engage with the question of how 1857 fits into the larger story of Indian nationalism.

This foregrounding of religion by Ray – where it becomes a rallying cry for both Muslims and Hindus – is in contrast to much of the earlier writings on 1857. This began with Syed Ahmed Khan, who was concerned with exonerating his fellow Muslims of the charge of igniting the fires of rebellion. In his pamphlet, he argues against the idea of a religious crusade as he cautions, 'It must be remembered that the men who in these times raised so loud the cry of "Jehad" were vagabonds and ill-conditioned men ... They were men floating without profession or occupation on the surface of society. Can such fellows as these be called leaders of a religious war? It was very little that they thought about religion.'<sup>49</sup> In later interpretations, the religious element was viewed as something that undermined the nationalist credentials of 1857. Hence, Azad notes that 1857 did not qualify as nationalism in the modern sense since

'religious feelings of the soldiers had to be wounded before they were roused against their foreign masters.'<sup>50</sup> The Marxists, too, had their problems with the presence of religion in 1857. Joshi gets around it by arguing that a 'true historical outlook demands that we do not forget the historical stage which Indian society had reached on the eve of 1857, the ideological values which would be normal to this society and the ideological forms in which the Indian people could formulate their aspirations.'<sup>51</sup> He makes a case for an instrumental reading of religion by pointing out that the rebels of 1857 did not let 'religion stupefy them,' but instead used it to get 'the strength to fight the Firinghis'.<sup>52</sup> K.M. Ashraf, however, points out that the Wahabis and other Muslim revivalists provided the political and organizational base for the uprising.<sup>53</sup> The latest book by popular historian William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal*, on Bahadur Shah Zafar focuses on the jihadi fervour of the sepoys that Ashraf writes about. Dalrymple characterizes 1857 as a clash of civilizations, drawing a direct link between the mutineers and contemporary jihadis.<sup>54</sup>

### CONCLUSION

The debate over the nature of 1857 continues to rage mainly because of its unique position in Indian history – it was not only the first widespread resistance to British rule but it also brought about fundamental changes in relations between the rulers and the ruled. Ray points out, 'The Mutiny constitutes the great disjuncture in the development of the Indian nation: it is not a part of the national movement, nor is it the dying throes of the old order.'<sup>55</sup> This has meant that Indian historians have willy-nilly been drawn like moths to the fire to the question of how to place 1857 in the story of Indian nationalism. In this endeavour Savarkar's work has been a looming presence, and often – as in the case of Majumdar – the invisible adversary. It was, of course, the first book on 1857 written from the point of view of the Indian actors. As Chaudhuri says, '*The Indian War of Independence* proved to be a

turning point in the historiography as a whole.<sup>56</sup> In fact, within two decades of Savarkar's book another work titled *Second War of Independence*, written by revolutionary Bhupendra Nath Dutt, made a similar argument. Just as the Bengali writers, following Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay, in the late nineteenth century believed that the struggles for an independent historiography as well as independent nationhood were both equally important,<sup>57</sup> Savarkar was less concerned about the veracity of his history than its intended impact: 'The nation that has no consciousness of its past has no future. Equally true is that a nation must develop its capacity not only of claiming a past but also of knowing how to use it for the furtherance of its future.'<sup>58</sup> The power of Savarkar's narrative lies in the construction of an elaborate mythology around the events and martyrs of 1857 – as Majumdar puts it 'the products of romantic and patriotic sentiments, rather than of an objective study of historical facts.' Ironically, most of the later Indian historians, schooled in conventional notions of objectivity, would differ from Majumdar. The majority, as we saw above, accepted that 1857 contained elements of an inchoate nationalism as well as formed the basis of Hindu-Muslim unity.

The durability of Savarkar's mythologizing is apparent from the popularity of the 'heroes' of 1857 such as Rani of Jhansi or Tatia Tope in the public realm. Though Majumdar tried his best to show that 'all the leading figures in this great outbreak were alienated from the British for private reasons,'<sup>59</sup> it is precisely these figures that have remained inscribed in popular memory. The futility of combating the popular perceptions of 1857 with cold objectivity was recognized even by Majumdar, who admits, 'The memory of the Revolt of 1857, distorted but hallowed with sanctity, perhaps did more damage to the cause of the British rule in India than the Revolt itself.'<sup>60</sup> Hence, well after Nana Sahib and his brother escaped to Nepal, there were regular sightings of him in different parts of India. As late as 1877 there were rumours that Nana was about to invade India with a Russian Army.<sup>61</sup> The heroes of 1857,

particularly the Rani of Jhansi, continue to live on in folk songs. A popular folk song in central India begins with lines: 'How valiantly like a man fought she, the Rani of Jhansi.' The refrain of this song, '*Khoob lari mardani, Jhansiwali Rani,*' was picked up by a modern Hindi poet.<sup>62</sup> Such was the legacy of Lakshmibai that Subhas Chandra Bose named the all-female brigade of the Indian National Army (INA), the Rani of Jhansi Regiment. Soon after Independence, Sohrab Modi made the big budget film *Jhansi ki Rani* (1953). The Rani figures prominently in the landscape of independent India – statues showing her in battle gear astride a horse are a common sight in many north Indian towns. In Bhojpur, folk songs and lullabies pay tribute to another hero, Kunwar Singh: 'It was a night in the month of Bhado/ And dark clouds covered the sky/ Babu Kunwar Singh went to war/ at the dead of night/ The Firinghis trembled with fear ...'<sup>63</sup>

Closer to our times, Bollywood films and Amar Chitra Katha comics celebrate Mangal Pandey, a sepoy of the 34<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry at Barrackpore who was hanged on 8 April 1857 for an act of insubordination committed a few days earlier. Though he himself is said to have admitted during his trial that he was under the influence of *bhang*, in Savarkar's eyes Pandey was the first 'martyr of the revolutionary war'. In the Amar Chitra Katha title on Pandey, he is described as having struck the 'first blow' of the 'great mutiny'.<sup>64</sup> Ketan Mehta's *The Rising* (2005) is in many ways inspired by Savarkar's narrative. In the final moments of the film, the vexed question of how to label 1857 crops up once again. The off-screen narrator informs the viewer that the British prefer to call 1857 a mutiny while Indians think of it as a war of independence. Pandey is described as the first *shahid* (martyr) of the Indian independence movement, who was a symbol of *azadi* (freedom) and an inspiration for future freedom fighters. At around the same time as the release of Mehta's film, Rudrangshu Mukherjee's monograph on Mangal Pandey was published where he debunks the notion that Pandey had any notion of patriotism or the incipient Indian

nation.<sup>65</sup> It is apparent that the question asked by Disraeli 150 years ago continues to cast its long shadow.

#### NOTES:

- 1 Benjamin Disraeli, 'Military Mutiny or National Revolt?' in Ainslee Embree (ed.), *India in 1857: The Revolt Against Foreign Rule*, (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1987), p.10. Disraeli was the leading spokesman for the Opposition in the House of Commons and used the troubles in India to attack the Viscount Palmerston government.
- 2 Karl Marx, 'The Failure of "Divide and Conquer",' in Ainslee Embree (ed.), *India in 1857: The Revolt Against Foreign Rule*, (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1987), p. 35.
- 3 Syed Ahmed Khan, *The Causes of the Indian Revolt*, (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 3. Khan, founder of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, published this pamphlet in 1858. He used to then work in the judicial branch of the East India Company and witnessed the events of 1857 first hand.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Sambhu Chandra Mookerjee, *The Mutinies and the People or Statements of Native Fidelity Exhibited During the Outbreak of 1857-58 by a Hindu*, (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1969). The London edition of the book was anonymously published in Calcutta in 1859 and reprinted in 1905.
- 6 R.K. Chakrabarty, 'Introduction', in Sambhu Chandra Mookerjee, *The Mutinies and the People or Statements of Native Fidelity Exhibited During the Outbreak of 1857-58 by a Hindu*, (Calcutta: Sanskrit Pustak Bhandar, 1969), p. xi.
- 7 Kalikinkar Dutta, *Reflections on the Mutiny*, (Calcutta: University of Calcutta, 1967), p. 10.
- 8 V.D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence*, (Bombay: Nandi Books, 1960), p. vii.
- 9 Ibid., p. 4.
- 10 Ibid., p. xix.
- 11 Ibid., p. 5.
- 12 Ibid., p. 30.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Benjamin Disraeli, 'Military Mutiny or National Revolt?', p. 21.
- 15 V.D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence*, p. 39.

- 16 R.C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1957), p. vi.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 223.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p. 225.
- 19 V.D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence*, p.xvi.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- 21 R.C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, p. xiv.
- 22 V.D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence*, p. 160.
- 23 R.C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, p. 241.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. xi.
- 25 Christopher Hibbert, *The Great Mutiny*, (New Delhi: Penguin, 1980), p. 273.
- 26 V.D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence*, p.31.
- 27 S.N. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, (Calcutta: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1957), p.xviii.
- 28 R.C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, p.227.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p. 241.
- 30 S.N. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, p.xxiii.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p. vii.
- 32 Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 268.
- 33 S.N. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, p.xiv.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 411.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. 417.
- 36 S.B. Chaudhuri, *Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies, (1857-1859)* (Calcutta: The World Press Pvt Ltd., 1957), p.298.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 277.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. xii.
- 39 P.C. Joshi, '1857 in Our History,' in P.C. Joshi (ed.), *Rebellion 1857: A Symposium*, (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1957), p.139.
- 40 Haraprasad Chattopadhyay, *The Sepoy Mutiny, 1857: A Social Study and Analysis*, (Calcutta: Bookland Pvt. Ltd., 1957), p.199.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 201.
- 42 Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Awadh in Revolt 1857-1858: A Study in Popular Resistance*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1984), p.169.
- 43 *Ibid.*, p. 170.
- 44 Rajat Kanta Ray, *The Felt Community: Commonality and Mentality before the Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 368-69.

- 45 Ibid., p. 375.
- 46 Ibid., p. 374.
- 47 Ibid., p. 370.
- 48 Ibid., p. 395.
- 49 Syed Ahmed Khan, *The Causes of the Indian Revolt*, p.8.
- 50 S.N. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, p.xiv.
- 51 P.C. Joshi, '1857 in Our History,' p. 151.
- 52 Ibid., p. 157.
- 53 K.M. Ashraf, 'Muslim Revivalists And The Revolt of 1857,' in P.C. Joshi (ed.), *Rebellion 1857: A Symposium*, (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1957).
- 54 William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: Fall of a Dynasty*, (New Delhi: Penguin, 2006). See also William Dalrymple, 'The Last Mughal and a Clash of Civilisations,' *New Statesman*, 16 October 2006.
- 55 Rajat Kanta Ray, *The Felt Community: Commonality and Mentality before the Emergence of Indian Nationalism*, p.358.
- 56 S.B. Chaudhuri, *English Historical Studies on the Indian Mutiny*, (Calcutta: The World Press Pvt Ltd., 1979), p. 171.
- 57 Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 109.
- 58 V.D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence*, p. xx.
- 59 R.C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, p. 225.
- 60 Ibid., p. 278.
- 61 Pratul Chandra Gupta, *Nana Sahib and the Rising at Cawnpore*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 200.
- 62 P.C. Joshi, 'Folk Songs on 1857,' in P.C. Joshi (ed.), *Rebellion 1857: A Symposium*, (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1957), p. 277.
- 63 Ibid., p. 281.
- 64 Mangal Pande, (Mumbai: India Book House, 2006), p. 31. On March 29, 1857, Pandey first shot at one British officer with his musket and then injured another officer in a swordfight. He then turned the musket on himself and fired. He, however, survived and was tried for rebellion.
- 65 Rudrangshu Mukherjee, *Mangal Pandey: Brave Martyr or Accidental Hero?*, (New Delhi: Penguin, 2005).

## Violence in the Mutiny: Reading the World of *Punch*

• MANJITA MUKHARJI •

... the criminal may be said to stand in the same relation to the insurgent as does what is conspiratorial (or secretive) to what is public (or open), or what is individualistic (or small group) to what is communal (or mass) in character.<sup>1</sup>

In his study of the Kanpur massacres of the Mutiny<sup>2</sup> of 1857, Rudrangshu Mukherjee has shown how the violence deployed by the Indian sepoys against their masters was couched in two different codes of violence. One is that of 'peasant insurgency' marked by the communitarian spectacle of the killings of the British on the Satichawra Ghat. The other is that of the 'criminal' governing the secretive butchering of imprisoned British women and children at Bibighur carried out by hired professional executioners at the behest of the rebel leaders.<sup>3</sup> That violence and terror constituted the lynchpin of British colonial rule in India has now become a historical commonplace. Hence, when the mutiny broke out in India on 10 May 1857 in the cantonment town of Meerut, not only was the British confidence in the invincibility of its control over India shaken to the bone, but most significantly, it shattered the monopoly that the colonizers had hitherto enjoyed over the exercise of violence. The present essay attempts to take Mukherjee's analysis of the codification of rebel violence as 'just'/'criminal' to a study of how the colonizers too couched their use of violence on the mutinous forces in India in similar terms to

legitimize it to the metropolitan imagination. More specifically, the present discussion would look at how these twin strategies of codification and the legitimation of British violence were played out in the mutiny-cartoons of one of contemporary England's most popular satirical journals, *Punch*, or *The London Charivari* (1841).

The drama of violence, to begin with, necessarily needs four characters for its enactment: the victim, the culprit, the judge, and the spectator. The point that Ranajit Guha and subsequently Rudrangshu Mukherjee try to make is a fairly simple one. For violence to be coded as an 'insurgency' it needs to be perpetrated by a mass on a common adversary in full-view of the onlookers. For a violence to be coded as 'criminal,' it needs to be carried out by individuals on a personal enemy behind closed doors. It is, however, the role of the judge that marks out the interchangeable roles of the victim-culprit in the drama. In the former he is the product of the logic of divine retribution wherein the mass (here the culprit) avenges itself on the miscreant (here the victim), thereby coding the violence as societal and therefore 'just'. In the latter, the judge is the State since the logic of retribution brought by the culprit on the victim is strictly personal marked by the absence of communitarian participation and viewership, and is hence blind, illegitimate and 'unjust'. It is this codification of violence as 'just'/legitimate or 'unjust'/illegitimate that we seek to study in representations of British violence during the Mutiny of 1857 in a specific forum, i.e., in the Mutiny-cartoons of the satirical humorous journal, *Punch*.

In general, the function of any cartoon is social: it influences the reader/viewer for or against something, either by presenting it as a figure worthy of sympathy or by distorting it into a figure of ridicule. In this functionalist sense, satire and cartoon are inextricably interrelated. The cartoon in comic-journalism also has an added function: it is a commentary on the various socio-cultural-political issues of the day. For instance, in a time of national crisis, such as war, it can act either as a safety-valve wherein the

power of the enemy is blunted by use of the rhetoric of ridicule, or as a tool of fanning public opinion and sentiments into a display of aggression towards the enemy by turning him into a symbol of evil. But whatever the 'reality' behind a public figure or situation it purports to reveal, it is a reality that is in fact a distortion designed by the artist for the specific purpose of influencing its reader/viewer. And this mediation has the element of humour as its mode. Since every society lays down the boundary between the humorous and the libellous, or even rude, quite differently, the histories of the forum of publication and its context are both crucial to unravelling the meanings of a cartoon. It, thus, seems necessary to briefly delineate the specific historical context in which *Punch* emerged.

The advent of *Punch* in 1841, under the joint-initiative of the journalists, Henry Mayhew, Joseph Stirling Coyne, and Mark Lemon, marked a significant break in the history of British caricature. With the death of James Gillray in 1815, the sharply personal and political broadsheet caricatures of the Georgian era, typified by the Hogarths and the Gillrays, gave way to a form of caricature that increasingly became characterized by a deliberate turning away from everything that was political or controversial or, to put it simply, *serious*.<sup>4</sup> The turbulent years following the 1820s, marked by the post-war depression, the Peterloo massacre, and severe press censorship, marked in turn a shift in the public tastes and demands. With gloom all around, post-1820s British readership marked by an increasing middle- and lower-middle-class public, some of whom were newly literate, sought none of the black humour or satire of a Gillray caricature; the times were changing and with it came into being a demand for casual, amusing reads.

Hence, the acutely political, often slanderous, broadsheet-caricatures came to be replaced with the well-domesticated magazine-caricatures; the political invectives with the politely social; the Hogarths, Gillrays, Hones and (early) Cruikshanks with the softened social comedy of Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1821).

However, alongside the two-shilling magazine-caricatures, there erupted another kind of caricature marked by the burgeoning working-class agitation for reform around this time. Recently empowered by literacy facilitated by the establishment of the Mechanics' Institutes, the working class erupted from below to make their voices heard in and through the cheap comic cuts in the Sunday sporting Press, the 'penny dreadfuls' and crime-sheets. Their agitation for reform and suffrage rights articulated in the cheap woodcuts of the Sunday papers reached a fever-pitch around the passing of the Reform Bill of 1832 by the Parliament. It was around this time that the cheap woodcuts became radicalized in a penny satirical weekly, *Figaro in London* (1831-39), based primarily on this agitation.

It was in this political climate that *Punch* emerged in 1841 under the initiatives of Mark Lemon, Henry Mayhew and Joseph Coyne. Mayhew was the editor of *Figaro* (after Gilbert Abbott à Beckett, its first editor) and Lemon of *Punch in London*, which was avowedly one of the early imitators of the *Figaro*. The radical humour of the *Figaro* was the driving force of *Punch* throughout the 1840s, a force that received an added fillip when, in 1842, its poor sales – it reportedly sold 6,000 copies a week while a 10,000 sale was required for it to survive – occasioned the selling of the rights of the magazine to the firm of Bradbury and Evans which made money from publishing the novels of Dickens and Thackeray.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the 1840s, the 'Punch Brotherhood', as the *Punch* cartoonists came to be called, armed with the socialist concerns of Dickens and Thackeray, launched into a powerful indictment of the Government, of capitalism, of the Corn Law, Poor Law and the reform of the Parliament, to mention a few. The 1843 publication of Thomas Hood's poem 'The Song of the Shirt', supported by cartoons such as 'Capital and Labour' and 'Cheap Clothing' by John Leech, condemning capitalism and the concomitant growth of inequality in Britain in the 1840s are cases in point. However, a pressing need to ensure its sales and profits, together with the need

to cater to the conservative views of the British middle- and upper-middle-class that were the *Punch* readership, increasingly mellowed the radicalism of the magazine. Nevertheless, it would be far too simplistic to pass the magazine off as just another strictly conservative mouthpiece; Mr Punch was the carnivalesque fool whose wit and humour slipped all attempts at classification. To reiterate the purpose of this essay, our interest lies not in studying the 'reality' behind the comic representations of the Mutiny in *Punch*, but in studying these representations as a site on which a certain section of the British metropolitan imagination sought to legitimize British violence in India of 1857 by codifying it as 'just' violence.

The critical question in this drama of violence on the metropolitan stage was related to identifying the figure of the culprit. Who was to be tried on the altar of justice? Was it the sepoy standing as a synecdoche of the mutinous Indians, or was it the Jew personified by the factionalist Benjamin Disraeli, or was it all that was the Other of Britishness. This critical question was crucially inflected by contemporary Parliamentary debates on the Indian Mutiny.

Let us consider the one-page cartoon titled 'The Asiatic Mystery. As Prepared by Sepoy D'Israeli', one of the earliest Mutiny-cartoons dated 8 August 1857:

We see here Disraeli portrayed as an emaciated sepoy, clad in a loincloth, squatting in a thatched hut, with his back to the outside world, stirring a cauldron labelled 'For the House of Commons' with a bamboo-stirring rod. The posture is typical of the conspiratorial insular Asiatic, secretively cooking potions of disruption with the 'King of Oude's Sauce'. But what strikes us largely about the cartoon is the particular facial profile of Disraeli, the Sepoy. The dark skin and the prognathic features bring together associations of racial inferiority attributed to the Indians in keeping with the contemporary phrenological justification of British Imperial rule. But the additional hooked nose and the pun on the



*'The Asiatic Mystery: As Prepared by Sepoy D'Israeli'*<sup>6</sup> (fig. 1)

colonizers. The title of the cartoon is an ironic commentary on Disraeli's 'Asiatic Mystery' from his novel *Tancred, or The New Crusade* (1847) that advocated the idea that divine revelation is only bestowed upon Jews and Arabs.<sup>7</sup> All of these suggest the overall message of the cartoon: Disraeli, himself an Oriental, cooks a spicy concoction for his fellow Orientals to incite them to rebellion. With one masterstroke the cartoonist projects a Britishness that is defined as everything that was not-Oriental.

The equation of the Indian with the Jew was of course not an accident or an innovation on part of the *Punch*-cartoonist. The political milieu was already rife with tension between the Whig-Liberalist Prime Minister, Lord Palmerston and the Tory-Opposition led by Benjamin Disraeli on issues that were mostly domestic and specifically surrounding the revision of the Reform Act of 1832. However, the immediate event that sparked off the Disraeli cartoon was the latter's (in)famous speech attacking Palmerston's ministerial policies on the Mutiny issue. Calling the 'Mutiny' a 'national revolt' rather than a matter of greased cartridges, Disraeli, in his speech on 27 July 1857, strongly criticized

name 'D'Israeli' at once ties up the Indian with the Jew as typifying the conspiratorial 'Oriental' in league with each other to the detriment of Great Britain. The secretive cauldron stirring is suggestive of witchcraft – a standard medieval calumny against the Jews. The use of the highly seasoned broth and hot sauce is reminiscent of the environmental determinism model of the

the interventionist foreign policy of Palmerston, especially in matters relating to local land rights and property succession, the abolition of certain religious customs and the displacement of ancient royal houses in India. Instead, he advocated an adoption of a free-trade non-interventionist policy that would be made possible only by the immediate dissolution of the East India Company and putting the Crown in direct control over India. Considering the fact that Disraeli, to begin with, was not very popular, the speech he made in the House of Commons, when viewed alongside the widely-circulated stories of terrible atrocities on British women and children in the massacre at Kanpur on 15 July, only served to project him as an ally of the enemy. While *The Saturday Review* and *The Spectator* were afire in their trenchant criticism or support of Disraeli's speech, what *Punch* achieved in a one-page cartoon of Disraeli was a masterstroke in summing up all the mixed sentiments that the speech aroused. *Punch's* 'Sepoy D'Israeli' cooking secret potions for the House of Commons conveyed it all: he was Disraeli the factionalist stirring up things for the sake of disruption; he was Disraeli, the authority on the Indian mind; he was Disraeli, the fellow-Oriental and sympathizer of the King of Oude. Though the political slant was more in line with the critical lens of *The Saturday Review* than the pro-Disraeli *The Spectator*, Mr Punch's unmistakable wit blunted the acerbic element in the criticism and transformed it into a cartoon that was characteristically poised on the golden-mean. The 'Sepoy D'Israeli' cartoon remains a classic example of what comic-journalism purports to do: 'instruct with delight'.

Alongside this attempt to expand the definition of the villain in the mutiny-drama to all people Oriental, there can be discerned a counter-attempt to restrict the same to the figure of the sepoy – an attempt that was stark in its elision of the rest of the participating Indian population from its representational realm. Let us consider these cartoons of the sepoy in particular and India in general that appeared in *Punch* between August 1857 and January 1858:

While the first and the last cartoons (figures 2 and 5) may be

grouped together for their shared use of the trope of the tiger, the two intermediary cartoons (figures 3 and 4) can be bracketed for their depiction of the 'poor sepoy'. Before we attempt a closer reading of the cartoons, let us begin with their obvious implications.

The two-page cartoon titled 'The British Lion's Revenge on the Bengal Tiger', appeared in *Punch* on 22 August 1857, barely a month since the Kanpur massacre of July 15. The cartoon shows India, the 'Bengal Tiger' in its utmost ferocity having killed a woman and child, and the 'British Lion' leaping on to it in revenge. With Britain still reeling in shock over the stories of rape and brutal slaying of the British women and children by the sepoys, and crying hoarse for vengeance and justice, what this cartoon seeks to do is structurally remarkable. It is interesting to note the lines of the composition of the murdered woman and child, the tiger and the lion. At the bottom of it is the dead child, still cleaving to the bosom of the dead woman (presumably its mother) whose arm is still slung over it in a protective gesture. This dead woman, whose torn clothes at once blends the terror of rape and death, is under the tiger representing India in all its bestial ferocity. And the vicious Tiger is



'The British Lion's Revenge on the Bengal Tiger'<sup>8</sup> (fig. 2)

stopped in its bloodthirsty act by the British Lion charging at it from above in revenge. The structural alignment of the innocent victim-treacherous criminal-righteous avenger mirrors the ethical hierarchy of the outrage and call for the vengeance of the British public. Furthermore, by situating the British Lion diametrically opposite the Bengal Tiger who is at the underside of the opposition, it shows first, that the two parties involved are equal and



*'The Clemency of Canning' Governor-General.  
 'Well, then, they shan't blow him from nasty guns;  
 but he must promise to be a good little sepoy.'<sup>19</sup>  
 (fig. 3)*

second, that there was in fact a clear-cut 'opposition' between the colonizer and the colonized. Such a portrayal, of course, neatly glides over the fact that the act of 'vengeance' was made possible only because a large part of the Indian troops remained loyal to the British.

The juxtaposition of the tiger and the lion in the first cartoon owes itself largely to a need to affirm prowess; to state that war-heroes are made not out of skirmishes but a deadly confrontation of equals. And since in mid-Victorian England imperialist ideology was increasingly configured in the idiom of Christian heroism, the figure of the colonizer came to be equated in the Victorian imagination with that of the 'just' retributer. '... with God's help', wrote Field Marshall Earl Roberts in a letter dated 31 December 1857, 'Englishmen will still be masters of India'.<sup>12</sup> The need for

such an image of the British Lion as the twin representative of the military might of the colonizer and of 'Justice', prevailing over the unruly, vicious, lustful Bengal Tiger was especially felt when the foundation of a hundred years of rule and the attendant belief in the invincibility of British control were shaken to the bone by news of the massacre of innocents at Kanpur.

The second cartoon titled 'The New Year's Gift', appearing in *Punch* on 2 January 1858, right after the successful quelling of the mutiny by the British troops led by Sir Colin Campbell, depicts Campbell showing off his military trophy, i.e., the suitably chained tiger, to Lord Palmerston who thus exclaims: 'Well ... Upon my word ... Eh! ... I'm really extremely obliged to you - But ... Eh! ... How about keeping the brute?' In contrast to the earlier cartoon, the Lion has been replaced here by Campbell and Palmerston,



'Too "Civil" By Half'  
The Governor-General Defending the Poor  
Sepoy<sup>10</sup> (fig. 4)

engaged in a conversation over the future course of action with regard to the chained tiger. The tiger is no longer a symbol to be recognized by the British imagination as India; instead, on its body, camouflaging with its stripes, is freshly inscribed the stamp of its domination - 'India'. The 'tigerish' Oriental is portrayed in all its treachery, as a nagging sense of a sudden pounce is made manifest by its



*"The New Year's Gift"*

*Pam (To Sir Colin.), 'Well--Upon my word--Eh!--I'm really extremely obliged to you--But--Eh!--How about keeping the brute?'*<sup>11</sup> (fig. 5)

crouching posture, frowning glance and the tilted chair. However, while Campbell as the tamer of the tiger emerges as the standard stock-type of the war-hero, the juxtaposition of a thoughtful Palmerston voicing his idea of 'keeping the brute' and the scribble of a map titled 'India' hanging in the background, adds another dimension to the cartoon's message. The British self-image is now not simply content with its military superiority. Following the spate of criticism during the mutiny months of the administrative inefficiency of the East India Company, what was now needed to consolidate the fractured self-image of the colonizer was not just a reaffirmation of military might, but a reinstatement of faith in its administrative competence. The sense of equality in the two forces that dominated the previous cartoon is replaced here by a clear-cut inequality of power. The beast does not meet another beast here; it

is 'tamed' by a Man and its future hangs upon the hesitant fancies of another Man. The older colonial confidence of racial, military and administrative superiority of the imperial Self over its indigenous Other is nowhere so obviously reaffirmed as in this cartoon.

While these cartoons made much of the trope of the tiger standing for the bestial, treacherous, overly-libidinous Indians, the cartoons titled 'The Clemency of Canning' and 'Too "Civil" By Half' were no different in depicting the sepoy. These cartoons were obvious indictments of the 'clemency' of the then Governor-General Canning's call for moderation in the Anglo-Indian affairs surrounding the mutiny. But what they subtly reinforced in the British popular imagination was the stock-figure of the sepoy as one dressed in the British uniform, brandishing bloodied sword and dagger, standing over brutally slaughtered children.

A closer reading of these cartoons framing, as it were, the moments of conflict and resolution, would reveal faultlines that call the hitherto monolithic celebration of British superiority into question. With the death-knell of the author rung by Barthes, post-structuralist readings have long since championed the cause of pluralistic readings as opposed to the tyrannical authorial intention. Since *Mr Punch* has no longer any control over the construction of the meanings of his sketches, and since *Mr Punch* himself is the carnivalesque fool armed with the licence to scorn with a smile, there erupts a plethora of subliminal meanings onto the surface of these cartoons.

The effect these successive images of the bloodthirsty 'tigerish' sepoy/Indian ravishing and murdering women and children had on the metropolitan reaction to the mutiny is anybody's guess. What is striking about these recurrent images of the tigerish sepoy/avenging lion is the way in which time has been played around in these images. For instance, that the Bengal Tiger was not stopped *in its very act of slaying* by the 'just' retributive figure of the British Lion was a historical given. Before the Lion could

avenge itself on the Tiger, the well of Kanpur was already swarming with dead bodies of women and children. When the British troops under Colonel Neill arrived, Nana Sahib was a fugitive, and it took the British at least a year and a half to regain their strong foothold over Kanpur. By thus compressing an action of a year and a half into a single moment of crime and retribution, this image stands typical of the modes in which the colonizers sought to legitimize their violence in India in 1857-58.

But what this compression of the time-frame does in terms of its exclusionary politics is even deeper. To cite another case in point, the obvious suggestion of treachery and the simultaneous marking of the uprising as a 'sepoymutiny' as opposed to a 'general uprising' signalled by the figure of the uniformed sepoy was yet another masterstroke of *Mr Punch*. It must be recalled that Disraeli had already been criticized for terming the mutiny a 'national revolt'. And Rudrangshu Mukherjee in his study of the Kanpur massacre tells us how as the mutiny commenced the sepoys deliberately cast off their uniforms, those 'markers of alien power that had sought to regiment them and thus set them apart from the peasantry from which they were recruited', and transmuted themselves from 'peasant in uniform' to 'peasant in arms'.<sup>13</sup>

However, to assume these elisions effected by the compression of the time-frame as a deliberate ploy deployed by *Punch* to reinforce racial stereotypes would perhaps be stretching the point too far. As Douglas Peers points out, till the establishment of telegraph communication in India in 1869, information regarding the goings-on in India reached the colonial metropolis either in the form of dispatches reprinted in government gazettes, or in the form of anonymous letters to the editors of metropolitan newspapers arriving on ships from India, or as 'expert' views of returning war-veterans and civilians, or by means of the increasing numbers of Indian newspapers that reached Great Britain during this time:

During this period, the time lag between India and Britain was

decreasing and news gained increasing immediacy. The development of a reliable overland mail route via the Mediterranean and Red Sea reduced the journey by 1836 to sixty days; further refinements brought this delay down to thirty days by 1841. The introduction of the telegraph, while not permitting the transfer of large chunks of text, meant that by the late 1840s brief notices of the most recent developments in India were arriving in London within a couple of days of their becoming known in Bombay. These notices provided copy for headlines that could be followed up later when letters and dispatches arrived in London.<sup>14</sup>

The compression and erasures in the representations of the mutiny in *Punch*, then, may well have been in part due to the lack of real information in the metropolis on the Indian issue. But the depiction of violence in these cartoons makes one wonder if these representations were reflective of the general feeling of its readers, or was it responsible, by its conscious or subconscious exclusionary politics, for forming a reaction that was in line with its conservative politics. *Mr Punch*, of course, offers us no easy answer.

The coding of British rule in India as 'just', however, was not new to the mid-Victorian British imagination. Dickens' endorsement of the articles 'Justice for "Natives"' and 'Law in the East' published in *Household Words* in June 1852, had already asserted the moral rather than the merely military/commercial nature of the British rule in India in very clear terms:

It is England's proudest boast that wherever her flag is unfurled, wherever her supremacy is established, there she carries the blessings of liberal institutions: she conquers but to set free. The same justice which is provided for the proudest son of Albion, is sent forth across the waters to attend the meanest swarthy subject of Her Majesty, in distant India.<sup>15</sup>

The codification of violence as 'just'/'unjust', however, reached its consummation in the illustration of 12 September 1857, titled 'Justice':

Consider also the corresponding poem titled 'Liberavimus Animam' (The Living Age):

#### LIBERAVIMUS ANIMAM

Who pules about mercy? The agonized wail  
Of babies hewn piecemeal still sickens the air,  
And echoes still shudder that caught on the gale  
The mother's – the maiden's wild scream of despair.

...

The Avengers are marching – fierce eyes in a glow:  
Too vengeful for curses are lips locked like those  
But hearts hold two prayers – to come up with the foe,  
And to hear the proud blast that gives signal to close.

...

Our swords come for slaughter; they come in the name  
Of Justice: and sternly their work shall be done:  
And a world, now indignant, behold with acclaim  
That hecatomb, slain in the face of the sun.

And terrified India shall tell to all time  
How Englishmen paid her for murder and lust;  
And stained not their fame with one spot of the crime  
That brought the rich splendour of Delhi to dust.<sup>17</sup>

The illustration graphically represents the poem in its shared evocation of visceral hatred and Britain's cry for justice against the raping and murdering sepoys of the Kanpur massacre. The sketch depicts 'Justice' as a woman wielding her sword in her right hand in a stance of meting out justice to the wrongdoer, standing over a heap of mutinous sepoys. In her left hand is a shield on which the traditional symbol of justice, the weighing scale, is inscribed. Structurally, the figure of Justice neatly divides the representative frame into two parts. To her front lie the crushed sepoys, a Conradian 'mass of limbs', while to her back lie the huddled figures of native women and children, literally shielded by the avenging



*'Justice'*<sup>16</sup> (fig. 6)

Justice. The message conveyed is clear: the barbarous sepoys are being crushed to death by the self-righteous avenger whose ethical superiority is reaffirmed by its act of sparing and even protecting the native women and children from its vengeful eye. And the poem seeks to muffle whatever 'puling' for mercy there might be in the hearts of metropolitan readers by its blazing reminder of the 'mother's – the maiden's wild scream of despair' at Kanpur.

What is indeed interesting about the coding of 'just' violence in this illustration is the figure of Justice herself. An obvious androgyny, reminiscent of the Amazon, is discerned in this figure. The traditional symbol of Justice as a merciful, benign woman with all her softness gets replaced by the Victorian Justice, a woman revealed in all the machismo and strength that was in line with the mid-Victorian militarist perspective. Also by retaining the gender of the symbol, what the cartoon projects is a sort of ethical symmetry in its act of 'just' violence. It was women who were raped and butchered at Kanpur, and it is the woman who metes out justice to her ravishers and murderers as the Avenger.

However, this whole enterprise of coding and legitimizing British violence in India during the Mutiny in terms such as justice and righteousness needs to be posited against the indiscriminate violence perpetrated by the British troops. To cite but one instance of how the blind indiscriminate British violence in India got translated as 'just' and legitimate violence in the pages of *Punch*, we would turn to a brief comparison of the account of Colonel Neill's Allahabad exploits with *Punch's* position on his acts in Kanpur. Published in *Daily News* on 25 August 1857, an official in a letter dated 23 June 1857 accounted on the indiscriminate killings in the areas around Benares and Allahabad that Neill and his officers indulged in. He described one episode in Neill's operation thus:

Every native that appeared in sight was shot down without question, and in the morning Colonel Neill sent out parties of regiment ... and burned all villages near where the ruins of our bungalows stood, and hung every native that they could catch, on the trees that lined the road. Another party of soldiers penetrated into the native city and set fire to it, whilst volley after volley of grape and canister was poured into the fugitives as they fled from their burning houses.<sup>18</sup>

The only mention of Neill in the year 1857 in *Punch* occurs

in a long column titled 'Brothers of the Order of Nena Sahib' on 17 October 1857:

In murdering women and children, with atrocious tortures, at Cawnpore, the Indian Sepoys made a revolting mess. General Neill has been compelling as many of these miscreants as he could catch, being high-caste Brahmins, to wash up, from the floor of the building in which the massacre took place some of this mess, previously to being hanged. This act of scavenging involves loss of caste, and that, the Brahminical brutes think, entails everlasting perdition. "Let them think so," says General Neill, and for having thus combined speech with act, an Ultramontane Sepoy in the Tablet attacks the gallant General with frantic violence, calling him Satan, and other hard names.<sup>19</sup>

Though the jab of the feature is directed primarily at the Catholic censure of Neill's symbolic act of re-inscribing domination through humiliation and terror, what this account does in terms of codifying Neill's 'violent' act as 'just' violence is multilayered. To begin with, it neatly elides any mention at all of Neill's indiscriminate slaughter in Allahabad on his march to Kanpur. Neill's meting out justice to the sepoys here is not codified in simple militaristic terms. He is not merely the avenger brandishing the sword of justice crying for an eye for an eye. Instead, his act of hanging the mutinous sepoys is preceded by his role as a purger of the hellish crimes perpetrated by the sepoys in Kanpur. His deliberate deployment of the act of ritual degradation, that of washing up the 'revolting mess' inflicted on the sepoys, at once projects itself as a spectacular act of exorcising the site of the massacre of traces of British defeat. As Rudrangshu Mukherjee tells us, events of British atrocities on the natives, Neill's Allahabad slaughter, for instance, predated the massacre of British women and children in Kanpur. Hence, the massacre should be read in a context in which indiscriminate violence was perpetrated by both the sides.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, taking his cue from the 'Synopsis of the Evidence of the Cawnpore Mutiny,'<sup>21</sup> Mukherjee further points out that the particular incident of the massacre of the imprisoned

British women and children was not carried out by the sepoy, but by trained butchers at the command of Nana Sahib, who, it is significant to recall here, was not a sepoy:

A personal servant of Nana Sahib, named Begum, who was in charge of the prisoners, brought orders from the Nana for the sepoy to kill the women and children. The sepoy refused to comply, and fired a few volleys aimed at the ceiling. At this four or five professional executioners were sent in armed with swords and long knives, and they cut up the prisoners. The bodies – it was said that not all were dead – were thrown into a well.<sup>22</sup>

The gross historical inaccuracy of the assertion that sepoy, and Brahmin sepoy, were perpetrators of the rape and murder at Kanpur cannot be explained away by the element of lack of information in the metropolis. The *Daily News* was already circulating reports of Neill's brutal slaughter. This particular framing of the events at the site of the massacre betrays the metropolitan society's attempt to legitimize its violence to a metropolitan audience.

Thus, when we consider the visual imagery of the Mutiny that appeared in *Punch* between August 1857 and January 1858, certain recurrent patterns can be discerned. First, the deployment of the spectre of the Kanpur massacre stands as a synecdoche for the great and varied mutiny. The uniformed sepoy is yet another synecdoche for the mutinous rebels held culpable for the Kanpur massacre and the uprising by extension. Finally, the rebellious peasants as well as women rebels like the Rani of Jhansi, for instance, have been excluded from the representative realm of these cartoons. Such synecdochal compressions were just the stuff needed to simplify the complexities of 1857. All these patterns are finally subsumed in the metanarrative of the British Avengers doling out 'just' punishments to the murderous sepoy.

On 26 December 1857, there appeared on the pages of *Punch* a feature titled 'How Mr Cooke takes Delhi'. The feature marked a

turnabout<sup>23</sup> in *Punch's* tone on the mutiny—coverage from the sensational and the sentimental to one of heavy sarcasm directed against the increasing commercialism of violence. A 'spectacle', seen from a 'box at Astley's' shows the mutiny as:

(A) Most animated affair, the interest never flags, and the author has had the good taste (lacked elsewhere, and where it might have been reasonably looked for), to omit any attempt at reproducing the horrors of the Indian crisis. We see the black rascals plotting and rebelling, and rendering themselves just detestable enough to make the audience shout with joy when the swift vengeance of countless supernumeraries breaks upon the miscreants, and they are banged, beaten, bayoneted, blown from guns, or otherwise disposed of, as suits the scene ... And as for Delhi, the revenge of England comes down upon it in a storm of fire that makes you smell powder for an hour afterwards. The spectacle is quite a national one, and sends away the audience most confirmed anti-sentimentalists.<sup>24</sup>

A question obviously arises, what was it that evoked *Punch's* ire, when *Punch* itself had been at the forefront of peddling Mutiny images? Surely, it could not be the petty angst of one losing a commercial monopoly, for then the competition would not be articulated with such aplomb. Whatever was at the root of such derision had to be common to the magazine's editors and readership.

There are two main points that can be discerned from *Punch's* attacks against other forms of image-making such as in Astley's theatricals or in the dioramas one could watch for a shilling or indeed the exhibitions at the Great Globe in Leicester Square. First, *Punch* was opposed to the fact that these images were 'entertaining' rather than 'educative', and second, it scorned at the cheapness of the enterprise.

The two objections are in effect related. Clarifying the first point, *Punch* writes on 17 October 1857, that, 'The supply of the demand for information on any point in connection with the

melancholy subject of the day, is quite a legitimate undertaking – but, like that of an ordinary undertaker, it is a dismal one, and however much it may instruct anybody, can amuse nobody.’ Images of the event were thus legitimately peddled only when they were aids to a pedagogic project, i.e., where its meaning was strictly contained within a particular discursive project. The comment is made in relation to an advertisement, which, *Punch* reproduces under the heading of ‘AMUSEMENT EXTRAORDINARY’. The advertisement, which appeared originally in *The Observer*, was for a set of dioramas of Delhi and Russia at the Great Globe in Leicester Square. Admission to the entire show was for a shilling. Thus, the diatribe against the Astley theatricals, and the like, as a critique of bad ‘taste’, unravels itself to be an attack against the loss of control over the construction of images and discourse relating to the Mutiny. Pierre Bourdieu has commented upon the social politics that determines considerations of taste.<sup>25</sup> *Punch*, being a mouthpiece of the Victorian middle class which was aspiring stridently for social hegemony, obviously sought to control the dissemination of meaning in British society. Especially crucial were the meanings of violence. Scholars have recently commented upon how persons as diverse as Cecil Rhodes and Charles Dickens sought to deflect the possibilities of class violence onto the imperial theatre. Dickens went as far to produce a novel inspired by the ‘Mutiny’, which sought to achieve precisely this object.<sup>26</sup> As an organ of the middle class, *Punch* thus remained wary of allowing Mutiny images to proliferate beyond the hegemonic, and the ‘educative’. Like Lear’s fool its wisdom lay in its knowledge of what to say, how to say it, and when to say it.

## NOTES:

- 1 Ranajit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 79.
- 2 I use the term ‘Mutiny’ to refer to the events in India during 1857–58 in preference over the terms ‘First war of independence’ or ‘national

- uprising' since this was the term in which these events were perceived in Britain, despite Disraeli's unsuccessful attempt to broaden the terms of debate in July 1857.
- 3 Rudrangshu Mukherjee, 'Satan Let Loose Upon Earth: The Kanpur Massacres in India and the Revolt of 1857', *Past and Present* (Oxford: August, 1990), pp. 92-116. [Hereafter referred to as 'Satan'.]
  - 4 This study of the transition of political caricature from Georgian to Victorian era is largely influenced by Richard Godfrey, *English Caricature, 1620 to the Present: Caricaturists and Satirists, Their Art, Their Purpose and Influence*, (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1984).
  - 5 M.H. Spielmann, *The History of 'Punch'*, (New York: Cassell and Book, 1895), pp. 29-53.
  - 6 'The Asiatic Mystery: As Prepared by Sepoy D'Israeli,' *Punch*, (London: Bradbury and Evans, August 8, 1857), p. 55.
  - 7 Anti-semitic strains had long been in vogue in England before the coming of Disraeli. Shakespeare's celebrated villain Shylock is a case in point. As a leader of the Tories and as the racial Other, Disraeli found himself at once privileged and alienated in the country he was serving. It was this anxiety that had provoked his quasi-autobiographical novel *Tancred or The New Crusade*, which launched into a defence of the Jews and Arabs by legitimizing them as the racial equals or even superiors of the British Self. The Jews and the Arabs, he claims here, are 'the Chosen Ones'. For a fuller analysis, see Anthony S. Wohl, "'Dizzi-Ben-Dizzi": Disraeli as Alien', *The Journal of British Studies*, (Chicago: July, 1995), pp. 375-411.
  - 8 'The British Lion's Revenge of the Bengal Tiger,' *Punch*, (London: Bradbury and Evans, 22 August 1857), pp. 76-77.
  - 9 'The Clemency of Canning,' *Punch*, (London: Bradbury and Evans, 24 October 1857), p. 171.
  - 10 'Too "Civil" by Half,' *Punch*, (London: Bradbury and Evans, 7 November 1857), p. 191.
  - 11 'The New Year's Gift,' *Punch*, (London: Bradbury and Evans, 2 January 1858), p. 5.
  - 12 Field Marshall Earl Roberts, *Letters Written during the Indian Mutiny*, (London: 1924), letter dated 31 December 1857, p. 119.
  - 13 Mukherjee, 'Satan', p. 99.
  - 14 Douglas M. Peers, "'Those Noble Exemplars of the True Military Tradition": Constructions of the Indian Army in the Mid-Victorian Press,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 31:1, (Cambridge: February, 1997), pp. 119-20.
  - 15 'Law in the East,' *Household Words*, (London: Bradbury and Evans, June 26, 1852) p. 347.

- 16 'Justice', *Punch*, (London: Bradbury and Evans, 12 September 1857) p. 5.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p. 6.
- 18 Quoted in R.M. Martin, *Our Indian Empire*, 2 vols, (London: n.d.) ii, p. 302.
- 19 'Brothers of the Order of Nana Sahib', *Punch*, (London: Bradbury and Evans, 17 October 1857), p. 164.
- 20 Mukherjee, 'Satan', p. 112.
- 21 'Synopsis of the Evidence of the Cawnpore Mutiny,' *Narrative of the Events in the NWP, 1857-58*, (Calcutta, n.d.).
- 22 Mukherjee, 'Satan', p. 114.
- 23 Note how only a few weeks earlier *Punch* had made fun of liberal humanitarian concerns for the 'poor sepoy' in 'The Clemency of Canning' cartoon, urging Britons to see that those natives ready to kill British soldiers 'are entitled to the tender mercies of the Pagan code of war'. 'A Leader from the "Star"', *Punch*, (London: Bradbury and Evans, October 31, 1857), p.177.
- 24 'How Mr Cooke takes Delhi,' *Punch* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 26 December 1857), p. 259.
- 25 Pierre Bourdieu (Richard Nice Tr.), *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2002).
- 26 See Lillian Nayder, 'Class Consciousness and the Indian Mutiny in Dickens's "The Perils of Certain English Prisoners",' *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, (Houston: Rice University, Autumn, 1992), pp. 689-705.

## Forged Linkages and 'Spectre' of 1857: A few Instances from Bihar

■ NITIN SINHA ■

Most accounts of 1857 in Bihar portray it as a final culminating point of a 'series of nationalist agitations'. A few of them even trace incipient nationalist impulses from the late eighteenth century, detailing the subversive activities of refractory zamindars against the newly emerging English East India Company-state. Others are more hagiographical in nature, specifically when it comes to Kunwar Singh, a zamindar of the Shahabad region, who became a cult figure in Bihar in 1857 and in later accounts, which documented the 'contribution' of Bihar to that glorious event. It seems that such accounts were building a claim, a regional assertion in the making of a 'national' event. It is not surprising that most of these publications came in and around 1957,<sup>1</sup> which not only marked the hundredth anniversary of the event, but also marked the first decade in the history of independent India. The impulse during the period was to look for, glorify and unite in one narrative the traces of anti-colonial/national events. This is not to say that they were not regarded as 'apparently unconnected disturbances' but the thrust was to stitch them together, and quite seamlessly, into a grand narrative of 'resistance' against the colonial state. One could get the above sense in the following claim made by one of the leading nationalist historians of that period:

All these apparently unconnected disturbances were really the

manifestations of the adjustments of the country, during about a century, to the new political fact of British dominion and government, and every rising was a test of it, the last great test being the Revolt of 1857-59.<sup>2</sup>

The political urgency of such a project was best manifest in the words of Radha Govind Prasad, a minister in the Bihar government of 1957: 'Records go to show that even prior to this Movement of 1857, there was a formidable Freedom Movement by the Kol population of Singhbhum as far back as 1831-33 and another widespread Freedom Movement by the Santhals during 1853-56.'<sup>3</sup> There were indeed more cautious approaches than this in reclaiming the past. As Rajendra Prasad had remarked, 'It would not be correct to regard the earlier movements as purely political movements for the freedom of the country.'<sup>4</sup> But this was not as much the negation of the 'anti-colonial movement' itself as it was of its nature. As Prasad quipped in the next sentence, 'They were occasioned and inspired partly by religious considerations also.'<sup>5</sup> This proposition in itself is not too disturbing (and many would disagree here), if we empathize with the anxieties of the new post-colonial state, and its nationalist agenda. One way of doing that was to link the many local and diverse agitations against the colonial state into a 'series' of 'real manifestations' against the 'British dominion and government'. Even more important than this was the 'reading' of one event through the lens of others. So 1857 became a dominant optic to look back at past events, and past events in turn served as a 'series of manifestations' culminating in the grand finale of 1857.

This nationalist search, however, is not the main area of investigation of this essay. Rather, it focuses on the ways in which the British had forged incredibly similar linkages between diverse events and the uprising of 1857 itself. The colonial state and its officials used the same optical methods and devices to understand 1857, 'its' past and future. Quite alike the urge of the post-colonial state, the colonial state had also stitched together many diverse

events to present a 'demonic' India, the India of 1857.<sup>6</sup> And interestingly, such linkages not only characterized contemporary India but also illuminated its past and guided its future. Such linkages cut across almost every aspect: social, spatial, and temporal. For instance, in the aftermath of the revolt, the dismissed commissioner of Patna, William Tayler, said: 'Patna, as is notorious, has for many years been regarded as the principal seat of disloyalty and intrigue.'<sup>7</sup> This must have sounded logical, at least to contemporary colonial officials, if we go back to the late eighteenth century and see the voices of 'discontent' emanating from the aristocratic order of the city. Many of the treatises, which were produced by the 'nawabi bureaucracy' in this period, 'served as vehicles through which Indians expressed some of the first coherent political critiques of colonial rule'.<sup>8</sup> These voices of discontent expressed by 'scholar-bureaucrats' such as Karam Ali and Ghulam Hussain ranged from anticipating the critique of 'de-industrialization' as was expressed in the second half of the nineteenth century (by the likes of Dadabhai Naoroji) to that of charging the 'hat wearing firingis' of not observing 'the standards of good government'.<sup>9</sup>

For instance, Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai's *Seir Mutaqherin* or 'View of Modern Times', a four volume historical narrative written in Persian in the early 1780s, represented the tumultuous events leading to the loss of indigenous aristocratic power in terms of *inquilab*. These events included the 'bad' rule, which was taken to have begun with Sirajuddaulah and continued into the British period. However, this *inquilab* did not impute social revolution (or even active radical political efforts) against British rule; it was only a lament against British dominance, which had led 'to a change in rulers, change of dynasties, a reversal of luck or fate, resulting in a destruction of the old economic order, a distortion of the old social order'.<sup>10</sup> But such representations and texts must have shaped the British understanding in rhetorically invoking a serialized representation of 'disloyalty', as is evident from what a military

officer remarked in 1857: 'From the days of Mir Kasim Ally, Patna had always been a rebellious city.'<sup>11</sup> The more recent 'anti-British plot' in Patna during 1844-46, to which we will turn shortly, equally reinforced such colonial understandings. A spatial entity – a townscape in the present case – came to imbibe a long uninterrupted rebellious past. That such existing jeremiad fed the colonial perception of Patna as a seat of disloyalty and intrigue is not surprising. What indeed is new in such colonial representations is the characterization of a *longue duree* conspiratorial history of resentment and resistance, quite akin to the structures of nationalist explanations of a long legacy of anti-colonial agitations. In both the cases, linkages are thus forged and the diversities of events and histories subsumed within a broader panoramic canvas of tracing and defining a spatial entity – whether India or Patna.<sup>12</sup> 1857 became and still serves as a landmark in such formulations because of its dramatic nature.

What this essay sets out to do is not to analyse the nature of the 1857 events per se, but to understand the layers of events and implications that marked this event, both before and after. While doing this, it will try to delineate how for each of these, 1857 served as a linking-site, by capturing certain snapshots from a diverse area, ranging from 'political intrigue' to the use of communications and the debate over regulations relating to townscapes and jungles in the aftermath of 1857. If the events preceding 1857 show forged linkages, the events following it demonstrate the horror, fear and spectre of mutiny that loomed large in a range of colonial perceptions and policies.

### COMMUNITY AND CONSPIRACY

'Muslim conspiracy' was one of the chief colonial characterisations of the 1857 event. This view not only gained currency because of the sepoys deciding to uphold the reigning Mughal emperor as the Emperor of India under whom they would wage a war against the 'firanghis' or on account of the religious rhetoric of the leaders but

also because of the ongoing Wahabi movement of which Patna was the headquarter.<sup>13</sup> Writing in 1958, Hugh Tinker argued that, 'Today in the time of Islamic revivalism, emphasis is placed by Pakistanis on the Islamic inspiration of the revolt; there has been attempt to explore the share of the Wahabis in the origin of the Mutiny, while other Muslim writers dwell upon the spell of the old Moghul Empire over the mind of India.'<sup>14</sup> Such 'nationalist' endeavours of the post-colonial era were actually preceded by colonial discourses at least a century old.

In the colonial accounts of 1857, the Wahabi movement was crucial in creating a fused representation of a space (Patna in general and Bihar in particular), of a community (Muslim) and a period (1844/46-1857). Going through the colonial narratives of the 1844-46 plot and the 1857 uprising leave little doubt that the former overshadowed the latter, each feeding upon and re-inscribing the other. Tayler put the events of 1857 in perspective when he wrote:

Ten years ago, a deep-laid plot was discovered in the City (Patna), which included many of the influential people. The Town contains an immense Mahomedan population – many of them of old and respectable families – many impoverished in consequence of the resumption of their lands.<sup>15</sup>

It was the strong Wahabi linkages and networks stretching from Patna to the Northwest Frontier that alarmed the colonial officials at Patna when the news of sepoy rebellion poured in from Meerut. The fear of the past Wahabi plot and the possibility of another conspiracy sharpened the dread. Tayler expressed this panic, '... no one knew whom to trust, or whom to fear – the great sect of the Wahabis, numbering some thousands between Patna and Dinapore, were observed to be unusually busy – private meetings were held at night at mosques and in private houses – all was uncertainty, suspicion and fear.'<sup>16</sup>

The *modus operandi* of the 1844 Wahabi 'plot' and other

incidents of the time provided fodder for easy linkages. As in 1857, the Wahabi plot was hatched through extremely diverse connections. First, were the Wahabi networks that spanned from Patna to Kabul. Vilayat Ali and Inayat Ali, two brothers from Patna, were at the forefront of the movement. While Vilayat Ali managed the Patna Centre, his brother, Inayat, went to Sittana, in the North-west Frontier region to spearhead the movement. However, these brothers, though influential before the 1844-46 plot and afterwards, physically had very little role in the actual 'plot'. While Inayat Ali was not in Patna in 1844, Vilayat Ali too had left Patna for Afghanistan with his family and supporters.<sup>17</sup>

Again, what indeed was very striking about this plot, and resonates with the events of 1857, was the attempt of Rahut Ali and Peer Buksh, the two main 'conspirators', to 'incite' the sepoys of the Dinapore military cantonment to rebel against British rule. The role of printed books and money was important. While the sepoys were lured to rise in revolt by cash advances, the ideological base of the movement was sustained by the circulation of books and other printed materials, like *Dawk-Book* and *Mahzarnammah* (public petitions). A large number of such papers were seized from the house of Rahut Ali.<sup>18</sup> Peer Buksh was the munshi of the First Regiment at Dinapore, who in association with one Syff Ali, who claimed to be an emissary of the King of Delhi but 'remained till the end a mysterious personality', acted as intermediaries between one Khwaja Hasan Ali Khan and the sepoys. It was in Khwaja's tent at the Sonapur mela that the plan to rope the sepoys into the rebellion was planned. As a result, not only Danapur sepoys but also those stationed at Sugauli (in north Bihar), Hazaribagh and Dorunda (in south Bihar) were contacted.

Similarly, the general religious tone of the leaders and their related activities provided a seamless bridge between this event and those of 1857. In 1845 a *Mahzarnammah* was 'drawn up and signed by a "large body of the inhabitants of the city (of Patna), bankers, *Amlahs* of the courts etc., etc.," binding themselves on oath to do

whatever was required for the protection of their religion and caste.<sup>19</sup> There was distrust in the city not only of the government's efforts to spread English education but also against the works of Christian missionaries, which taken together were thought to strike at the religious faith of the native communities. Tayler acknowledged this simmering discontentment almost two years before the mutiny:

Owing to sundry causes, the minds of the people in these districts are at present in a restless and disaffected state, and they have generally conceived the idea that there is an intention on the part of government to commence and carry through a systematic interference with their religion, their caste and their social customs.<sup>20</sup>

Quite a few changes by the colonial state in 1844–45 had inflamed the native population to think so. One such change was the messing system introduced in the jails. In the Chapra jail of Saran district, this system was introduced in 1845 and there were serious disturbances among the prisoners regarding this. The introduction of the messing system in the Saran and Shahabad jails was preceded by a hunger strike by the prisoners; 600 of them at these two jails had refused their food for two days. The state had great difficulty in finding a cook whose caste and sub-caste purity could be acceptable to all the inmates. In fact there were instances when a cook selected by one set of Brahmmins was rejected by another set of the same caste.<sup>21</sup> About the same time, as Datta mentions, a ship with pilgrims bound for Mecca was put under quarantine in Bombay, which led to a widespread rumour that the officers of Bombay had 'closed the ways for the men of Islam to proceed to Mecca'.<sup>22</sup>

There are two interesting trends of tracing the continuities and mitigating the breaks when we come closer to the period of 1857. On the one hand, and as argued above, there was an urgency to establish linkages with the past in order to highlight a linear

history of 'disloyalty' of the native population, particularly Muslims, against British rule. But on the other hand the panic and the fear, which 1857 generated, forced the officials to present it as something 'sudden' and 'unprecedented'; a situation in which, as Tayler had put it, '... no one knew whom to trust, or whom to fear'. Though the event was perceived as 'sudden' the explanations of why the 'disloyalty' had taken roots went back in time. The reason Tayler and most of his contemporaries gave was that the Englishmen were 'isolated from their (natives) hearts'. As a result, 'there was an utter absence of those ties between the governors and the governed, that unbought loyalty which is the strength of kings, and which, with all his faults, the Native of India is well capable of feeling.'<sup>23</sup> William Kaye's 'theory' was similar as according to him: the mutiny happened because 'we (Englishmen) are too English'.<sup>24</sup> Historiographically too, this view has been passed down to us. This view, which emphasized the 'suddenness' of the event that had caught the British unawares, was an exercise in exculpating the limitations of colonial bureaucracy as indicated by an examination of the handling of the Wahabi conspiracy.

#### **THE 1857 MUTINY: CONCERTED OR TRANSIENT ATTEMPTS?**

The seditious activities of the Wahabis were on when Motee Mishra, a Jamadar of the same regiment to which Peer Buksh belonged, gave the information about the 1844 'conspiracy' to his European military officer (Major Rowcroft). However, notwithstanding the officially drawn linkages, any direct continuum between the Wahabi plot and 1857 appears tenuous. In the early 1850s both the Ali brothers had left Patna. They tried to reorganize their resources after reaching Swat, but Vilayat Ali did not survive long to see his hope of a common uprising against the British come true. He died on 5 November 1852. Inayat Ali, who then became the leader, was in touch with the Wahabis of Patna but links were being severed. Both in the Punjab region and in Patna the activities

of the Wahabis were 'closely watched'. After receiving a few defeats at the hands of the British in the Northwest Frontier region, Inayat Ali also died in 1858.

The government had arrested Peer Buksh and turned him an approver. Peer Buksh exonerated Rahut Ali of all his charges as a result of which the latter was set free. Though Khwaja was arrested and was booked under charges of fomenting disturbances, Peer Buksh denied identifying him. So Khwaja was also released on 27 October 1846. Thus the entire band of 'conspirators' of the plot came out unpunished.<sup>25</sup> It was not the dearth of information that restricted the state to book them, but it was partly the fear to do so and partly because of the other engagements of the period. The Afghan War diverted all the attention of the state towards the north-west region, so much so that this incident (Wahabi plot) 'which, in quiet times, might have made itself heard all over the country, but which, lost in the din of battle in that momentous winter, gave only a local sound.'<sup>26</sup> It was nearly a decade later, in 1857, that this episode acquired unprecedented prominence. This was because of the Wahabis' disloyal past and their activities at that point in time.

With the outbreak of the first 'sepoy mutiny' in Bihar on 12 June 1857, the Wahabi fear exerted itself once again. Tayler on 19 June 1857 invited three Maulvis of Patna 'for consultation of the state of affairs'. That was, however, a trap to arrest them. Though Tayler regarded their detention as 'one of the most successful strokes of policy', his contemporaries not only labelled such an act as 'treachrous' but also 'extraordinary and possibly dangerous'.<sup>27</sup> He also tried to arrest Karim Ali, a Maulvi of Gaya, but the latter escaped twice. The properties of Karim Ali were seized, but he managed to flee to Gorakhpur. One Peer Ali, a bookseller of Patna, was also arrested along with thirty-six others. Sixteen of them were given capital punishment; of whom fourteen were hanged on the same day that the judgement was passed.<sup>28</sup>

Though it is correct that people like Karim Ali were suspected

in 1846, it would be wrong to see them as 'rebels'. As E.I. Brodtkin has argued, the terms 'loyal' and 'rebel' during 1857 'were more often than not the simplistic categorization'.<sup>29</sup> The actual line was more obscure. So also was the concept of 'loyalty', ranging from those based on 'salt' to those of 'caste' and 'regiment'.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, the impulse to rebel was more transient than linear. This does not amount to saying that rebels' actions were grossly and crassly 'opportunistic' or 'fragmentary'. They did have a 'vision' – a vision of political authority<sup>31</sup> – but the attempts to realize that authority did not inherently or necessarily mean that they harboured anti-British sentiments throughout the period. Kunwar Singh's career best illustrates this.

Reportedly, Kunwar Singh was also a party in the Wahabi plot of 1844–46. The magistrate of Patna noted in 1845:

I have received information that Baboo Koomar Singh, one of the most influential Zemindars in the neighbourhood and a resident in the Shahabad district is supposed to be also implicated in this conspiracy – it is a well known fact that this Baboo during the late excitements, on account of the prisoners, came to this city (Patna) and was in communication with Rahut Alee.<sup>32</sup>

In spite of having this information about his association, the state did not arrest him on the apprehension that his arrest would excite people to rebel. However, this fear was not the only limiting factor (and definitely not the lack of information); the reasons went deeper into the political arrangement the colonial state had with the leading elites of the region, which they did not want to upset. Kunwar Singh was the owner of a large estate from which the government derived almost three lakh rupees annually. Though he was in debt and unable to pay the revenue timely, yet the government favoured him for being a popular elite of the region. As late as 1856, Tayler maintained that: 'He is the scion of an ancient and noble family, the proprietor of a large and valuable

estate in Shahabad, a generous and popular overlord, much beloved by his tenantry and respected throughout the district both by the Europeans and natives.<sup>33</sup> As early as 1838, Kunwar Singh himself had petitioned the government to stand as security for him and help him repay his loans. And throughout the period till 1855, when the government appointed a Surbarakar (manager) to manage his estates, he was in constant touch with the local authorities in the matter of helping him clear his financial liabilities. This did not mean that the government was in anyway involved with the actual process of Kunwar Singh's loans from the Peshwa.<sup>34</sup> But it does point toward a relationship between the government and Kunwar Singh, in which the latter wanted to use the name of the government as a seal of security, and the former symptomatically, as Tayler had put it, 'in conciliate(ing) the loyalty and goodwill of all the high classes in the Division.'<sup>35</sup> Kunwar Singh had written a petition to the government on 25 June 1857, thirteen days after the first sepoy outbreak in Bihar. The real crisis came, seemingly, when he failed to get Rs 13 lakhs from the Peshwa as a result of which the Board of Revenue intimated him of the withdrawal of the Subarakar arrangement. His Petition of 25 June 1857 was actually a request to the government to not do so and also to request for a loan of four to five lakhs of rupees. And while this petition was still pending consideration, the sepoys at Dinapore were up in arms on 25 July 1857, giving Kunwar Singh a whiff to spearhead the movement in Bihar, possibly as a pressure tactic.

#### THE SPECTRE OF 1857 AND THE COLONIAL STATE

The fear that struck the English mind during and after the 1857 event spilled out in different kinds of regulations, ranging from the composition of the army to the regulation of space, which in turn ranged from re-ordering the nature of communications to a clearing of jungles and even further to revisiting the nature of town planning. The thrust was two-fold. Though the colonial

state wanted to safeguard the safety of Englishmen first, in case there was such an event in the future, it also did not want to 'distance' itself from native society because, as seen in the remarks of Tayler and Kaye, this distance was regarded as one of the main reasons of the mutiny. One could then argue that in spite of having a very well-laid, clear-cut agenda of governance, the post-mutiny colonial state was actually trying to balance parallel perspectives.

The attempt to identify the rebelliousness with a city or a town or with a particular section of the population, as we have seen above, permeated the idea of regulating the boundaries of contact-zones. Spatial re-arrangements became crucial in this regard, which in turn were meant to govern social relations. The improvement of communications was an integral part of this process. Control over the means of communication had been crucial in the mutiny-days to regain control over the 'disturbed territory'.<sup>36</sup> Once that control was achieved, and the mutiny had subsided, the state felt a pressing need to provide for a means of speedy communication for the movement of troops between the different military cantonment towns and the major cities. Though the roadways, especially the Grand Trunk Road, had played a crucial role in the attainment of political control during the mutiny, the railways, because of their speed, became the privileged means of communications in the later political ideologies and policies pertaining to keeping the empire intact. A more pronounced, two-tier system evolved, in which the railways were in the centre of the communication-grid, complemented by feeder-roads to connect the 'interiors' with the nearby railway stations. Politically, the emphasis on connecting the interiors arose partly because of the great limitations felt by the colonial state in checking the mobility of 'mutineers'. The control established by the colonial state on the main imperial line – the Grand Trunk Road – during the early days of the mutiny led the mutineers to take to bye-lanes, making the task of pursuing them difficult for the former. In Bihar, in particular,

the fight between the forces of Kunwar Singh and his brother Amar Singh on the one hand and the state on the other stretched to the jungles of Shahabad, again a space that was very flimsily known to the colonial authorities. For instance, in spite of every precaution to prevent Amar Singh from returning to the Jagdishpur jungles (the home estate of Kunwar Singh), he with his 1,500 men managed to sneak in. And it was complained that, 'Every endeavour to obtain information from the people of the district proved in vain.'<sup>37</sup>

One of the results of increasing the control and knowledge of such areas in the post-mutiny phase, in this case the Jagdishpur jungles, was their renting out on a lease. A Lease Plan was drawn in 1858, which also had conditions 'to ensure speedy clearance of the jungle'. The rectified plan further proposed to cut the whole of the jungle on the estate within one year of the date of lease, 'that one-fourth of the entire area shall be cleared of roots and rendered fit for cultivation within the first five years of the lease and a similar quantity in each succeeding period of five years so that the whole estate may be cleared and brought under cultivation within twenty years.'<sup>38</sup>

The fear of intrigue and conspiracy was equated with narrow gullies and bye-lanes. The arm of control was therefore also extended to regulate spaces within the cities. Some of the studies on colonial towns and cities have shown how influential the spectre of 1857 was in re-organizing and re-planning spatial boundaries within the cities. For instance, Veena Oldenburg shows how safety was sought to be ensured through widening the roads to prevent 'overcrowding', how the 'railway station became a guarded area including a fort, arsenal, a barrack, and extra accommodation for the evacuation of Christians in the event of the another outbreak in the city'.<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, such attempts were not only made for colonial towns, which underwent the 'mutiny experience', but also for those whose genesis was in the post-mutiny period. One such town was Jamalpur. However, we do hear dissonances in the actual

application of the policies, which nevertheless point toward the deeper ambiguities that marked colonial rule.

Jamalpur town came into being in 1862 when a railway workshop was developed there. During the same years (early 1860s) the government had come up with an idea of 'fortifying the principal railway towns', as they not only had the 'valuable machinery and rolling stock' but also had a greater number of Englishmen stationed there.<sup>40</sup> However, the provincial government of Bengal was not too inclined to make investments on fortifications, arguing that the three hundred odd Europeans at Jamalpur would suffice to disperse any mob. Similar was the reaction of the Madras government, arguing that 'a local or sudden insurrection is not much to be feared, and if a mutiny, as in 1857, were again to take place, the line of rails would be so easily broken up over the whole country, that with the small European force at our disposal, it would be impossible to keep the line open.'<sup>41</sup> The Madras official in fact went on to argue that:

Placing these (existing) stations in such a state of defence, is open to great objections. It would appear as though we looked forward to another mutiny taking place, which is much to be avoided. I would never allow the Native mind to be impressed with such an idea.<sup>42</sup>

The Bombay Military Department also voiced its disagreement with turning every station 'into a permanent port of garrison'<sup>43</sup> and argued that 'it's too late to attempt carrying out the instructions of government'.<sup>44</sup> However, the central authority was insistent; on the factor of exciting the native mind, it directed the Madras government 'not to be deterred by such a consideration from taking a step which prudence commands as of considerable political and military importance'.<sup>45</sup> The Bombay Military department was similarly advised to do the best by making 'strong gates so arranged as to be readily shut, and small towers to enable the railway authorities to secure much valuable property, and save many lives in the event of tumult or sudden insurrection'.<sup>46</sup> The

government of India did however concede that while the new stations should be built with defense as a prime objective, the existing ones could be provided with possible defense structures. In Jamalpur, iron-palisade was raised to enclose the workshop.<sup>47</sup>

In spite of such contradictions in the colonial perspective post-Mutiny, we do find in these debates a very interesting feature of fusing the spatial entity of a town or a city with the 'regional' attributes of groups and people. So, it was argued that Kanchanparrah, where the workshops for the Eastern Bengal Railway were situated, did not need any precautionary defence because its neighbourhood was 'agricultural and Bengalee'. But Jamalpur, being situated near Monghyr 'with a neighbouring population somewhat bolder than in Bengal proper' might propel greater danger.<sup>48</sup> Similarly Mirzapur, though an important changing station in the Northwestern provinces, was not a 'revolutionary place'. So it only needed a surrounding mound with the ditch-fence raised and deepened a foot.<sup>49</sup> In contrast to this, Kanpur was identified as a town exhibiting 'revolutionary tendencies'.<sup>50</sup>

This essay has therefore tried to unfold the range of implications associated with the event of 1857 by the colonial state and how such meanings affected the conditions of colonial rule. Community, space and 'political intrigue' have been our three areas of examination, through which a complex picture of 1857 was produced, and through which the state sought to view past, contemporary, and future India. These meanings however were neither homogenously construed nor temporally fixed. The theory of 'Muslim conspiracy', for instance, was superseded by the idea of 'loyal Muslims' in a period of three decades after the mutiny. Similarly, the spatial-cultural zones created post-Mutiny were maintained and bridged at the same time, this contradiction producing its own tensions. Nevertheless, the fear, trauma, and the 'lessons' from the mutiny pervaded the colonial mind throughout the remaining period of their rule of India. It thus outlined, if not

determined, the future conditions of colonial rule. It also became a guiding optical tool to view the past, a legacy for the later nationalist discourse.

### Notes

- 1 Three publications, which came out in 1957 were P.C. Roy Chaudhury, *Bihar in 1857*, (Patna: Government Secretariat Press, 1957); K.K. Datta, *Biography of Kunwar Singh and Amar Singh*, (Patna: K.P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1957); K.K. Datta, *The History of Freedom Movement in Bihar* (Patna: Government of Bihar, 1957).
- 2 K.K. Datta, *Anti-British Plots and Movements before 1857*, (Meerut: Meenakshi Prakashan, 1970), p. 43.
- 3 'Foreword', Roy Chaudhury, *Bihar in 1857*, p. ii.
- 4 Rajendra Prasad, 'Foreword', Datta, *Freedom Movement in Bihar*, vol. 1, p. i.
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 Complementary to this trend was also the negation of a 'united' effort to dislodge British rule. Accordingly, on many occasions the British officers described it as just a 'sepoy mutiny' sans popular support, or episodic, disjointed eruptions based on local grievances.
- 7 *Brief Narrative of Events connected with the Removal of W. Tayler from the Commissionership of Patna*, (India papers/474349, SOAS Library, 1858). Tayler himself wrote this pamphlet in his defence.
- 8 See Kumkum Chatterjee, 'History as Self-Representation: The Recasting of a Political Tradition in Late Eighteenth-Century Eastern India', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 32, no. 4, (1998), p. 917.
- 9 Ibid., pp. 925, 939-42.
- 10 Anand A. Yang, *Bazaar India: Markets, Society, and the Colonial State in Bihar*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 53-54.
- 11 Datta, *Freedom Movement in Bihar*, p. 1.
- 12 By 'diversities' I do not intend either to re-produce one of the colonial trends of emphasizing a completely 'localized' nature of the event (based on local factions and motives) nor to stress upon the 'fragmentary' nature of these events and hence ending up in their 'glorification' and 'celebration'. These were, in the first instance, not fragments, and had

wider linkages, but not exactly in the same way the historiography (both the then colonial and later nationalist) have tried to chart it out. They were in other words, 'diverse', connected but not unitary.

- 13 Peter Robb has rightly put that '... religion and religious leaders had influenced the revolt; British commentators inflated their part into a general Islamic conspiracy.' Robb, *A History of India*, (London: Palgrave, 2002), p.147. However, the relation between the Muslims and the revolt was not static. As Hugh Tinker has pointed out, in the 1850s the revolt was seen as 'Muslim Conspiracy'; later on with the writings of Syed Ahmed and William Hunter, Muslims became 'loyal'; and yet again in the independent Pakistan it was seen as a 'Muslim national revolt'. Tinker, '1857 and 1957: The Mutiny and Modern India', *International Affairs*, vol. 34, no. 1, 1958, p. 59.
- 14 Tinker, 'The Mutiny and Modern India', p. 59.
- 15 Tayler, *Brief Narrative*, p. 7.
- 16 *Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.
- 17 See Kanak Singh, *History of Freedom Movement in Bihar: A case-study of Patna City*, (Patna: Janaki Prakashan, 1991), pp. 4-5.
- 18 Datta, *Anti-British Plots*, pp. 20-22.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 24.
- 20 John William Kaye, *A History of the Sepoy War in India, 1857-58*, (London: 1875, first published 1864), vol. 3, p. 70.
- 21 P.C. Roy Chaudhury, *Sarkar Sanan: Based on Old Correspondences regarding Sanan District in Bihar from 1785 to 1866*, (Patna: Government Printing Press, 1956), pp. 24-25.
- 22 Datta, *Anti-British Plots*, p. 24.
- 23 Tayler as quoted in Kaye, *History of Sepoy War*, vol. 3, note, p. 69.
- 24 *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. xii.
- 25 Datta, *Anti-British Plots*, p. 29.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 30.
- 27 Datta, *Freedom Movement in Bihar*, p. 19.
- 28 Singh, *History of Freedom Movement*, pp. 8-9.
- 29 E.I. Brodtkin, 'The Struggle for Succession: Rebels and Loyalists in the Indian Mutiny of 1857', *Modern Asian Studies*, 6, 3, (1972), p. 277.
- 30 Tinker, 'The Mutiny and Modern India', pp. 60-61.

- 31 Tapti Roy, 'Visions of the Rebel: A Study of the 1857 in Bundelkhand', *Modern Asian Studies*, 27, 1, 1993.
- 32 As quoted in Datta, *Freedom Movement in Bihar*, p. 4.
- 33 Datta, *Biography of Kunwar Singh*, p. 36.
- 34 Ibid. See chapter three.
- 35 Ibid., p. 42.
- 36 I have dealt with this issue in some detail in 'Contest and Communication: The geography of rebellion in Bihar', *Biblio: A Review of Books*, (Delhi: March-April, 2007).
- 37 Datta, *Biography of Kunwar Singh*, p. 171.
- 38 See Appendix XI, *Ibid.*, pp. 223-26.
- 39 Veena Oldenburg, *The Making of Colonial Lucknow, 1856-1877*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), see; pp. 30-44.
- 40 Public Works Department, Railway - A, nos. 23-24, July 1865, National Archives of India. [Henceforth PWD, Rly, NAI].
- 41 PWD, Rly - A, nos. 57-58, June 1865, NAI.
- 42 Ibid.
- 43 PWD, Rly - A, nos. 24-7, December 1864, NAI.
- 44 PWD, Rly - A, nos. 127-8, June 1864, NAI.
- 45 PWD, Rly - A, nos. 57-58, June 1865, NAI.
- 46 PWD, Rly - A, nos. 127-8, June 1864, NAI.
- 47 It was one among the twenty works completed during the year 1866 in Jamalpur. *Progress Reports of Railways in Bengal & of the Jubbalpoor Line*, PWD, Rly-A, Prods., 10, June 1863, NAI.
- 48 PWD, Rly - A, nos. 23-4, July 1865, NAI.
- 49 PWD, Rly - A, nos. 2-4, July 1865, NAI.
- 50 Ibid.

**'Mutiny' in Margins ...**

## When the Sepoys Batted: 1830-50 on the Playing Field

■ BORJA MAJUMDAR ■

By playing team sports, participants were thought to learn teamwork, the value of obeying constituted authority, courage in the face of diversity, loyalty to fellow players and respect for rules. To play cricket or to play the game meant being honest or upright ...<sup>1</sup>

The issues of pig and beef fat, and threats of forcible conversion to Christianity, may have been the sparks to light the fuse, but the powder keg of resentment was already deeply and closely packed. In retrospect the mutiny was an accident, which was waiting to happen.

— *David Washbrook*

Drawing on the statements quoted above, this article aims to suggest that in inspiring India for the 'accident' of 1857, one that shook the country, sport, especially cricket, had a hand. It is not to suggest that sport, like the many commonly stated causes – drain of wealth, racial discrimination, annexation on the basis of the Doctrine of Lapse, was yet another cause of the mutiny. It is not my intention to add to the debate on causality and try to introduce yet another in the list of the causes of 1857. Rather, it is the aim of this paper to suggest that the confidence behind the act of defiance that resulted in 1857 may, in part, have been acquired over the years in an arena hitherto unexplored. This confidence, I aim to document, may have been garnered in the 1830s and 1840s on the cricket field where Indian sepoy had already successfully thwarted English superiority in the latter's own sport.

It is argued in the latter half of the article that such proto-nationalist activities on the sporting field shaped colonial sporting policy in the post-1857 period. On the one hand, the British encouraged the organization of Indian cricket along communal lines, a straightforward outcome of 1857. On the other, it was the colonial policy of bringing the princes back to the forefront of administration after 1857 that resulted in cricket being appropriated by the native aristocrats who had both the means and the motivation. Had this not been the case, Indian cricket, like its earliest English counterpart, which was organized and controlled by peasants from South East England, would have remained a more representative sport. Aristocratic appropriation of cricket was something the colonial state envisaged. With the princes acting as compradors, it was in British interest to position them as the leading patrons of Indian cricket. This allowed the colonizers to use cricket as a tool for acculturation, a means to douse subversive native sensibilities. However, a caveat needs to be introduced here. Deliberating on the nature of princely patronage of cricket, it was assumed that all princes would see cricket as a means to link themselves to the English aristocracy. It is a different matter that some of them like the Maharaja of Natore in Bengal were determined to set up cricket teams comprising Indians only as a direct challenge to the colonizer.

While for years the uprising of 1857 has been taught in Indian schools and colleges, and we have come to learn of multiple causes that may have provoked the uprising, the one question that continues to plague scholars is how the sepoys, underlings, could have acquired the confidence to stand up to their superiors. Such a faith, it may be admitted, could not have been acquired overnight. By drawing attention to the cricket field, hitherto unexplored by scholars, I wish to suggest that the belief that the English could be overwhelmed had already been acquired by Indian sepoys in the 1840s. And it may be proposed, as an extension, that it was such faith that urged Indian nationalists in the post-mutiny period to

appropriate European sport as a means of resistance. With military uprisings no longer an option and the British state firmly entrenched as the paramount power in India, the sports field assumed increased significance in the second half of the nineteenth century.

## I

While sport has been accorded little merit in studies of Indian history, it is beyond doubt that it was of major significance in discourses relating to the disciplining of the indigenous populous and in subsequently stimulating resistance against the colonial state.<sup>2</sup> The games of cricket and football, especially, were considered by the colonizers to carry with them a series of moral lessons, relating to hard work and perseverance, about team loyalty and obedience to authority and, indeed, involving concepts of correct physical development and 'manliness'. As such, they were used as key weapons in the battle to win over local populations and to begin transforming them from their 'uncivilized' and 'heathen' state to one where they might be considered 'civilized' and 'Christian'.<sup>3</sup>

The pre-eminent role of the games ethic in India was most evident in the case of the Indian Army. In the early 1830s, British generals and commanders of the Bengal Army fought hard against indigenous religious customs and social habits to introduce cricket and other European sports among the Indian sepoys, mostly from high-caste Hindu backgrounds. Despite overall initial resistance from the sepoys, their superiors were successful in promoting the game among the local soldiery, who, on their part, were introduced to a new code of ethics. Cricket, for the English commanders, was a moral means to serve a wider imperial end. In fact, it has been rightly argued that bureaucratic and military coercion were not the only reasons why Britain was able to hold on to its vast empire for as long as it did. Cultural power – ideas, beliefs, rules and conventions concerning social behaviours, carried

throughout the empire by the British, also contributed to the ability to control.

Interestingly, most English garrisons within the British Indian Army were modelled in the spirit and ethos of the English public school. Numerous games of cricket and soccer were played by Indian soldiers across the country. Almost every leisure hour was utilized by soldiers to sharpen their sporting skills and more often than not these games became arenas of intense rivalry. The love for cricket cultivated at the level of the British soldiers had a much wider impact on local society. Indian sepoy, in emulation of their superiors took an active interest in the game, and by the 1840s, cricket had gained the reputation of an egalitarian and apolitical agency, which alone transcended the divisions of the colonial social order.

## II

When did the Indians' tryst with cricket begin? In trying to answer this question chroniclers and scribes have invariably turned their attention to Bombay. I did the same in my book *Twenty-Two Yards to Freedom: A Social History of Indian Cricket*.<sup>4</sup> We have all been unanimous in suggesting that the formation of the Oriental Cricket Club in Bombay by the Parsis in 1848 marked the beginning of organized cricket in India. This was followed by the formation of a spate of Parsi cricket clubs in the 1850s and 1860s. There were stray attempts earlier such as the one in 1839 when a schoolteacher, Boswell, tried to introduce the game among his students in Bombay,<sup>5</sup> but such efforts were few and far between. It was the Parsi initiative, all scholars of Indian cricket agree, that started what is today the nation's most relentless obsession.

However, as is often the case with history, new findings contest the old and make for fascinating new revelations. One such startling revelation was that Indian cricket was born amidst native sepoy who had accomplished themselves as players by the middle of the nineteenth century. News reports published in the *Sporting*

*Intelligence Magazine* brought out by the Editor of the *Englishman* newspaper between 1833-50 say as much.<sup>6</sup>

In a detailed account of a match played at Sylhet on 3 March 1845, the reporter states, 'You will oblige me by giving a place in your columns to the account of a match played here ... (between) the European officers and the sepoy of the light company against those of the other companies of the 28<sup>th</sup> Regiment.' The rest of the report is even more startling, 'The most enthusiastic European cricketers could not have played with more energy and cheerfulness than the native sepoy did. I am not a cricketer myself, but invariably attend as a spectator when the natives are playing; the knowledge that the officers, whether playing or not, take an active interest in their performances gratifies the sepoy.'<sup>7</sup>

Interestingly the sepoy had acquired prowess in even the most difficult of skills, such as, wicket-keeping, 'Among the sepoy I observed one or two who bowled well, some who were very good wicket-keepers, and others who caught well ... and as fielders few Europeans can surpass them.'<sup>8</sup> The report singled out sepoy Lungum for his extraordinary batting prowess and declared that in a season or two the native sepoy would be equipped to handle the best European talent in India.

From other reports published in the same magazine we come to know that sepoy cricket was well developed across the Indian heartland. On the other hand, sepoy hardly played cricket in the South where the game continued to be a preserve of the English soldiers in the army. Similarly in Bombay, sepoy cricket was hardly developed. Places where it was fairly well developed were Barrackpore, Dum Dum, Agra, Cuttack, Midnapore, Sylhet, etc. It may be a mere coincidence that the cities and towns where sepoy cricket was fairly well developed were those which were prominent in the sepoy uprising of 1857.

The well-entrenched nature of native cricket across the heartland is evident from multiple reports published in the *Sporting Intelligence Magazine* over the years. About native cricket in Agra, a

*Sylhet, March 3, 1845.*

—  
LIGHT COMPANY—1st Innings.

Captain Powell, 0, bd Ross,	..	..	..	0
Lieut. Sneyd, 1, bd Salmon,	..	..	..	1
Sepoys Sungum Opudeale, 11216, bd Salmon, ..	..	..	..	11
" Soophu, 1, bd Ross,	..	..	..	1
" Goordut, 111, ct Costley, bd Salmon,	..	..	..	3
" Swsabal, 1, bd Ross,	..	..	..	1
" Dabie 1st, 1, run out,	..	..	..	1
" Roostum' 21, bd Salmon,	..	..	..	3
" Merwan Sing, 111, bd Ross,	..	..	..	3
" Davie, 21111, not out,	..	..	..	6
" Ramhit, 1, ct Ross bd Salmon,	..	..	..	1
" Byes, 11211,	..	..	..	6
				Total 37

—  
THE OTHER COMPANIES—1st Innings.

Lieut. Lysaght, 213, bd Sneyd,	..	..	..	6
Ens. Costley, 0, bd Powell,	..	..	..	0
" Ross 1123, stumped, Sneyd	..	..	..	7
" Salmon, 21, ct Ramhit, bd Powell,	..	..	..	3
Sepoys Buldee, 2, bd Sneyd,	..	..	..	2
" Bundoo, 151, bd Sneyd,	..	..	..	7
" Uckball, 312, ct Roostum, bd Powell,..	..	..	..	6
" Sewpersaud, 12132, bd Soophul,	..	..	..	8
" Dwan Sing, 112, not out,..	..	..	..	4
" Mattabuz, 1, run out,	..	..	..	1
" Pattondeen, 211, ct Roostum, bd Sneyd,	..	..	..	4
" Byes, 1111111111, ..	..	..	..	10
				Total 59

—  
LIGHT COMPANY—2nd Innings.

Capt. Powell, 0, ct Uckball, bd Salmon,	..	..	..	0
Lieut. Sneyd, 1521, stamped Ross,	..	..	..	2
Sepoys Sungum Opudeah, 4111, bd Ross,	..	..	..	7
" Soophul, 112, bd Ross,	..	..	..	4
" Goordut, 31, tipped himself out,	..	..	..	4
" Swsabal, 2, ct Ross, bd Salmon,	..	..	..	2
" Dabie 1st, 112, bd Ross,	..	..	..	4
" Roostum, 422222, bd Ross,	..	..	..	14
" Dabie 2nd, 0, ct Costley, bd Ross,	..	..	..	0
" Merwan, 0, bd Ross,	..	..	..	0
" Ramhit, 0, not out,	..	..	..	0
" Byes, 12112,	..	..	..	7
				Total 51

## THE OTHER COMPANIES—2nd Innings.

Lieut. Lysaght, 3, bd Soophul,	..	..	..	3
Ensign Costley, 211122311, bd Powell,	..	..	..	14
"    Ross, 2145, ct Sungum,	..	..	..	12
"    Salmon, 11133122, bd Soophul,	..	..	..	14
Sepoys Buldee, 12221, bd Sneyd,	..	..	..	2
"    Bundoo, 0, bd Sneyd,	..	..	..	0
"    Uckball, 21111, not out.	..	..	..	0
"    Sewpersaud, 4, ct Sneyd, bd Powell,	..	..	..	4
"    Dewan Sing, 0, bd Powell,	..	..	..	0
"    Mattabar, 0, bd Powell,	..	..	..	0
"    Pattandeen, 2, bd Sneyd,	..	..	..	2
"    Byes, 11112111, ..	..	..	..	10
				Total 73

It affords us most particular gratification to have been made the medium of the first record of a native Cricket match,—not merely for the novelty of the event, but for its *precurstive* character as a leader of the way, and an example, to the introduction of so noble a game among the Sepoys, many of whom we are sure in every corps will delight to be instructed in it by their European officers. Jack Sepoy is in many respects an athlete, and has no objection at all to the robust foot sports of England; as we can ourselves allege upon our own experience, for we have often (with other officers of a most happy regiment) had a tussle with them in leaping, running and even at "fives" though Jack was rather awkward at the last named amusement, which, to our thinking requires more skill and activity than "rackets." We hope to find Cricket taking its place as a regular native regimental game; and, if so, we think that as the Government build fives, courts, &c. for the recreation of the European soldiery, they would also supply an annual (or other periodical) set of Cricket implements, for the service of all native corps, ready and willing to use them,—and this not only for the sake of encouraging manly recreation, but for the new bond that it will form between the men and their officers.—ED.

*Scorecard of a match played at Sylhet*

report published in 1843 states that though the match was well contested, the fielding and bowling of the natives was 'inferior to that of their antagonists'. The reporter declared that while the native bowlers bowled round arm, they did so without sufficient practice and were unable to deliver the balls with any consistency.<sup>9</sup>

In yet another report, sent in from Cuttack, the scribe comments '... you seem to be little acquainted with this land of the Oriahs and the sporting characters that are to be found in it ... Now that the cold weather is setting in, sufficient hands can be mustered for witnessing that 'scientific, manly and truly English game.'<sup>10</sup> The

report was accompanied by the scorecard of the first match of the season, according to which one of the teams had in their ranks three native players.

## IV

The early popularity of cricket among the sepoys was ascribed to cricket's potential as healer of the difference between the European and the native. One of the reports draw attention to this aspect of the sport, 'Cricket is essential in improving one of the great defects, so often complained of, the distance of the Europeans in the intercourse with the native.' It goes on to suggest that European officers, from the senior to the junior, encouraged the game either as spectators or players. 'Were they not to do so ... I fear the sepoys would not long continue to play.'<sup>11</sup> The writer suggests that while there were many tangible products of Britain's colonial legacy, one of the most striking and influential was cricket. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, cricket had been a significant determinant of the relationships established between the colonizer and colonized, helping to reduce the potential for conflict between two very different cultural traditions. The reporter, to draw a contrast with an indigenous sport, cites the example of hockey on horseback. Hockey, it is mentioned, was a very popular Manipuri pastime played on horseback or ponyback. 'It might be supposed that sepoys would take an interest in it; for the natives of the upper provinces are generally admirers of good horsemanship, and no little skill is required in playing mounted hockey.'<sup>12</sup> However, the sepoys seemed to take no interest in it, possibly, because, as stated, there lacked that spirit of intimacy with their superiors that they seemed to have begun to value.

But not always did the spirit of sportsmanship last. In an article titled, 'Sepoy Cricket at Sylhet', a reporter writes that the match between two regimental sides, one of them containing no less than eight native cricketers, was perhaps the best-contested and most acrimonious encounter of the season. He singles out sepoy Soophul

for praise describing his bowling as 'first rate'. This transformation was inevitable and was rooted in the very nature of sport. As Brian Stoddart so eloquently puts it, 'In the very success of this socially segmented and skewed imperial ideology ... lay the origins of some major complications for the empire and what became of its post-colonial commonwealth. These complications emerged from an enormous contradiction that existed within the imperial construction of sport ... Sport was promoted as an instrument of apparent trans-cultural unity but within it were several strands of potential conflict.'<sup>13</sup>

Thus, it is hardly surprising to note that within the confines of the army the 'games ethic' was successfully subverted on occasions. Sepoys, already peeved with discriminatory treatment meted out by the colonial state, initiated this process of subversion. To that extent, the history of the appropriation of the games ethic within the ranks of the Indian Army can be seen as part of a nationalist enterprise.

In fact, all of the matches that pitted the native sepoy against European officers of the regiment were of special interest. To draw a parallel, such matches assumed proto-nationalist proportions of the kind depicted in the blockbuster Hindi film *Lagaan*. That the cricket field had already become an arena for assertion of native strength against European dominance is interesting in the light of what happened in 1857.

## V

The British had taken their lessons from these occasional defeats against the sepoy and such matches were a thing of the past by the mid 1850s. In fact, British refusal to play against the Indians became a norm in some provinces by the second half of the nineteenth century. Repeated urgings by the Town Club in Calcutta for a bilateral contest was turned down by the exclusively European Calcutta Cricket Club and it was only in 1895 that they acceded to the request of Saradaranjan Ray, founder of the Town Club, for a match.<sup>14</sup> In south India too locals initially saw cricket as a means of assertion against the British. When matches were played between

the Indians and the British, nationalist overtones often coloured the outcome. This becomes evident from a comment in the *Times of India* at the time the Parsis played Lord Vernon's Englishmen in Bombay in 1890. Vernon's team won all its matches in India except the one against the Parsis, which the visitors lost by four wickets. Commenting on the Parsi victory, the *Times of India* wrote, 'The Parsis are heartily to be congratulated on their really splendid victory ... It is a great feather in the cap of the Parsis to have pulled off the match.'<sup>15</sup> Similar reports appeared two years later when the Parsis were pitted against yet another touring English side, this time under Lord Hawke. As reported in the *Times of India*, 'The interest usually excited by international cricket matches in Bombay reached its highest point yesterday, when the local champions (Parsis) came forth to defend their laurels against the team which Lord Hawke has brought out from England. The visitors are a fairly strong combination, and amongst them are two or three men who have played first class cricket in England ... If therefore the Parsis succeeded in beating them, it was felt they would add a fresh feather in their caps.'<sup>16</sup>

That the feather was appended in style is evident from the following report in the *Bombay Gazette*: 'The success which the Parsis achieved by their superb fielding and bowling was greeted with thunders of applause. ... There is no gainsaying that the remarkable calibre of the Parsis told heavily against Lord Hawke's team. ... In their bowling the Parsis certainly exercised better judgement, and coupled with the excellent disposition of their field, set by their captain Mr Pavri, the sequence (for the British) told a woeful tale.'<sup>17</sup> Likewise, the birth of the Presidency match in Chennai (Madras) played between Indians and Europeans, 1915-52 V. Ramnarayan argues, was born of '... [a] desire to meet the Englishman on equal terms on the cricket ground, and try to vanquish him.'<sup>18</sup> As it turned out, the Indians won a substantially greater number of matches than the Europeans. This accounted for the large crowds at the Presidency matches.

Reacting to cricket's potential for stirring nationalist sensibilities, the colonial state, as a conscious policy, stimulated the organization of Indian cricket along communal lines. Lord Harris, Governor of Bombay, between 1890 and 95, used reclaimed land on the seafront of the back-bay to allot plots to the cricket clubs of the Hindus, the Muslims and the Parsis. The plots were authorized by the government on 12 September 1892, for a meagre annual rent of twelve rupees each. It was stated that this simultaneous but separate allocation to the three communities would have the dual effect of placing them on equal terms with the European members of the Bombay Gymkhana and prevent unpleasantness between the communities themselves.<sup>19</sup> At the root of cricket's communal organization, however, were issues of racial segregation and 'divide and rule', as reflected quite stringently in official policies after 1857.

From the very beginning, therefore, cricket in Bombay was organized along communal lines, an element that D.B. Deodhar claims 'came into existence only because the burra sahibs in India, in the earlier days, had an undisguised superiority complex in all their dealings with the Indians. The British therefore opened their separate exclusive clubs in the three presidency towns of Bombay, Calcutta, Madras, followed closely by the establishment of other such clubs in other cities such as Poona and Bangalore. The Parsis who picked up the game also picked up the tendency for exclusivist organization. On the one hand, the British did not admit the Parsis to their "sanctified fortresses". The Parsis, therefore, had perforce to have separate clubs. However, they did not allow other Indians into their clubs. Consequently, the Hindus had to organize separate clubs and the Muslims, last in the field, followed suit.'<sup>20</sup>

Communally organized cricket was also a feature of Karachi and Lahore. Karachi was the first of the two cities to organize a communal tournament because of its proximity to Bombay. The Sind Quadrangular Tournament began in Karachi in 1916 and in its first year the Parsis beat the Hindus in the final. The two other teams were the Muslims and the Europeans. This tournament later

became a Pentangular with the addition of the Rest who comprised of Christians and Jews. Colonel C.B. Rubie, who served in the British Army in Mesopotamia during World War I, was instrumental in the establishment of the Sind communal cricket tournament. He and other war veterans figured prominently in the administration of cricket in Karachi.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, the Northern Indian Quadrangular Tournament of Lahore began in 1923 after a series of articles and letters appeared in the local press demanding the start of a communal cricket competition. The competition comprised of teams representing the city's Muslim, European, Hindu, and Sikh population.

Communal organization of sport often resulted in ill feeling among the rival groups. According to a description in the *Indian Social Reformer* of 1906, 'The Hindu boys played in dhotis, without shoes or boots, bowled under-hand and made all the mistakes of novices. Parsi players, far more advanced by then, ridiculed the Hindus for their dress and style of play.'<sup>22</sup> This episode, the *Indian Social Reformer* asserted, generated bad blood between the two communities.

Interestingly, the Indian sporting world was aware of the harmful effects of communal organization by the 1890s. Shapoorji Sorabjee, India's first historian of the game, had already referred to the potential dangers of communalism in the last decade of the nineteenth century in the following words: 'To expect all political differences to disappear or all available self interest to be foregone on the institution of cricket relations is to live in a fools' paradise'.<sup>23</sup>

B.R. Kagal expresses similar sentiments in his memories of the Bombay Pentangular tournament, colonial India's foremost cricket tournament. He argued that the consequences of communally organized club cricket in Bombay in the first two decades of the twentieth century were far from satisfactory. The crowd was always guided by divisive communal sentiments, exactly what the colonizers wanted, and there were cases when the police had to intervene to maintain law and order:

I have recollections, as a small boy, of having witnessed more than one scene of this kind from the pavilion of one of the leading Gymkhanas. Of course, it must be admitted that the participants in these 'melees' came mostly from the "mavali" or the 'goonda' class but that did not prevent more respectable classes of people getting occasionally mixed up either by accident or even through indiscreet and misplaced enthusiasm. No wonder parents forcibly kept boys away from matches, which should have proved, in most cases, a source of valuable cricket education.

Looking back nearly thirty-five years, I distinctly recollect thoughts and reactions, which I would be ashamed to own up publicly at present. Worse still, I remember vividly how on returning home after some of these all-absorbing contests, small boys would join groups of elders carrying on heated discussion on even slight incidents which almost always ended in the denunciation of the communal traits and failings of those teams that opposed the groups' favourite or communal team. It was not unusual, in the first decade of the century, to find a couple of lathis stored in the kit bag, along with the gear, as a matter of pure precaution. At least that used to be the explanation invariably advanced in answer to child like and innocent curiosity by the young enthusiastic cricketer proceeding to the "maidan". What was unfortunate, was the mistrust and the sense of insecurity that was evident from these most sincere explanations; and this while proceeding for a friendly sporting encounter, for a game and for recreation.<sup>24</sup>

While growing communal discord on the cricket field fitted with the colonial policy of 'divide and rule', princely stranglehold over cricket also worked to the detriment of nationalist initiative on the sporting field. Among other things, princely monopoly over cricket resulted in anglophiles like the Maharajkumar of Vizianagram, Vizzy as he was popularly known, captaining the Indian team on tours to England. Vizzy led the Indian tour to England in 1936, a post that he secured after much lobbying and

manipulation and only because he carried favour with the Viceroy Lord Willingdon.<sup>25</sup> Under his leadership, the tour was fraught with unpleasantness and discord within the team, which heightened when Vizzy sent home one of the best players, Lala Amarnath, on charges of indiscipline.<sup>26</sup> India lost the series, the careers of C.K. Nayudu and Wazir Ali were over, but Vizzy was knighted by King Edward VIII. The MCC too awarded him a membership without putting him through the customary waiting list. Such princely dominance over cricket checked nationalist sensibilities on the cricket field, allowing British-India contests to carry on uninterrupted. This was a stark contrast to the case of hockey. With the possibility of India beating Britain rife in hockey between 1928-48, the British refused to play against their own colony. In fact, Britain did not participate in Olympic hockey contests in the years 1928-36, knowing that the Indians were favourites to win the gold. This is especially interesting because Britain had won the Olympic gold in field hockey in 1904 and 1920, the only years when hockey was played before 1928 and years when India did not participate. When Britain did play against India in 1948 they were trounced 0-4, a major confidence boost for the newly independent Indian state. Such a boost was never achieved in cricket with the Indians defeating the English for the first time in 1960.<sup>27</sup> While British refusal to play against India in hockey draws attention to the seriousness of sporting contests between the colonizer and the colonized, it also reinforces the value of the British policy of allowing native princes to consolidate their hold over Indian cricket.

Interestingly, even princely patronage of cricket, at times, was rooted in ideas of nationalism. Existing studies of princely patronage have assumed that all princes saw in cricket a means of associating with the ruling British. This view ignores instances of native princes setting up cricket teams comprising of Indians only, an initiative deriving from the belief that this was the only means of challenging the British. The Maharaja of Natore for example was an ardent

nationalist, having been an active member of the Indian National Congress for some years. Soon after turning eighteen, he became President of the Natore Political Association at the request of Surendranath Banerjee. In 1894, he joined Banerjee and Anandamohan Bose as member of the Rajshahi municipality. After the partition of Bengal in 1905, he was a key figure in the anti-partition movement, delivering a famous speech against the partition at the Calcutta Town Hall.<sup>28</sup>

However, he differed from the nationalists in his mode of resistance. Until 1914, he used the cricket field to challenge the English; after which he invested his time in the evolution of the vernacular press.<sup>29</sup> That he was to a large extent successful in rousing nationalist sensibilities among his subjects is borne out by contemporary accounts:

Whenever the Natore XI defeated the European teams of Calcutta, our chests swelled with pride. Before the formation of the Natore XI, we, Indians, were losers on most occasions. But with the formation of the Natore XI, Maharaj Jagadindranarayan turned the tables on the English ... (Sport) is the only arena where we are allowed to compete on even terms with the English. The English have always ridiculed us as effete. It is on the sporting field that we may counter such false allegations. This is why we justifiably perceive a victory on the sporting field as a national victory against the British. Though the English mock us for our perceptions, it is evident that whenever they lose to us, they are filled with rage and humiliation. Thus, whatever is said on this count, that the Natore XI stimulated nationalist instincts among the youth is doubtless. This is a great achievement and has given the Maharaja immortality.<sup>30</sup>

The efforts of the Maharaja of Natore were preceded by the initiatives of other native patrons of sport like Nagendraprasad Sarbadhikary, hailed as the father of Indian football. With British sovereignty firmly entrenched in the post 1857 context, patrons like

Nagendraprasad searched for apolitical ways to avenge their socio-political humiliation in British hands. Sport afforded them such an opportunity.<sup>31</sup>

In fact, the spread of European sport in colonial India went hand in hand with its cultural indigenization. Historians of Indian soccer note that Calcuttans with the rest of India in their trail were the only people in the world to indigenize football skill and technique, playing barefeet, as they did from the very beginning. The Bengalis imparted to the game a distinctive Indian touch. From the very beginning, Mohun Bagan, the leading Bengali club, played barefeet, keen on cashing in on barefoot speed and footwork, and despite abject failure against booted teams on rainy grounds, never thought of wearing boots. The barefooted jugglery of Indian legends like Gostho Paul, the Bhaduris, Samad and Kumar against booted European teams even on slushy surfaces was a constant source of pride for the Bengali nationalists. The barefooted genius of Indians made P.B. Clark, the captain of the visiting Islington Corinthians, an amateur British side, remark in 1938: 'Indians alone play real football, what they call football in Europe is after all only bootball.'<sup>32</sup>

## VI

*'The stuff of history is no more nor less than the sum total of human experience, and sport has increasingly occupied an important part of this experience in modern society. There is, consequently, no reason why sport cannot provide a legitimate basis for historical study, i.e., the critical basis for continuity and change over time.'*<sup>33</sup>

It is indeed an interesting question as to why the sepoys and then some Indian princes and middle-class patrons readily appropriated the British masculine games of cricket and football. From a pragmatic point of view, it may be supposed that they saw in them a worthwhile cultural tool to reassert their hurt self-esteem and injured masculinity. On the other, cricket and football had the potential to be assimilated as means of crossing swords with the

British imperialist. At a time when the ills of an unequal political and economic structure threw up contradictions, which quite naturally had a deep impact on the social psyche of the Indians, sport might have provided a level playing field. Failing to attain power and prestige within the army or in society, the sepoy and later the middle-class Indian nationalist would have naturally searched for apolitical ways to counter British humiliation.

Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century, the games ethic in India had come a long way. From being a preserve of the European imperialist and an English public school code, its appropriation created an arena of competition between the British and the Indians, in turn breeding among the Indians a confidence, which might well have flowed into contexts far more serious than the sporting field. To suggest that Indian sporting clubs of the 1840s and 1850s from their very inception began to reflect or represent purely nationalist instinct or ethos on the sports field is perhaps erroneous. Nonetheless, from the middle of the century, sport had become a new and unique cultural nationalist force among sections of Indian society, although the approach of different segments of society to games was hardly uniform. It is thus just to suggest that the answer to the confidence on display in 1857 may be hidden in the idiosyncrasies of a game in which the English had been successfully challenged by Indian sepoys two decades before the Mutiny happened. It may also be argued that the British policy in the wake of the 1857 uprising of divide and rule and preferring the prince over the peasant, shaped the evolution of Indian cricket, football and hockey in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

#### NOTES:

- 1 Brian Stoddart, 'Sport, Cultural Imperialism and Colonial Response in the British Empire: a Framework for Analysis', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 30 no. 3, (1988), p. 649.

- 2 For details on the role of sport in colonial India see; Ramachandra Guha, *A Corner of a Foreign Field: The Indian History of a British Sport*, (London: Picador, 2002); Arjun Appadurai, 'Decolonization of Indian cricket', in Arjun Appadurai and Carol Breckenridge (eds.), *Modernity at Large*, (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1996); Tony Mason, 'Football on the Maidan: Cultural Imperialism in Calcutta', in J.A. Mangan (ed.), *The Cultural Bond: Sport, Empire, Society*, (London: Frank Cass, 1992), pp.142-54; J.A. Mangan, 'Eton in India: The careful creation of the Oriental Englishman', in *The Game Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the diffusion of an ideal*, (London: Frank Cass, 2001), pp. 122-41.
- 3 For details see; J.A. Mangan, *The Game Ethic and Imperialism: Aspects of the diffusion of an ideal*, (London: Frank Cass, 2001); Keith A.P. Sandiford, *Cricket and the Victorians*, (London: Scolar Press, 1994).
- 4 Boria Majumdar, *Twenty Two Yards to Freedom: A Social History of Indian Cricket*, (New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2004); Ramachandra Guha, *A Corner of a Foreign Field: The Indian History of a British Sport*, (London: Picador, 2002); Mihir Bose, *A History of Indian Cricket*, (London: Andre Deutsch, revised edition, 2004).
- 5 Meher Homji, 'A century of Parsi Cricket', in Meher Homji (ed.), *Parsi Cricket Centenary 1886-1986*, (Mumbai: June, 1986), p. 45.
- 6 The entire collection of this magazine is available in the Rare Section of the Regenstein Library, University of Chicago.
- 7 *Sporting Intelligence Magazine*, March 1845, p. 450.
- 8 Ibid.
- 9 Ibid., (1843), p. 245.
- 10 Ibid., (1842), pp. 517-18.
- 11 Ibid., (1845), p. 450.
- 12 Ibid.
- 13 Stoddart, 'Sport, Cultural Imperialism and Colonial Response', p. 669.
- 14 The Town club was founded by Saradaranjan Ray in 1884.
- 15 Quoted in Shapoorjee Sorbjee, *A chronicle of cricket amongst Parsees and the Struggle: Polo vs. Cricket*, (Bombay: 1897), p. 52.
- 16 Ibid., p. 54.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 V. Ramnarayan, *Mosquitoes and Other Jolly Rovers: The Story of Tamil Nadu Cricket*, (Chennai: East West Publications, 2002), p. 24.

- 19 In recognition of Harris' contribution to the cause of Indian cricket, the Harris Shield Cricket Tournament for schools was started in Bombay in 1893. This is the oldest surviving cricket tournament in India. Oil portraits of Lord Harris are to be found in the headquarters of the Hindu, Islam and Parsee Gymkhanas in Bombay.
- 20 D.B. Deodhar, *March of Indian Cricket*, (Calcutta: Illustrated News, 1948), pp. 42-43.
- 21 C.B. Rubie and B.D. Shankar, *A History of the Sind Cricket Tournament and Kanachi Cricket in General*, (Karachi: 1930), p. 2.
- 22 'Hindu Cricket', *The Indian Social Reformer*, (1906), p. 292.
- 23 Sorabjee, *Polo versus Cricket*, p.123.
- 24 B.R. Kagal, 'Communal Cricket', in M.H. Maqsood, *Who's Who in Indian Cricket*, (Delhi: 1940), pp. 24-32.
- 25 For details on how he secured the captaincy see; Boria Majumdar, *Once Upon a Future*, (New Delhi: Yoda Press, July 2004).
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 In 1960 the Indians under Nari Contractor defeated a second string English side under Ted Dexter 2-0 to register their first ever series win against England.
- 28 For details on the nature of the Maharaja of Natore's cricket patronage see; Boria Majumdar, *Twenty Two Yards to Freedom: A Social History of Indian Cricket*, (New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2004), Chapter 1.
- 29 This is evident from the huge benefactions the Maharaja made in the 1920s for the development of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad, the best-known literary association in colonial Bengal. For details see; Jagadindranath Roy and Prabhatkumar Mukhopadhyay (Eds.), *Manasi o Marmabani*, (Calcutta: 1925-26).
- 30 *Manasi o Marmabani*, pp. 525-27.
- 31 For details on the sporting career of Nagendraprasad Sarbadhikary see; Boria Majumdar, 'Tom Brown Goes Global', in the *International Journal of the History of Sport*, Vol. 23, No. 5, (August 2006), pp. 804-19.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Robert F.Wheeler, 'Teaching Sport as History: History through Sport', *The History Teacher*, (May 1978), pp. 311-12.

## Can the Subaltern Sing? The 'Indian War' in Nineteenth Century British Broadside

■ PROJIT BIHARI MUKHARJI ■

It is a curious academic quirk that despite the extensive corpus of writings on the 'subaltern' in Indian historiography, those with the very first claim to the name, i.e., the white subalterns in the British Indian Army, properly so-called in the official record, have received so little attention. This aporia has, in its own capacity, contributed to the lasting image of the British in India as a monolithic block of oppressive whiteness. As Rudrangshu Mukherjee rightly pointed out during his exchange with Barbara English, there is a long history of depicting the Indians as a fractious and quarrelsome lot incapable of concerted action, counter-posed to the unified, orderly British.<sup>1</sup> While Mukherjee's brilliant study addresses one end of the wedge showing the 'native' indeed was capable of unified and organized resistance in the white heat of the summer of 1857, at the other end of the wedge though, it remains to disaggregate the monolith of the 'British imagination'. It is a question that haunts the otherwise sterling works of Jenny Sharpe and Gautam Chakravarty.<sup>2</sup> Why was it necessary to obsessively produce and circulate images of the 'Mutiny', if not to seek to consolidate a fractured and only anxiously unified 'British imagination' in its outrage?

To be sure the testimonies of such subalterns as Lord Roberts or Sir Mowbray Thomson does indeed enter the historical

narrative, yet clearly their later positions in life as well as the fact that the testimonies were most definitely written for polite rather than subaltern audiences, pre-empt us from tracing the fault lines that mark the subaltern consciousness in their writings.<sup>3</sup> In fact concerned as they are in mining the racial and imperial divide, novels, narratives and records of the revolt are singularly deficient in articulating divisions of class within the white garrisons. The class-conflict and the working class' lack of enthusiasm for the imperial war mongering had at one point threatened recruitment to such an extent that even apparently liberal intellectuals such as Charles Dickens had descended to ribald racist depths to try to deflect the class-antagonism into racial-hatred.<sup>4</sup> Occasionally one encounters anecdotes such as when Reginald G. Wilberforce mentions that the subalterns were especially fond of a song called 'Coffee Shop' which they always sang on the march and shouted out loudest the chorus – 'Confound our Officers'.<sup>5</sup> Yet there is just too little information to allow us to reconstruct the oppositional consciousness of the subaltern in these registers of writing on the 'Mutiny'. The intended careers of these texts are simply not conducive to the articulation of such information.

A rich vein of information on how the subaltern white soldiery experienced, imagined and consumed the images of the revolt, are available in the broadsides and ballads that were incessantly churned out from the various networks of presses in the British Isles. Little-known structures such as the Poet Box presses had complex networks of exchange whereby songs and ballads were exchanged and sold by printers in different cities. John Sanderson of the Edinburgh Poet Box is known for instance to have obtained songs from the Leitches in Glasgow, and his brother Charles obtained songs from the Dundee Poet's Box. Some other Poet's Boxes are known to have existed in Belfast and Paisley. Moreover, the ballads printed on the broadsides more often than not drew on networks of oral culture and occasionally include

references to public performances, thereby insinuating an even wider sphere of influence and circulation than the networks of Poet Box presses.

Recent works by Ruth Finnegan and Robert A. Schwegler have shown that the divide between the oral and textual was not only porous but indeed flows took place in both directions. While orally circulated ballads were printed in the broadsides, similarly printed songs too were memorized and then transmitted orally.<sup>6</sup> This complex process therefore militates against romantic visions of these ballads being completely independent of the more polite registers. Our task thus is to attempt to examine the complex issue of British subaltern vision of the revolt, in both its dependence on and its autonomy from the elite imaginaire.

### BRITISH NATIONALISMS

Linda Colley has contended that by the late 1830s 'Britishness' had emerged as a recognizable and meaningful identity from amongst a welter of local and trans-local affiliations, pre-eminently through Great Britain's foreign military engagements, which gave the soon-to-be-British people a sense of a common destiny.<sup>7</sup> Colley has rightly sought to re-orient a tendency to see British nationalism as product of a linear process whereby four distinct national identities, i.e., those of the English, Welsh, Scottish and Irish are welded into a unified identity. Krishan Kumar has further contended that British nationalism provided a surrogate identity for English nationalism, which while ardently denying the existence of any nationalism remained well-entrenched in the British identity through its very absence. Kumar further argues that though the English were the 'state-bearing people' within the empire, the absence of an articulated idiom of English nationalism allowed them to appropriate the labours and talents of other ethnicities in the running of the empire.<sup>8</sup> It is against this theoretical backdrop that we shall attempt to raise the issue of British nationalisms as articulated in the broadside ballads narrating the revolt of 1857.

At a time when the overt display of Scottish or Irish national icons – tartans, bagpipes and thistle in the case of the former, and shamrock and wearing green in the latter was officially frowned upon and even occasionally prohibited by legislation, a ballad appeared sometime after 1860 called the *Thistle and Shamrock*. After articulating the blood-thirsty outrage of British nationalism in a passage that went thus:

Our sons are away to the Indie's again  
 The rebels to fight on Hindoostanee plain;  
 At Cawnpore and Lucknow there they have been,  
 The bold sons of the thistle and shamrock so green,  
 Britons will be triumphant and that you will see,  
 And revenge we will have for their cruelty:  
 Our brothers and sisters they tortured full sore,  
 At Delhi and Lucknow, Meerut and Cawnpore.

It then went on to ask in the chorus,

Old England is proud, but what would it have been,  
 Were it not for the thistle and shamrock so green.<sup>9</sup>

Partha Chatterjee has perceptively written, 'In the Elite/ Subaltern relationship, just as the autonomy of the two consciousnesses is true, so too is the domination of Elite and the subordination of the subaltern true. Hence the subaltern consciousness, despite its autonomy remains subordinated. It is only by accepting this dialectical form that it becomes possible to analyse the history of the subaltern'.<sup>10</sup> Chatterjee rightly, repeatedly reiterates the interdependence between the Hegemon's culture and that of the subaltern. The continuity of the subaltern's oppositional consciousness manifests itself in continually re-imagining the Hegemon's cultural repertoire into oppositional registers while remaining dependent on the Hegemon's repertoire for its stock of images. It would be fallacious to search for a radically different set of images in the subaltern cultural productions. Instead as we see, the usual set of images of brutality and cruelty in Delhi, Lucknow, Meerut and Kanpur and the consequent outrage and quest for

vengeance are shared with more polite forms of the imperial imaginaire. It is the open assertion of England's dependence upon Scottish and Irish soldiers within this strident Britishness that is interesting. We have here an example of a foreign war, not simply affirming Britishness but also making claims for Scottish and Irish identities at the same time. Scottish chauvinism is rampant in the Scottish pamphlets dealing with the revolt. While some evoke Scottish military heroes like Campbell, others paint idyllic images of the honest Scottish lads bravely avenging the horrors of the revolt while all the time wishing to return home to their highland homes. What is rarer is the positing of a Scottish-Irish alliance as the saviour of England as we have in this ballad. It is another broadside, which perhaps holds the clue to the reason for this alliance. In the ballad *Lads That Were Raised Among the Heather* it is said once again,

The Shamrock, the Rose, an' the Thistle combin'd,  
Hae men that ne'er showed the white feather;  
But foremost in battle you will always find,  
The lads that were raised 'mang the Heather.<sup>11</sup>

But it is not the ballad per se that gives us the clue, but another ballad on the same sheet, the title of which is printed as the header for the whole sheet. The *Lothian Hairst* is a ballad written at the end of the harvesting season and tells the story of how seasonal workers came in from neighbouring 'friendly' ports by ships at the end of August and lived and worked together before leaving for home once again at the end of the harvest.<sup>12</sup> Among the names mentioned are 'M'Kenzie, Reid and Rose', 'Chalmers, Shephard, Logan, Jock,' and 'Royal Stewart too'. Names such as Reid and Shephard are quite common in Ireland and there is known to have been a significant number of Irish agricultural workers working in the Scottish fields of the time. Ruth-Ann M. Harris in her book, *The Nearest Place That Wasn't Ireland: Early-Nineteenth Century Irish Migration*, mentions these seasonal Irish workers in Scotland as comprising a significant proportion of the labour force. Yet she

clarifies that, coming from the poorest of backgrounds, they left little by way of historical evidence and are often invisible in the historical narrative. Moreover, these workers worked under harsher conditions than indigenous labour, and hence comprised the very underbelly of agrarian society.<sup>13</sup> It was perhaps this camaraderie that gave rise to the alliance of the Shamrock and the Thistle. A camaraderie expressed by the *Lothian Hairst* in the very last verse –

Come fill the glass and drink it roon'  
Before our boat shall start,  
And may we safely reach the shore,  
And all in friendship part.

If the 'Sepoys' were mere 'peasants in uniform', their white counterparts were not any different. For as the opening verse from the popular ballad *Jessie's Dream at Lucknow* went,

Far awa' tae bonnie Scotland  
Hae my spirit taen its flight,  
An' I saw my mither spinni'  
In our Highland hame at night.  
I saw the kye abrowsing,  
My faither at the plough.<sup>14</sup>

It was perhaps thus that despite sharing the outrage and bloodthirst of the more polite narrative of the revolt, these ballads did not gloat in the counter-revolutionary operations. A ballad commemorating the re-conquest of Delhi by the British troops (*The Indian War and the Fall of Delhi*) for instance ends with the plea,

And soon may those cruel wars cease,  
And men like brother live in peace.<sup>15</sup>

The above quoted ballad *Lads That Were Raised* also makes a similar plea in its last verse, saying –

Oor kilties gaed forward and conquer their foes  
And peace for the Sepoys did claim.

It is this dialectic consciousness perhaps that Partha Chatterjee had signified when he mentioned the simultaneous autonomy and subordination of the subaltern consciousness. We need not delve too deep into the recesses of post-colonial analytical movements to understand the subaltern's pursuit of an early peace. After all in most cases it was they who bore the brunt of the violence and received the least recompense for it.

The scope of this article does not allow us at present to pursue these themes of subaltern nationalisms or indeed their attitudes towards imperial warfare in depth. Yet we believe that the foregoing discussion has done enough to draw attention to the difference that marks out the subaltern consciousness from the forms that are to be glimpsed in the polite letters, novels and narratives of the revolt.

#### MEMORIALIZING THE REVOLT

In a memorable and characteristically natty formulation Jacques Lacan wrote that, '... history is always producing itself on the stage where it will be played out, once it has been written down, both within the subject and outside him.'<sup>16</sup> Going on to then quite uncharacteristically explain himself, Lacan clarified, that, an instance of trauma can leave very different mnemonic traces in different actors who experience it. Moreover this mnemonic trace can then provide the structure for the experience of other future traumatic episodes. Michael Taussig too has made a very similar argument about the appropriation and deployment of commonly shared images always mirroring the present triumphs and travails of the group by way of a structural homology.<sup>17</sup>

The mode of historicization whereby the revolt of 1857 was related in the broadsheets of the times to older battles hold clues as to the way the revolt was experienced in the subaltern subconscious. Often what cannot be openly articulated for fear of

editorial censorship or reprisals from those in authority can be discerned in the affective structure of the event's historicization.

In a popular ballad entitled *Bonnets O Blue* published from the Dundee Poet's Box, sometime after 1880, the opening verse recounted the struggles of the Stuart Prince Charles, better known as the Bonnie Prince Charlie. In rich detail it recounted how brave Scots had laid down their lives in the Battle of Culloden, where Charles' entire army had been mercilessly butchered by the Duke of Cumberland in 1745-46. It told also of how despite months of pressure and torture, Scottish peasants had hidden Charles till he could escape to France. The Dundee Poet's Box, which published the ballad was indeed known to have published other Jacobite ballads too. A ballad avowedly in praise of the Royal Highland Regiment of the British Army thus sought to narrate action in Kanpur and Lucknow as a re-enactment of the Battle of Culloden. It recounted also the Battles of Waterloo and Alma in the course of the song. But by beginning with Culloden and ending with India a curious set of mnemonic sympathies were set up. Thus, while remaining avowedly pro-Unionist and aggressively British in its Indian engagement, the affective ambiguities of the text are clearly visible in its mode of historicization. After all a ballad which begins with an elegy to resistance against English imperialism and praise for brave rebellion to the imperial yoke and ends with a hope for the success of the imperial mission elsewhere, is clearly ambiguous in its position to the events. What emerges in the process is a strident Scottish assertion rather than a British imperial affirmation. Thus the song goes –

I'll sing o' that hardy, intelligent race,  
Whose valorous deeds time can never efface;  
Whose sires the Romans could never subdue – 18

Tom Nairn has pointed out that it was in the wake of the failed Jacobite uprising of 1745-46 that traditional Highland life was completely destroyed and Scotland turned into an agrarian back-

water which, when pitted against an aggressively industrializing England, developed certain morbid strains of nationalism. Nairn contends that these 'under-development' stoked nationalisms of Victorian Scotland were very different from the modern 'over-development' driven Scotch nationalisms.<sup>19</sup> A popular ballad entitled the *Bravest Fellows Out*, which cherishes the memory of the valiant Scots, who were purportedly the 'bravest men', begins with King Haco of Norway's attempted invasion of Scotland in the thirteenth century. It elevates the struggle against Haco to almost mythic proportions by narrating how a fortuitous tempest destroyed the Norwegian fleet. Most remarkable though, is its re-counting of the battles of William Wallace and Robert Bruce against the English.

Altho' the Saxon sceptre now o'er Scotland holds command,  
It ne'er by conquest was attained, unconquered Scotland stands,  
For Edward, England's King was made in vanquished strain return  
by Wallace, freedom's martyr, and the Bruce of Bannockburn.

Thus denying English dominion over the Scottish lands, the ballad etches a narrative that seeks to recount Scottish bravery. Moreover what remains the un-stated template for the depiction of the revolt of 1857 is a history of Scottish help to the English in times of need. By starting the narrative with Haco's invasion attention is perhaps drawn to the reign of Alexander III of Scotland under whom the invasion had occurred. Alexander III was married to the daughter of the English King Henry III and had helped his father-in-law throughout his reign in his struggle against the rebellious barons with an army of 5,000. The affective similarities thus emerge in the final verse when the Scottish military presence in India is sought to be narrated in an idiom of help-in-a-time-of-crisis.

It was to Scotland England came when dire rebellion ran,  
And carnage red had dyed the fields of sunny Hindoostan,  
Our noble Campbell was sent, his name we'll long revere,

He brought the Queen an Empire back, and made himself a peer,  
He was a noble Scot, his memory long we'll cherish.<sup>20</sup>

The point we are seeking to make here is that the mode of historicization by relating the revolt to prior battles, supplies the affective template to structure the way the revolt is perceived. Further, this structure often reveals hidden anxieties and tensions that perhaps cannot always be expressed openly for fear of censorship. The variations in the perceptive structure of the two ballads used here maybe related to the difference in the affective templates. While the first by invoking memories of Culloden is perhaps more subversive to the elite modes of memorialization, the latter by depicting Scottish military participation in the idiom of 'help' given by one nation to its neighbour at a time of need also undid the strident British imperial project in its own way. Significantly, thus, Campbell '*makes himself a peer*' and is not 'rewarded with a peerage by the Empress Victoria'.

Another ballad, the *Braw Ninety Third* published in December 1863, which also uses a similar strategy of narrating Campbell's troops in India as Scottish help for England at a time of need, ends with a verse that clearly outlines its vision of the Imperial project being a partnership of equals –

I have na'e wish to brag o' the thistle, not I,  
But the saying is, "Aye let the sleeping dog lie,"  
The thistle will flourish wi' shamrock an rose,  
And defy every nation that call themselves foes.  
Let peace be our motto, let right conquer might,  
But they'll no find us backward when eager in fight,  
When England and Ireland will go hand in hand.  
Wi' the braw 93rd and the Campbells at hand.<sup>21</sup>

Interesting contrasts emerge when this mode memorializing the Revolt in the Scottish ballads is compared to strategies deployed in Irish and English affective broadsides. The Irish broadsides such

as the *Massacre of Four Catholic Clergymen* or the very similar *Massacre of Five Catholic Clergymen* refrain from mentioning any prior wars. Instead it concentrates upon the torture and killings of the clergymen and how their faith was insulted in the course.<sup>22</sup> Their crosses, it is said, were snatched from them even as they clung to them at the point of their death only to be trampled under foot before the clergy finally were speared. While the Scottish ballads dwell upon the suffering only in the passing and dilate instead upon the gallantry and valour of their military exploits both past and present, the Irish ballads depict their clergy as 'innocent lambs to the slaughter'. Amidst revolting scenes of violence and torture –

With excruciating torture, those demons in their ire,  
Chopped off their legs & arms and threw them in the fire,  
They cut their scarlet bodies up as they done many before  
This way the sepoy used our clergy at Cawnpore.

The clergy are depicted as bearing all this and yet 'most heavenly they stood' in forbearance. Worse yet, that all this were done whilst they were celebrating mass. The ballad predictably does not forget to draw attention to the suffering of Christ by referring to him in the penultimate line of the ballad as the 'blessed redeemer atop Mount Calvary'. Long discriminated for their Catholic faith by the English it was perhaps not surprising that the Irish couched their affective response to the revolt in terms of suffering for religion and bearing such suffering with 'heavenly' serenity. Interestingly though the invocation of a religious affective frame at times also introduces an element of ambiguity towards the violence of the counter-revolutionary war. The *Massacre* ballads, for instance, conclude in the final line by recalling the Christian virtue of forgiveness.

The English broadsheets on the other hand seek to memorialize the events by merely underlining the suffering of the fellow Englishmen in India. The twin strategies of English

memorializing were thus to stress first that the English in India had suffered and second to reiterate the shared bonds between all who had 'first drawn breath in England'. A ballad entitled *The Great Indian War* for instance stressing the unity of all Englishmen through the battles itself goes on to say –

There's some from the north, and some from the south, and  
 some from the east and west,  
 But none can tell which of their sons are thought of as the best,  
 When they are in a foreign land where canons loudly roar,  
 And fighting for old England in the great Indian war.<sup>23</sup>

Another ballad, *Massacre in India*, published from Birmingham and performed publicly by one Michael Hart goes on to say –

There's glory for him who for his country bleeds  
 Dear happy England, your sympathy is with us,  
 Though we are far away from your shores of liberty and love  
 Though the blood of your daughter flows around  
 Yet the standard of our country doth proudly wave above.

Suffering and the imperial conquest unite the English in their nationalism and the events of 1857 are memorialized within an affective structure that evokes these sentiments. Deprived of the sovereign autonomy of the English, the Scots and the Irish seek alternative affective structures within which to imagine and memorialize the events of the revolt. Both the Scottish strategy of a historicization as well as the Irish religious affective frame of memorialization revealed ambiguities towards the imperial counter-revolutionary violence. While overtly all the narratives subscribe enthusiastically to the imperial vengeance, a critical engagement with their affective frameworks displays deep-seated ambiguities in the Scottish and Irish ballads. Importantly though these ballads reveal also the differences between the affective structures of the different groups. The oppositional consciousness of the subaltern,

thus, can hardly be reduced to being a mere surrogate to class consciousness. It remains unquestionably pluralized and marshals a string of different affective structures derived from the specific historically fashioned experience of the specific group. Chatterjee aptly summed it up when he wrote that, '... the evolution of class-conflict geographically can take a range of different forms. Consequently the characteristics of originality, difference and pre-eminence, etc., of class-conflict are distributed within a complex and ever-changing framework'.<sup>24</sup> Put plainly, while the broadsides drew upon a subaltern consciousness, the degree to which it was opposed to the imperial narratives of the elite as well as the specific forms it took varied geographically and ethnically. Yet, as we have seen in the foregoing section, there were also overlaps between such ethnic groups as the Scottish and the Irish.

#### SUBALTERN' WOES

It is the very material disenchantments of the subaltern that provide for him the grist of oppositional consciousness. Thus, the 'Mutiny' ballads sometimes become an occasion to directly articulate the plight of the ex-soldiers. While Gautam Chakravarty has shown how by the end of the nineteenth century 'Mutiny' narratives of the polite society lean towards the adventurous, in the subaltern narratives of a couple of decades after the revolt we find a more critical attitude where the earlier confidence of the military counter-revolutionary mission has been circumscribed by an impoverished retirement.

A ballad titled the *Dear Old Saxhorn*, written by a certain Jim Williams, who had been part of a band regiment in the Bengal Army where he played the Saxhorn, tells of how

My once erect form is now bent with woe,  
And my steps they are tottering, feeble and slow;  
Whilst poverty, sickness, sorrow and care,  
And grief beyond measure have whitened my hair.

Jim Williams' ballad is extraordinary further in being based on his experiences in the Bengal Army during the revolt, yet in not mentioning any fighting whatsoever. Instead he goes on to write that his music,

O'er Bengal's hot plains caused natives to wonder  
 Oh! music, thy influence who can withstand?  
 Thy power is felt in every land.  
 Not only by mankind – but creations mute  
 Snakes, reptiles, fishes, insects, the fowl and the  
 Brute.<sup>25</sup>

Where Jim Williams is restrained, another ballad entitled *The Poor Discharged Soldier* is far more forthright in indicting the army. He has, he says,

... fought by land and sea, night and day far away  
 For thirteen pence a day ...  
 But after all I've done and battles I've won  
 In place of march I got the run, which does me sore annoy.  
 With my old red coat all tore and bones bruised and sore,  
 I'm left starving on the shore.

He goes on to tell a tale of utter woe of how in his impoverished state the only way open to him before he takes to 'roguery' is to 'break an arm or blind an eye' and go through town with his army medal begging in the name of 'glory and renown'. He bitterly tells of all his brave deeds from Kabul to China and how he now stands at a corner in a tavern just for the joy of seeing others eat meat and bread. It is this bitter impoverished state that finally forces him to cast doubts upon his military deeds and cynically wonder,

Now very long ago, you must know, it was so  
 Of to India I did go, says the poor soldier boy.

And fought the black men there, I declare, and I swear,  
 Without either dread or fear, says the poor soldier boy.  
 But after the campaign I was sent back again,  
 Some were kilt, and more were lame but it mattered not a toy  
 They'd no pension give to I, live or die, I might fly,  
 To the devil or Buckleroy, says the poor soldier boy.

So now to end my theme, I am to blame for the same,  
 I wish I had been slain, says the poor soldier boy.  
 When I took delight to go and fight out of spite,  
 Away off to the Sikhs, says the poor soldier boy.<sup>26</sup>

Till the early 1870s an army subaltern only became eligible to receive pension if he was permanently disabled in the course of the battle. Hence, a large number of those who fought the counter-revolutionary war in 1858 and 1859 came home to the lamentable fate of 'poor soldier boy'. It is in the light of this sorry fate that we can begin to realize the motivations of the oppositional consciousness that animated the Scottish ballads of the 'Mutiny'. In fact scarcely any call it the 'Mutiny' at all, preferring war or rebellion instead. Though it would be unfair to read too much into this nomenclature, it is certain, from the evidence marshalled above that the British subaltern who actually re-conquered much of the subcontinent saw it quite distinctly from the way it was inscribed in the polite narrative genres. Unlike the polite forms it also progressively became more disillusioned as more and more soldiers perhaps came home to broken health, poverty and bleak futures.

An English broadside entitled *Jordan*, published from Brick Lane and deploying mystic imagery reminiscent of the various Antinomian religious traditions that E.P. Thompson so ably showed to have been present in the area,<sup>27</sup> also expresses this disillusionment. Immediately after expressing the confidence that Sir Colin Campbell would 'tame the black Sepoy and will drive them to the other side of [of the Biblical river] Jordan', it adds,

There is nothing but stagnation among the British nation  
 The banks are all failing too according  
 I am very much afraid if we don't get better trade  
 We'll be going to the other side of Jordan.

A few lines later commenting on 'a big address' sent by the 'ladies of England' on the horrors of slavery, the balladeer pointedly asks, in tone perhaps not coincidentally reminiscent of Dickens' critique of 'telescopic philanthropy' in *Bleak House* –

But they'd better look at home to their own white slaves,  
 That are starving on the English side of Jordan.<sup>28</sup>

Despite the obscure usage of the metaphor of the river Jordan which derives no doubt from the vocabularies of the Antinomian heterodoxies as well as the confidence in Campbell's abilities to tame the black Sepoy, its protest against the plight of the subaltern classes of London are in no way muted. Such evidence shows that the disillusionment was not limited to the Highlands but was expressed at the very heart of the empire itself. The message of the song is loud and clear, that unless the stagnation and starvation at the heart of the empire is addressed, the British will end up in the same place as the beaten sepoy, i.e., the other side of Jordan.

Of late a section of scholars have been vocal about the dangers of academically producing an essentialized Scottish identity in opposition to the English dominated British state. Peter Symon, seeking to avoid complicity with the Scottish neo-nationalism that has developed in the wake of the rapid and unequal development of the region following the discovery of North Sea oil and consequent capitalist interventions, has followed D. McCrone to warn us against an overemphasis of the Scottish difference from English culture. Symon's concerns are particularly relevant since his work highlights the 'folk' musical revival, which has been one of the cornerstones of the 'new "over-development" nationalism'.<sup>29</sup> We have, thus, tried to be sensitive not only to the fragmented and

inchoate nature of the 'under-development' nationalism that so forcefully refracted much of Scottish 'Mutiny' ballads, but have also tried to hint at overlaps with elements of English and Irish society as well.

Having said this, there is a serious risk of falling prey to the Charybdis of 'romanticized subaltern radicalism' in seeking to avoid the Scylla of 'essentialized ethnic identifications'. Being, as we have shown above, fragmentary and in certain ways dependent upon more privileged species of discursive practices and image-repertoires, they are often ambiguous in their radicalism. They remain, for instance, implicated in the imperial militarism of the period as well as often exhibiting what Gautam Chakravarty calls 'chromatism' by regularly referring to Indians as 'blacks' and 'niggers', quite a few of them are avowedly religious in their sentiments and almost all deploy the 'sign of white femininity' as an occasion for patriarchic re-affirmation. Yet, they retain a modicum of autonomy by continually re-imagining the images and discourses they consume and appropriate from the registers of the elite.

#### PLURALIZING THE SIGN OF WHITE FEMININITY

The story we seek to unpack from the broadsides and ballads of the British subalterns in this section is neither radically subversive nor wholly novel from those to be seen in the elite narrative genres that Jenny Sharpe, for instance, studied. Yet there are elements in it which manifest a different affective order, a fruitful moment of opposition to that elite representative schema. While being neither homogenous nor wholly free from the impress of the elite consciousness, it yet succeeds in refracting the elite cultural images into subversive registers.

The story of the women in the 'Mutiny' broadsides is quintessentially the story of three women – Jessie Brown, Mary, and Willie's Mary. This is not to say the other more recognizable forms of white femininity that we met in Sharpe's book are wholly absent. These latter generally appear anonymously, in the passing,

merely as a faceless crowd of outraged and wronged women, of whom the *Merry Little Soldier* says –

Lovely maids with arms extended  
 For our protection loudly call  
 We to arms will fly to shield them  
 Or for them in glory fall.<sup>30</sup>

It is definitely Jessie and Mary and to a lesser extent Willie's Mary who are more conspicuous in the outpouring of ballads on the revolt.

Jessie is purported to have been a British Officer's wife who was present at the siege of Lucknow and inspired and gave strength to her fellow captives through her faith. She and the others were saved by Campbell's troops just as her spirit was about to break. There are several ballads devoted to her. Her ethnic identity changes from Scottish to English in some of these, while in others her name too is absent. The motif though is roughly the same. The ballads begin with Jessie dreaming of her village home and then recounts that she is on the last leg of her spirit when suddenly she hears Campbell's troops approaching and playing their bagpipes. Initially she thinks it to be an illusion but soon realizes it to be true and shouts out, 'We are saved!' before falling to her knees and thanking God for the deliverance. A concluding paragraph is sometimes added to praise her strength and virtue. In the Scottish versions such as *Jessie's Dream at Lucknow*, published by the Dundee Poet's Box, the opening scenes recall scenes typical of Scottish peasant life and mention Jessie's husband Tam, who was probably a Macgregor, since she recalled their slogan at her wedding. Also, the bagpipers of the relief party are playing Auld Lang Syne when she hears them first.<sup>31</sup> Contrapuntally in the English version published from Brick Lane, Jessie Brown is thinking of her friends and children back in 'Old England'. Moreover after 'thanking the Maker' for their deliverance they raise a cheer for the Queen and

country and sing 'God Save the Queen' and the 'Highlanders follow, with Auld Lang Syne'.<sup>32</sup> Another Scottish version called *Dinna Ye Hear It?*, whose chorus is shared by the Brick Lane version, leaves Jessie nameless though asserting that she was a Highland maiden.<sup>33</sup>

The figure of Jessie though close to the *Merry Little Soldier's* lovely-maids-calling-for-help, does have elements which mark her out. Her virtue and her faith become a source of strength for the fellow captives, thus making her in a sense their saviour as well. Jessie's figure may have borne more mellowed shades of the virtuous strength of women that emerged so pronouncedly in the rumours that were rife at the time about General Wheeler's daughter. Various versions of the Wheeler story circulated. Most tended to agree that the General's daughter was abducted by a rebel, but she succeeded in slaughtering her captor and his family before jumping into a well and giving her life. Another related rumour that made this strong-willed feminine virtue a source of almost mystic strength to the army, alleged that, the relief contingent in Kanpur took strands of her hair as amulets and mementoes with them while going to battle. Though Jessie is nowhere as violent or active as Miss Wheeler, yet in virtuousness and faith her character resembles Miss Wheeler in being a beacon of strength.<sup>34</sup> In *Jessie Brown the Heroine of Lucknow* for instance, the song begins with the lines –

O Britons at home, you have heard of brave Jessie  
 The brave soldier's wife in the tumult of war  
 God bless her dear heart, all blessing attend her,  
 She gave joy to our hearts like an evening star  
 The moon it shone bright and day was departing  
 We know 'ere tomorrow our spirits must fly,  
 Surrounded by demons, no prospect of succour,  
 Determined to yield not, but bravely to die.

Moreover, the sharing of the same chorus by two different versions

of the ballad points perhaps to borrowing from an earlier oral tradition. If so, it is quite possible that the figure of Jessie too had proto-types in earlier folk songs and drew upon older traditions of the honest and strong peasant/soldier's wife. In fact the Brick Lane version also mentions that it was to be sung to the tune of 'The Soldier's Wife'; probably this was the source from which the themes derived.

Another ballad on a related theme depicts the young volunteer's wife insisting on marrying and accompanying him to Calcutta.

... your danger I will share,  
As a Soldier's wife I will venture life and help to gain the  
Indian war.

Unlike Jessie, Mary's participation in the war is much more direct. Various versions once again were available of the Mary ballad. Some popular versions were *The Paisley Officer*, *William and Mary Of The Indian War*, *The Undaunted Female*, etc.<sup>35</sup> The basic story comprises of a young man who has wooed a pretty young woman for a long time but just as they are to marry the revolt breaks out. The young man variously called William, Henry, John, etc., volunteers for Campbell's troops. The young girl refuses to be parted from her lover and after much deliberation convinces him to take her along. She crops her hair and dresses like a man and joins the forces too and side-by-side they fight the rebels. She puts up with all the hardship of battle happily since she can be with her lover. In one version, *The Paisley Officer* the story ends in tragedy when Henry is struck dead and Mary breaks down and cradles his lifeless head on the battlefield, just as she too is shot through the heart and their bloods mingle on the battlefield as their bodies lie lifeless. In most of the other versions though there are happier endings as they triumph over the Indians. In Mary, thus we have a figure of a woman who completely subverts the image of the lovely-maids-calling-for-protection. We have here a woman with strength of

character, in spirit as well as body, who can, for the sake of love, perform what is usually considered the manliest of jobs, i.e., war. Significantly though this is not the figure of the wild Amazon that could threaten or disturb patriarchal power structures; Mary does what she does at the end merely to be with her lover.

Though Mary's depiction clearly subverts the sign of white femininity as outraged mothers and daughters in need of protection, there could be an even more subversive reading of the figure. For the larger parts of the ballad Mary remains dressed as a comely young man while living and sharing the barrack life of her lover. Is it possible that she becomes a surrogate for homoerotic love that could not be openly admitted even in the world of the ballads? In *The Paisley Officer* for instance it is said,

He took her onto Paisley town, and much they wondered there,  
To see the new recruit that look'd so gentle, slight and fair.

Precisely where the 'wonder' for the 'gentle, slight and fair' new recruit transmogrified into attraction might be difficult to clearly identify in these ballads, but cross-dressed figures have long been used as a literary trope to depict homoerotic love. Opening up further homoerotic possibilities, both men and women seem to be attracted to Mary – 'The ladies admired her as she stood each day upon parade'. Though it is immediately asserted that 'no one thought the soldier's coat concealed a lovely maid', but following those such as Judith Butler who view gender as performative social role-playing,<sup>36</sup> we might contend that this assertion only serves to assert the male-male homoeroticism. Since for all intents and purposes Mary played the part of a man and none could tell that she was not, in her lover's continuing attraction for her, we clearly glimpse then a homoerotic fascination. In a similar vein we might read *The Undaunted Woman's* scenes of lovers fighting side by side:

And I'll fight beside my true love in Sulej or Lahore,  
 As a soldier then she walked with her lover it is said,  
 By her William did she stand and fight in the Indian war

As Pauline Greenhill points out, 'cross-dressing ballads' can be read as both heterosexual or queer narratives. As parts of a performative oral repertoire these texts moreover are especially well suited to produce a range of different meanings while being performed or heard by diverse communities of audiences or performers.<sup>37</sup> To reject such queer readings as 'alternative', 'connotative', 'sub-textual', etc., is to thus remain trapped within what queer theorist Alexander Doty has dubbed the 'heterocentrist paradigm'.<sup>38</sup>

Another song that supports this queer reading is quoted by Reginald Wilberforce in his journal as having been sung by the subalterns in India at the time of the revolt and went thus,

Away go those brave heroes  
 The likes we never see more  
 And with them goes the light bobbee  
 And the lad that I adore.<sup>39</sup>

By themselves the songs are innocuous perhaps, but read against the grain they may well be a surrogate for forbidden homoerotic sentiments. The figure of Mary whether as a repository of homoeroticism or as a strong-willed, cross-dressed woman capable of military action, subverts the dominant image of the white woman as the victim in need of protection.

Finally, there is Willie's Mary and her variations. Willie's Mary is different from Jessie and Mary in that she does not go to India but waits loyally for her husband to return home from the war. These ballads usually narrate the moment of reunion when the triumphant soldier, though much changed in appearance and in cases even maimed but decorated and honoured for his bravery returns home to his loyal wife. In a variation of the theme he

returns to his old widowed mother. She becomes thus an embodiment of all that one seeks to return to, love, security, comfort, etc. The nostalgia that one feels for home accompanied by the uncertainty of return found its lyrical form in Willie's Mary. In *Willie Safe At Home* for instance, Willie, the returning soldier, tells Mary that –

I was often sad and weary,  
 Naught could my spirits cheer,  
 The thoughts of thee dear Mary  
 And friends I love so dear;  
 Brought tears in my eyes,  
 And filled my heart in pain,  
 I was afraid I'd ne'er behold  
 My native land again:  
 Far far across the main  
 With the army I did roam.  
 But Mary dear, thy Willie's here  
 Safe, safe at home.<sup>40</sup>

Willie's Mary is perhaps the most patriarchal of all the women we meet in the ballads. Devoid of action or agency she is the patient, passive and loving homeland that one remembers nostalgically when far away from home and faced with the possibility of an imminent death. In certain senses she stands for the motherland itself, as is to be seen in the above quote where longing to see Mary and the 'native land again' slip into each other. By a dual slippage land is feminized and women are territorialized. Their attributes can now blend into one another. A woman can take on the attributes of the land – fruitful, patient, pliable, capable of possession, etc., while the land takes on feminized qualities of nurture, love, beauty, etc. Michael Taussig has pointed out the tendency of peasant cultures to equate nature and nurture, production and reproduction by establishing a replaceable relationship between land and woman.<sup>41</sup>

A more dramatic and perhaps even more lyrical telling of the same themes is to be glimpsed in *The Soldier's Return from India*. Though some versions of this and *Willie Safe at Home* use the same woodcut on the top of the broadside to frame the narrative, the crucial difference between the two is that in the *Soldier's Return* it is not Mary the beloved, but rather the soldier's old, widowed mother who impatiently asks a returning soldier for news of her only son. The soldier puts her anxieties to rest and makes her proud by letting her know that though,

He's bronzed, he's lame and bended,  
You scarce would know him, dame,  
But though his face is alter'd,  
His heart is just the same.<sup>42</sup>

When she even more anxiously asks by the end of the song when he is due home, it is dramatically and happily revealed that it was her son that she has been talking to all the while.

It would be barren to wonder if these songs helped to assuage the anxieties about long periods of separation actually driving loved ones away from each other. As was most likely, a soldier who spent a long period in India would take up a 'native' mistress at the very least (as indeed many were known to do), or the long separation and poor communications would drive his beloved at home to marry another, and to reduce the ballads to such a function would be to turn them into clever psychological props. Let it suffice instead to say that Willie's Mary functioned instead as an image of all that was glorious and good in the ideology of subaltern participation in an imperial war. By nostalgically framing the mother country as the real mother or the loyal love, the soldier seeks a recognizable form in which to articulate his attachment to the country as well as an affirmation of the reciprocation of his commitment to the nation, which he desired, but as we have seen above, did not always obtain. In the face of the doubts and the cynicism met with in such ballads as *Dear Old Saxhorn*, such affirmation would have had a definite

value. This feminine figure also accents once again the fact that the subaltern consciousness is not always subversive or consistent; instead it remains fragmentary and disjointed in its opposition to the elite narratives. Its oppositional orientation is glimpsed in its ever-changing efforts to re-interpret elements of elite consciousness into a semantic system that would express the subaltern's aspirations, triumphs and travails.

### CONCLUSION

Much interest had been generated by the 'Mutiny' in the British imagination not only in 1857-58 but indeed for nearly a hundred years thereafter. In fact scholars have pointed out that the Raj revival of the 1980s once again trawled out the 'Mutiny' and its nostalgias.<sup>43</sup> Yet the academic accounts of this interest have largely concentrated on the polite letters of the middle and upper classes of British society. While historians have long debated the fractious nature of the Indian involvement in the revolt, the privileging of the polite British imagination has pre-empted a similar disaggregation of British imagination. Surprisingly therefore little attention has been paid to the role and imagination of the white subaltern soldiery who fought the counter-revolutionary war.

We have attempted, in what remains undoubtedly only a preliminary foray, to outline the possibility of such disaggregation. While fighting shy of any attempt to depict the British subaltern as being a radical anti-war activist, we have attempted to show how their imagination of the revolt or the 'Indian War', as the balladeers called it more often, varied from the visions of the elite. Though it remained fragmentary and subordinated to the elite discourses of the time – being dependent on the latter for its stock of images and tropes – yet, one can, as we have contended, read a certain oppositional orientation in it. This opposition manifests itself in a constant attempt to re-imagine popular polite images into ones which bear homologies with the aspirations and experiences of the

subaltern. We have in fact gone further and commented that the very affective structures through which events become memorialized as experiences are in themselves marked by the difference and autonomy of the subaltern. We have also shown that the evolution of this class-conflict varies in the form it takes. Other identities such as those of ethnicity are also crucial in giving the particular form it takes at a certain historical juncture. Yet the intersection of these identities, i.e., subalternity and ethnicity, give both a new form. Therefore just as Scottish subalterns and English subalterns react to the revolt differently, so too are British nationalisms transformed in the subaltern domain into a series of peasant patriotisms whose relationship with the dominant British nationalism is once again different from that found in hegemonic texts.

Subaltern opposition to elite cultural forms thus does not split the two into two mutually opposed cultural systems. Instead a fragmented and dependent consciousness of the subaltern develops marked by the autonomy of its affective capacity to re-imagine the images of the polite narratives. The specific forms these oppositions take as well as the degree to which they are subversive to elite forms depends upon their refraction by various other social identities such as those of ethnicity, gender, etc. This refraction though is overdetermined and mutually transformative for both identities, i.e., while gender or ethnic identities are transformed by subaltern imaginations, they infect subaltern consciousness too in historically specific ways.

The visions of the revolt in the subaltern consciousness emerge, thus, as deeply ambivalent and fragmented by other cross-cutting identities such as ethnicity and gender. It remains autonomous, however, in its capacity to subvert dominant images of the revolt by re-imagining them. Despite the plurality of forms that this class-conflict takes in different parts of the British Isles, certain symmetries also emerge due to the common experience of material deprivations. The subalternity of these actors thus allows us to also

develop linkages and networks that help qualify essentialized ethnic and gender identities as well. In sum, by deploying post-colonial tools of analysis on metropolitan cultural forms, we hope, it may be possible to get beyond the trenchant celebrations of nationalism, on both sides, in the various studies of the events of 1857.

#### Notes:

- 1 Rudrangshu Mukherjee, "'Satan Let Loose Upon Earth': Kanpur Massacres in India in the Revolt of 1857', *Past and Present*, (Oxford: August, 1990), pp. 92-116; Barbara English, 'The Kanpur Massacres in India in the Revolt of 1857', *Past and Present*, (Oxford: February, 1994) pp. 169-178; Rudrangshu Mukherjee, 'The Kanpur Massacres in India in the Revolt of 1857: Reply', *Past and Present*, (Oxford: February, 1994) pp. 178-89.
- 2 Jenny Sharpe, *Allegories of Empire: The Figure of Woman in the Colonial Text*, (London: University of Minnesota Press, 1993); Gautam Chakravarty, *The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination*, (Delhi: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
- 3 See for instance, Mukherjee, 'Satan Let Loose'.
- 4 Lilian Nayder, 'Class Consciousness and the Indian Mutiny in Dickens's "The Perils of Certain English Prisoners"', *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, (Baltimore: Autumn, 1992) pp. 689-705.
- 5 Reginald G. Wilberforce, *An Unrecorded Chapter in the Indian Mutiny*, (Gurgaon: The Academic Press, 1976 [Reprint]), pp. 80-81.
- 6 Ruth Finnegan, 'How Oral is Oral Literature?', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, (Cambridge: 1974), pp. 52-64; Robert A. Schwegler, 'Oral Tradition and Print: Domestic Performance in Renaissance England', *Journal of American Folklore*, (Champaign: Oct-Dec., 1980) pp. 435-41.
- 7 Linda Colley, 'Britishness and Otherness: An Argument', *The Journal of British Studies*, (Chicago: October 1992) pp. 309-29.
- 8 Krishan Kumar, 'Nation and Empire: English and British National Identity in Comparative Perspective', *Theory and Society*, (Dordrecht: October, 2000), pp. 575-608.
- 9 L.C.Fol.178.A.2(107), National Library of Scotland - Hereafter NLS.
- 10 Partha Chatterjee, 'Bhumika: Nimnborger Itihaash Chorchar Itihaash' in Gautam Bhadra and Partha Chatterjee (eds.), *Nimnborger Itihaash*, (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 2004). p. 8.
- 11 RB.m.143(122), NLS.

- 12 RB.m.143(122), NLS.
- 13 Ruth-Ann M. Harris, *The Nearest Place That Wasn't Ireland: Early Nineteenth Century Irish Labor Migration*, (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1994).
- 14 L.C.Fol.70(120b), NLS.
- 15 Written by John Wilson and printed by James Lindsay, Glasgow. Firth c.14(84), Bodelian Library – Hereafter Bod. Lib.
- 16 Jacques Lacan (Translated by Alan Sheridan), 'Empty Speech and Full Speech in the Psychoanalytic Realization of the Subject' in *Ecrits: A Selection*, (London: Routledge, 2006) p. 57.
- 17 Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991 [Reprint]).
- 18 L.C.Fol.70(22a), NLS.
- 19 Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neo-Nationalism*, (Altona: Common Ground, 2003).
- 20 Firth c. 14(281), Bod. Lib. Published from the Poet's Box of Glasgow on 9 July 1864.
- 21 Published from the Poet's Box at Glasgow on 23 Dec., 1863, Firth c.14(279), Bod. Lib.
- 22 Firth c.14(82) and Harding B 26(423), Bod. Lib. The latter was published by J. Moore from 40, Ann-Street, Belfast.
- 23 Harding B 11(2084), Bod. Lib. Published by A. Ryle & Co., Monmouth Court, London.
- 24 Chatterjee, 'Bhumika', p. 6.
- 25 RB.m.143(040), NLS.
- 26 L.C.Fol.178.A.2(217), NLS.
- 27 E.P.Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).
- 28 Harding B 15(153b), Bod. Lib. Published by T.Taylor, Taylor's Song Mart, Brick Lane, Bethnal Green.
- 29 Peter Symon, 'Music and National Identity in Scotland: A Study of Jock Tamson's Bairns', *Popular Music*, (Cambridge: May, 1997) pp. 203-16.
- 30 2806 c.17 (277) Bod. Lib. Published by W.Armstrong of Banastre Street, Liverpool.
- 31 L.C.Fol.70 (120b), NLS.
- 32 Harding B 15 (147b), NLS. Published by T.Taylor, Taylor's Song Mart, Brick Lane, Spitalfields.
- 33 Firth c. 14 (88), NLS.
- 34 For accounts of the various versions of the Wheeler story see Edward

- Leckey, *Fictions Connected with the Indian Outbreak of 1857 Exposed*, (Bombay: Chennon and Woodhall, 1859).
- 35 L.C.Fol.178.A.2 (198), NLS; Firth c.14(174), Bod. Lib., 2806 c.15 (196), Bod. Lib. The last was published by W. Birmingham, Dublin.
- 36 Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 1990).
- 37 Pauline Greenhill, "'Neither A Man Nor A Maid': Sexualities and Gendered Meanings in Cross-Dressing Ballads', *The Journal of American Folklore*, (Champaign: Spring, 1995) pp. 156-77.
- 38 Alexander Doty, *Making Things Perfectly Queer: Interpreting Mass Culture*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).
- 39 Reginald G. Wilberforce, *An Unrecorded Chapter*, p. 82.
- 40 Firth c.14(163), Bod. Lib. Published by H. Such of Union Street, London.
- 41 Michael Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983 [Reprint]).
- 42 Harding B 11(3580), Bod. Lib. Also published by H. Such of Union Street, London.
- 43 Jenny Sharpe's *Allegories of Empire* for instance makes this point.

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## Histories of Western Education and the Mystery of the Missing Mutiny

■ SANJAY SETH ■

By the early decades of the nineteenth century, colonialism had increasingly come to be seen and defended as an essentially pedagogic enterprise. Those aspects of British rule which had long been hailed as the justification for foreign rule of another peoples – the Pax Britannica which created peace where once there had been disorder and brigandage, the ‘rule of law’, the provision of public works, and so on – were now seen not only as goods in themselves, but also as having an educative value. Education more narrowly conceived, as formal instruction or schooling, was seen as an aspect or subset of this wider pedagogic mission. Thus, Sir Richard Temple, reminiscing upon his career as a senior colonial official in India, distinguished between education imparted through ‘contemplation of the example set by the British Government in India in its wise legislation’, and that imparted through ‘definite instruction’<sup>1</sup>; and Sir Narayan G. Chandarvarkar, the distinguished vice chancellor of Bombay University, said in a conference that ‘the very presence of the British with their traditions of liberty ... [was] an education to the people’, one supplemented by the decision in 1835 to provide Western education to Britain’s Indian subjects.<sup>2</sup>

This ascription of pedagogic effects to colonialism was intimately connected to the fact that by the latter part of the eighteenth century, and certainly by the early nineteenth, any

admiration once excited by India had greatly diminished. India was not only different, but was clearly, in the eyes of its ruler, 'lesser'. It was of course only on this presumption that the transformative effects of British rule could be seen as desirable and 'educative'. Colonialism could be seen a pedagogic agent on condition that native society was perceived to be deficient: as failing to impart any lessons, or failing to impart the right ones; indeed, as imparting the wrong ones. With regard to education as schooling, the same logic applied; the presumption that indigenous knowledges were inferior was spelt out with brutal clarity in Macaulay's Minute, which famously declared that a shelf of European literature was superior to all the literature and science of India.

Colonialism-as-pedagogy was a way of depicting or rendering the claim that colonialism functioned in order to effect 'improvement', and every policy and practice of the British which could be construed as 'improving' was the potential subject of a history, from the suppression of infanticide to the building of the railways. Such historical narrativization underpinned the Raj, it was present in its every pore, lurked behind its every utterance. To write histories of Britain's work in India was to give expression to the self-understanding of the Raj, and to thematize its principal justification: that it ruled *by virtue* of the gap between itself and its colonial subjects, and that it ruled *in order* to improve its subjects and their condition. Many such histories were written, including – the focus of attention of this essay – histories of Western education.

In what follows, on the basis of a close reading of a wide cross-section of such histories of education in India, I argue that for all their diversity, they display a common narrative structure. I then proceed to document the fact that the so-called Mutiny of 1857-58, surely one of the most important events in the nineteenth century history of India, and one that had an impact on the newly established educational system, nonetheless hardly figures in these histories. Having suggested that their shared narrative structure is deeply revealing about the status and function of these histories, I

conclude by arguing that equally revealing is what they omit, namely the Mutiny.

### HISTORICIZING EDUCATION

An extraordinary number of writings in colonial India narrativized the history of Western education, including historical 'chapters' in books and government reports, short and long essays in periodicals of the time, pamphlets, and full-fledged books. Many other works treated some or other aspect of education in India, but I do not include these in my discussion, for the category 'texts on education' is much wider than 'histories of education', which form a (voluminous) subcategory within the former. Before classifying these histories according to differences in subject matter, an initial distinction may be made pertaining to the status of the work and the circumstances of its production. We can broadly divide histories of education into those that are 'official' and 'unofficial'.<sup>3</sup> Official documents are histories that were produced by the state, largely for the state. Once an educational system, and a bureaucracy to administer it, had been set up following the 1854 Despatch, the manner in which policy on education in India was made was superficially modelled on how it was made in nineteenth and twentieth century England and Scotland. A committee would be appointed to investigate and advise on education or some aspect thereof, and it would produce a (usually lengthy) report, which might include a historical chapter, and would make findings and recommendations. The government would then examine the recommendations – the reason why the process was only superficially similar was that in India public opinion was not a very significant factor – and adopt, amend or reject them. Significant statements changing or elaborating upon the government's policy on education would take the form of a 'Minute', 'Despatch' or 'Resolution'. Many of the 'official' histories I am referring to occur as chapter(s) in the reports of such committees. Typically, such a chapter tells the history of education in India by recounting the

determinations of previous committees, ending with the last major report or policy pronouncement; and becomes in turn the concluding episode in the next committee's historical account.

Unofficial histories were all those which were not produced by the state, whether they were written by British or Indian, by journalists or those connected with the educational system, supporters of colonial rule or nationalists. These were usually parasitic on the official histories, drawing some of their essential information from these. It was possible to write an 'unofficial' history which was little more than a gloss on the official ones – and many such were composed. By the twentieth century the number of unofficial histories of education were so numerous that the Education Department planned to publish a series of chronologically arranged 'educational records' (two such volumes were published by the government printery), with the aim that 'these may yet assist in guiding some future student in the compilation of a history of this subject more elaborate than those which have yet appeared'.<sup>4</sup>

Histories of education also differed according to subject matter. There were histories which were about British India in general, such as T.N. Siqueira's *The Education of India* and Nurullah and Naik's *A History of Education in India (During the British Period)*, as well as histories of education confined to a province, with titles like *History of Education in the Madras Presidency* and *A History of the Growth and Development of Western Education in the Punjab, 1846-1884*.<sup>5</sup> Education was a 'provincial subject', that is, a matter for determination by those administrative units deemed to be 'local' or 'provincial' (these often consisted of areas with populations larger than many European nations), within the broad policy parameters and financial limits set in London and by the central government of India. Thus, if the broad policy framework of any history of education necessitated reference to the central government, the concrete historical narrative necessitated reference to provincial developments.

When the decision to concentrate government attention upon education in Western learning was made, what was being proposed was not a mass education system. The small sums to be dispensed upon it, combined with the proposal to disseminate the new knowledge in English, meant that this education was to be confined to a small but influential elite, with the expectation that the impact of this education would 'trickle down' to the classes below this elite and be influenced by it. The 'trickle down' theory was abandoned by the 'Despatch' of 1854, and eventually an 'educational system', composed of primary, secondary and tertiary levels, did emerge – even if it remained an inverted educational pyramid down to and beyond Independence. The existence of different levels of education, at once differentiated and yet part of an integrated system, provided another subject for educational history – histories of the different levels of education, as with J.M. Sen's *History of Elementary Education in India*.<sup>6</sup> In this case as in all others, a history by level could be 'crosstabulated' with other categories, as, for example, in Sana Ullah Khan's *A History of Education in the Punjab (Primary Education)*, and J. Ghosh's *Higher Education in Bengal Under British Rule*.<sup>7</sup>

Yet another subject matter for educational history was its 'development' with reference to different 'sections' of the population. As the educational system became both more extensive and more rigorously administered and regulated, both the government and sections of the population began to take an interest in its differential effects. Women's education became a much debated topic, and a subject of histories; and the education of Muslims, and especially the idea that they were 'missing out' on Western education, became something to be discussed and documented historically, as well as statistically. Many histories were written on both.<sup>8</sup>

There are also histories which are more difficult to classify, and might be called histories by topic. There were thus histories of vernacular education, and rural education;<sup>9</sup> as well as histories of

'indigenous' education', in British times as well as ancient times. Finally, there were not an insubstantial number of histories of individual institutions (usually commissioned by these institutions to commemorate anniversaries and the like), and of bodies connected to education.<sup>10</sup>

At this point one might wonder whether this enumeration serves to dissolve the presumed unity of the object, 'histories of education'. I enumerate them in some detail partly in order to indicate the density of the field; but also as a prelude to demonstrating that despite variations, this is indeed a 'field', even a genre. For what these texts have in common is a narrative structure, which provides them with an archetype; the individual texts and the different kinds of history of education vary or improvise upon this. The archetype is one in which the history of education is divided into 'stages' or often, and more portentously, into 'eras' or 'epochs'. The eras are divided by 'landmarks', which in initiating a new phase mark it off from the preceding one. The landmarks are usually the policy pronouncements of the government.

Typically, a history will begin with a brief mention of institutions of learning in ancient and medieval India (often rendered as 'Hindu India' and 'Muslim India'), and the state of their decay at the time of the arrival of the British. Entire centuries are dealt with in a usually very cursory fashion, so this tends (to borrow Levi-Strauss's distinction<sup>11</sup>) to be a 'cold' chronology; and since in any case this is part of the 'pre'-history of colonial rule and of Western education, it is also omitted in many accounts.

The real history, and the 'hot' chronology, begins with the late eighteenth century, when individual Englishmen in responsible positions privately sponsored institutions of Oriental learning: Governor-General Warren Hastings establishes a Madrasa in Calcutta, and Jonathon Duncan, the British Resident in Benares, establishes a Sanskrit College there.

The next phase begins with the decision in 1813 to allocate some money for the promotion of learning. Since there is money

to be spent, in 1823 a General Committee for Public Instruction is established to advise on how it should be spent. The debate over whether funds should continue to be spent on oriental learning or allocated to the patronage of Western learning begins in earnest soon after. The conflict between the 'Orientalists', and the 'Anglicists' led by Macaulay, forms an important and dramatic episode in most histories. The highpoint and concluding moment of this phase is Macaulay's Minute.

The next epoch begins with the government accepting and acting upon the recommendations of the Anglicists, in the Despatches of 1835 and 1839. Government patronage is now directed at founding and supporting institutions which teach Western knowledge, mostly in English, and at the higher levels of secondary and at college level, rationalized by a theory that if the elite are remoulded through the effects of Western knowledge, this will eventually 'filter down' to lower layers of the population. The decision of 1835 provides the occasion for many a rhetorical flourish.

The 1854 Despatch, sent by the authorities in England to the British Indian Government, opens the next epoch. If Macaulay's Minute and the decision of 1835 are often dramatized, the Despatch is written about in epochal terms – quite literally. The Calcutta University Commission will later call it 'epoch-marking'<sup>12</sup>, and the Indian Statutory Commission 'epoch-making'; the author of a history of education in Madras will declare that it 'marks an era'<sup>13</sup>, while the author of a history of education in India will label it 'the most important landmark in our educational history'<sup>14</sup>; the British principal of the elite Presidency College of Calcutta University will declare that it is 'the climax in the history of Indian education'<sup>15</sup>; and all of the above and many others will describe it as 'the Charter of Indian education'. The Despatch is ascribed such importance in these histories because instead of being one of a piecemeal series of pronouncements on education, it lays out a scheme for the development of education in India; and the scheme is to institute an

educational system. Admitting that the education of all but an elite had hitherto been neglected, the colonial authorities in England effectively abandoned the 'filtration theory', placing new emphasis on education at all levels and not simply the higher levels. It introduced the innovation of a grants-in-aid system (soon to be followed in England, under the Revised Education Code of 1861) as one of the funding mechanisms to make an expansion of the system possible. By mandating the establishment of provincial departments of Public Instruction to oversee and inspect education, it authorized the creation of a bureaucracy, which would administer the education system which was being created. The 1854 Despatch also threw government support behind the creation of universities in India, and three years later universities, modelled upon London University (as institutions which would examine and award degrees to students who did all their studying at affiliated colleges) were established in the Presidencies of Bengal, Bombay and Madras.

As the very 'charter' of Indian education, the 1854 Despatch is never actually superseded; however, soon other 'landmarks' appear on the horizon, such as the Indian Education [Hunter] Commission of 1882-83, which issued an eight volume report in 1883, with numerous recommendations, most of which were accepted by the government. The effect of implementing these recommendations was to accelerate an already discernible tendency for private agencies to supply the Western education, which the urban middle classes had increasingly sought, but which government parsimoniousness failed to provide in sufficient quantity.

When the autocratic but energetic Lord Curzon assumed the Viceroyalty, he designated education as one of the areas he intended to reorganize. The Indian Universities [Raleigh] Commission was appointed which delivered a report in 1902 reaching the conclusions and making the recommendations Curzon desired, and extensive reforms were enacted in 1904. All the histories of education treat this as an important landmark, though they differ

considerably on how they evaluate it. In some histories Curzon's reforms appear as a long overdue attempt to impose some order and direction upon a burgeoning, out of control system; in others, especially nationalist histories, as an attempt to reassert government control over universities which had fallen under the control of Indians, and through such reassertion to also exercise greater control over a rapidly expanding secondary school sector.

The last of the great commissions was the Calcutta University [Sadler] Commission, which issued its 12-volume report in 1919, and many of the recommendations of which were endorsed by the Government of India in 1920.<sup>16</sup> After this, education is devolved to a provincial level to a greater extent than before, following the introduction of dyarchy; and less than twenty years later when World War intervened, it was clear that Independence was in the offing. The Wardha Committee is the next plausible candidate for a Commission-type landmark; but histories written after the Wardha Committee treat it as marking the beginning of a new history (the preparatory steps to shaping education in independent India), rather than as the next epoch in a continuing history. Histories of education written after the Calcutta University Commission, and which are therefore in a position to take the story beyond this date, continue to structure themselves around landmarks, but these either tend to be regionally significant ones (and thus the histories take on a provincial focus, joining the category of provincial histories described above), or else the landmarks become constitutional/political ones with significance for education, such as the Government of India Act of 1935.

This is the general narrative structure shared by histories of education. It is played out in various ways, in some texts at considerable length and in great detail, while in others this elementary or skeletal narrative structure, with a minimum of embellishment or improvisation, simply is the text.<sup>17</sup> Variations and improvisations upon the archetype correspond to the sub-varieties enumerated above. In Sen's *History of Elementary Education in India*,

some of the landmark events, which pertain principally to higher education, figure less prominently; while on the other hand, the passing of Primary Education Acts in various provinces is here accorded narrative importance. In histories of education with a provincial focus, the 'landmarks' may vary somewhat according to events or policies of local significance; in Sattianadhan's *History of Education in Madras*, for example, 1883 is a milestone year not only because the Hunter Commission bought down its report in that year, but because a new Director of Public Instruction in Madras set about reforming the education system of that province. In histories of Muslim education the focus of the history introduces variation. In M. Azizul Huque's *History and Problems of Muslim Education in Bengal*, the 1854 Despatch yields to the Hunter Commission in importance; the former paid no attention to the specific claims and needs of Muslims, whereas the latter is described as 'the charter of educational rights of Moslems in Bengal'.<sup>18</sup>

#### THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING MUTINY

We have here a dense body of writings narrating the history of Western education in India. The subject matter is capacious enough to be distinguished into so many sub-fields, but this in no way effaces the unity of the subject: differentiations occur within the context of considerable overlapping, and an easily documented and ever-present inter-textuality. To recapitulate, histories of education vary according to the type of the educational history concerned (regional, or with a focus upon Muslim education, and so on); and to some extent, according to the political sympathies they display. For instance, in a nationalist history such as that written on the eve of Independence by Nurullah and Naik, the conventional dating and sequence is followed up to the Curzon period, but after that the significant landmarks are the introduction of dyarchy in 1921 and the Government of India Act (and with it autonomy for provincial elected governments) of 1937. In a teleological narrative which traces the Indian peoples' struggle 'for the power to control and direct educational policies',<sup>19</sup> as this history approaches its telos of

Independence, the narrative skein is increasingly threaded upon constitutional developments which constitute steps towards self-rule, rather than simply educational ones. However, the essential narrative structure remains a constant and defining feature across the variations of type and political sympathy, and over a long period of time. This is one where the narrative is divided into 'stages' or 'eras' or 'epochs'. These eras are distinguished by 'landmarks', which are usually the policy pronouncements of the government, or the official enquiries and committees, which occasioned new policy directions. These are, in short, all histories of what the colonial government said regarding education, of what it did, of the resistances it encountered in its doings, the changes of direction which were necessitated, and the rationales for these. While their immediate subject matter is Western education, these are essentially histories of the colonial state.

By the early nineteenth century, India was already being annexed to the history of Britain. James Mill's *History of British India* had declared that 'the subject forms an entire, and highly interesting, portion of the British history.'<sup>20</sup> Sir J.R. Seeley reprimanded historians of eighteenth-century England who dealt with the minutiae of English affairs, and 'do not perceive that in that century the history of England is not in England but in America and Asia.'<sup>21</sup> It was in the nature of colonialism that once having annexed and consolidated territory, in its 'mature', ascendant phase, it came to annex the history of these peoples to its own, 'stuff[ing] it with the grandeur of their own dominance as its principal content'.<sup>22</sup> It should not be altogether surprising, then, that the history of Western education should appear as the history of Britain's work in India, or even more narrowly, of the sayings and doings of the colonial state. In this regard histories of education were not fundamentally different from histories of other topics – of railways and public works, for instance. Everywhere the history of India is annexed to the history of Britain, and becomes the story of the sayings and doings of the British, and of the colonial

government as it brought 'moral and material improvement' to India and glory to itself. In colonial India, this is what history, including the history of education, meant.

Yet the Mutiny does not figure in these histories, whether colonialist or nationalist. In the course of a brief narrative history of the progress of education in Agra and Awadh, J.A. Richey only mentions in passing the fact that education was 'disrupted' in 1857, despite the fact that this area was the epicentre of the hurricane.<sup>23</sup> Nurullah and Naik in their comprehensive and lengthy account refer in passing to the 'events of 1857' and the 'disturbances of 1857', and note that for a while it led the government to caution in giving grants-in-aid to missionary schools.<sup>24</sup> Syed Mahmood mentions the Mutiny only inasmuch as he notes that Delhi College had to be closed due to the Mutiny, and notes that the year that the three universities were established was also the year that the Mutiny broke;<sup>25</sup> H.R. James manages to avoid mentioning the Mutiny in the course of a detailed account of the establishment of the three Presidency universities in 1857.<sup>26</sup> T.N. Siqueira does not have a single reference to the Mutiny in his history of education in India. The examples could be multiplied.

The explanation for this omission cannot be because the Mutiny had no effect on education. It is true that the Mutiny did not disrupt the fledgling education system to the same degree that the Swadeshi movement and Non-Cooperation, with their explicit calls for the boycott of government provided education, were later to do. Nonetheless, the Mutiny did have an effect on education, especially in Bihar and in the United Provinces; in Agra, for instance, colonial authorities reported that educational buildings were systematically destroyed.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, at the highest levels in England it was seen by some to have contributed to the disaffection that led to the Mutiny; Sir George Clerk, Secretary to the Board of Control, complained that 'the proselytizing spirit in which education has been conducted' had contributed to 'distrustful and hostile feeling in India',<sup>28</sup> and Lord Ellenborough, President of

Board of Control in 1858, recommended that the grant-in-aid system be abolished, because grants to missionary schools had caused alarm and contributed to the disaffection that fuelled the Mutiny.<sup>29</sup> The Educational Despatch issued by the Secretary of State in 1859 began by observing that its review of the educational machinery set into motion as a result of the Despatch of 1854 was required, amongst other reasons, because 'the more recent measures, of Government for the promotion of Education have been alleged to be among the causes which have brought about the recent outbreak in the army of Bengal ...'<sup>30</sup>

Why, then, is the Mutiny missing from these histories? My characterization of the narrative structure and function of these histories already provides, in the most general terms, an answer: these were histories of Britain's good works in India, to which Indian rebellion and its violent suppression did not suitably belong. But we can expand on that answer, by returning to and complicating our account of the structure and function of these histories.

Above I have suggested that histories of education, like histories of railways and public works, were the story of the sayings and doings of the colonial government. But there was also an important difference – unlike a history of British endeavours at building railroads in India, where India is the stage on which the true subject, Britain, acts, via the agency of its colonial state, histories of education are narratives of the colonial state's work *on* its Indian subjects. Histories of education must include the Indian who is the subject of the colonial state's pedagogical and transformative attentions. He is an ineradicable or irreducible element of this history, the very occasion for this history, an essential premise of it. These are, then, histories of the colonial state, but also histories of the colonial state plus a residue – the Indian who is being educated. What is the status of this residue: that is, what is his function and structural position in these narratives?

In 'official' accounts, as well as those accounts which are not

official but written from the colonizer's perspective, the Indian pupil is necessary as the object acted upon, educated, improved – but not as the active subject of such histories. If such histories of growth and development suggest a comparison with the *Bildungsroman*, the European novel of individual growth, self-development and coming to maturity, we would immediately have to note that the colonizer's histories are in fact more closely analogous to the *Erziehungsroman*, a novel-form which, according to some scholars, is distinguishable from the *Bildungsroman* because it is didactic and more directly about pedagogic problems; the novel of education in the narrower sense, in which the central protagonist is more the pedagogue than the pupil.<sup>31</sup> For in the *Erziehungsroman*, as in these histories of education, the pupil functions as that which makes the narrative possible and necessary, but without ever fully coming to presence as a Subject who will unfold and realize his true self. And in these histories, by contrast to the *Bildungsroman*, the forces working to shape individuals were not the 'normal' forces of society – work, family, religion – but forces external to rather than immanent to native society, superimposed and maintained from without, and conceived of as working against the 'normal' forces of society, to countermand and overcome their effects. In India Western education, and colonialism-as-pedagogy more generally, would operate not to 'bring out' what was latent in the individual, but rather to transform and remake him. In what is seen as the original and archetypal *Bildungsroman*, Goethe's *William Meisters Lehrjahre*, Wilhelm Meister's harmonious self-development culminates in a reconciliation with his social environment, such that he can with equanimity face the prospect of a life outwardly not altogether different from that of his father's; in India Western education would be seen to have failed had its products returned to traditional occupations, e.g., that of a pandit.

But like the *Bildungsroman*, the *Erziehungsroman* is also an essentially 'progressive' narrative; obstacles and problems exist in order that the story may be propelled by narrating the means by

which they were overcome. These obstacles are the kind in which the overcoming itself contributed to the pupil's growth; a Mutiny cannot be absorbed into such a narrative. Indeed, it is necessary to keep separate and to sharply distinguish the narrative of the Britain's good works, here in the form of its production of educated and loyal brown sahibs, from the history of native rebellion and its bloody and vengeful suppression. That is why, in the aftermath of the rebellion, colonial officials went out of their way to distinguish the educated native from the rebellious sepoy and the insurgent peasant, and defend him from charges of treason<sup>32</sup> – a defence that had less to do with any great regard for the educated babu than with the need to keep distinct two narratives, the one of the conquest and defence of the Indian possessions, the other of Britain's improving mission.

Nationalist histories, also threaded around the actions of the colonial state, nonetheless anticipated a day when its work would come to an appropriate fruition. They too draw attention to the cultural gap between the agency of transformation and its Indian object, but to an altogether different end. In these accounts, the racial and cultural gap between the agency of transformation and the object to be transformed is the reason why the transformation is being delayed, and entirely unnecessarily so. It is because the agency of education was too rooted in European culture, that it was failing to fulfil its transformative mission. Thus these histories urge an Indianization of the institutional machinery of education, as well as an Indianization of its cultural content. T.N. Siqueira describes the functions of education in terms that are completely indebted to the ideal of *Bildung*: 'Education is the drawing out of a child's latent possibilities by providing them with suitable opportunities for their exercise and, through exercise, their development and perfection'; 'education is an immanent action ... The only true education is self-education.'<sup>33</sup> As with the individual, so with the nation – 'just as a child cannot be educated except in terms of his own personality, so a nation can only be educated in terms of its own

"personality".<sup>34</sup> However, the education system created by the British had not educated Indians through their own language and traditions; had been alien to these, an 'imported article' working from without, rather than immanently. The disappointments of a century's efforts at education were due to this, and it was argued that what India needed was 'to graft what is best in modern education on to the indigenous tree ... [to] produce its distinctive fruit: it must aim at making Indians better Indians.'<sup>35</sup> With minor variations, this central theme – that while the dissemination of modern, western knowledge was desirable and necessary, the form that this took was insufficiently adapted (in the words of Nurullah and Naik) to India's 'own peculiar needs and problems'<sup>36</sup>, and needed to be 'Indianized' – is tirelessly reiterated in all the nationalist histories of education. Anti-colonial nationalism embodied the desire to be 'modern but different', that is, to acquire the characteristics that made the colonial power strong, but to do so in the name of an irreducible difference that was conceived in national terms, and for which nationalism purported to speak. As Lala Lajpat Rai put it, 'We do not want to be English or German or American or Japanese ... we want to be Indians, but modern, up-to-date, progressive Indians.'<sup>37</sup>

In narrativizing the past, these nationalist histories portend and anticipate the day when the agency of pedagogy having been Indianized, the pedagogue and pupil will be cut of the same cloth, and narrating the history of the pedagogue will also be to narrate the history of the pupil; when as a result of this, the agency of transformation will be able to far more effectively do its work; and when the processes of transformation through pedagogy having done their work the Indian will be brought to the threshold where he can proceed from being the object of this history to the subject of another – when, in our terms, the history of education can finally be written as a *Bildungsroman* rather than as an *Erziehungsroman*. But the object/subject who is being transformed and will emerge from this will be the modern Indian, who bears no resemblance to the

sepoys and peasants and landlords who rallied to restore the lost empire of the Mughal emperor. Indeed they, and the past that they represented, had little to offer for the future, just as, in Lajpat Rai's words, while there were things to admire in the indigenous system, 'any widespread revival of the ancient or medieval systems of education is unthinkable'.<sup>38</sup> Like the colonialist narratives, which told the story of the untiring and unselfish efforts of the pedagogue, these *Bildungsroman* in the making also had no space for the Mutiny, or the Mutineer.

Thus if the shared structure of the histories of education illustrates that these were testimonies to the sayings and doings of the colonial state, the omission of the Mutiny shows how neither colonial nor nationalist histories, albeit for different reasons, had any narrative room for the Mutiny. The Mutiny was consigned to other historical narratives, those of Indian heroism and resistance, or of the defence of Empire and of British courage – of which of course, there were also many written.

#### NOTES:

- 1 Sir Richard Temple, *Men and Events of My Time in India*, (Delhi: BR Publishing Corp. 1989; first published 1882), p. 494.
- 2 Sir Narayan G. Chandavarkar, 'Presidential Address', in Jamnadas M. Mehta (ed.), *Report on the First Bombay Educational Conference*, (Bombay: 1917), p. 12.
- 3 This distinction is more meaningful than the historian's distinctions between 'primary' and 'secondary' sources; for my purposes all histories of education are 'primary' documents.
- 4 'Preface' to H. Sharp (ed.), *Selections from the Educational Records, Part I (1781-1839)*, (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1920), p. iv. The other volume produced was J.A. Richey (ed.), *Selections from the Records, Part II (1840-1855)*, (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1922).
- 5 T.N. Siqueira, *The Education of India: History and Problems*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939); S. Nurullah and J.P. Naik, *A History of Education in India (During the British Period)*, (Bombay: Macmillan, 1951, second, revised edition; first edition published in 1943); S. Sathianadhan, *History of Education in the Madras Presidency*, (Madras: Srinivasa, Varadachari

- and Co, 1894); H.R. Mehta, *A History of the Growth and Development of Western Education in the Punjab, 1846-1884*, (New Delhi: Rima Publishing House, 1985 (reprint)).
- 6 J.M. Sen's *History of Elementary Education in India*, (Calcutta: Book Company, 1933).
  - 7 J. Ghosh, *Higher Education in Bengal under British Rule*, (Calcutta: Book Company, 1926); Sana Ullah Khan, *A History of Education in the Punjab (Primary Education)*, (Lahore: 1932).
  - 8 For example, M. Azizul Huque, *History and Problems of Moslem Education in Bengal*, (Calcutta: Thacker, Spink and Co., 1917).
  - 9 For example, Herbert A. Stark, *Vernacular Education in Bengal from 1813 to 1912*, (Calcutta: Calcutta General Publishing Co., 1916); S.N. Chaturvedi, *The History of Rural Education in the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (1840-1926)*, (Allahabad: The Indian Press, 1930).
  - 10 For example, P.M. Limaye, *The History of the Decan Education Society (1880-1935)*, (Poona: 1935).
  - 11 Claude Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966), p. 259.
  - 12 *Calcutta University Commission Report*, (Calcutta: Superintendent of Government Printing, 1919), Vol. 1, 39.
  - 13 Sathianadhan, *History of Education in the Madras Presidency*, p. 41.
  - 14 Siqueira, *Education of India*, p. 68.
  - 15 H.R. James, *Education and Statesmanship in India, 1797-1919*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1911), p. 38.
  - 16 Even the Calcutta University Commission had a provincial brief, though it was clear that in its deliberations the Commission would not simply be thinking of Bengal, and in endorsing its recommendations the Government of India commended them to all provincial governments.
  - 17 For instance, M.L. Zutshi's pamphlet, *British Education in India* (Allahabad: the Indian Press, 1910), divides the history of education into five stages, each commencing with a landmark, and the appendices reproduce the texts of the landmarks - Macaulay's Minute, the Despatch of 1854, and so on.
  - 18 M. Azizul Huque, *History and Problems of Muslim Education in Bengal*, p. 59.
  - 19 Nurullah and Naik, *A History of Education in India*, p. xv.
  - 20 Quoted in Ranajit Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard UP, 1997), p. 77.
  - 21 J.R. Seeley, *The Expansion of England*, (London: Macmillan, 1895), p.10.
  - 22 Guha, *Dominance without Hegemony*, p. 196.

- 23 Richey, (ed), *Selections from educational records*, p. 232.
- 24 Nurullah and Naik, *A History of Education in India*, pp. 217, 220, 240, 241.
- 25 Syed Mahmood, *A History of English Education in India*, Delhi: Idarah-I Adabiyat-I (Delli, 1981 (first published in 1895), pp. 89-90.
- 26 James, *Education and Statesmanship in India*.
- 27 See, Thomas R. Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt: India, 1857-1870*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), pp.121-22 (note 72).
- 28 Quoted in *General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1857-58*, (Calcutta; 1859), p. 50.
- 29 Metcalf, *The Aftermath of Revolt*, p. 94. The debate around education occasioned by the Mutiny is well discussed on pp. 121-33.
- 30 Educational Despatch, dated London, 7th April 1859, section 1 (reprinted in Richey, *Selections from the Educational Records*).
- 31 See, inter alia James Hardin, 'Introduction', in Hardin (ed), *Reflection and Action: Essays on the Bildungsroman*, (University of South Carolina Press, 1991), p. xvi; Randolph P. Shaffner, *The Apprenticeship Novel*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1984), especially chapter 2; Francois Just, "Variations of a Species: The Bildungsroman", *Symposium*, XXXVII: 2 (Summer 1983); and Marianne Hirsch, 'The Novel of Formation as Genre: Between Great Expectations and Lost Illusions', *Genre*, XII: 1 (1979).
- 32 For example, the director of Public Instruction for Bombay declared that, 'during the last disastrous year, there has not been produced one tithe of evidence ... to prove that the educated natives, as a class, or any individual among them, have, or has tampered with treason', and two years later added, 'It has been abundantly shown that the most faithful friends of the British Government are to be found in this [educated] class' - *Report of the Director of Public Instruction, for the Year 1857-58*, (Bombay: Education Society's Press, 1859), p. 30 and *Report of the Director of Public Instruction, for the Year 1859-60*, (Bombay: Education Society's Press), p. 44. The DPI for Bengal asserted that the Mutiny only served to prove 'that men who have received a certain amount of Education at a good English school are far more trustworthy and well-affected to Government, better subjects in every sense of the word, than those who have not had that advantage.' - *General Report on Public Instruction in the Lower Provinces of the Bengal Presidency for 1857-58*, p. 21.
- 33 T.N. Siqueira, *The Education of India*, p. x.
- 34 *Ibid.*, p. 267.
- 35 *Ibid.*, p. xiii.
- 36 Nurullah and Naik, *A History of Education in India*, p. xiii.
- 37 Lajpat Rai, *The Problem of National Education in India*, (London: Allen and

Unwin, 1920), p. 75. For nationalist debates on education, see, Sanjay Seth, *Subject Lessons: The Western Education of India*, (Duke University Press, forthcoming 2007), especially chapter 6.

- 38 Lajpat Rai, *The Problem of National Education in India*, p. 55. Of those few who did advocate a return to such systems, wrote the outspoken Lajpat Rai, 'I do not know whether they are idiots or traitors', p. 80.

**Other Texts ...**

## Re-visioning the Land: Attaching Affect to the Empire after 1857

■ AISHWARYA LAKSHMI ■

The Mutiny of 1857 and the counter-insurgency operations that followed it led to the destruction of the landscape of much of North India. Contemporary travellers like Bholanath Chandra and Vishnubhatta Godse comment on the devastation of the many of the towns and cities: entire villages were burnt, and cities like Jhansi, Chanderi, Delhi and Lucknow, were either converted into ghost towns, denuded of their inhabitants and principal buildings, or their characters unalterably changed. These spectacles of destruction, to which the public hanging and display of rebels contributed was a directed part of the British strategy. It often exceeded military-strategic ends, and was tied to a specific politics of revenge – the sternness of the counter-insurgency operations and the spectacles of violence that accompanied them were to serve as a stern example and warning for the future.

As one might expect, in the immediate aftermath of the Mutiny, Indian communities residing in much of North India experienced a sense of the loss of the ethico-cosmological imaginations of their homes. For instance, accounts by contemporary residents of Delhi and Lucknow, the poet Mirza Ghalib and Elihu Jan, the hookah attendant to the Queen of Awadh, remark on the remarkably changed character of both cities.

following their falls in September 1857 and March 1858 respectively. Post-Mutiny, both citizens felt an inability to sustain the older imaginations of Delhi and Lucknow – as a paradisiacal garden and as deriving its character from the fairy world (peristan) of the palace respectively – and to attach affect to the new spaces of the cities that were emerging under the British. As Jan observed, ‘When I returned to Lucknow with my husband, he resumed his shop near the palace. But the English began knocking down bazaars and planting grass everywhere, and, amongst the rest, our bazaar was swept away.’<sup>1</sup>

The British too, however – especially those who had been residing in India prior to the Mutiny – experienced a loss of the earlier imagination of India. The picturesque imagination of India – of the country as a calm, unchanging, decaying yet beautiful landscape – made popular by the paintings of William Hodges and Thomas and William Daniell and practised galore by travellers and residents in India through sketches and travel diaries, was shattered. It seemed temporarily as if this imagination of India was going to be lost forever. This was not, however, the case. Though the sense of India as an old world land imbued with a ‘classical fading grandeur’<sup>2</sup> was indeed gone, the picturesque returned in a re-invigorated form, tied to a different notion of empire and history from its earlier counterpart. This change dovetailed with the shift in the picturesque that was taking place in England in the mid-century. In the 1840s, John Ruskin had begun expressing his displeasure at the ‘immoral nature’ of the early nineteenth century picturesque in its encouragement of visual pleasure sans attention to habitus. He advocated a renewed aesthetic tied to the aesthetics and ethics of depth, drawing out marks of age and beauty of nature, not for their visually pleasing properties but in the service of history and nature. In India, the picturesque, post-Mutiny, was also tied to an aesthetics and ethics of depth – no longer interested in mere surface spectation but of image plotted within the long (and historicized) *history of India*. It, however, remained inattentive to and dismissive

of the claim for habitus, one of the key ingredients of Ruskin's reforming impulse.

This paper will investigate the 'return' of the picturesque – the mode of viewing the land as in a 'picture', usually with a division of the picture frame into the three receding planes of the foreground, off-skip, and the background – following the Mutiny of 1857. This will entail reading instances when the picturesque seems to have disappeared or actively disavowed, as in Felice Beato's Mutiny photographs, and when the picturesque seems to be working like the early nineteenth century aesthetic, as in when the British use it to depict the newly created 'ruins' during the Mutiny. The paper will focus on three 'texts' to elucidate the altered nature of the picturesque post-Mutiny: the Mutiny memoir of a British civilian; reportage photography of Felice Beato during the years of 1858–59; and photography of Samuel Bourne in the 1860s, in the immediate post-Mutiny years, where the picturesque is finally turned away from its earlier usage. It will show how the aesthetic began to move away from allowing for a pleasurable surface speculation of empire and was put in service of an ethics of depth, tied to the domestic ideology of the new empire (following the transfer of power from the East India Company to the Crown in November 1858).

There is extant, though somewhat scattered scholarship, on the changed use of aesthetics in the imperial project in the second half of the nineteenth century, a usage that was tied to the self-understanding and representation of empire practiced post 1858. Thomas Metcalfe's *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and Britain's Raj* (1989), has outlined the way in which the British in the post-Mutiny years began to construct impressive architectural monuments that symbolized the emergence of British rule from within India's own historical depth. This project involved a two part process: one, an active process of historicizing India's art and architecture, and the second, a creative and selective syncretization of the elements differentiated and classified by the first act. Thus,

first, Indian history was divided into several segments – along regional, dynastic, and religious lines – and the architecture and art of each period and region read as emblematic of certain traits. From this visual archive, the British then isolated and adopted the most desirable traits and corresponding forms and used them to create a new style of architecture – the Indo-Saracenic (1860-1905) – that was employed in constructing a range of buildings – from colleges like the Mayo and St Stephens College, to museums like Victoria Memorial Hall (now the National Art Gallery), to monuments, like the Husainabad Clock Tower, Lucknow.<sup>3</sup> By thus historicizing older aesthetic forms, isolating and choosing ‘pure’ and ‘vital’ strains, a new syncretic style of architecture was created – that stood as a visible embodiment of the new empire that was a continuation of the past but in a more vital form.

Recently, Tapati Guha-Thakurta (2004) has researched the manner in which the above activity was supplemented by major photographic projects undertaken during this period – ethnographic ones such as William Johnson’s two volume *The Oriental Races and Tribes*, 1863–66, and the eight volume *The Peoples of India*, published between the years 1868–1875, and architectural projects like James Fergusson’s *History of Indian and Eastern Architecture*, 1876, that provided above two hundred illustrations in a six hundred page book.<sup>4</sup> Here too a similar process of historicization occurred – of reading ‘history from stones’<sup>5</sup> (or from physical appearance) and plotting of both within a developmental narrative.

In these photographic compendiums and impressive architectural projects, older aesthetic forms got re-read and put to different usages. Thus, the picturesque, which in landscapes or ethnographic ‘portraits’, had found a home in amateur and private collections in the early nineteenth century and which encouraged a surface speculation and consumption of India, now got attached to the official bureaucratic machinery and found a life in photographic compendiums of architecture, ethnography, and archaeology, in

service of a science of 'depth' and comprehensiveness. The picturesque vision itself, therefore, of mercantile imperialism, content with surface spectation and exploitation and uninterested in leaving enduring marks of its presence in architecture was replaced by a new vision of empire which sought to create a place for itself in Indian history by historicizing its past.

This paper will begin at an earlier point than Metcalfe's and Thakurta's works – during the years of the Mutiny itself – and show the process by which the picturesque, one and arguably the most prominent of the earlier aesthetic forms, began to be used to create a new vision of Empire after the Mutiny.

## II

During the Mutiny, a significant portion of the British population in India was either on the run from rebels or in pursuit of them. Fugitive and counter-insurgency narratives, two opposed genres of writing that chronicle the above moments, are also divided in their use of the picturesque. If the picturesque, as discussants of the early nineteenth century aesthetic – Suleri, Leask, Grewal – have pointed out, has always been an aestheticizing activity tied to a privileged and self-consolidating gaze, then it should come as no surprise that the first should be devoid of and the latter contain its presence. Even when present in Mutiny narratives, however, the picturesque is at best only a partial frame and aestheticizes the present in order to plot within a history different from its early nineteenth century counterpart. I illustrate this by examining a British fugitive narrative and Mutiny painting.

William Edwards' *Reminiscences of a Bengal Civilian* was written in 1866. Edwards had been the Collector and Magistrate of Budaon, Rohilkhand since 1855. Budaon began to get disaffected in the end of May 1857, and Edwards, after sending his wife and children to Nainital for safety, prepared to face the rebellion. Rebellion broke out on 1 June, and Edwards had to flee along with some other English civilians, chief among them being a Mr and Mrs Probyn with their three children. This party wandered the

countryside and jungles for ninety-three days till they joined General Havelock's relieving column in Kanpur. Edwards was then appointed judge and special commissioner of Fatehpur (in the North West Provinces) and continued there till his health broke down in April 1858, when he sailed for England.

Edwards' memoir, like other fugitive narratives, departs from British writing in India up until this point in revealing the British in hitherto unimaginable degrees of intimacy with Indians, as they are aided and given shelter in their flight by the latter. These intimacies lead to the stepping out of the picturesque frame, which until now had conditioned not only the mode of seeing but had also regulated the proper distance from which to gaze at the picturesque subject. In this movement lies a radical possibility – of the birth of a new figuration that eschews the insistent specularity of the colonial gaze and is attentive to the particularity of the (British-Indian) encounter. The memoir temporarily gives us precisely such a glimpse, but goes on to elide it by a symbolic reading of the encounter. Let me elaborate.

On their escape from Budaon, Edwards and the Probyn family are given shelter by tribesmen (the Aheers) in the middle of the jungle. Edwards describes their entry into the village as follows:

At last, just as the day was dawning, the rain all the while pouring in torrents, we reached our destination; a wretched, solitary hamlet of four or five houses in the middle of the waste, and inhabited by only a few herdsmen and their cattle. The scene was desolate beyond description. As we came up, no one was moving in the village, all being yet asleep. One of the Thakoors roused up the chief man, a wild-looking Aheer, who pointed out to us a wretched hovel, which he said was for Probyn. It was full of cattle, and very filthy: the mud and dirt were over our ankles, and the effluvia stifling.

The passage zooms in on what is presented only in passing in

standard picturesque accounts, such as Fanny Parks' description of the village of the 'wretches' that she comes across in one of her journeys, as a 'sight' from her budgerow on the river bank. Here, up close the picture is one of extreme indigence: the Aheers are very poor, live in what amounts to swampy land, and swim everyday to find dry pasture for their cattle. Under normal circumstances, Edwards, though the magistrate of the district, would never have seen this side of Indian life. Now, however, the wanderers are given shelter by the Aheers, and Edwards and the Probyns live in this 'wretched hovel' for weeks and even establish some kind of intimacy with the herdsmen and a connection with the desolate landscape.

In the passage, the hamlet seems hardly a habitation for humans, and the filth together with the mud, dirt, and effluvia make it an abject landscape.<sup>6</sup> The abjectness of the fugitives' own condition in fact seems to be displaced on to the landscape, as the Aheers and their hamlet merge into an indistinguishable impression of dreariness and silence, operating below and outside of memory and history. Everyday dependencies of obtaining milk from the cattle for the Probyns' baby, of being obliged to the Aheers for not only daily sustenance but also *secrecy*, however, begin to split the above scene of indistinguishable or varying degrees of darkness and squalor, and some light and a discrimination enters. As the following quote, describing a typical evening in the hamlet, demonstrates:

... here, after sunset, when the herdsmen had returned and the cattle were folded, have we sat together and talked with them for hours; they asking much about our country, and never ceasing in their inquiries as to how it is that our Queen's husband is not our king, which is a source of the most unfeigned surprise to them; and we inquiring of them about their cattle and habits of life, and receiving most curious information. We spent some comparative pleasant evenings in this way with this primitive people. We also much enjoyed each evening watching the

strange and interesting sight of the vast herds of cattle emerging from the jungle, and swimming off in droves to their different villages ...; the herdsmen generally swimming behind them, and sometimes mounted on the stronger animals of the herd.

The fading sunset casts a light, which throws some cheer on what was earlier a desolate, dark space, and the 'evening chat' is almost homely. Apart from the light, it is labour that lifts the scene from its previous abjection. The Aheers are presented as hard-working herdsmen who drive cattle in an organized way, and as earning an honest livelihood. Edwards' specular 'enjoyment', derived from the sight of the herdsmen returning, is premised on an acknowledgment (and approval) of honest labour that humanizes the Aheers and makes their habitation almost a home. Not only the picturesque framing but the source of picturesque pleasure – from image qua image – seems to have been abandoned as well.

The aestheticizing impulse, however, returns with renewed force in the final word on the life as fugitive and the Mutiny, a reading that gestures towards the moral sublime.

Our Government cannot be fairly blamed for the troubles which are the natural and necessary result of the struggle between light and darkness; between ancient barbarism and modern progress, of which, in my opinion, we have as yet only seen the commencement.

Their error was in not being prepared for such a catastrophe, and in forgetting that the sun cannot rise without setting the clouds in commotion.

The understanding of the Mutiny as the opposition between the light and the dark, undoes the radical potential of Edwards' strange 'adventure' until now. The opposition homogenizes a strife that in

narration has been split and recasts life in the Aheer hamlet. The days spent as fugitive, Edwards notes, led to 'the depression of mind and body ... It is at such times I feel the real blessing the Psalms are'. The people and land fuse, once again, as indistinct figures of a dark dream, illuminated occasionally by the Bible. This play of light and dark marks the rest of the memoir where the entire journey as a fugitive is portrayed as a dark depression, and the only 'light' and relieving moments lie in readings of the Bible or in movement across the land.<sup>7</sup> The metaphoric reading glosses over and disregards other 'lights' that have at times marked the narrative and the journey and have broken the darkness.

The symbolic reading of the strife makes use of chiaroscuro that carries an anti-picturesque injunction: the picturesque image with its internal specular and secular play of light and dark is a 'lie': it is only a visual play. The 'real light' lies with the Bible and by extension, the manner in which Christianity informs history. I illustrate by a brief reading of a Mutiny painting, 'The Relief of Lucknow', painted by Thomas James Baker in 1859, based on a sketch by the Swedish artist Egron Lundgren, who was in India during the Mutiny [Fig.1].<sup>8</sup> The painting belongs to the genre of Mutiny 'history paintings', where a major event such as the surrender of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the Mughal Emperor, or the fall of Lucknow was depicted.<sup>9</sup>

The painting portrays the meeting of the three most popular English military heroes: Colin Campbell, Sir James Outram and Gen. Sir Henry Havelock at Lucknow after the city had fallen in May 1858. The three men occupy the centre of the painting, where the diagonal lines converge, in a patch of clearing and light. On the left side of the diagonal are some dead rebels, soldiers and citizens, and on the right Indian and British figures. The figures on the left and right form part of an ascending line, guiding the eye away from the general scene of disorder on the left to the scene of stability in the middle foreground, to the ordered space on the right, where Indian figures tend to the sick or the dead or look on, if not



*'The Relief of Lucknow'*

approvingly, passively at the three generals. The line culminates in the minaret on the fort. The movement of the eye, therefore, guides us to the picturesque city of Lucknow, which looms in the background and creates the grand orientalist setting for the occasion.

Early nineteenth-century picturesque paintings had depicted beautiful buildings and landscapes dotted by Indian figures. Both (figure and landscape) denoted the anachronistic presence of a classical, decaying age in the present. The images were laced with nostalgia, even as they marked the fact that this age was doomed to come to an end.<sup>10</sup> In the present painting, the figure-landscape relation differs. It is the British who are in a positive reinforcing relation to the cityscape for according to the optics of the painting, the buildings appear to 'look on' to and grace the historical scene enacted in the centre. The Indian figures fall into two groups: rebel soldiers and citizens, both now suppliants, on the left, and the 'faithful' citizens on the right. Neither is imbued with classical grandeur. Indians are no longer the heirs of the city – they inhabit the painting as rebels who have been overpowered or as docile subjects of the empire. The latter is exemplified in the seated figure in the lower right of the painting, who works like Timothy

Mitchell's 'threshold figure' – the 'native' figure that occupies the threshold of the painting, allows us entry into the painting, and reassures us that he sees in the same manner as us.<sup>11</sup>

The play of light and dark in the painting differs from standard picturesque compositions. In the Indian picturesque, light and dark enhanced the scenic beauty and allowed the viewer to attach affect to the land. In the English picturesque, they played another function. As John Barrell has pointed out, in English picturesque compositions, the play of light and dark denoted the rightfully allotted 'places' of the gentry and the poor, with the rich invariably inhabiting bright parts of the landscape, and the poor, the graying, shaded, twilit areas. The two, however, worked together to create a picture of harmony.<sup>12</sup> The mutiny paintings borrow some conventions of the above, but differ in degree and kind. The 'darkness' that the Indians inhabit in these works carries the resonance of the damned, and is different from the twilit areas that are the rightfully allotted place of the English rural poor. Furthermore, the light and the dark are not in a relation of mutually reinforcing harmony but rather in an oppositional relationship, where the 'light' emerges *out of* the destruction of the 'dark'.

In the painting under consideration, it is obvious that the patch of light which 'graces' the heroes is achieved by a destruction of the 'dark' spaces (and people who inhabit those spaces) in the painting. The play of light and dark serves a symbolic rather than compositional purpose. Furthermore, the space of light, the scene in the foreground, is firmly ground in the present. The dominant temporality in the painting is of the movement of moral history – firmly presentist and symbolic – rather than a mummification of the present in a picturesque image. The picturesque buildings have no inner temporality: they are merely the 'frame' of the painting, the setting for the historical action by the British heroes. It is this action that mobilizes the frame and creates a forward temporality of moral history in the painting.

In the new use of *chiaroscuro* and altered nexus of figure-ruin relation, the character of the earlier picturesque began to change. Despite the firmly moral-symbolic reading, some vestiges of the older aesthetic indeed remained – the ruins of Lucknow in the pathos of their fall inadvertently evoke a nostalgia for the grand past. This pathos, however, is a formulaic and conventional one meant to reconcile one with rather than question the legitimacy of the present. It is no match for the sublimity of the historical action enacted in the foreground – of Britain's role in a world historical moral movement.

### III

A similar movement – temporary disappearance and a comeback of the picturesque – is evident also in photographs of the Mutiny. Of the six Mutiny photographers whose works are found at the British Library, John Murray, Harriet and Robert Tytler, Unknown, Patrick Gerald Fitzgerald, and Samuel Bourne, only Bourne's works are 'picturesque'. Bourne, however, belongs to a different category from the other four, photographing at a later stage than the others (1860s-1880s). The works, therefore, can be divided into two groups, the one comprised of the 1857-58 photographers, and the other of Samuel Bourne. The 1857-58 photographers (excepting for the Tytlers, who by and large avoided scenes of strife and almost exclusively focused on taking different views of the Taj and the Qutub Minar, two monuments that continued to excite British admiration even during the Mutiny)<sup>13</sup>, depict the ruined and desolate landscape in a marked anti-picturesque manner, while Bourne presents India as 'an exotic, yet serene, theme park'.<sup>14</sup> If the first group demonstrates a reportage impulse then the second camp, comprised of Bourne, demonstrates the picturesque impulse. Only a few years later, these twin impulses would be admirably reconciled under the institutional umbrella and activities of the Archaeological Survey of India (inaugurated in 1861). Even at this juncture, however, these impulses are not as contrary as they seem to be. They

reflect two modes of representing the Empire post-Mutiny that dovetailed at the ideological level. Reportage as memorialization created the symbolic landscape of the empire and the re-introduction of the picturesque attached surface affect to this landscape.

Let me then briefly discuss Beato and Bourne, the only two professional photographers in the list, to flesh out the movements I outline above. Felice Beato, the official photographer of the Crimean War, arrived in India in February 1858 to capture the scenes of the Mutiny. Beato's Mutiny photographs can be grouped into three categories: pictures of ruins and the landscape, almost all of scenes of strife; groups of British and Indian soldiers (mainly the Sikhs, who sympathized with the British cause), portraiture of individual rebels, and scenes of hangings; and some 'picturesque' views of the Jama Masjid, the tomb of Safdar Jung, and Hindu cloisters and ruins at the Qutub site, reminiscent of earlier views of India in the works of the Daniells. Of these, the first form the greater part of Beato's *oeuvre* and I will concentrate on these. Beato's landscapes mainly depict the new ruins, such as the Kashmiri Gate, the first site to be breached by the British in the fortified city of Delhi; the Residency at Lucknow, the site of rebel siege of the British; and sites of contestation such as the ridge, the location from which the British lay siege to the city of Delhi.

The most (in)famous among Beato's works is the scene of Secundrah Bagh [Photo 27/(2)] taken in 1858. In Secundrah Bagh, Lucknow, 'two thousand Indians were slaughtered to avenge the earlier massacre of English women and children at Cawnpore (Kanpur).'<sup>15</sup> Cawnpore had become the watchword for a series of acts of revenge acted out on Indian civilian populations and the soldiery. By the time Beato arrived in Lucknow, the bodies had been buried, and he had them disinterred and arranged to reconstruct the 'scene'. The photograph reveals the inevitable staging behind the colonial 'evidentiary'. My own reading of the picturesque and sacred landscape aesthetics has confirmed this

movement and shown that it is at moments in history when aesthetic categories seem the most transparent that they are the most informed by obfuscatory historical weight. Thus, it is when the picturesque and sacred unequivocally read as 'evidence of mobility and stasis in Mutiny fiction, that these aesthetics are most turned away from their earlier quotidian usages. Similarly, the photograph that stands testimony to the 'impartiality' of the camera eye and of the war-reporter who captures all scenes of violence equally, is the one that in Beato's oeuvre is most fabricated. The photograph also reveals to us the violence inherent in the empire's creation of the 'evidentiary' and the archive, as it disinters bodies from an already ignoble burial. Violence is overtly inscribed into other photographs, such as the one dated 1858 which depicts bodies of rebels hanging from trees [Photo 666/(1)].

While photographs like that of the Secundrah Bagh and hanged rebels created a grisly spectacle of the Mutiny, one that fed the contemporary thirst for revenge, Beato's ruins performed

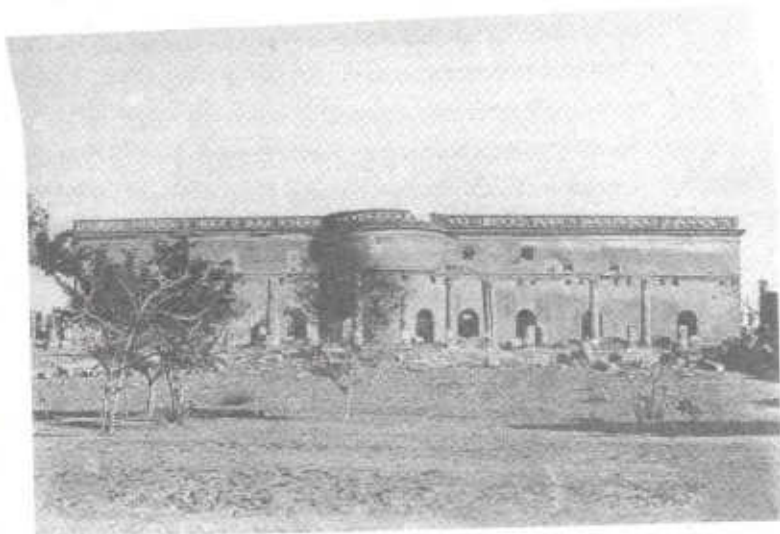


*The Flagstaff Battery*

another task – they began to create a symbolic landscape of the empire, a figuration that enjoyed a longer life than the initial fanatical, racist sentiments. By depicting ruins by the use of a resolutely anti-picturesque technique, Beato's war reportage began the process of memorialization by creating 'lieux de memoires',<sup>16</sup> places of memory. This memorialization was backward and forward looking – it commemorated the recent past and made visible Britain writing itself into Indian history by the actual re-shaping of its landscape.

The ruin photographs of sites significant to the British: scenes of strife, such as the Lucknow residency, the room in which Sir Henry Lawrence was killed [Photo 1100/(11)], pictures of the ridge and bastions from which the British fought. These range from frontal foregrounding of the ruined buildings, such as the Residency, to the picture of an empty destroyed room, to a shot of piles of concrete. In these stark photographs, the buildings and walls of concrete operate like 'characters' – bleak, desolate, hardy and standing testimony to British suffering, courage, and fortitude. The battered walls of the Lucknow residency against the lone landscape, for instance, evoke *what we don't see*: the fortitude and martial strength of British men and women as the siege dragged on. The hardy walls of the residency, of course, not only evoke but also screen the abjectness and oftentimes the ignobility of siege life (as ration had to be bought, so that some lived in relative luxury even in the worst of times, while others went without the bare essentials) that siege narratives reveal.

– In contrast to gradually receding picturesque compositions, the photographs work with two sharply juxtaposed planes – foreground and background (patch of land and building: 'Mosque Picket' and 'Hindu Rao's house', or in the photograph of 'Metcalf's House', where the sky seems almost like the high horizon of the Persian school) – reinforcing the idea of the ruins as characters: the holders of significance against the empty background. Furthermore, in the frontal placement of the building-ruins, in the awkward trees that

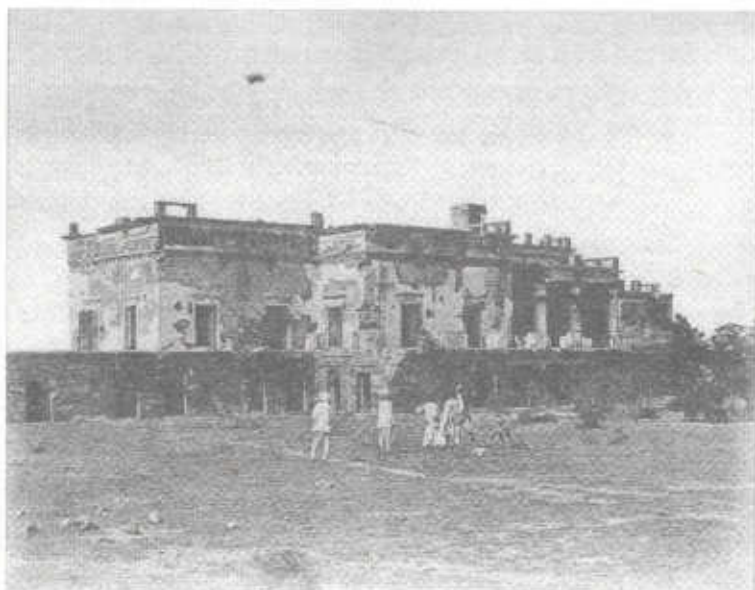


*Metcalfe's House*

instead of framing the buildings break the alignment of and scatter the gaze, in the relative lack of use of shadows (and when used they only serve to highlight the bright glare under which these photographs seem to be taken), these photographs resolutely avoid the nostalgia and the 'homeliness' of the picturesque. The ruins thus instead of being attached to the temporality of degeneration stand as embodiments of present valour and moral courage. Instead of the temporal disjunction (between classical, fading grandeur of the Indian present and modern present of the traveller/artist) so crucial to the picturesque compositions of Hodges and Daniells, we get a flattening out of time, as all buildings – whether it is the 'Mosque Picket', 1857, or Metcalfe's house built in the 1830s, or the Kashmiri gate, dating from the mid seventeenth century – serve equally as 'ruins' in the tale of British fortitude and valour.

These ruins tell the concrete story of the military-moral subjugation of India, but they also serve as a metaphor for the writing of Britain into India's history – by a flattening out of the past as a period of 'oriental tyranny' against which the claim to the morality of the present rule, founded on courage and moral right,

shines forth. These photographs therefore create *lieux de memoire* of the ruin sites – quasi-sacral places that confirm upon every visitation the moral rightness of the empire, and re-tell the reason for existence of that rule. And indeed, British travel in the post-Mutiny years was to be invariably organized around a visit to these sites. While previously the Jama Masjid, the fortified palace of Delhi, etc. only told of the Mughal or Hindu past, now these monuments tell the story of the Britons as well. To these numbers were added sites such as the ridge, Metcalfe's house, Hindu Rao's house, the tree in the palace at Delhi (where Britons had been killed). Beato's photographs thus essentially began to create a new symbolic landscape in the very act of 'recording'. The Indian ruins in Beato's photographs, unlike in Hodges' and the Daniells' works, no longer hark back to the Mughal Emperor or an even older past, but mark the re-direction of Indian history by the British. They also legitimized this rule by telling a tale of Christian fortitude over barbarity.



Hindu Rao's House

The picturesque did not disappear, however. It made a comeback in the photographs of Samuel Bourne from the 1860s onwards and went on to enjoy popular life in the works of later British and Indian photographers. It got its most remarkable lease on life in the Indian paintings of Raja Ravi Varma (1848-1908) in the 1880s, who began to use the picturesque to create a new symbolic-sacral mythic landscape of India. In its resurrected form, however, the picturesque moved away from the compositional specificity of the earlier aesthetic, and as mentioned earlier, got attached to the ideology of depth as the picturesque image was plotted within a directed history. Thus some elements of the early nineteenth century picturesque – the use of trees and shrubs to break the monotony of the eye, emphasis on ruins, eye for ruggedness – continued, while some other elements like the strict division into three planes (foreground, off skip, background), changed. I will, in what follows, confine myself to a discussion of Bourne's work to outline how he used it to attach surface affect to the empire.

Samuel Bourne, photographer, set out for India in 1862 and arrived in Calcutta in mid-January 1863. He lived for seven years in India, during which he travelled extensively to photograph the scenery and architecture of the country. In 1864, he set up a partnership with Howard and later Charles Shepherd and through an excellent distribution network, with outlets all over India and Europe, distributing his photographs through Marion & Co., of Soho Square in London, marketed prints both in India and abroad. Bourne left India in 1874 to continue a successful career in cotton doubling in England but the Bourne and Shepherd firm continued in Simla, Calcutta, and Bombay under different proprietors, English and finally Indian following independence in 1947.<sup>17</sup> The studio still operates in Calcutta at its present location at S.N. Banerjee Road.

Bourne's photographs not only fed into an entirely different culture industry but also performed different work from Beato's. If

the value of Beato's work came from its status as 'authentic reportage', which nonetheless as I have argued began to create myths of places and monuments that directly helped create the ideology of the new empire, then Bourne's photographs helped re-attach surface affect to this empire. This is evident in the intended audience of each photographer. Beato's works found place in newspapers, contemporary historiography such as that of Charles Ball, and military archives, whereas Bourne's works fed a vast market that met demands for exotic 'views' by people who had never been to India, and were bought as mementos by travellers who wanted to keep a visual record of architectural sites they had visited. Bourne's prints circulated in a wider network, in which prints were ordered on the basis of the sites of which the tourist-buyer wanted a visual record.

Though Bourne's photographs loosely adhered to the picturesque frame, their deeper affiliation with the picturesque lay not in the compositional specificity of the aesthetic, but in the desire to create a visually pleasing commodity of the land. A case in point are his photographs of Mutiny sites. His bird's eye views of these sites, taken in the 1860s, were quite the opposite of the eye-level view of the picturesque, but are picturesque in effect and ideology, for they convert a contested or evidentiary space (of Beato) into visually pleasing 'scenery'. Bourne's photographs, thus mark the re-creation of India as a visually pleasing spectacle, but now these views are tied not to the temporality of the diorama but of the pageant. In the diorama, the meaning of the image is independent of its order of appearance in a given sequence; quite the reverse is true of the pageant, where a meaning is created in the sequence of unfolding of the image. Bourne's picturesque views, coming after Beato's, form part of a directed history and are guided by directed codes of looking around objects and monuments. In this shift, landscape became subsidiary and was replaced by the monument and the monumental. Indeed, it was not Bourne's landscapes but his prints of architectural sites that were more

popular. These monuments, pace Beato's ruins, were part of a new symbolic landscape of the Empire. Viewing them would become even more organized following the activities of the Archaeological Survey of India, which set out in photographic projects to historicize and catalogue these monuments. The period of 1860–1910 in general was marked by the pageantry of Empire, a re- and self-presentation of the empire in public spectatorial and important photographic events, such as the celebration of Victoria becoming Empress in 1876, the Viceroy's durbar in 1902, and the commemoration of the coronation of George V in the Delhi durbar in 1911. This was accompanied by, as has been discussed earlier, the erection of public monuments such as impressive railway stations and museums as visible symbols of the new empire.<sup>18</sup> All of these were spectacular visual and photographic events whereby the British began to fashion and present themselves as the legitimate heirs to India's rule. The 'image' in these visual-photographic events and public monuments, as in Bourne's photographs, unfolds not within the neutral sequence of the diorama, but within a directed historical temporality, where it speaks to the emergence of a vital present from India's own (historicized) past.

#### IV

Bourne's photographs helped re-attach affect to the land and create a new romance of the empire. British memoirs and travel writing from the latter part of the nineteenth century and onwards, continued this movement in offering conventional picturesque descriptions of hill stations and the like. This figuration was not a return to its early nineteenth century counterpart, however. The Mutiny informed these creations via the narratives and tropes that were engendered during the conflict. The picturesque in narrative and visual archive, post-Mutiny, would always carry an anti-nostalgizing injunction, either in direct narrative asides as to the deceptive nature of Indian beauty or in the image being plotted within a degenerative Indian history. These images were ultimately

instrumental in memory formation of the Mutiny that was founded on a series of erasures of the event – of the ignobility of siege life; of the unusual encounters between British and Indians as fugitive narratives testify; of the singular nature of the rebellion, which was neither a throwback to the past nor evidence of the tyranny of influence. 'Memory' of the Mutiny, therefore, was formed by active processes of memorialization and erasure, which has been questioned only by post-colonial historiography and criticism's return to the archive.

## NOTES:

- 1 *Elihu Jan's Story or The Private Life of an Eastern Queen*, translated and transcribed by William Knighton (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts & Green, 1865), p. 68.

For Ghalib's account see, Mirza Asadullah Khan Ghalib, *Dastanbuy*, trans. Khwaja Ahmad Faruqi (New York: Asia Publishing House, 1970).

- 2 Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing, 1770-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

- 3 Thomas R. Metcalf, *An Imperial Vision: Indian Architecture and the British Raj*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

- 4 See John Falconer, *India: Pioneering Photographs: 1850-1900* (London: The British Library & The Howard & Jane Ricketts Collection, 2001), pp. 22-23.

For a discussion of James Fergusson, see Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories. Institutions of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (NY: Columbia University Press, 2004).

- 5 This is taken from a longer passage by James Fergusson, from his architectural tour of India between the years of 1835-1842. Here, he is specifically referring to his short stay at the temple of Chidambaram, 'My visit was unfortunately far too hurried ... Had I a week to devote to it, I feel convinced I could have picked its history out of its stones ... .As it is, I could only trace the outline of a picture I longed to fill up.' James Fergusson, *Picturesque Illustrations of Ancient Architecture in Hindoostan* (London: Hogarth, 1848), p. 59, as quoted in Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories*, p. 14.

Scholars and bureaucrats will, in fact, engage in precisely the kind of reading that Fergusson wishes he had time for, under the umbrella of the Archaeological Survey of India, inaugurated in 1861.

- 6 David Spurr in his discussion of 'the rhetorical features of [the colonial] discourse,' identifies 'debasement', which includes filth and defilement, as one of them. He extends Kristeva's idea of the abject as 'marking the boundary of the self and the other and therefore constitu[ting] the limits of the speaking subject,' into the sphere of social organization (78). He notes: 'I do not wish to suggest that Kristeva's theory provides a rationale for colonial order as a natural consequence of normal human development. ... The idea of abjection, however, offers an analogy between the symbolic structure of individual consciousness and the systems of representation at work in culture at large. Both structures appear to depend for their internal coherence on a symbolic exclusionary tactic: the horror of the Other, the repudiation of the scapegoat,' David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), p. 79.
- 7 For another illustration of this, see Francis Cornwallis Maude, *Memories of the Mutiny, with which is incorporated The Personal Narrative of John Walter Sherer* (London & Sydney: Remington & Co. Ltd., 1894), vol.1.
- 8 In C.A. Bayly, ed. *The Raj: India and British 1600-1947* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 1990), p. 247.
- 9 See 'Surrender of Bahadur Shah' from Charles Ball's *History of the Indian Mutiny*, reproduced in *1857: A Pictorial Presentation* (Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1957), p. 22.
- 10 See Nigel Leask, *Curiosity and the Aesthetics of Travel Writing 1770-1840* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p.174.
- 11 See W.J.T. Mitchell's discussion of such (Maori) figures in John Alexander Gilfillan's painting, *Native Council of War* (1855) in 'Imperial Landscape', *Landscape and Power*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 23.
- 12 As he notes, 'A basic rule of landscape composition in the 18th.c. – exemplified well enough by George Lambert's *Woody Landscape* of 1757 – is that the rich and their habitations must be illuminated, and the poor

and theirs be left in the shadows of the "dark side of the landscape";.. The division has the advantage of marking the differences in status and fortune between rich and poor, while showing that the unity of the landscape and of the society it can be seen to represent is dependent on the existence of both, which combine in a harmonious whole.' John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape* (New York: Cambridge University press, 1980), p. 22.

- 13 'Tyder Collection: Views of India by Robert and Harriet Tytler,' Photo53/(1)- 53(15), and Photos 32/(3) – 32(8) in 'Views of buildings and sites connected with the Indian Mutiny,' in the India Office, BL.
- 14 Robert Flynn Johnson, *Reverie and Reality: Nineteenth Century photographs of India from the Ehrenfeld Collection* (New York: Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 2003), p. 3.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory*, ed. Lawrence Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
- 17 Arthur Ollman, *Samuel Bourne: Images of India* (The Friends of Photography, Untitled Series, 1983).
- 18 For a further discussion on architecture and empire in this period and onwards, see Tapati Guha-Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutionalization of Art in Colonial and Postcolonial India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

## Nationalist Spectacle, Authenticity, Historicity: The Registers of 1857 in Indian Cinema

■ SHARMISTHA GOOPTU ■

This essay explores the registers of 1857 in Indian cinema. Just as the historiography of 1857 is complicated by questions relating to the nature of the uprising, so also the depiction of 1857 in Indian films has been complex and, as I wish to argue, to an extent influenced by mainstream discourses. Considering the work done on the Mutiny/Uprising till date, it is clear that the events of 1857 as a whole defy categorization, and as regional studies by Rudrangshu Mukherjee, Tapti Ray and Eric Stokes<sup>1</sup> have proved, there were multiple uprisings sparked by a range of factors, which were specific to regions and even localities. As William Dalrymple puts it in his recent monograph on Delhi during the uprising of 1857, 'scholars are still arguing over the old chestnut of whether 1857 was a mutiny, a peasant's revolt, an urban revolution or a war of independence. The answer is that it was all of these, and many other things too: it was not one unified movement but many, with widely differing causes, motives and natures.'<sup>2</sup> 1857 has had multiple registers in academic and public discourse, but what remains little explored, and even less understood, is the complexity of its visualization in Indian cinema.

Filmic rendition of 1857 acquired unprecedented highlight following the release of director Ketan Mehta's *Mangal Pandey: The*

*Rising* in 2005. Featuring Aamir Khan, the film produced a national debate on the question of the relation between film and history. The film was accused of fabricating and falsifying history, by intellectuals, politicians and local groups like the Mangal Pandey Suraksha Samiti, which had sprung up to defend the nationalist legacy of Mangal Pandey. Rudrangshu Mukherjee, who published his study of Mangal Pandey a few months before the film's release,<sup>3</sup> was of the opinion that the film was a blatant attempt to pass off as history nationalist myths surrounding the figure of Pandey. Mukherjee argued that according to testimonies at the trial of Mangal Pandey, the sepoy was heavily intoxicated when he committed the rather rash act of attacking the British officers at his cantonment. He had no larger vision of contesting the company's rule and was not supported by other sepoys, though they may well have sympathized with him. In a similar vein, Semanti Ghosh's Bangla article in *Anandabazar Patrika*<sup>4</sup> drew upon other 'historical inaccuracies' in the film, such as Pandey's participation in the Afghan war. Even the film's omission of a mention of Pandey's native village Nagwa and scenes that showed Pandey visiting a prostitute, Heera, were labelled as falsification of history by politicians and local groups in his native district Ballia. There were others, including myself, who defended the filmmaker's liberty to access nationalist myths to sell his product, and in a short commentary published in *Economic and Political Weekly*, I made the point that perhaps the current debate on the historicity of *Mangal Pandey* was motivated by the emergence of Bollywood cinema as major newsmaker and as India's leading international brand.<sup>5</sup>

While the debate raised some very important questions on the relation between recorded history and its rendition in cinema, what was less deliberated at that point was *Mangal Pandey's* complex relation to the mainstream debates on 1857. For, while the film clearly built on the nationalist construction of the historical figure of Mangal Pandey, it also claimed a degree of 'authenticity' based on historical reconstruction. Why at all would commercial Hindi

cinema attempt to do such? What credentials, was it imagined, an 'authentic' portrayal of the life and times of Mangal Pandey attribute to the film? To arrive at an answer to these questions, this essay looks at four films of the historical genre made at various points since the 1950s, and how each of these films could be related to public discourses on 1857. What I seek to establish in the process is not only the complex nature of the filmic renditions of 1857, but also the conscious choices involved therein, and try to understand why at all such choices would be made by filmmakers and producers. The four films discussed in this essay are the best known films relating to 1857 - *Jhansi ki Rani* (1953), *Shatranj ke Khilari* (1977) *Junoon* (1978), and *Mangal Pandey: The Rising* (2005). There were others, such as *1857* (starring Suraiyya, 1946), *Veerangana* (Shobhana Samarth, 1947), *Maharani Jhansi* (1952) and *Lal Qila* (Jairaj and Nirupa Roy, 1960), which are now mostly inaccessible and did not generate enough newsprint for analysis of their reception. Incidentally, the 1983 film *Mangal Pandey* was not a historical but a dacoit-police film, which had nothing to do with the events of 1857.

## II

To start out, I would like to make a distinction between 'historical' films and the more general category of 'period' films. Broadly speaking, the majority of the films set against a historical backdrop made in Bombay since the 1940s were based on Mughal or Nawabi themes. Of these, some such as *Tansen* (1943), *Humayun* (1945), *Shah Jehan* (1946), *Anarkali* (1953), *Mirza Ghalib* (1954), *Mughal-e-Azam* (1960), or *Umrao Jaan* (1981) were loosely based on historical events and personages. Others, to name a few, *Chaudvin ka Chand* (1960), *Pakeezah* (1971), *Bahu Begum* (1978), were historically located, but did not draw upon recorded history or historical personages. What they drew generally upon was a Lucknowi/Nawabi culture and ethos to tell stories of courtesans, poets and doomed lovers, and were loosely termed 'Muslim socials'. For the former, I consider it

appropriate to use the term 'historical', and 1857 films would fit this category. The latter are more aptly 'period' films, though 'historicals' could naturally be fitted into this larger rubric.

Broadly speaking, neither 'period' films (which are not also historicals, i.e. the Muslim socials) nor 'historicals' purport historicity as such, though they do recreate the 'period feel' to varying degrees. A case in point for the former is *Bahu Begum* with Ashok Kumar and Meena Kumari in the lead roles. The film is a love triangle set against the backdrop of Lucknow's declining Nawabi culture; and the most there is to impute any 'authenticity' to its studio sets and costumes is the opening shot of towers and minarets of what could be Delhi or Lucknow or any city with similar architectural settings. Those films that I would term 'historicals' often display a greater engagement with period reconstruction, either through the use of actual historical sites and elaborate outdoor sets, or conversely, by inserting a disclaimer to the effect that the film in question was not a historical document as such. A typical disclaimer appears at the start of *Mirza Ghalib* with a voice: '*Yeh chitra Miza Ghalib ke jivan ki kuch ghatanao par adharit ek filmi natak hai, jis mein bahut se kalpanik prasanga aur patra bhi shamil kar diye gaye hain, unko ~~astvik~~ astvik ya aitihasik na samjha jaye.*' (This film is a drama based on some events in the life of Mirza Ghalib to which many imaginary happenings and characters have also been added, these should not be considered real or historical.) *Mughal-e-Azam*, the most famous of all the historicals, which loosely draws upon the episode of Prince Salim's (later Emperor Jehangir) rebellion against Akbar, but is really the mythic love-story of Salim and the court-attendant Anarkali, did not even carry such a disclaimer. The voice-over opening the film directly assumes control as the voice of India and picks out a period in its history for narration, the reign of Akbar, played here by Prithviraj Kapoor. Yet, the line separating this film or other historicals from 'history' was not always defined. As Madhu Jain tells us in her book *The Kapoors*, 'If Prithviraj believed he was Alexander, so did thousands of school

cinema attempt to do such? What credentials, was it imagined, an 'authentic' portrayal of the life and times of Mangal Pandey attribute to the film? To arrive at an answer to these questions, this essay looks at four films of the historical genre made at various points since the 1950s, and how each of these films could be related to public discourses on 1857. What I seek to establish in the process is not only the complex nature of the filmic renditions of 1857, but also the conscious choices involved therein, and try to understand why at all such choices would be made by filmmakers and producers. The four films discussed in this essay are the best known films relating to 1857 - *Jhansi ki Rani* (1953), *Shatranj ke Khilari* (1977) *Junoon* (1978), and *Mangal Pandey: The Rising* (2005). There were others, such as *1857* (starring Suraiyya, 1946), *Veerangana* (Shobhana Samarth, 1947), *Maharani Jhansi* (1952) and *Lal Qila* (Jairaj and Nirupa Roy, 1960), which are now mostly inaccessible and did not generate enough newsprint for analysis of their reception. Incidentally, the 1983 film *Mangal Pandey* was not a historical but a dacoit-police film, which had nothing to do with the events of 1857.

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children. Apparently, after the film (Sohrab Modi's *Sikandar*) became a huge success, textbooks used his photograph when they wanted to show Alexander the Great. Shashi Kapoor recalls his embarrassment when he came across his father's photograph in his history book when he was a student of Don Bosco. It was the same with Akbar: the emperor's face bore Prithviraj's features.<sup>6</sup> This nature of fluidity between a polymorphic filmic rendition and 'history', as is written or practiced, becomes more constrained when we come to the films based on the Mutiny.

Historical films on 1857 have been relatively few when contrasted to, say, films on Mughal themes or Rajput themes. As noted by Avijit Ghosh in an article in the *Times of India*:

the relationship between Hindi films and the great 1857 Revolt has been both sporadic and uncomfortable. The uprising that swept through the Indo-Gangetic plains created many heroes: Rani of Jhansi, Tanya Tope and Kunwar Singh to name a few. But Bollywood, usually a prolific and persistent recorder of historical drama, has looked the other way. Of the 10,000-odd movies produced since Hindi films got talking in 1931, there are hardly 10 movies on 1857.<sup>7</sup>

Perhaps a factor was that the Mughal romance, for instance, offered a full scope to dialogue writers, lyricists and music composers, and the Hindi film's integral component of the song and dance. Yet, it is also striking that the 1857 films I discuss in this paper, reveal, with the exception of one film (*Jhansi ki Rani*, 1953), a more rooted concern for historicity, not evidenced in the former, which allowed a full play to the mythic element of history. In fact, such concern may, by itself, account for relatively few films being made on events relating to 1857, which otherwise offer scope for lavish historicals. The subtext of historical accuracy in the films based on 1857 and in their reception, posits a rather different relation with historical discourse than is, for example, offered by films on Mughal themes.

## III

***Jhansi ki Rani: the last great 1857 'historical'***: In her discussion of Indian historicals of the late colonial period, Priya Jaikumar writes:

Indian films in the historical genre depicted imaginary pasts ... Indian historicals were structured as romances to tell stories of a colony's victimization and unrealized power by staking physical and moral claims on the homeland. Demonstration of physical as well as spiritual strength are central to the progress of the historical film's narrative and to its specularization ... Exaggeratedly dramatic speech influenced by Parsi and Shakespearean theatre, multiple plots, heightened use of character for symbolism, reduced character development, and an episodic structure defeat the historical film's realism.<sup>8</sup>

Sohrab Modi's *Jhansi ki Rani* (1953), with Mehtab and Sohrab Modi in lead roles, the first of the 1857 films I will discuss, was in the above genre, 'a spectacular account of Rani Lakshmibai's (Mehtab) life, the nineteenth century queen of Jhansi known as Manu to her friends and who led her armies into battle against the British East India Company during the 1857 rising'.<sup>9</sup> The film's narrative as outlined in the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema* is as follows:

The film chronicles Lord Dalhousie's annexation policies; which had forced a treaty upon the aged and childless King Gangadhar Rao (Mubarak). The high priest (Modi), who controls the throne and who has opposed the signing of the treaty, searches for someone capable of leading a revolt and finds the defiant Manu. He persuades the King to marry her, making her the rightful successor to the King instead of the scheming Sadashiv Rao (Ramsingh) who is on the side of the British ...<sup>10</sup>

Clearly, this was a nationalist rendition in the vein of the historicals of the late colonial period that Jaikumar studies. Though the film

did not depict an imaginary past, it was a romantic visualization of 1857. With the relaxation of censorship codes, which prohibited anti-colonial propaganda, it was one of the first Indian films to draw upon historical events of an anti-colonial nature. It was a powerful evocation of the recently rested anti-colonial struggle through the kind of symbolism and moralist perspective that was particularly relevant to a newly independent India. It used imaginary events and characters to develop this schema and its dramatic impact, had elaborate battle scenes,<sup>11</sup> and overall was another of the great and rousing historicals. Though the film was later much talked about and shown on the national television network in the 1980s, it was little seen in its time. According to filmmaker Shyam Benegal, 'the film collapsed. And it hurt Modi's career.' This is instructive: the film was just a few years ahead of the centenary celebrations of 1957, when 1857 was re-visited as an event of 'national' significance. It was also the last 1857 historical in the above-described genre.

The next film on 1857, made after a break of twenty-three years, in 1977, was a very different kind of film, with an altogether different schema. By then the great historical had had its day. Also, in the meantime, 1857 had re-emerged in its hundredth year, marked by national celebrations to memorialize the event.

The centenary celebrations occasioned considerable public debate on the uprising of 1857, mostly related to the question of whether it was a Sepoy Mutiny or a War of Independence, and the nationalist re-construction of the event. For instance, on 11 May 1957, the *Times of India* (Bombay) carried the following editorial piece:

It was 10 May, a hundred years ago, that Indian sepoys mutinied in Meerut. The trouble spread to other cities, and what started as a protest by Indian soldiers soon turned into a concerted challenge to British power. The full story of the stirring events of 1857 has yet to be told. There are still many points on which historians do not see eye to eye with one another. Was the

revolt a war of independence? Or was it no more than a gesture of defiance by a few disconcerted men and women in high positions? Was it inspired by feudal interests? Or did it have wider base and a popular character? Were Bahadur Shah, Rani of Jhansi and Nana Sahib national heroes? Different persons may give different answers to these questions, and historians may endlessly debate motives of the men who led the revolt. But whatever these differences, there is no denying that memory of that revolt left a deep impress on national memory, and that it was the memory of that great resistance which inspired the freedom movement to which Congress gave final shape. In the centenary year of that first challenge to British power the nation, now free, remembers with gratitude the men and women who led and took part in that revolt.

On 9 May, *Times of India* (Delhi) had carried a report of the UP Government's granting of amnesty to 2000 prisoners in celebration of the centenary, and the declaration of 10 May as a public holiday in the state. According to the report, celebrations had started in Lucknow the previous day, when people paid homage at the spot where leaders of the uprising had been hanged. The next day's (10 May) front page carried a lead photograph of a Mutiny site in Meerut with the caption, 'A view of the famous temple at Meerut Cant. where Indian soldiers took a vow to rise against British to free their 85 companions who earlier had been sentenced to various terms for refusing to use cartridges'.<sup>12</sup> The second lead story was a report of mass rallies planned in Delhi, led by the Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the communist leader S.A. Dange. It was also reported that the Central Council of the All India Kisan Sabha had called for removal of statues of British Generals responsible for the suppression of the Mutiny from public places to museums. It was also suggested that jagirs awarded for loyalty to the British during the uprising, and still being enjoyed by descendants of the original awardees, be confiscated and distributed among poor 'kisans'.<sup>13</sup> Finally, there are reports of special celebrations at those places that were sites of the uprising, Lucknow, Meerut, Jhansi, Mathura, Agra,

Bithur, Kanpur, Allahabad. At Gwalior, various political parties paid homage at Rani Lakshmibai's 'samadhi'.<sup>14</sup>

While on the one hand the centennial entrenched 1857 in its nationalist myths, it obviously also generated a greater currency for 1857 as 'history'. The centenary celebrations were themselves flagged off with a ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan at which the official history by Dr S.N. Sen, which had been commissioned in 1955 by the Union education ministry, was presented to the President, Dr Rajendra Prasad. As pointed out by Shahid Amin, there followed 'a whole crop of histories of the Ghadar in different districts and regions written in the medium-sized university towns in North India', where 1857 had the greatest political currency.<sup>15</sup> Stretching this, it may be posited that 1857 became in the collective psyche an event not only of nationalist significance but also one that claimed 'historicity' in its renditions.

Why there were no more great 1857 historicals in the genre of *Jhansi ki Rani* is not easy to account. Perhaps the subject was too grim; perhaps it needed elaborate outdoor shoots for the scenes of war<sup>16</sup> that could be kept at a minimum or even dispensed with in say, the Mughal romances [*Mirza Ghalib* (1954) and *Tajmahal* (1963) are cases in point]; or, perhaps, it just came to be considered a subject that was the stuff of more 'serious' deliberation. A telling comment in this last direction came from film historian Firoze Rangoonwala who suggested 'the fear of getting caught in a historical controversy could have stopped Bollywood from looking into the subject'.<sup>17</sup> Regarding this, a parallel could be drawn with films on Partition. It has often been commented upon that the first Hindi film related to the subject of Partition was M.S. Sathyu's directorial debut *Garam Hawa* (1973), made more than twenty years after 1947, and it has been noted that perhaps Partition remained, for a long time, too traumatic and contested an episode to be easily addressed. Even *Garam Hawa*, or Ritwik Ghatak's Bengali films of the 1950s and '60s, did not directly refer to the genocide of 1947, and it is only in very recent films such as *Gadar: Ek Prem Katha*

(2001) or *Pinjar* (2003) that we actually get a visualization of the immediate physical trauma of Partition. While 1857 was not part of living memory in the way that the Partition was for many people in the Bombay film industry, the point here is that with the attachment of political capital, perhaps, 1857 became, like 1947, a somewhat delicate issue, and, maybe, perceived as best left to those who purported a 'seriousness' in its rendition (though, of course, that might not be a nationalist perspective, as later films proved). In the 1970s we get the next two 1857 films, in a new genre, both, in their own ways, claiming authenticity in the depiction of history.

#### IV

*Shatranj ke Khilari: the new genre of the 1857 'historical'*: In 1977, Satyajit Ray, started shooting a historical film based in Awadh of 1856, in the reign of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah. It falls into our discussion of 1857 films because of its plot centring the British takeover of Awadh, which has been cited as one of the causes that triggered the 1857 uprising in the region. The film has two parallel narratives, one based on Munshi Prem Chand's short story of two chess-playing jagirdars, who remain absorbed in their games of chess while the British moved into Lucknow, the other dramatizing the take-over of Oudh by the British under General Outram. Though the film was hyped as Ray's first Hindi film, it is mostly in Urdu, with some English dialogues for the British characters.

The film has a strain of nationalist sentiment in its concession of the treacherous act of Dalhousie's take-over of Awadh, the frustrations of the Nawab, and Outram's own discomfort with the course of events. As mentioned by Darius Cooper, Ray adds to the film three crucial scenes that do not figure in Premchand's original short story, of which one has 'King Wajid Ali Shah accepting, in a long monologue before his ministers, the hopelessness of his political position' and another that 'occurs in the study of the British Resident, where General Outram, in a compelling political exchange with a junior officer, Captain Weston, tries to justify the

judgement that the Indian ruler of Oudh is unfit to rule.<sup>18</sup> Yet, it is a new genre of the 1857 historical with its overt subtext of historicity, and its departure from the established elements of the historical genre that were available in *Jhansi ki Rani* – the film builds on research and recorded history and dispenses with the larger-than-life element established by the genre. Rather than intense engagement as called for by the heightened use of character and action in the conventional historical, the voice-over (by Amitabh Bachchan) punctuating the diegesis gives the sense of a fait accompli, establishing distance from the unfolding historical events.

Shooting for the film began in Calcutta on 6 December 1966.<sup>19</sup> Ray was India's most famous filmmaker and his films automatically generated a series of assumptions about the quality and value of the product. *Shatranj ke Khilari* was meticulously researched and period reconstruction undertaken in the minutest of detail. *Filmfare*, which had been following the shoots since its 7–20 January 1977 issue, for instance, revealed in its 18 February–3 March issue that actor Amjad Khan, who plays Wajid Ali Shah in the film, was being trained in Kathak, for scenes in the film that had Wajid Ali performing the Raas-leela with his nautch girls.<sup>20</sup> Cooper mentions that Ray's research on Wajid Ali Shah had revealed, according to Ray, Wajid's 'extraordinary character', which 'made the King a figure worthy of film treatment'.<sup>21</sup>

After the film's release in 1977 a reader critically wrote in to *Filmfare* on the issue of period reconstruction in the film: 'The movie based upon Ray's wide research, simultaneously claims to be based upon Munshi Prem Chand's story, and the latter loses in the end. From the very beginning Ray starts parading his research conducted in London and elsewhere. Research on Nawab Wajid Ali Shah is demonstrated by flashing original letters, pictures, drawings and paintings.' The same writer also complained that the Nawab's speeches were 'punctuated by inane poetry recitals exploiting each and every point of Ray research at a stretch.'<sup>22</sup> Contradictorily, the same writer complained that Ray's research was 'no better than

Manmohan Desai's. Imagine chess players sitting for a game after applying full make up, a nineteenth-century Begum with threaded eyebrows and kilos of make up on her face while going to bed, the players having shining white teeth despite chewing paan all the time.<sup>23</sup> This writer is apparently of the opinion that the flaunting of the research behind the film had destroyed the soul of the rendition. Yet, he remains mired in the question of authenticity, going to the minutest of details to fault the period reconstruction. Clearly, this was a viewer who did not appreciate the film, yet both strands of his complaints reveal the key issue of historicity: for the filmmaker, in his meticulous research and the documentation of that research; for the viewer, in his expectations of 'authenticity' in a Ray historical, as against mainstream commercial cinema. For another reader, who wrote into the same section of *Filmfare*, the film was 'a triumph for the director' for it 'captures(d) the period'. Ray himself declared many of the sources he had consulted while making the film in the 31 December 1978 issue of *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, in response to a critic's comments in the 22 October 1978 issue of the magazine that he had been 'Orientalist' in his depiction of Wajid Ali as weak, ineffectual and effeminate. These included among other contemporary sources, Abdul Halim Sharar's *Guzesta Lucknow*, which provided both the socio-cultural details and a portrait of Wajid in Lucknow and Calcutta, the text of Wajid Ali Shah's *Rajas*, where he plays Krishna, and the young Wajid's personal diary, *Mahal Khana Shahi*.<sup>24</sup>

Ray's choice of the subject was indicated, by Ray himself, to be his 'interest in chess, the Raj period, and the city of Lucknow ...'<sup>25</sup> While the film was criticized on various grounds, it is instructive that the issue at stake, for filmmaker and viewers alike was authenticity in the rendition of history, which did not appear to be such a significant issue for *Jhansi ki Rani*. Of course, this was a Ray film which carried expectations very different from what one would have of a mainstream commercial genre, yet the mutation of the 1857 historical is significant in itself, and the 1957 centennial

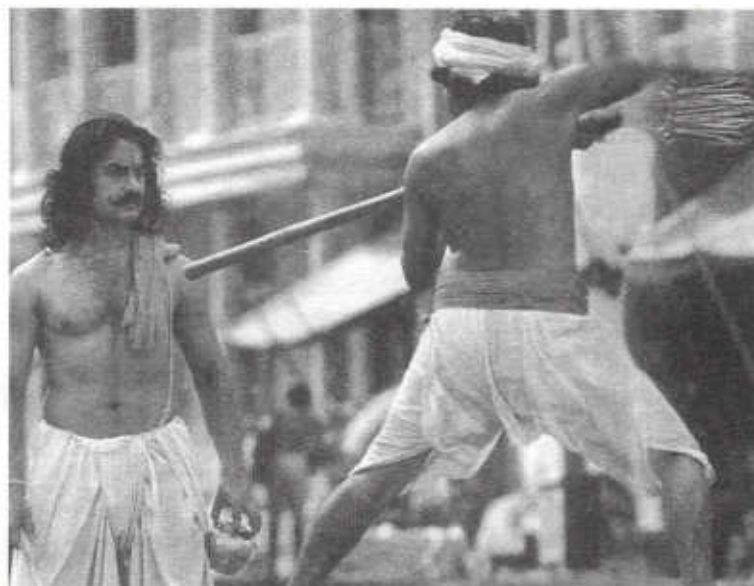
could be posited as a backdrop. The subtext of historicity remained significant in *Junoon*, the next 1857 film.

***Junoon: the first 'authentic' depiction of 1857:*** *Junoon* (1978) was released in the same year as *Shatranj ke Khilari*. The screenplay was based on 'A Flight of Pigeons', a long short story by Ruskin Bond which was supposedly based on diary notes left by an English girl who was caught up in the events of 1857. Directed by Shyam Benegal, who pioneered the New Cinema movement, the film, situated in and around Lucknow, is the story of an Anglo-Indian family trapped in the violence of the uprising, and of a group of people thrown together by the course of events. As noted in the *Encyclopaedia of Indian Cinema*, the film weaves 'a passionate love story into the historical fresco' and 'opts for a colonial sexual fantasy'.<sup>26</sup> However, the film also appropriated for itself a claim to the 'authentic' depiction of historical events.

*Junoon* was actor Shashi Kapoor's debut as producer and was released under the new banner Filmvalas. In an article on the making of the film, *Filmfare* noted, 'In the early years of his career Shashi Kapoor had said he would do whatever he could to sponsor good cinema. "Junoon" is an attempt to redeem that pledge.'<sup>27</sup> According to the *Filmfare* article, the film was shot 'on actual locations or, for cinematic logistic reasons, at the nearest corresponding spots.'<sup>28</sup> The film was claimed to be the first authentic depiction of the Mutiny (perhaps on account that *Shatranj ke Khilari*, strictly speaking was not a 'Mutiny' film), its claims for authenticity resting on registers such as, the credentials of its director which placed it in the category of art cinema, its research and naturalistic period reconstruction or, like *Shatranj*, its departure from the principal structures of the mainstream historical genre, as discussed above.

## V

***Mangal Pandey: The Rising:*** Returning to *Mangal Pandey*, the most



*A still from Mangal Pandey: The Rising*

recent 1857 film, we get a complex text, to a great extent drawing upon the genre historical and the structures of the mainstream Hindi film, yet not entirely devoid of the subtext of historicity.

*Mangal Pandey* was not in the art film category like *Shatranj ke Khilari* or *Junoon*. It was a big budget,<sup>29</sup> mainstream film, with big stars, and re-constructed the nationalist legend of Mangal Pandey, the sepoy of the 34<sup>th</sup> Regiment of the Native infantry of the East India Company's army whose 'mutiny', sometime late in the afternoon of 29 March 1857<sup>30</sup> is claimed to have initiated the uprising of 1857. As noted by one reviewer, 'The stuff of Bollywood is all in place – colour, music, the obligatory Holi number, men refusing to die from bloody wounds'.<sup>31</sup> The character of Mangal Pandey in the film is played by Aamir Khan, whose film *Lagaan* (2001, dir. Ashutosh Gowariker) made history for Indian cinema when it got nominated to the Oscars in the Foreign Film category in 2001, setting a trend of sending in mainstream Hindi films for international awards and film festivals. Khan was producer

and lead actor of *Lagaan*, a period drama set in 1893, which told the story of the oppression of the British Raj and spirited resistance by a group of men in the drought-hit village of Champaner, who play cricket against the officers of the local British cantonment to save their lives and land. The film was a huge hit in India, and became the first cross-over Hindi film, with runs in mainstream theatres in the UK and other parts of the world. *Mangal Pandey* was Khan's next film after a break of more than three years, directed by Ketan Mehta, who has been a critically acclaimed director of the New Cinema movement of the 1970s and '80s, and later moved into more mainstream cinema. *Mangal Pandey* was in many ways an extension of *Lagaan*, with its popular anti-colonial schema, its identification as an Aamir Khan film, which generated enormous hype before the release, or its use of an international cast and its eye for the international market. The film flopped at the box-office, and a large part of the flak it received from viewers and critics was related to its 'distortion' of history. As one critic spouted, 'Bollywood continues to defile history. Now distorting, now disparaging, Bollywood's arthritic treatment of the past goes on. Ketan Mehta's much panned "Mangal Pandey" is only the latest, and probably the weakest, link in the chain which goes back many years ...'<sup>32</sup>

Put in perspective, for a commercial mainstream film, which had a certain economic logic in appropriating a popular nationalist legend, such assessment apparently indicates a confusion of categories. Yet, perhaps it was not so, given that the text of *Mangal Pandey* is complex and composite; the film is not entirely historical, yet it is not wholly fictitious, though it definitely displays liberties with known historical episodes to flesh out the narrative, given that very little is actually known about the historical figure of Mangal Pandey. For instance, a significant part of the film centres round Pandey's evolving relationship with the prostitute Heera. A scene, where Pandey expresses disgust at the prostitutes who 'sell their bodies to Englishmen', Heera retorts, 'But we only sell our bodies,

you sell your souls', is unmistakable in its reference to what happened in Meerut where 'courtesans of the *bazaar* brothels' taunted the sepoy, 'egging on the men to rescue their 85 comrades from the gaol.'<sup>33</sup> Needless to say, this is a case of cinematic license, for these events took place in Meerut, not in Barrackpore, and not in the life of Mangal Pandey, according to established histories. Yet, also, it is not wholly fictitious, and indicates an effort to weave known historical facts into a composite text.

Mangal Pandey, as constructed by the film, is a layered and nuanced character. He is no nationalist to start with, but a loyal sepoy in the company's pay, who even fires on hapless villagers on the command of his senior officers. He is a caste-conscious brahmin, and it is his realization that he may have been defiled and rendered outcaste by biting the cartridge issued to him that marks a decisive turn in his life. Unlike Bhuvan, the protagonist of *Lagaan*, he is not an unproblematic positive character, who can embrace an untouchable at a moment's notice or stands opposed to the colonial state from the start. While he undergoes some sort of nationalist transformation during the second half of the film, and of course the logic of a popular film demands that this happen, this transition is shown developing in stages and at several levels, leaving him torn between loyalties and friendships. Even the lead British character, Captain Gordon, played by British actor Toby Stephens has several shades, unlike the uncompromisingly villainous Captain Russel of *Lagaan*. Gordon is tormented by the pull between his friendship with Mangal Pandey and his call to duty as a Captain of the British Army. This is not to say that the film dispensed with the Hindi film stereotype of the white villain, but this was transposed on the minor white characters as the oppressive agents of colonialism. The point here is that the film, while definitely not based on the kind of research that went into *Shatranj ke Khilari*, and neither purporting the kind of historicity that Ray did, was also not completely comparable to say, *Mughal-e-Azam* or even *Jhansi ki Rani*, with their uni-dimensional and rounded symbolism. *Jhansi ki Rani*, for

instance, glosses over the entire course of events relating to the Rani's own lack of choice in the matter of eventually joining the rebels, to present her as a singular symbol of anti-colonial resistance.<sup>34</sup> *Mangal Pandey*, by contrast, presents a more complex imagery. The film is also curiously reflexive of the nationalist reconstruction of 1857. The title sequence is picturized on a group of men on an elephant, singing the theme song with the refrain 'mangala mangala' as the day gets started, marking auspicious celebration and addressing themselves to towns, villages and homes to rise. Contrast this to the following description in the *Times of India* of 'prabhat pheries' (morning rounds) to mark the centennial celebrations in 1957 – 'All over the country, in towns, villages, "prabhat pheries" were taken out to singing of national songs and tricolour hoisted in mark of centenary. In many places, flag of revolutionaries – green with a golden sun – was unfurled also.'<sup>35</sup> *Mangal Pandey* is also not a self-contained narrative, as *Jhansi ki Rani*, but ends with a pointed reference to the nationalist trajectory, linking it to Pandey's narrative, harnessing an established discourse of Mangal Pandey as nationalist hero. In the final sequence, following Pandey's hanging, the voiceover notes that the battle started by Mangal Pandey was one of the bloodiest uprisings in human history. And while the British termed it 'sepoy mutiny', for Indians it was the 'first war of independence', which though suppressed had managed to destroy the Company and the rule of India passed over to the British Crown: 'Mangal Pandey became a symbol of nationalist resistance. As the first martyr to the nationalist cause, he inspired future generations to fight for freedom.' The voiceover dissolves into footage showing Gandhi and evocative scenes of civil disobedience and mass rallies. Pandey's dream, we are informed, was realized ninety years later, on 15 August 1947, when India finally became independent.

Thus, for Ketan Mehta's *Mangal Pandey* also, it is possible to identify a subtext of purported historicity, which was perhaps so forcefully contested because it treaded so fine a path between

'history' and its 'distortion making a sifting complicated for both; historians, with their sense of historical accuracy, and mass of ordinary filmgoers, whose only exposure to Pandey was perhaps in their school textbooks which fit him into the nationalist trajectory.

For the film itself, this subtext was clearly motivated by a bid for a greater mobility for mainstream cinema, as first happened with *Lagaan's* nomination to the Oscars; such investment was quite poignant when, after the film's poor showing at the Locarno Film Festival, the director claimed that his film had been given a standing ovation there.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the film had been conceived through a subconscious referencing of the films of the '70s, which had rendered 1857 a suitable subject for 'serious' cinema.

**Conclusion:** As stated at the outset, this essay has tried to explore how 1857 films have directly or more sub-consciously drawn from mainstream discourses on the Mutiny/uprising, to present their renditions of 'history'. Professional historians have typically been dismissive of such renditions, which have hence remained relatively obscure from academic analysis. This essay has tried to show how public and political discourses have influenced the mutation of 1857 films, and how such linkage was fuelled by equally political imperatives of the filmmakers concerned. To return to Shahid Amin's article where he indicated that 'commemoration is too serious (or political) a business to be left to historians: poets, publicists, politicians, playwrights all must contribute.'<sup>37</sup> I would add filmmakers to that list.

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## The Amar Chitra Katha of 1857: The Nation in the Comic

■ NALIN MEHTA ■

'*Mangal Pandey*, the movie, is certainly not real history ... our Amar Chitra Katha version is based on authenticity.'

– Anant Pai, Founder Editor, Amar Chitra Katha\*

I am a child of Amar Chitra Katha (ACK hereafter). Growing up in the 1980s, poring over the ACK comics on history and mythology was one of the greatest delights of my childhood. The comics opened up a world of wonder from the past that first ignited my interest in history. My first mental map of history and mythology, my first imaginary of the past, in that sense, was drawn from ACK. I am a professional scholar of politics and culture but for all my later education and readings, even today when I read of, say, Emperor Akbar, the mental picture that pops up in my mind is still that of the red-clad, mustachioed figure I first encountered in an ACK volume at the age of six. I took great pride in possessing virtually the whole collection and, at some subterranean level, my subsequent academic explorations were an attempt to fill flesh and blood on to the skeleton of 'history' that the comics provided me as a child. Of course, ACK is only a popular version of a certain kind of history – I did not accept it at face value after a certain point in life – but its real significance was that it provided a riveting glimpse of the past and fired my first journey of curiosity into history and

culture. Even if that journey led to a negation of some of ACK, ACK was the kernel.

This lengthy personal preamble was necessary to begin this paper that sets out to examine the representations of 1857 in ACK comics. At its core, this paper is about the old chestnut of what constitutes history: the account of the academic researcher or those that circulate in the domain of the popular?<sup>1</sup> In this debate, ACK, over the years, has come to symbolize all that is wrong in the ways of representing the past. As Partha Chatterjee noted acerbically: 'I do not have any recipes for making academic history more sensitive to the popular. Certainly, the answer cannot be to turn academic history into some variant of the *Amar Chitra Katha*'.<sup>2</sup> ACK comics have long invited the disdain of the professional historian. Yet, ACK cannot be dismissed so easily. This is a series that has sold a whopping 86 million copies since its inception in 1968.<sup>3</sup> Since the early 1970s, generations of Indian children have had their first encounter with history, including their first impressions of 1857, in its pages. It is no exaggeration to say that ACK has come to occupy an iconic place in Indian popular culture and in the construction of what Sunil Khilnani calls the 'great Amar Chitra Katha of the national imagination'.<sup>4</sup> Comics need to be taken seriously not only because they embody popular culture but also because, as pictorial productions, they have a huge influence in constructing social maps in children's minds.<sup>5</sup> For instance, Robin Jeffrey, scholar of the Indian media, attributes a great deal of his interest in history to a comic book on the American civil war that he read as a nine year old in Canada:

I came across a copy of *Red Badge of Honour*, one of the classics of English literature, and a fictional story set in the civil war, in a volume of "Classics Illustrated". The second half of it was an illustrated history of the civil war, purely for commercial reasons. But it just blew my mind. I have had the Battle of Gettysburg running around in mind ever since I was 9 or 10 purely for this reason.<sup>6</sup>

ACK too began its life as an Indian edition of the 'Classics Illustrated' but it soon moved from publishing Western content to Indian themes.<sup>7</sup> Unlike the Canadian variant of the 'Classics Illustrated', however, ACK specifically markets itself as an 'educational tool' for children and has since been appropriated by successive Indian governments and the state's educational bureaucracy, as a subsequent section details. It therefore becomes important to understand what ACK does to Indian history, and to pivotal events like 1857. ACK's representations are important markers of how these events live on in the popular psyche and this essay will study ACK's version of 1857 in four separate volumes – *The March to Freedom-1: The Birth of the Indian National Congress* (No. 348), *Rani of Jhansi* (No. 51), *Mangal Pandey* (No. 675) and *The Historic City of Delhi* (No. 696) – to point out the linkages and the disjunctures between popular culture and the professional academic history of the period.

With studies of popular culture becoming fashionable in recent years, several scholars have focused their professional lenses on ACK<sup>8</sup>, but with the odd exception, these accounts generally view ACK as '19<sup>th</sup> century orientalist/nationalist historiography'<sup>9</sup> or as complicit in the 'iconography of the fundamentalist Hindu right.'<sup>10</sup> I will show that this kind of criticism is misplaced. First, ACK is a popular comic series that cannot be judged by the standards of a scholarly peer-reviewed journal article. It should be judged on its own claim of functioning as an 'educational medium', but also by the limitations imposed by a children's genre, marked by simplification and the need to entertain. I argue that ACK actually walks a tight rope of contradictions that reflect not only its own twin objectives of market sales and 'national integration',<sup>11</sup> but also the various problems inherent in the historiography of 1857 itself.

Perhaps no other section of Indian history has been more hotly debated or written about than the events of 1857 and since its first colonial histories written by John Kaye and G.B. Malleson,

historians have argued over the nature of the upsurge. As William Dalrymple sums up, these debates centre around, 'whether 1857 was a mutiny, a peasant's revolt, an urban revolution or a war of independence. The answer is that it was all of these, and many other things too: it was not one unified movement but many, with widely differing causes, motives and natures.'<sup>12</sup> ACK strings together all these versions of 1857 in a complex narrative that caters to a number of registers that bound the world of ACK. Each issue operates in a field of tensions: sales versus educational values; scholarly accuracy versus the need to appease particular interest groups; a commitment to Indian history versus a commitment to national integration ... the result is a fascinating phenomenon, the product of an extraordinarily complex series of choices.<sup>13</sup>

By juxtaposing a textual analysis of 1857 in these volumes with 'real history', I will show that while ACK pays lip service to the nationalist construction of 1857 as a war of independence, the paradigm offered by the 'official' NCERT (National Council of Education Research and Training) school textbooks until very recently, the narratives that cross its various volumes are far more complex. With one exception, far from depicting a simple, coherent narrative of a unified national struggle, as typified in the first nationalist account of the event by V.D. Savarkar,<sup>14</sup> the comics paint a more critical picture. This is much more in tune with the later critical nationalist perspective of the historian S.B. Chaudhuri, who saw the struggle as nationalistic, in spread and nature, but not in terms of a 'fully-fledged Western nationalism'. Chaudhuri saw the disturbances as an 'indigenous patriotism' which emerged out of a number of local causes but attained a broader significance.<sup>15</sup> This view considered the uprisings as part of a continuum of anti-colonial uprisings but recognized its multiple and contradictory strands. In fact, ACK's *Mangal Pandey* goes even further and comes close to the critical perspective of historian S.N. Sen, or even R.C. Majumdar, the most critical of the mutiny's Indian investigators, who contended that 'the so-called First National War of

Independence of 1857 is neither First, nor National, nor a War of Independence'.<sup>16</sup> The point is that ACK is a popular cultural product that weaves all the various ambiguities and the discords in the discourse of 1857 in its pages. It is not simple nationalistic propaganda – it is a sophisticated product that represents a certain popular Indian consensus of what 1857 was and what it meant in Indian history.

### AMAR CHITRA KATHA: COMICS, EDUCATION AND THE STATE

Before moving onto depictions of 1857 in the ACK comics, it is important to briefly sketch the history of ACK and its linkages with the Indian state and its educational apparatus that feed directly into the production process of the comic books and as we shall see, have a bearing on its depictions of 1857.

Comic books around the world have illustrated history: in the United States (*Classics Illustrated*), Japan (*Berusaiyo no Bara* and *Nihon Igai Shi*), South America (*Ché* and episodes of *Inodoro Pereyra* in Argentina; *Hisprietas de Indians* in Columbia; *Elpidio Valdés* in Cuba; and *México, Historia de un Pueblo* and *Episodios Mexicanos* in Mexico).<sup>17</sup> Some of these profess to document history while others fictionalize historical events. ACK belongs to the former category. Since its inception, it has been marketed and sold as an educational, but entertaining, tool for Indian children. The story of ACK's inception in 1967 is instructive. ACK was born out of a desire to tell Indian children Indian stories and educate them on what it calls the 'glorious heritage of India'. Its founder Anant Pai recalls:

In 1967 I had gone to Delhi. There was a shop there called Maharaj Lal and Sons. Lots of people were standing on the pavement and watching a quiz contest on the TV. Because we didn't have TV in Bombay I also stood by and watched. One of the questions was, what is the name of the mother of Ram? None of the five boys from that college [St Stephen's] could answer that question. Then a little later there was a question on

the Greek gods of Mt Olympus. Everyone knew the answer. Then I said this is because our children are going to so-called English medium schools, convent schools, getting alienated from their roots, getting alienated from their culture.

Then I came back to Bombay and proposed this idea to various publishing companies. India Book House accepted the idea and that is how it came about.<sup>18</sup>

ACK's first ten titles were merely reprints of the American *Classics Illustrated* but its first Indian title, *Krishna*, became so successful that the series moved entirely into Indian themes, going from mythology to history. ACK has since sold 86 million copies of 436 different titles in eleven Indian languages and been translated into French, Spanish, German, Swahili, Fijian, Bahasa Indonesia and Serbo-Croat.<sup>19</sup> Significantly, ACK explicitly markets itself as a modern-day family elder, aiming 'to fill the lacuna left by [absence of] grandparents in the smaller nuclear families in urban areas. In the olden days, grandparents would regale the children of the household with these tales from folklore and epics. Amar Chitra Katha stepped in to fill the void.'<sup>20</sup> Showcasing itself in this vein, ACK's rapid success in the 1970s was linked to a vigorous marketing effort targeted directly at schools, including quiz and fancy dress competitions, debates and the formation of Amar Chitra Katha/Tinkle clubs.<sup>21</sup>

From the late 1970s onwards, ACK had the approval of the state. The central government's interest in the series followed from a survey carried out by ACK in thirty-one Delhi schools, which showed that children learnt better through comics than textbooks. According to Anant Pai:

Those who learnt through comics had 50 per cent higher scores than those learning from standard means ... I met the education head ... said to him: "I want the education minister to inaugurate my seminar on comics." The Ministry of Education participated; the National Council of Educational Research and Training sent delegates; it was a remarkable suc-

cess. After that, the government said government funds could be used to buy comic books for schools.<sup>22</sup>

An ACK-organized seminar, 'The Role of Chitra Katha in School Education' on 4 February 1978 got it the seal of approval from the education ministry, NCERT and the Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan.<sup>23</sup> Since then, literary support programmes with the libraries of government-aided schools like Kendriya Vidyalayas have always been an important part of ACK's commercial success.<sup>24</sup> Since the late 1970s, ACK has enjoyed the patronage of the state, irrespective of the ideology of those in power. This has been most evident in the numerous instances of senior office-bearers of the central government being present at the launch-functions of ACK's titles (see pictures). As John Hawley points out, ACK is a business, but its success has also turned it into a 'quasi-public institution'.<sup>25</sup> It comes under pressure from a number of political groups and operates in a field where its success hinges on achieving a minimal consensus on the issues it portrays. According to Hawley, for instance, when ACK's portrayal of Valmiki as a thief before he wrote the *Ramayana* (*Valmiki*, No. 49) led to protests by a Dalit group in Punjab, Pai removed the issue from circulation, travelled to Jalandhar and Patiala to meet the protesters, and tried to enlist the services of the Congress' senior Dalit leader Jagjivan Ram as a negotiator with the Dalit groups concerned. ACK waited a long while before coming out with another issue that involved the question of untouchability. Its staff was instructed to be sensitive towards its lower caste readership and when *Chokamela* – a title on the fourteenth century Dalit bhakti poet – came out in 1983, its launch was presided over by then Union Home Minister Buta Singh, also a Dalit leader from the Punjab.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, when ACK came out with its series on the ten Sikh Gurus during the Khalistan insurgency in the early 1980s, it took care to get each issue approved by the Shiromani Sikh Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee.<sup>27</sup>

In 1985, when the Congress induced ACK to come out with



*Indian President Giani Zail Singh releasing a volume of Amar Chitra Katha, 1983*

a special commemorative issue on the occasion of its centenary celebrations, it responded with a mini-series, with the neutral title, *The March to Freedom*. The first volume in the series was titled *The Birth of the Indian National Congress* and was launched by then Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi. Significantly though, the issue focused on the colonial exploitation of India and the Congress itself did not figure in the 32-page issue until page twenty-seven. It also contained five pages devoted to 1857 and this is where our textual analysis might begin.

### **ACK and 1857: The Comic Tale of a Problematic Historiography**

Asked about his views on the nature of 1857, Anant Pai is clear about what he saw as its primordial motivations:

You can't call it a war of independence because there was not much coordination between the various rebellious forces and among the Marathas, for example. They were not necessarily nationalist. It was based on feudalism. I doubt if the concept of the nation, as we have it today, existed. They were fighting basically to be free from the British. The concept of nationalism was slowly getting formed around that time.<sup>28</sup>

This response touches on the complex gamut of the historiography of 1857 that has grappled with the 'nature' of the uprising. For critical historians like R.C. Majumdar or Tarachand, the events of 1857 were not 'the birth-pangs of a freedom movement in India, but the dying groans of an obsolete aristocracy and centrifugal feudalism in the medieval age.'<sup>29</sup> Nonetheless, studies have shown that a wide cross-section of people did take part in the upsurge and the question of whether this was an early nationalism remains a vexed one. The problem, as Tapti Ray notes, was that 'in its manifest form, the rebellion failed to match up to the nationalist historians' notion of an anti-colonial struggle.' Many of the disparate events of 1857 that did not fit into a linear nationalist discourse of progress and modernity were, therefore, rejected as 'backward' or 'antiquated'.<sup>30</sup> In contrast, S.B. Chaudhuri, forcefully argued that while multiple factors drove the disturbances, these had an 'internal consistency', making them both 'mutiny and rebellion, unmistakably united.'<sup>31</sup> The regional studies of later historians like Eric Stokes and Rudrangshu Mukherjee, however, established how different the disturbances were in different places.

In sharp contrast, the Indian state has always made it clear that it sees 1857 as a landmark in the freedom struggle. 1857 has been part of the political discourse of nationalism ever since Savarkar's characterization of it as a 'war of independence' and it was a discourse that the post-colonial state continued. In fact, the first public debates between historians over 1857, erupted in 1957, when the Government of India celebrated its centenary, with R.C. Majumdar leading the charge against 1857's nationalist credentials.

The problem for ACK was to portray this intensely complicated debate in a 32-page comic book for children. ACK's depiction of the events of 1857 is one of the foremost examples of the pulls and pressures caused by its scholarly pretensions and educative aim, its desire to be entertaining and non-threatening to the state or any interest group, as well as the commercial aspect of

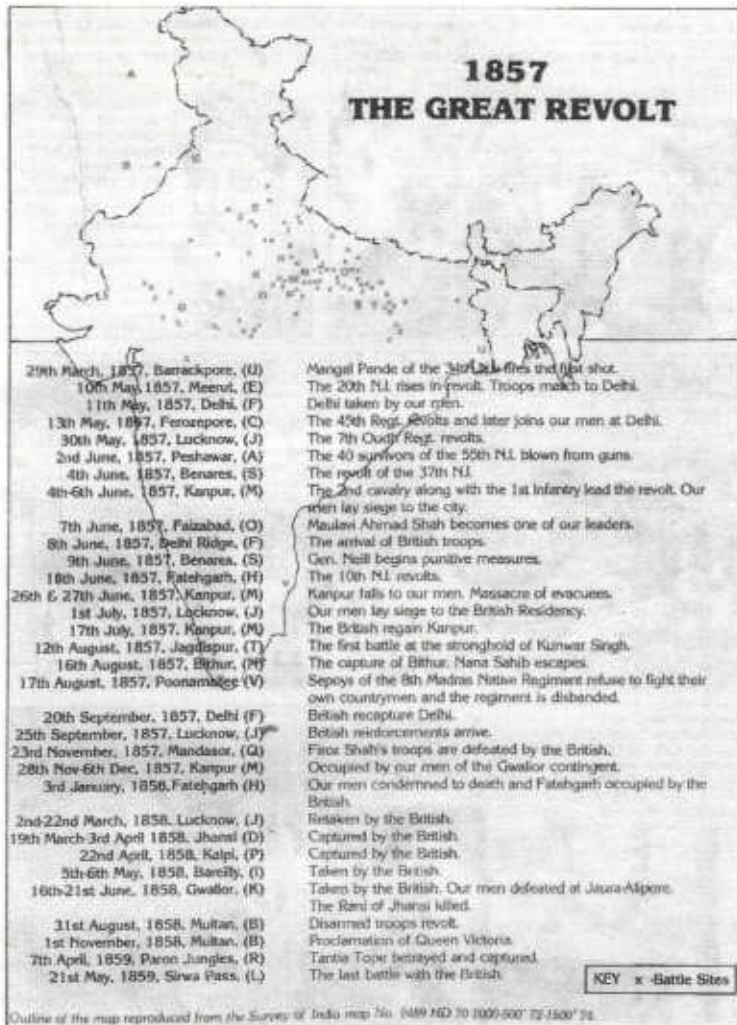
increasing sales. Purporting to tell the story of 'the epic of new India', the first volume in *The March to Freedom* series, *The Birth of the Indian National Congress*, contains as many as seven bibliographical references from scholarly publications: ranging from the works of Dadabhai Naoroji and Romesh Dutt to R.C. Majumdar's *History and Culture of the Indian People - Vols. VIII, IX and X*.<sup>32</sup> As Frances Pritchett has noted, it is in this volume that ACK's scholarly pretensions are most obvious, with whole pages of documentary-style educative prose inserted into the narrative. Four prose pages are inserted in a row: a centrefold called 'India Under the British Yoke', which is further divided into the 'The Wealth Drain', 'Torture to Extract Land Revenue', 'Famine Deaths', and 'Lest We Forget'.<sup>33</sup> Interestingly, it even has a map of the 1857 disturbances. In addition, excerpts from proclamations and newspaper articles appear in the narrative. For instance, Queen Victoria's proclamation as Empress of India in 1858 and an article from the *Hindu Patriot* about the poor state of peasants feature prominently.<sup>34</sup>

Leading up to the events of 1857, the comic builds a narrative of colonial exploitation based on the drain of Indian wealth, the end of indigenous industry due to the cotton-loom of Manchester, the adverse impact of changes in systems of land revenue, peasant revolts from the late 1700s and the social displacement caused by the colonial state. The economic themes were, no doubt, first developed by the early nationalists but it is in the discussion of the peasant revolts and social displacement that we see the first signs of later narratives that explored the multiple strands of anti-British sentiment. Moving to the causes of 1857, the volume moves to a depiction of Evangelical missionary activity and the resentment it caused. As a Brahmin notes on page 21, 'The one aim of all frangees is to convert us all to their religion.' On the next page, the narrative blurb baldly declares: 'It was this fear which triggered off the sepoy mutiny in 1857.' Emphasizing the religious aspect of the uprising, it shows an angry Mangal Pandey exhorting his comrades



*The March to Freedom-1: The Birth of the Indian National Congress*(No. 348)p.22 to mutiny with the declaration: 'Rise and take up arms ... Strike a blow for your religion!'<sup>35</sup>

Up until this point, the narrative is about the vacillation of the sepoys, with the narrator clearly stating – 'No one joined him [Mangal Pandey], no one stopped him.'<sup>36</sup> It is when



*The March to Freedom-1: The Birth of the Indian National Congress (No.348) p.23*

describing the post-Mangal Pandey events that the comic joins the statist narrative, portraying the events as one united national movement:

What began as a mutiny soon grew into a revolt. Our farmers, traders, professionals, rajas, nawabs all, all joined the struggle

against the British ... The anger we had suppressed for nearly a century burst forth with a vengeance.<sup>37</sup>

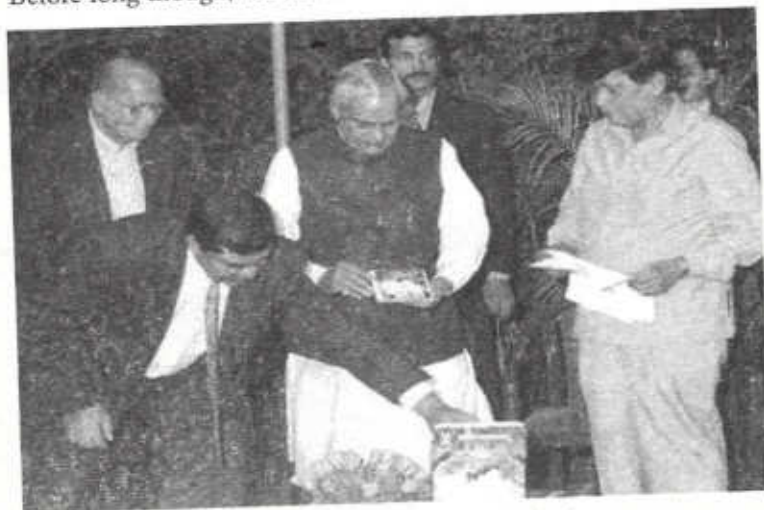
This sudden change of tone and the emphasis on 'all' Indians joining the struggle is a clear pandering to the dominant nationalist perspective of the state. Also to be noted is the use of the collective 'us' as against the Other. Pritchett finds this unpardonable: 'This narrowed perspective naturally leads, despite all the trappings of historicity, to an inadequate understanding of the past.'<sup>38</sup> Yet, if we discount the emphasis on 'all', this characterization is not too dissimilar to that of the eminent historian, S.N. Sen, according to whom:

What began as a fight for religion ended as a war for independence for there is not the slightest doubt that the rebels wanted to get rid of the alien government and restore old order of which the King of Delhi was the rightful representative.<sup>39</sup>

The problem is with the bald declaration that 'all' Indians joined up. However, the tension between ACK's different vectors and aims is revealed in the very next blurb when the narrator admits that not all Indians were one in 1857: 'Even in those tense days when passions ran high, many of our countrymen provided shelter and protection to helpless British women and children.'<sup>40</sup> The obvious slippage in the 'all' argument is even more striking when we juxtapose *The Birth of the Indian National Congress* with ACK's account in another comic, *The Historic City of Delhi*. While the former asserts that Bahadur Shah Zafar, 'came out of retirement and assumed leadership', the latter is clear that the last Mughal emperor 'unwittingly became the rallying point of revolutionary forces in the country'.<sup>41</sup> It is an inconsistency that immediately reveals the complicated nature of the popular construction of 1857 in ACK's various volumes, all edited by Pai himself.

It is only in *The Birth of the Indian National Congress* that ACK panders so overtly to the nationalist 'us' and the notion of a unified national struggle in 1857, and *The March to Freedom Series* has since

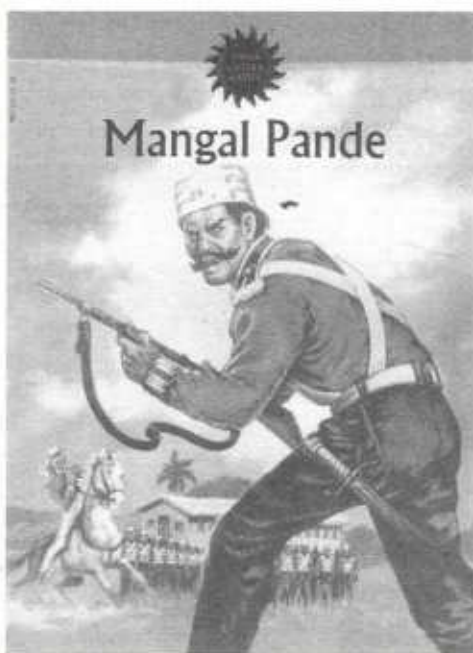
been supported by successive ruling regimes – a book version of the series was released by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee of the BJP in August 1997.<sup>42</sup> In all other ACK comic-books, the narrative is rather different and much closer to Pai's stated view of 1857 as a feudal upsurge, with some crystallization of a nascent nationalism. The ACK issue on *Mangal Pandey*, for instance, concentrates solely on the religious and professional grievances of the Bengal Army and does not once mention the words 'nation', 'freedom struggle' or 'patriotism'. Saul David has shown that 54 of the 74 infantry regiments in the Bengal Army mutinied – as opposed to just 3 of 29 in the Bombay Army, and none in the Madras Army – largely because of the professional dissatisfactions of the Indian soldiery concerned, combined with the rise of militant Evangelism and the perceived threat to religion.<sup>43</sup> This is precisely what ACK's *Mangal Pandey* concentrates on as the primary motivation for revolt. It begins with a depiction of the 'tall, handsome sepoy of the 34<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry' enjoying the easy collegiality of military life and telling each other how good it was to 'share work and leisure'.<sup>44</sup> Before long though, the discussion turns to the difficulty of money



Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee releasing  
CD-rom on *Amar Chitra Katha*, 1998

and the meagre 'seven rupees a month' that constituted an ordinary sepoy's salary. Saul David has shown that this was a basic cause of dissatisfaction – the sepoys' basic pay of seven rupees a month in 1857 was the same as that at the turn of the century, while the cost of living had trebled in the same period.

In addition, it has been well documented that power and prestige within the army hierarchy also contributed to seething resentment. Even the most senior Indian officer was subordinate to a junior European and could not give orders to a European NCO.<sup>45</sup> The first few pages of *Mangal Pandey* follow this script faithfully, with one sepoy telling another: 'Ha! You can only hope to rise to the rank of subedar'.<sup>46</sup> ACK's *Mangal Pandey* moves from the familiar tale of a *khalasi* first telling a sepoy about the greased cartridges to the infamous reputation for proselytizing that the 34<sup>th</sup> Native Infantry's commanding officer, Colonel Wheeler, had come



Cover image of ACK's *Mangal Pandey*

to command. The men of the 34<sup>th</sup> Regiment heavily resented the Colonel's efforts at Christian preaching and the ACK text has a group of sepoys talking about their fears:

Sepoy 1: It's all part of a plot to convert us to Christianity. Col. Wheeler never loses an opportunity to warn us that if we are Christians, we will be saved!

Sepoy 2: Saved! We will be lost! Our honour lost! Does he know what he is talking about?<sup>47</sup>

The narrative makes no effort to attribute any other motive but religion to the immediate unrest and moves from the rumours aroused in the bazaars by the greased cartridges to the sincere efforts of General Hearsey to pacify the soldiers and the general confusion in the barracks. Unlike the 2005 Bollywood version of Mangal Pandey's story,<sup>48</sup> which depicts a clear, premeditated conspiracy by sepoys of the Bengal Army and various dispossessed kings, ACK's version depicts a soldiery that is confused, not knowing what to believe and a British officer class that was truthful about the cartridges but could not communicate its message effectively. ACK is clear that none of Mangal Pandey's comrades knew how to react when he took up his rifle on the parade ground on 29 March and shouted at them to revolt. In fact, referring to how some of the soldiers later hit the British NCO, Sergeant Hewson, from behind as he tackled Mangal Pandey, ACK's narrator adopts a mournful tone: 'The mob instinct had unfortunately taken over.'<sup>49</sup> Going on to narrate how Sepoy Sheikh Paltu thereafter allowed the injured Hewson and Lieutenant Baugh to escape by holding Pandey from behind, the narrator clearly describes the mental state of the sepoys:

The crowd now again played the part of spectator. They did not come to the aid of Mangal Pande, as they had not earlier come to the aid of the British officers.<sup>50</sup>

This is a narrative that makes no patriotic claims about a soldiery out to liberate Hindustan; instead it paints a realistic picture of local and religious grievances that came together in the mutiny of Mangal Pandey. The only reference to the larger nation comes on the final page when the narrator describes how the disbanded men of the 34<sup>th</sup> N.I. go home as heroes and then 'spread the disaffection far. Soon the surrounding areas were aflame. The Great Mutiny had begun and Mangal Pandey had struck the first blow.'<sup>51</sup> This is

almost precisely how the critical historian R.C. Majumdar described Mangal Pandey's role in his seminal treatise with its strong position against the nationalist discourse of 1857 as a war of independence. According to Majumdar:

Mangal Pandey fully deserves the honour of the first martyr which posterity has given him. But it is difficult to account for the attitude displayed by his comrades. They refused to join him openly, and yet made themselves guilty of acts of commission and omission ... [After being disbanded] The dishonoured sepoy of these two regiments returned in a sullen mood to their distant homes in Avadh, there to spread the story of the cartridges, greased with the fat of the cow and the pig, which was sure to excite the masses who not unnaturally looked upon these sepoy as martyrs in the cause of religion.<sup>52</sup>

Clearly, ACK's *Mangal Pandey* is fairly close to historical accounts of 1857 and steers clear of the nationalist rhetoric that peppered *The March to Freedom-Birth of the Indian National Congress* issue.

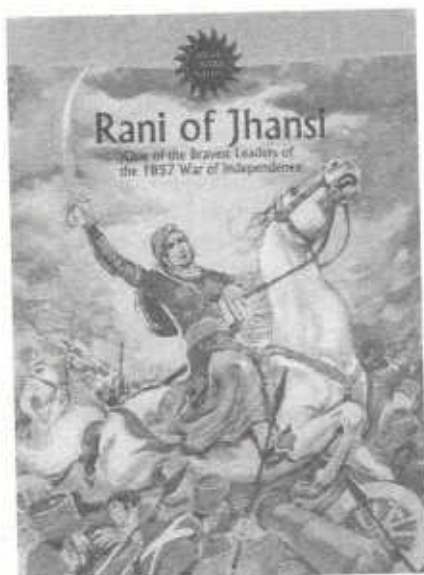
ACK's balancing act with 'history' and its engagement with a more nationalist discourse is even more striking in the final issue that this essay will analyse – *Rani of Jhansi*. In this title the Rani is introduced as 'one of the bravest leaders of the 1857 war of independence' on the cover itself. This is the only instance that ACK refers to 1857 in these terms – in all other issues it is either referred to as a 'revolt' or a 'mutiny' – and again this is to accommodate the nationalist legend of the warrior queen. The text itself nonetheless replicates the complexity inherent in the historiography of 1857. While it refers to the mutinous sepoy as 'nationalist soldiers' the Rani herself is never shown to be fighting for anything other than her native Jhansi. To begin with, unlike Savarkar's account, which visualized the Rani as one of the guiding hands behind the sepoy mutiny in the Jhansi garrison, the ACK version attributes her no such agency, which, incidentally, was also how the British commissioner of Sagar, Erskine, initially viewed her

status.<sup>53</sup> In ACK, when the British commissioner asks the Rani to rule in the Company's name till order is restored, she responds with the words,

You refused me my kingdom when I asked for it. Now that you cannot keep it, you are handing it to me! The Indian troops will destroy me if I give you protection. You had better save your lives as best as you can.<sup>54</sup>

This depiction ties together the historical evidence of the Rani with her nationalist legend. The first part of the statement plays upon the sentiments popularly ascribed to a Queen dispossessed of her kingdom, while the second seems to draw from the well-documented letter that she wrote to Erskine, probably on 12 June, where she clearly stated that she had no option but to go along with the sepoys because they had threatened to 'blow up her palace with guns' if she did not.<sup>55</sup>

Unlike the claim of 'all' Indians joining the battle in *The Birth of the Indian National Congress*, *Rani of Jhansi* clearly draws out a picture of internal dissension and strife. The first challenge to the Rani came from Sadashiv Rao, a distant nephew of her late husband, and then from the armies of neighbouring Dattia and Orcha. The Rani's battles with the forces of the two kingdoms fill up more than two pages and there is no attempt to gloss over the problems here for the nationalist narrative of a united freedom struggle. In fact, far from the narrative of united struggle, *Rani of Jhansi* draws a picture of isolated theatres of war, cut off from each other and without any coordination. For instance, the Rani is depicted as content in defending Jhansi and makes no attempt at contacting any of the other leaders until after the fall of Delhi and the approach of Sir Hugh Rose's Central India Force. At this point, the volume depicts a darbar where the Rani discusses whether to surrender or to fight, at which point, a senior statesman is shown to advocate an anti-war line that would 'save our homes'. This account may be said to be historically grounded because the Rani did in fact remain uncommitted until Rose was almost at her walls.<sup>56</sup> A



Cover image of ACK's Rani of Jhansi

Mama Saheb, and Gangadhur advocated a fight to keep the kingdom.<sup>57</sup>

Of course, the Rani fought with rare personal courage after she finally committed herself against the British. This is central to her legend and ACK plays up her fighting abilities, as opposed to those of her allies. The defeat of the Maratha armies at Kalpi has the narrator refer to them as 'over-confident', for having ignored her advice. The blurb on the back-jacket concludes:

Rani Lakshmibai was also extremely shrewd and possessed all the qualities of a good leader. When she died fighting on the battlefield the morale of the Mutiny broke and other rebel leaders like Taty Tope, Rao Sahib and the Nawab of Banda could not offer much resistance.<sup>58</sup>

The hagiographic portrayal of the Rani aside, the point is that while the mutineers and the various rebel leaders of the aristocracy are referred to as 'nationalist', the text itself reveals the constant contradiction between this overarching claim and events depicted.

number of secret reports by British spies had also reported many such consultations between the Rani and her officers. Most of these reports made it clear that she intended to cede control to the British but was also preparing to fight, in case their response was not positive. At one such council of consultation, Kasheenath Haree and Lallo Buxee proposed making terms with the British, as the ACK depicts, while her father,

When Jhansi's soldiers fight they fight only for the 'independence of Jhansi',<sup>59</sup> and when Lakshmibai links up with Nana Sahib at Kalpi, she puts herself in the service of the 'Maratha standard'.<sup>60</sup> Despite ACK's lip service to the idea of 'nationalist' soldiers, the text largely follows recorded events. Marrying recorded history with the legend of the warrior queen, it simultaneously reveals the multiple strands that drove the *dramatis personae* of 1857.

### CONCLUSION

ACK stitches together a complex narrative of the events of 1857 that addresses its various aims: education and nationalist discourse as well as entertainment and higher sales. It pays homage to the nationalist discourse on 1857, but it does not follow that narrative unquestioningly. ACK also brings a critical perspective to its portrayal of 1857, a perspective that replicates the debate on the 'real nature' of the upsurge. Writing history is a tricky endeavour, especially for a comic book, and I have argued that ACK's version, though marked by the tensions that this study has indicated, also effectively balances the same.

ACK's portrayal of 1857 is significant because this is the first and sometimes the only enduring glimpse of history for many Indian children. Its portrayal of the events of 1857, therefore, is an important window to understanding how a large cross-section of India might look upon and understand those crucial events. Sometimes even adults refer to it. As Anant Pai recalls, he first realized the impact of ACK in 1975 when he overheard two government servants resolve an argument on a point about the *Ramayana* by referring to an ACK comic book. He claims he was taken aback and since then has tried to keep the comics as close to recorded history as possible.<sup>61</sup> While that effort often comes into conflict with the other markers of the world of ACK, there is no doubt that the series has come to occupy a very important place in Indian popular culture. Though sales have fallen since the early 1990s, largely due to the influx of television, ACK has recently tried to re-invent itself by aggressively wooing overseas Indians and by

getting into video animation and mobile gaming.<sup>62</sup> Its future will depend on how it adapts itself to market forces, but its past is undeniable. For over three decades, ACK has been the nation's comic: encompassing in its pages debates that have constituted the modern Indian nation.

## NOTES:

- \* Personal interview with Anant Pai, Founder Editor, Amar Chitra Katha, (Mumbai, Recorded on Phone from Melbourne, 21 September 2006)
- 1 See for instance the contributions in *Seminar*, 'Rewriting History: A Symposium on Ways of Representing Our Shared Past', 522 (Feb. 2003).
- 2 Partha Chatterjee, 'History and the Domain of the Popular', *Seminar*, 'Rewriting History: A Symposium on Ways of Representing Our Shared Past,' 522 (Feb. 2003), <http://www.india-seminar.com/2003/522/522%20partha%20chatterjee.htm> [Accessed 19 Sep. 2006].
- 3 Tom Pilcher, 'Brad Brooks', in *The Essential Guide to World Comics*, (London: Collins and Brown, 2005), p 285. Also see sales figures put out by India Book House in reprint of *Paurava and Alexander*, No. 640 (Mumbai: August 2005, first published in 1978).
- 4 Sunil Khilnani, 'The Ides of August', *Outlook*, (New Delhi: Aug. 22, 2005), Reproduced in [http://www.outlookindia.com/fullprint.asp?choice=1&fodname=20050822&fname=AKhilnani+\(F\)&sid=1](http://www.outlookindia.com/fullprint.asp?choice=1&fodname=20050822&fname=AKhilnani+(F)&sid=1) [Accessed 17 Sep. 2006].
- 5 Psychologists have done a great deal of research on the influence of pictures on children's minds. See for instance, Carolyn Saarni, 'Children's Understanding of Display Rules for Expressive Behavior', *Developmental Psychology* (1979), 15(4), pp. 424-429; J. Simon and Y. Preteur, 'Comparison Between the Evolution of the Visual Exploration and the Narration of a Strip Cartoon in Children from 6 to 7 years old, from Contrasting Socio-Economic Backgrounds', in F. Lowenthal, F. Vandamme and J. Cordier (eds.), *Language and Language Acquisition*, (New York: Plenum, 1982); Louise Sweeney, 'Reversing Children's Attitudes About Drugs', *Christian Science Monitor*, (25 April 1983); A. S. Tan & K. J. Scruggs, 'Does Exposure to Comic Book Violence Lead to Aggression in Children?' *Journalism Quarterly* (1980), 57(4), pp. 579-83.
- 6 Personal Interview with Robin Jeffrey, Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies, Australian National University, (Canberra: 25 Sep. 2006).
- 7 Personal Interview with Anant Pai.

- 8 At least nine scholars have, or are, currently pursuing active research on ACK: four in India (Bangalore, Jadavpur and Delhi), three in the U.S., one in the U.K. and one in Germany. Details in bio-data supplied to the author by Anant Pai, Founder Editor, Amar Chitra Katha, (Email correspondence: 29 September 2006)
- 9 Nandini Chandra, 'The Market Life of Amar Chitra Katha', *Seminar*, 'Symposium on Media, Text & Design', 453 (May 1997), p. 25.
- 10 Sailaja Krishnamurti, 'Constructing "The Glorious Heritage of India": Popular Culture and Nationalist Ideology in Indian Biographical Comics,' in James Gifford & Gabrielle Zezulka-Mailloux (eds.), *Culture and the State: Nationalisms*, Vol. 3, (Edmonton, Canada: Proceeds of Conference at University of Alberta, 2003).
- 11 [http://www.amarchitrakatha.com/about\\_us/index.asp](http://www.amarchitrakatha.com/about_us/index.asp) [Accessed 21 September 2006].
- 12 William Dalrymple, *The Last Mughal: The Fall of a Dynasty, Delhi, 1857*, (New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2006), p. 17.
- 13 Frances W. Pritchett, 'The World of *Amar Chitra Katha*' in Lawrence A. Babb & Susan S. Wadley, *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) p. 81.
- 14 V.D. Savarkar, *The Indian War of Independence, 1857*, (New Delhi: Rajdhani Granthgar, 1970, 8th ed.).
- 15 S.B. Chaudhuri's argument summarized by Jim Masselos, *Indian Nationalism: A History*, (New Delhi: New Dawn, 2005, 5th ed.), p. 31. For Chaudhuri's thesis see *Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies, 1857-1859*, (Calcutta: 1957) and *Theories of the Indian Mutiny, 1857-59: A Study of the Views of an Eminent Historian on the Subject*, (Calcutta: World Press Private, 1965).
- 16 R.C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, (Calcutta: Firma K.L. Mukhopadhyay, 1963, 2nd ed., first published 1957) p. 474.
- 17 John A. Lent, 'India's *Amar Chitra Katha*: "Fictionalized History or the Real Story?," *International Journal of Comic Art*, 6,(1) (Spring 2004), p. 56.
- 18 Personal interview with Anant Pai.
- 19 The Indian languages are Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Assamese, Gujarati, Punjabi, Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Sanskrit and Urdu. [http://www.amarchitrakatha.com/about\\_us/index.asp](http://www.amarchitrakatha.com/about_us/index.asp) [Accessed 21 Sep. 2006].
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 John A. Lent, 'India's *Amar Chitra Katha*', p. 58.
- 22 Ibid, p. 56

- 23 Nandini Chandra, 'The Market Life of *Amar Chitra Katha*', p. 27
- 24 Purvita Chatterjee, 'Bid to Revive Brand - IBH Plans Animated Tele Serial on Amar Chitra Katha Content', *The Hindu*, 22 September 2004.
- 25 John Stratton Hawley, 'The Saints Subdued: Domestic Virtue and National Integration in *Amar Chitra Katha*' in Lawrence A. Babb & Susan S. Wadley, *Media and the Transformation of Religion in South Asia*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995) p. 129.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 130.
- 27 Each title on the ten Sikh Gurus carries a seal of approval from the SGPC on its inside cover jacket. It specifically states that the 'script has been approved' by the SGPC. See for instance, *Guru Nanak* (No. 47).
- 28 Personal Interview with Anant Pai.
- 29 R.C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, p. 58.
- 30 Tapti Roy, *The Politics of a Popular Uprising: Bundelkhand in 1857*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 12.
- 31 S.B. Chaudhuri, *Civil Rebellion in the Indian Mutinies*, p. xvi.
- 32 ACK, *The March to Freedom - 1: The Birth of the Indian National Congress* (No.348), Inside Cover Jacket.
- 33 *Ibid.*, pp. 16-20.
- 34 *Ibid.*, pp. 25-6.
- 35 *Ibid.*, pp. 21-2.
- 36 *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- 37 *Ibid.*, p. 24
- 38 Frances W. Pritchett, 'The World of *Amar Chitra Katha*,' p. 92.
- 39 S.N. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting, 1957), p. 411.
- 40 ACK, *The March to Freedom - 1*, p. 24
- 41 ACK, *The Historic City of Delhi* (NO. 696), p. 30
- 42 Email correspondence with Anant Pai, Founder Editor, *Amar Chitra Katha* (29 September 2006).
- 43 Saul David, *The Indian Mutiny*, (London: Penguin/Viking, 2002), pp.19-33.
- 44 ACK, *Mangal Pandey* (No 675), p. 1.
- 45 *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 31.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- 47 *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- 48 *Mangal Pandey - The Rising*, Directed by Ketan Mehta (2005).
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 26.

- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Ibid., p. 31.
- 52 R.C. Majumdar, *The Sepoy Mutiny and the Revolt of 1857*, p. 74.
- 53 Ibid., p. 294.
- 54 ACK, *Rani of Jhansi* (No. 51), p. 10.
- 55 *Translation of a Khurectah of the Ranee of Jhansee to the Address of the Commr. and Agent Lieutenant Governor, Saugor Division dated (supposed) 12th June 1857*. Reproduced in S.N. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven* pp. 298-99.
- 56 Christopher Hibbert, *The Great Indian Mutiny: India 1857*, (New Delhi: Penguin, 1980) p. 379.
- 57 See S.N. Sen, *Eighteen Fifty-Seven*, p. 283.
- 58 ACK, *Rani of Jhansi* (No. 51), back cover.
- 59 Ibid., p. 19.
- 60 Ibid., p. 26.
- 61 Frances W. Pritchett, 'The World of *Amar Chitra Katha*,' p. 80.
- 62 Purvita Chatterjee, 'Bid to Revive Brand - IBH Plans Animated Tele Serial on *Amar Chitra Katha* Content', *The Hindu*, 22 September 2004.

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