

**VALIANT SELF
AND
PERNICIOUS FOREIGNER**
CONSTRUCTING A PAST FOR NATION MAKING
IN THE LITERATURE OF LATE 19TH CENTURY BENGAL

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfilment of the requirement for
the award of the Degree of*
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

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DECLARATION

This dissertation titled *Valiant Self and Pernicious Foreigner: Constructing a Past for Nation Making in the Literature of Late 19th Century Bengal*, submitted by me in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this university, has not been submitted for any degree of this or any other university and this is my own work.



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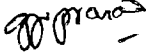
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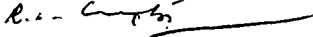
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CERTIFICATE

It is certified that this dissertation titled *Valiant Self and Pernicious Foreigner: Constructing a Past for Nation Making in the Literature of Late 19th Century Bengal*, submitted by **Arjun Ghosh** in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of the degree of **Master of Philosophy** of this university, has not been submitted for any degree of this or any other university and this is his own work.

We recommend that this dissertation be place before the examiners for evaluation.


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“ওৱা যত বেশী জানে,
ততো কম মানে।”

হিরক ৱাজাৱ দেশে
সত্যজিৎ ৱায়

“The more they learn,
the less they obey.”

Hirok Rajar Deshe
Satyajit Ray

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To Albeena I am indebted for introducing me to Peter Barry; Jyotirmoy for being obstinately critical; Anubhuti for being a saviour; Nadeem for throwing light upon the Medieval; Abhay and Prem for logistic support; Rajesh for reading the drafts; Vineet for helping me to prepare the bibliography; Ashok, Moti, Sunny and Amar for typesetting the manuscript and getting it ready in time.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“The nation that has no consciousness of its past has no future. Equally true it is that a nation must develop its capacity not only for claiming a past but also for knowing how to use it for the furtherance of its future”

Vinayak Damodar Savarkar¹

In 1842 Lord Ellenborough issued the “Proclamation of the Gates”, ordering the British Army in Afghanistan to bring back to India the sandalwood gates which were believed to have been stolen by Sultan Mahmud in his raid of 1026 A.D. The move to retrieve the gates was presented by the British as an attempt to reverse the subjugation of India by Afghanistan. In the debate in the House of Commons Ellenborough’s supporters argued that the effort would “relieve that country, which had been overrun by the Mohammedan conqueror from the painful feelings which had been rankling amongst the people for nearly a thousand years”, and that “the memory of the gates [has been] preserved by the Hindus as a painful memorial of the most devastating invasions that had ever desolated Hindustan”.

Brought to India the gates were found to be of Egyptian workmanship and in no way associated with India. They were placed in a storeroom in the Agra Fort and by now, possibly, eaten by white ants².

¹ Quoted in Amelendu Misra ‘Savarkar and the Discourse on Islam in Pre-Independent India’ *Journal of Asian History*, 33(2), 1992, 142-184, 142.

² Romila Thapar ‘Somnatha and Mahmud’ *Frontline*, 23 Apr 1999, 121-127, 125-126.

The importance the telling of the past plays in shaping the present and charting the future can be encapsulated in Milan Kundera's observation that the only reason why people want to be masters of the present is that they want to change the past³. The fight for access to the laboratories where photographs are retouched and biographies are written, the archives where records are accessed, printing presses which publish volumes about the past, and research institutions which set the agenda for studying the past – all corroborate this fact. A society without a past is seen as an aberration, like a person suffering from amnesia, a pathological condition. Every society has its own methods and ceremonies of remembering the past – it is a reflection of how the society perceives its present.

When the society is a nation, what is remembered and what is forgotten, what is desired to be remembered and what is desired to be forgotten, is arbitrated by its elite. There are at any point of time as many different claims to a nation's past as there are contenders to the political control of the nation.

Studying the writing of the past can be a way to study the forces shaping the nation. even though its professed aim is to learn from the mistakes of the past, history can be used to justify present ideas through the past by learning predetermined lessons from a constructed past.

I have studied one such project of history writing, which accompanied the rise nationalist consciousness in 19th century Bengal. My objective was to articulate and investigate my own ideas about the concept of the 'nation'. What made the task doubly interesting was that other than academic history, 19th century Bengal saw a tremendous surge in the output of historical fiction opening another important question – the way in which history, literature and all forms of narratives are related. The study of the texts of historical fiction produced in Bengal of the 19th Century helped me work out my ideas

³ Neera Chandhoke 'The power of story telling' *The Hindu*, 17 Apr 2001, 8.

regarding literature, history and nationalism I have elaborated on these issues in chapter one.

The point that I would like to stress is that without a close reading of the texts I could not have grasped the complexity of the manner in which history writing relates to nation-formation, the way the nation becomes a mobilising ideal for the national ruling class and most crucially the strategies which can be adopted to challenge an existing hegemony.

I have chosen to work upon two novels of Romesh Chunder Dutt – *Maharashtra Jiban Prabhat* (1878), and *Rajput Jiban Sandha* (1879), and a collection of shorter works, which includes two short stories from Shoshee Chunder Dutt's *The Times Of Yore* (1848), Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay's story 'Anguriya Binimoy' (1857) and Rangalal Bandopadhyay's poem *Padmini Upakhyan* (1857). The objective of my research was to study the means through which a past can be constructed in the task of nation-making and the nature of the relationship between history and literature. To do so I had chosen to work upon the formative stages of the historical discourse in Bengal. When I began my study I had expected this stage to have taken its form around the time Bankimchandra wrote *Anandamath* (1882) with sporadic attempts preceding it. My research completely disproved these early notions. The literary output in the genre of historical fiction was prolific in the period before *Anandamath*. What I also figured out was that at about the time of the publication of *Anandamath* there was a perceptible change in the social milieu, the conception of nationalism and with it in the writing of historical fiction. The nationalist consciousness took the form of a nationalist movement. The *bhadralok* was frustrated in his efforts to play a bigger role in the colonial administration and seek a greater share from the spoils of colonial rule. Denigrated as the *babu* he had to suffer the Ilbert Bill controversy and the hurdles of the ICS examination. He organised himself politically along with discontented elite from other parts of the British India - the Indian National Congress was formed in 1885. In literature on the one hand Bankimchandra defined the *janmabhoomi* (land of birth) as the *punyabhoomi* (holy land) by the invocation of the motherland as the mother goddess, an icon which was offensively hindu. By this period a section of the

Western educated Bengali muslims started writing historical fiction. They responded to their hindu counterparts with tales of muslim glory and heroism. On the other hand certain secular writers, who wished to create a broader unity against the British invoked the slogan let 'bygones be bygones' and called for hindu-muslim unity. All in all the dynamic of this period – the final quarter of the 19th century – needed in depth attention on its own. I found that I could not do justice to this demand within the constraints of an M.Phil. dissertation without taking recourse to gross simplifications. Therefore, my work covers the period around the third quarter of the 19th century (1848-1879) and ends by the time *Anandamath* was published.

CHAPTER 2

WRITING HISTORY, WRITING THE NATION

“Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation.”

Ernest Renan¹

History, Literature and the Modes of Mental Production

Interest in the past is always an attempt to know the present. In the words of Benedetto Croce “All history is contemporary history”.² The eyes of a historian which perceive the past are always rooted in the present. There is, therefore, a continuity between the past and the present. This however, is not a one way process – while the historian tries to learn of the present in the light of the past, (s)he also engages in an effort to make sense of the past in the light of the present. While it is the questions thrown up by the present which are sought to be answered from the past, the facts of the past work to constitute the historian’s conception of the present. So there is also a constant interaction between a historian and his/her facts. The historian grapples with the body of facts and shapes an image of the past, an image which is meant to serve the interest of the present. The image is inevitably a verbal image – the perceptions of the past is mediated by the written word. It seeks a recognition of history, not for the trueness of the story, but for the storyness of the

¹ Quoted in Eric J. Hobsbawm *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, myth, reality*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1999, 12.

² Edward Hallet Carr *What is History?*, London, Macmillan, 1962, 15.

truth.³ The story of history uses poetic insight to make sense of the past, to recover and interpret the events of the past, and impart life to the historical, social and human forces which evolve the present. The interpretative function of history requires the historian to focus on those events which bear the greatest potential in explaining the present. Not all facts of the past are historical facts. It is the historian who selects the facts. He needs to draw a generalisation and construct a scheme of history. The generalisation itself is in turn shaped by the unique events which constitute it.⁴

'Past' and 'history' are not synonymous. The 'past' is transformed into 'history' through the selection and ordering of facts into a generalisation. History then is a narrativisation of the past, a verbal artifact and a product of language use.⁵ Following Lacan, Barthes highlighted the function of the narrative as an instrument through which society transforms infantile consciousness into "subjectivity" from which an order can be derived. Historical narratives, then, become essential for society to inscribe its own past into the symbolic order of language and thus constitute its 'self'. The definition of history as a narrative form has been challenged by positivists. Positivism recognises only facts and observable phenomenon and emerges from attempts of 18th century Enlighteners to apply the laws of natural sciences to the study of society. Philosophers have shown the difficulty of distinguishing '*what* was said from *how* it was said' even in the discourses of natural sciences. In the discourses of natural sciences there is a practice of evolving a standard regarding the forms of scientific explanation. No such standardisation is there, or is possible, in non-formalised discourses such as history.⁶ Historical interpretations, therefore, cannot be equated with the scientific method. 'Archival' facts acquire significance only in a framework – through emplotment into beginning, middle and end. Ricoeur argues that emplotment of facts is not imposed by the historian but is a process of structuration within

³ Sudipta Kaviraj *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India*, New Delhi, Oxford UP, 1998, 107-08.

⁴ Carr op. cit., 57-58.

⁵ Hayden White "'Figuring the nature of the times deceased": Literary Theory and Historical Writing' in Ralph Cohen ed. *The Future of Literary Theory*, New York, Routledge, 1989, 19-43, 21-22.

⁶ Ibid., 23; Hayden White *Metahistory: the historical imagination in nineteenth-century Europe*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins UP, 1974, 12-13.

which a unique event acquires significance in relation to other events. Thus a chain of events imparts a temporality to archival facts, adding a non-chronological temporality to chronological events. A chronicle is transformed into a story with a beginning, middle and end where facts cease to be messages and acquire a secondary connotative meaning. According to Benedetto Croce, "Where there is no narrative, there is no history".⁷ But such a characterisation of history cannot lead to a denial of its "truth value", or that history is able to carry precise information. To do so would imply that literature and poetry tells us nothing about society. The emplotment of facts places them in an interpretative apparatus for the production of meaning. A set of events on its own cannot be interpreted as a tragedy or a farce - ordering them in particular plot structure can. Correct facts can be wrongly interpreted and so wrongly emplotted. Kaviraj illustrates that – whether a battle was fought on a particular day or not is a matter of evidence but whether it denoted European supremacy is a matter of interpretation, arrived at through construction and narrativisation.⁸ The most important question which historical narratives seek to answer is 'What does it all add up to? What is the point of it all?' Thus a historian's rendering of the past does not emanate from the nature of the "data" but from the conclusions it puts forward and the frame of coherence and consistency into which it is constructed.

The aim of narratives in producing coherent and consistent "truth value" is not exclusive to any form of discourse – "factual" or "fictional". All forms of discourse – myth, literary fiction and history – refer to the real world and tell their own "truths" about it. It is, however, possible to distinguish between narratives of "history" and those of "fiction". In history though events as primary referents are in the form of empirical happenings, it also describes certain 'non-events' which did not 'happen'. The colonisation of vast parts of the world are events, but the racial superiority of the Europeans 'cannot be events, but concepts'.⁹ Without the description of non-events there is no history – it cannot answer the question 'What does it all add up to?' If in history 'non-events' are invented, in fiction 'events' may also, be invented. While a historian tries (or is supposed to), explain the past

⁷ Hayden White *Content of the Form: Narrative discourse and the historical representation*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins UP, 1989, 28 and 50-54, White *Metahistory*, 5.

⁸ Kaviraj op. cit., 112.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 110.

by "finding", "identifying", or "uncovering" the events, a fiction writer "invents" them. While the events constituting historical works exist outside the consciousness of the writer, those constituting fictional works arise very much from within the writer's consciousness.¹⁰ The extent to which a fiction writer invents his events varies from writer to writer and period to period making the relationship between fiction and history a complex one. Some so-called historical novels, as those of the 17th century, were historical only in the choice of theme and costume, the psychological make-up of the characters being more faithful to the writer's own day.¹¹ Even as late as the mid-18th century Henry Fielding looked upon himself as a historian of bourgeois society and entitled his works as histories – *The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling* (1747).¹² Conversely, certain works of history are still regarded for their "literary" qualities long after they lost value as explanations of the past – such as the works of Herodotus, Edward Gibbon, Jules Michelet, Alexis de Tocqueville, or Lucien Febvre.¹³ In fact in the period of our interest in 19th century Bengal, many of the writers tried their hand both as writers of history and as writers of fiction.¹⁴ We can infer, therefore, that history and fiction can be distinguished in as far as their events are "real" or "imaginary" but not in terms of their interpretative content.

The quality of a work of historical fiction cannot be judged by its correctness - any such effort will be self-defeating. The criteria for judging historical literature cannot be different from that for all literature. Liberal humanist criticism showers greatness on works which are universal and timeless, whose values transcend their age. Such criticism is anachronistic, as values are not universal but historicised. Attempts to universalise a culture specific value system are essentialist in character. In opposition to such a concept Terry Eagleton proposes that all literature bears an impression of its own age, and great literature

¹⁰ White *Metahistory*, 6.

¹¹ Georg Lukacs *The Historical Novel* Hannah and Standley Mitchell trans., Middlesex, Penguin, 1969, 15.

¹² Meenakshi Mukherjee *Realism and Reality: The Novel and Society in India*, Delhi, Oxford UP, 1985, 42.

¹³ White 'Figuring the nature', 23-24.

¹⁴ Kaviraj op. cit., 112.

is that in which such impression is the deepest.¹⁵ For historical literature the task is dual – other than its own age the work should bear an authentic impression of the age in which it is set. In his discussion of the works of Walter Scott, George Lukacs admires the ‘extraordinarily realistic presentation of history, [and] his ability to translate ... elements of economic and social change into human fates’. Lukacs clarifies that ‘realistic presentation of history does not mean the ‘chronicle-like, naturalistic reproduction of the language, mode of thought and feeling of the past’. Lukacs praises Scott’s ‘necessary anachronism’ which recognises the past as a ‘necessary prehistory of the present’, without modernising the psychology of his characters.¹⁶ Scott’s characters and the events of his novels may be unknown or lesser known in history but their psychology is that of the period. Thus the invented elements, the ‘imaginary events’ are probable on two counts. First, on the basis of the psychological make up of the age. Second, the novelist uses the ‘factual sparseness’ of the available records, exploits the ‘softness of evidence’ to introduce such counterfactual elements. The counterfactuals bask in the borrowed legitimacy of the factual elements.¹⁷

The advantage of fictional narrative over historical narrative is its ability to give primacy to human agency through the action of the characters in the work. The negation of all historical fiction as falsification is a negation of human agency against impersonal processes. It is a refusal to admit that ‘human beings have significant control over their own destinies’.¹⁸

Both history and literature as narrative forms are part of this agency. The historian and the literary artist, in the act of writing, structure the real world for human consumption and mediate in its destiny.¹⁹ Liberal humanist criticism which seeks to discover timeless

¹⁵ Terry Eagleton *Marxism and Literary Criticism* translated to Bangla by Niranjana Goswami, Calcutta, Dipayan, 1991, 11.

¹⁶ Lukacs op. cit., 63-68.

¹⁷ Kaviraj op. cit. 133.

¹⁸ White *Content of the Form*, 32-33.

¹⁹ Scott Wilson *Cultural Materialism: Theory and Practice*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995; Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield eds. *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, Manchester, Manchester UP, 1994, 10.

truths and "man's" essential nature' refuses to recognise this human agency and, therefore, acknowledge the mediatory role of historical narratives. Again such mediation is not a one way process. Following Marx's thesis that the educator himself has to be educated E.H. Carr points out that the historian himself is a product of history.²⁰ The character of history's mediation between the past and the present is determined by values which the historian accords to the existing social establishment – 'what is "progress" to one is "decadence" to another'. The exact form of coherence which a historian renders to the past, the kinds of generalisations (s)he makes about the present world, is predetermined by his/her particular ideological position. Mannhiem enlists the various concepts of time for various ideologies: for the conservatives history reveals the evolutionary process of modern institutions which are the best possible form of society that human beings can aspire to; the Liberals, endorse a possibility of improving these institutions, but that being a possibility realisable only in a remote future, discourage any effort to realise it in the present; for the Radicals such change is imminent and must be brought about through revolutionary means; and the Anarchists take to an idealisation of a remote past of pristine glory and best form of society, thereafter human society having fallen into the current state of corruption, but the pristine state is achievable at any time.²¹ For the Anarchists the past is an arena for 'discovering' inherent greatness which gives hope for a reawaking of the 'self'. History becomes an exercise to ascertain the causes of decline. In such a framework the image of the past is the historian's contribution to the future. It can be used by his/her contemporaries for political myth-making through fictional narratives.²² History writing, therefore, participates in and emerges out of the inner conflict of social forces. The historian and the literary artist takes a position vis-a-vis the co-relation of forces. No narrative, including historical fiction, is non-ideological.

²⁰ Carr op. cit., 34.

²¹ White *Metahistory*, 21-2

²² Romila Thapar *Past and Prejudice*, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1973.

Before we move on it is essential to clarify the exact relationship between human agency and the role of social forces. According to Marx, men and women make their own history but not in conditions of their own choosing.²³ Thus, the enlightenment notion of a static social structure and human nature is disproved. He elaborates on the nature of the social revolution in his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*:

In considering such transformations a distinction should always be made between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal political, religious, aesthetic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out...we cannot judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production. No social order ever perishes before all the productive forces for which there is room in it have developed... Therefore, mankind always sets itself only such tasks as it can solve...the task itself arises when the material conditions for its solution already exist or are at least in the process of formation.²⁴

Within a particular epoch or mode of production each small change creates the possibility of further changes. The sum total of such changes is limited within an epoch till the entire structure is dismantled and a new one takes its place. Raymond Williams seeks to correct the misconceptions surrounding the concept of base and superstructure. He presses the need to revalue the superstructure, 'towards a related range of cultural practices away from a reflected, reproduced or specifically dependent content', and base 'away from a notion of fixed economic or technological abstraction, and towards the specific activities of men in real social and economic relationships containing fundamental contradictions and variations and therefore always in a state of dynamic process'.²⁵ Human consciousness and therefore the artist's consciousness, which is social product is also shaped by the contradictions that exist in society. The artist as social being has to take a stance for or

²³ Quoted in Dollimore op. cit., 3.

²⁴ Karl Marx 'Preface' to *A Contribution to The Critique of Political Economy* in Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels *Selected Works* Vol. 1, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1977, 502-506, 503-04.

²⁵ Raymond Williams *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays*, London, New York Verso, 1997, 34.

against particular social positions. In a class society it is a class position. The ruling class not only controls the primary means of production, but also through it all means of mental production.²⁶ The ruling class ideology thus becomes the dominant ideology, and its culture the hegemonic culture. Hegemony can be described through Bacon's remarks in 1617: 'There will be perpetual defection, except you keep men in by preaching, as well as law doth by punishing'.²⁷ The dominant culture imposes itself on a subordinate consciousness and tries to pass itself off as *the* tradition or *the* significance past, its class interest as the *common* interest and its values the *only* rational and valid ones. Hegemony encompasses not only culture but the entire social process. It tries to legitimise the specific relations of production, i.e. domination and subordination, as natural and unalterable. Although a particular social order imparts greater amount of liberty and utilisation of productive forces than the social order it replaces, it cannot take this process to its logical conclusion as that is against its rules. Thus, human society enjoys greater liberty in capitalism over feudalism, therefore, it is progressive, but it imposes newer constraints on liberty in its reactionary phase, thus, maintaining inequalities. In a class society these are primarily inequalities among classes. The dominant culture tries to efface these contradictions and incidents of dissent and struggle. As Alan Sinfield argues, even patriarchal attitudes in a literary work must appeal to the women among its audience.²⁸ Hegemony is a process which must be perpetually renewed, recreated, defended and modified in the act of suppressing the 'perpetual defection'. Therefore, it can never be total.²⁹ Even the narratives of the hegemonic culture lack unity. Narratives try to impart a coherence to the changing relations between various institutions of the state brought about by constant challenges to the existing economic, political and social relations. It tries to render its values as 'common sense' or 'given' and thus makes its stories seem plausible. In *Othello*, the racism and sexism remains untraced as his voice is interpreted as that of 'common-sense'. Dominant ideology tries to explain through plausibility 'who we are' and 'how the world works'. But, as Alan

²⁶ Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels *The German Ideology* quoted in Alan Sinfield *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992, 35.

²⁷ Quoted in Dollimore op. cit., 5.

²⁸ Sinfield op. cit., 33.

²⁹ Raymond Williams *Marxism and Literature*, Oxford, Oxford UP, 1977, 112.

Sinfield emphasises, the dominant order '*cannot but produce* faultlines through which its own criteria of plausibility fall into contest and disarray'.³⁰ The contradictions in the social order repeats itself in its texts. The ruling culture is unable to define the whole culture. It leaves behind potentials for challenging conventional interpretations. An act of re-reading can recover marginalised voices. Even to co-opt and misrepresent the dissident the dominant narratives must present the dissident voices. Therefore, the dominant narratives cannot prevent their "abuse". The contest between the oppositional readings is decided by the specific balance of historical forces. The task of the literary critic is to focus on the faultlines and undertake a revolutionary interpretation of narratives. While dominant criticism cannonises suitable texts and interprets them as a unity, thus delinking it from other human experiences, Alan Sinfield suggests that dissident reading should reestablish this link rigorously. The notion of 'timelessness' has to be challenged by placing narratives in their context. This can be done by linking the literary narrative to other social practices, thus opening up its function within the process of social contradictions.³¹ Undoubtedly this is true even of history and historical fiction which tries to impart a coherence to the past in an attempt to explain the present from a particular ideological position. The images of the past and the present thus shaped need to be scrutinised.

Our interest in this study is in the way history can be used to answer the needs of the present by shaping a nation.

Capitalism, Colonialism and the Nation

The 'nation' is a modern concept. To borrow an allegory from Eric Hobsbawm the intergalactic historian studying the nuclear-war ravaged earth would conclude that 'the last two centuries of the human history of planet Earth are incomprehensible without some understanding of the term 'nation''.³² It is not possible to study the emergence of the nation without referring to the various economic, political and ideological changes brought about by the bourgeois revolution. Capitalism in its search for greater and greater profits is

³⁰ Sinfield op, cit., 31-45.

³¹ Ibid., 22, Marx and Engels op. cit., 44.

³² Hobsbawm op. cit., 1.

consolidatory and expansionist in character. This leads to a tendency of the capitalist market to facilitate the formation of culturally uniform nationalities. Through such consolidation in the form of a national economy the bourgeoisie is able to regulate the access to capital and the market both of which are fundamental to its sustenance and growth. Due to its expansionary mould capital flows out of the nation of its origin in search of newer areas for investment. According to Eric Hobsbawm, 'nation-states were the building blocks of world capitalism during a lengthy period of its [capitalism's] development, and with it of the bourgeois society of the 'developed' world.... World capitalism consisted primarily of a set of economic flows to, from and between such developed national economies'. Lenin has described colonialism and imperialism as the oppression of advanced capitalist nation states – thereby, the bourgeoisie of these nation-states – over other nations. Even in its very foundation stages the modern nation - state in Europe was fraught with absolutism.³³ Such nationalism in its aims is deeply contradictory. While it upholds the ideals of liberty and progress, its political history is replete with chauvinism, xenophobia and annihilation of liberty both in instances of inter-colonial rivalry between advanced capitalist countries and in the relationship with their colonies. Even in its economic logic advanced capitalism is blind to the economic aspirations of the people of the less developed nations. Ricardo's 'Theory of Comparative Advantage' and Smithian 'Free Trade' arguments no doubt are attractive from the point of view of the superior economies of Britain and France which have already established their hegemony over other national economies. But they have been opposed by protectionist arguments from nations which are at the receiving end. Freedom and liberty in the metropolitan nation are guaranteed by their negation in the colony. This contradiction in the imperialist nationalism produces its dialectical opposite in the form of anti-colonial nationalism.³⁴

³³ See Eric J. Hobsbawm 'Some Reflections on "The Break up of Britain"' *New Left Review* 105, Sep-Oct 1977, 3-24, 4; Aijaz Ahmed's Introduction to Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels *On the National and Colonial Questions* Aijaz Ahmed ed., New Delhi, Left word Books, 2001, 1-20; V.I. Lenin *The Socialist Revolution and the Right of Nations to Self-Determination* in *Selected Works*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1977, 157-108, 163.

³⁴ Aijaz Ahmed *Nationalism and Globalisation*, Occasional Paper Series 4, Pune, Department of Sociology, University of Pune, 2000, 5.

This opposition between imperialist nationalism and anti-imperial, anti-colonial nationalism is dialectical in character. It would be wrong to invest western Europe with the agency of exporting nationalism to the rest of the world. The history of colonial contact meant that European nationalism was as influenced by its colonies as anti-colonial nationalism was shaped by colonial institutions; the 'self' of the European conqueror was constructed against the conquered 'other'. From the fact that nationalism emerged in Europe before it did in the colonies, to conclude the latter to be a resultant of the former would not be correct. The emergence of national consciousness bears a direct relationship to the extent of social change brought about by capitalism, its character is determined by the exact class character of the national bourgeoisie and the relationship it establishes with pre-capitalist classes. Before focussing on the exact features of colonial nationalism let us first of all discuss some of the precepts on which the concept of the nation is constructed.

To state, according to me, the most important character first I shall once again borrow a simile from Eric Hobsbawm – nationalism is 'like the cloud with which Hamlet taunted Polonius, it can be interpreted according to taste as a camel, a weasel or a whale, though it is none of these'.³⁵ I would subscribe to the view articulated by Aijaz Ahmad that 'nationalism is not itself a class ideology, and that different class segments and coalitions take hold of it in a variety of circumstances. In other words, nationalism is not some singular ideology with an identifiable essence'.³⁶ Nationalism becomes the idiom of mobilisation for the particular class alliance to establish, maintain and further its own dominance. Nationalism by itself cannot be described as progressive or reactionary, inclusivist or exclusivist, rational or irrational, secular or communal. The manner in which each nationalism defines itself is the manifestation of the nationalist elite and the correlation of class forces in the particular nation. Such a conception of nationalism which recognises its ability to adapt to different societies and historical conditions, leaves no space for any

³⁵ Hobsbawm op. cit., 3.

³⁶ Ahmed op. cit., 5.

universal, fixed definition – like Stalin’s famous definition.³⁷ Attempts to define a nation as bounded by a uniform culture have thrown up many problems. It can fall into a ‘threshold trap’, that is it tries to prescribe a certain size for a nation. Such a ‘threshold principle’ is useful to eliminate the autonomous identity of small peoples, if not to exterminate them. Second, the assertion of cultural identity informs a view of international relations as a hierarchy of nations, into superiors and inferiors. The nation’s superiority is asserted through expansion and conquest.³⁸ Without a fixed definition there can be no fixed national elite, and it opens up the possibility of overthrowing the existing national elite. Such a conception then converts the nation from a static to a dynamic entity, from a barrier before the emancipation of human productive forces to its facilitator. The same nation can have different nationalisms.

Hugh Seton-Watson urges emphatically the distinction between nations and states, stressing that a nation can be divided among several states or a state can include several nations within it. Also, states have preexisted nations, and some nations accomplished statehood much later.³⁹ However, wherever nations are not yet states, they strive to be so. The nationalist elite works towards achievement of state power over the population of which it assumes the leadership. This equation nation=state=people inevitably links the nation to territory.⁴⁰ By definition then, such a state arrests the control over all inhabitants included within its boundaries. Such a state can then rule over all its inhabitants directly and also impose the cultural definition of the nation on them. It also tries to uphold the national identity as superior to other identities. The extent to which such imposition takes place depends on the class character of the nationalist elite. An alternative to this is an arrangement of autonomous governance of various peoples within the ambit of the nation-

³⁷ Joseph V. Stalin *Marxism and the National Question* in *Works* Vol. 2, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1953, 307. Stalin writes. "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture'.

³⁸ Hobsbawm *Nations and Nationalism*, 31-38.

³⁹ Hugh Seton-Watson *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*, London, Methuen, 1977, 1.

⁴⁰ Hobsbawm *op. cit.*, 19.

state. Benedict Anderson draws our attention to a practice which arises out of the equation of nation and territory – the use of the map of the nation as a logo. The map of the nation, achieved or to be achieved, is used in various propaganda material calling for the allegiance of all to whom it is addressed to the national cause.⁴¹

According to Anderson the most striking characteristic of nations is that they are ‘imagined communities’. He makes it clear that by ‘imagined’ he does not mean ‘false’ but refers to the ability of inhabitants of a nation to link with each other even without a physical meeting. It is the imagination of a communion where each citizen envisages a collective fate. He enlists the factors which historically make the imagining of the nation possible – the loss of privilege of the classical languages as the only access to truth; ending of the divine legitimacy of monarchs; and the demise of the indistinguishability of cosmology and history. Kingship derived its legitimacy from divinity and not from the people whom it ruled. The people were subjects and not citizens, they linked their lives to the monarch and not to each other. According to him, along with the demise of these key concepts the base for national consciousness was laid by the birth of print languages. Print languages contributed in three ways – they created unified fields of exchange for the speakers of various dialects of vernacular languages; print-capitalism facilitated a standardisation of languages; and as a resultant of the first two changes certain dialects of a language, after some alterations, emerged as the new power-language of the nation. This language was of course, chosen by the nationalist elite.⁴² These languages are almost always semi-artificial constructs arising from a constant standardisation of the chosen dialect(s). On occasions, like modern Hebrew, it can be invented. At other times, like Hindi, it can be derived through a purging of ‘alien’ influences.⁴³ In order to strengthen the consolidatory capacity of print languages the nationalist elite undertakes a project to increase literacy among the masses. The last point would illustrate the limitation of Anderson’s valorisation of print languages, as its role is crucial only to linguistic nationalism. In a country where religion or ethnicity is the mobilising factor for nationalism the role of print languages is far more

⁴¹ Benedict Anderson *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London and New York, Verso, 1991, 175-76.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 9-46.

⁴³ Hobsbawm *op. cit.*, 54.

limited. That, however, does not take away from the importance of Anderson's concept of 'imagining the nation' – different factors can be instrumental in forging the linkages.

The fourth crucial feature of dominant forms of nationalism – that is, bourgeois nationalisms – is the nature of the link between the nationalist elite and the masses which it seeks to lead. The nationalist elite plays the crucial role in galvanising the members of the nation. It does so by shaping a national high culture. Since the bourgeoisie seeks to enlist the support of the masses to the protection of its own class interests, it speaks in an idiom understood by the masses. It, therefore, projects itself as the protector and emancipator of folk culture. But before the culture of the people can be emancipated the intelligentsia searches for its essences. In the process the folk culture is transformed, artificialised into a high culture. The people must depend on and rally behind the intelligentsia as only the intelligentsia has proper knowledge of and, therefore, access to the people's culture.⁴⁴ But as Aijaz Ahmed reminds us, no culture can be genuinely popular if its production is not democratically controlled.⁴⁵ To maintain its hegemony, therefore, the bourgeois intelligentsia undertakes a diffusion of the national high culture through schools, and other forms of academic, bureaucratic and technological communication, and above all through artistic and literary means. But its hegemony is strained with tensions and betrays the pressures the intelligentsia has to face in having to stake its claim to state power against opposition. The consent thus cultivated is temporary and the unity formed between the people and the elite is broken when the contradictions sharpen.

Finally, the bourgeois nation seeks to legitimise itself as a god-given, natural, ever-existing entity. Anderson points out the paradox of nationalism – while historically it is objectively modern, the nationalists assert its subjective antiquity. It seeks to forge a continuity with the (chosen) past by the 'invention of tradition'. The nationalist elite takes on a project of inculcating certain chosen values and norms of behaviour through constant practice. In doing so it appeals to existing proto-national feelings thus gelling older,

⁴⁴ John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith eds. *Nationalism* Oxford, Oxford UP, 1994, 63-65.

⁴⁵ Ahmed op. cit., 30.

precapitalist identities to the service of its class interest. In plenty of cases the past itself had to be invented.⁴⁶ Thus invented, the tradition can then be used to disqualify the 'others' through the nationalisation of pre-existing differentiating marks.

These then are the general characteristics of nationalism mostly modeled on the basis of a bourgeois nationalism. But the conditions of the rise of nationalist consciousness in less developed or colonised countries is vastly different from those in advanced capitalist countries. Such a distinction was made by Joseph Stalin when he suggested that in eastern European countries like Austria-Hungary and Russia the task of the demolition of feudalism remained unfinished. In these countries the most powerful resistance the national bourgeoisie had to face in the path to nationhood was from the ruling nobility, and in certain cases the big bourgeoisie of a different nationality. Under such circumstances the bourgeoisie avoids mobilising the 'masses' in an assault on the existing feudal structure by undertaking agrarian reform as it ran the danger of bringing forward its own demise. The bourgeoisie addresses the problem by appealing to the "native folk" and begins to shout about the "father land" claiming its own cause is the cause of the nation as whole'. Stalin argues further that whether the proletariat answers the call of the national bourgeoisie depends on the development of class antagonisms.⁴⁷ This process has been theorised further by Gramsci as the "passive revolution" where the national bourgeoisie seeks the allegiance of the proletariat, but also its "passivity".⁴⁸ The passive revolution, therefore, focuses not on economic questions but on cultural questions.

For the colony, however, there was an added condition - the colonial state. The anti-colonial nationalism, unlike the west European variety was born in a moment of defeat. As I have already discussed the paradox of West European bourgeois nationalism was that while it spoke the language of liberty and progress, in its colonies it represented a

⁴⁶ Eric Hobsbawm's Introduction to Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger eds. *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge, Cambridge UP, 1983, 1-14.

⁴⁷ Stalin op, cit., 30.

⁴⁸ Antonio Gramsci *Selections from Prison Notebooks* Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowel Smith ed. and trans., Chennai, Orient Longman, 1998, 107-14.

repressive regime. In a sense the colonial state was a much 'distorted, backward and particularly repressive replica of the imperial nation-state'. Colonialism imposes those very conditions over the conquered people which it had defeated in its home country – it refuses rights to the people and replaces it with obligation. Colonialism, therefore, is a nationalism which produces its dialectical opposite in the form of an anti-colonial nationalism. In its objectives anti-colonialism seeks to convert subjection into citizenship and move from obligations to rights.⁴⁹

What were some of the conditions which the colonial state fosters? First the colonial power gave rise to a modernisation and industrialisation which was grossly uneven. In fact, in a county like India British industrialisation grew at the cost of a massive deindustrialisation of India. In the process such intervention disrupted the traditional society unalterably. Second, in order to establish its hegemony the colonial state made an assault on the culture, of the subject people. The colonised were the 'natives', 'indigenous' – terms which semantically denoted their 'inferiority' and 'belonging there'. By contrast the coloniser 'did not belong there' and was therefore superior.⁵⁰ This assisted an argument for a 'civilising mission' whereby the colonisers projected themselves as the saviours of a fallen culture. In India the Europeans criticised the Indian "tradition" as barbaric and the assault was mostly targeted on religious beliefs and practices. Third, in order to strengthen its hegemony and provide cadres for the government the colonial state set up a modern education system where, among other things, it preached its own cultural superiority against the inferiority of the natives. This gave birth to a nationalist elite which was bilingual in character which served as a link between the colonial state and the colonised masses. The elite, however, was excluded from the decision making offices of the colonial administration. It could only aspire to a vertical ascent, to a limited extent, in the colonial administration but could not look forward to a horizontal move to other colonies. Fourth, the colonial government perceived the ruled in terms of denominational categories. It tried to promote education through caste societies and denominational schools and colleges. In

⁴⁹ Ahmed op. cit., 5.

⁵⁰ Anderson op. cit., 122.

political conferences it sought representation from different denominations and suffrage was also fragmented to social units rather than being universal. Such a mode of functioning accentuated the existing cleavages exponentially and transformed them into political cleavages.⁵¹ Fifth, a condition which is linked to the fourth, the colonial state tried to co-opt a section of the pre-colonial ruling class and refrained from undertaking a radical transformation of production relations in the manner of its home country.

The colonial middle class shaped through the colonial institutions found itself in an in-between position – it was subordinate in relation to the coloniser and by virtue of its bilingualism dominant in relation to the colonised masses. It sought to challenge its subordination by claiming to be the cultural leaders of the colonised. As the cultural leader it called for a programme to reform the ‘fallen’ culture which is denigrated in the coloniser's narratives. As in the case of the 19th century Bengali intelligentsia the nationalist elite speaks of reforming the nation but settles for reforming its own particular segment. It lacks strength and there is an absence of any revolutionary urge. Recent scholarship on the reform movements of 19th century Bengal have questioned its claim to be a ‘renaissance’. Dependent for its survival on the colonial state the nationalist elite adopted a strategy of contradiction and compromise. Even though it demanded greater concessions and ‘rights’ from the colonial administration it did not challenge the colonial institutions. Also, it did not seek to dismantle the pre-capitalist classes which stemmed its own growth. In its preservation of the pre-capitalist relations it talked in the idiom of a revival programme, revival which would sanctify the pristine culture as essentially ‘modern’, thus no ‘inferior’ to the metropolitan culture. Such a nationalism born in a moment of defeat was extremely attractive to those who had been despised. Such a response, by claiming to be modern accepted ‘modern’ knowledge's claim to universality. Colonialism, then, was explained as a ‘cultural invasion’ without challenging the deepening of its political economy.⁵² Partha Chatterjee explains the modus operandi through which this strategy of contradiction and compromise was put into practice by the 19th century Bengali intelligentsia. A distinction is

⁵¹ Ahmed op. cit., 33.

⁵² Ibid., 16 and 24.

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made between two domains 'outer' and 'inner'. Interactions with the West – all things termed 'material' – science, technology, economy is the domain of the 'outside', where the West has proved its superiority and defeated the East. The "inner" domain is the domain of culture – all things 'spiritual' – where the East is already sovereign. It is the soul of the civilisation, and is inviolable.⁵³ The nationalist elite as the protector of national culture assumed juridical authority over the "inner" domain. It legislated the markers of cultural identity and dispelled all 'foreign' influences and agents from the "inner" domain.

The pristine and primordial culture which is signified by the "inner" domain is a constructed one. Aijaz Ahmad states that 'all cultural nationalism must to some degree always be conservative and incline toward cultural differentialism'. It is a defence mechanism of the weak and takes the form of a pathology.⁵⁴ It seeks to expel all pernicious 'outsiders' – a most effective way of bonding otherwise disparate sections. In this it is helped by the existing denominational categories of the colonial state. Thus, majoritarianism masquerades as nationalism. In India this has taken the shape of a religious nationalism.

It would, however, not be correct to assume that such xenophobic, revivalist nationalism is the only possible response to colonialism and imperialism. While such revivalist movements seek 'origins' it is possible to look for 'beginnings', discover normativity within the present. This calls for a truly emancipatory, pluralistic nationalism, an alternative conception which has the potential, for releasing all the capacities of the existing socio-economic epoch, move towards a revolutionary transformation of social relations. The line between progressive anti-imperialism and the reactionary anti-West, anti-modern attitudes is frequently unclear. In keeping with the principle that the slave knows more than the master, Aijaz Ahmad asserts that it is the task of the people to go beyond the choice of the traditional and the modern - go beyond the formal rights of citizenship to a struggle for substantive rights for social and economic equality – in other words accept

⁵³ Partha Chatterjee *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1993.

⁵⁴ Ahmed op. cit., 26-27.

'the very difficult task of creating, for the first time a kind of modernity that has never been'.⁵⁵

In the search for a primordial origin for the nation and a continuity with the past history becomes an important discipline. It becomes the terrain of politics and way of talking of the collective self through invocation of existing identities in the idiom of a nation. This history is not a history of kings and queens, it is a history of a people; it is not a history from the point of view of the subject where 'he', 'she' or 'they' are the actors, it is a history from the point of view of the citizen with 'we' and 'us' as the actors. Lukacs illustrates how with the rise and fall of Napoleon and the involvement of mass armies history becomes a mass experience.⁵⁶ History takes the form of national myth-making where even facts are altered. This is done by the nationalist elite where the nation is in subjection and by the state where nationhood has been achieved. School text books of the French Republic claimed that 'our ancestors' were the Gauls and not the Franks;⁵⁷ English history text books describe William the Conqueror as the Founding Father of the English nation, whereas William did not speak English.⁵⁸ Since the fiction writer does not have a constraint of 'finding' his/her story - (s)he can 'invent' it, historical fiction is a very logical tool to the service of nation-making. Here the writer describes the nation not as it is but as it should be - and extending the argument - not as it was but as it should have been. Homi Bhabha marks out the faultline in the project of national narratives to render coherence to the definition of 'many as one'. According to him the narratives of the nation use two simultaneous modes of representation. First, the pedagogic which seeks a we-were-always-here legitimacy and authority. Second, the performative which invokes nationalist signs, icons and practices which demand constant rehearsal. Thus, the national 'self' is split between claim to originary essence and an acknowledged lack of 'fixity'. It is through the performative that it urges the margins of the nation to demonstrate their acceptance of and

⁵⁵ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁶ Lukacs op. cit., 20-23.

⁵⁷ Hobsbawm op. cit., 73.

⁵⁸ Anderson op. cit., 201.

allegiance to the pedagogic. Thus the nation is 'less than one'. The performative necessity, then, enables those in the margins to challenge the dominant representation with narratives of their own and interpretations of their own.⁵⁹

Colonialist Imagination and the Writing of India's Past

In order to study European practices of travel writing in the modern era Mary Louise Pratt uses the concept of the 'Contact Zone' to describe the interactional processes through which the metropolitan and peripheral consciousness is formed:

While the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery, it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis - beginning, perhaps with the latter's obsessive need to present and represent its peripheries and its others continually to itself.... The term "Contact Zone" which I use to refer to the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict... by using the term "contact" I aim to foreground the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination.⁶⁰

In order to establish its hegemony over the colonised world or the 'discovered' lands the European needed to know what it chose to call "the rest of the world". As the originating point of expeditions to "the rest of the world" Europe could conceive itself as the "centre of the world". The 'centre' can only be the centre and establish its 'hold' over the periphery by a knowledge of the periphery. Without a differentiation from the periphery there can be no centre. Knowledge, therefore, became a route to power. That knowledge was modern knowledge – objective, scientific, and exact. The Western Enlightenment man had gained control over nature through a scientific knowledge. He now chose to apply the Western practice of science to the study of the human world - man studying man, thus reordering

⁵⁹ Homi Bhabha 'Dissemination: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation' in *The Location of Culture*, London and New York, Routledge, 1995, 139-170.

⁶⁰ Mary Louise Pratt *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*, London and New York, Routledge, 1992, 6-7.

them into a subject/object, self/other relationship. For such study "the rest of the world" was conceived as a 'panopticon' by which the history of mankind and human evolution could easily be traced. In the words of Edmund Burke '...now the Great Map of Mankind is unrolled at once; and there is no stage or gradation of barbarism and mode of refinement which we have not at the same instant under our View'.⁶¹ The family tree of mankind of course had the west European male as the apogee of progress – the privileged 'Viewing' subject. The project of colonial knowledge encompasses all branches of learning. Travel writing became an important means for the construction of Europe's 'other'. What is very interesting to note is that much of these branches of knowledge were conceived as 'science' and continue to be used with authority by the scientific community even today. One such branch is the classificatory system of plants proposed by Linnaeus in *System of Nature* (1735) through which 'one by one the planet's life forms were to be drawn out of the tangled threads of their life surroundings and rewoven into European-based patterns of global unity and order'.⁶² But it would be wrong to conclude that the European eye had an unmediated agency. The West in order to universalise and master the globe did not always create new knowledge. It often incorporated other knowledge systems and local Knowledge by refiguring them. Pratt demonstrates the bewildering process in which the European traveller 'discover' a site like Lake Tanganyika. The traveller uses the guidance of locals who are already aware for the existence of the site and 'discovers' it. The 'discovery' is authenticated only when the traveller returns to the metropolis and reports it to institutions like the Royal Geographical Society, the Foreign Office, or publishes an article or a map. Thus, the unknown is known.⁶³ With a grasp of the other's knowledge of the and the reason for the other's 'otherness', the threat it poses is neutralised. The perfection of the European self the essence of mankind is reached in opposition to the other. With perfect knowledge the self can control the other, its behaviour can be 'predicted' and

⁶¹ Quoted in Anne McClintock *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest*, New York and London, Routledge, 36.

⁶² Pratt op. cit., 32.

⁶³ Ibid., 202-04.

'managed.'⁶⁴ The European coloniser enters into such a project of forming, an 'imperial knowledge' in the 'Contact Zone' of 'India'.

When the European man engaged himself in the endeavour of 'discovering' a disciplined, configured, categorised, classified, all-important, all-controlling 'truth' about the Indian civilisation it searched for an 'essence'. This it found in the caste system. In the words of Reverend Sydney Smith in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1814:

If it were possible to invent a method by which a few men sent from a distant country could hold such masses of people as the Hindoos in subjection, that method would be the institution of caste. There is no institution which can effectively curb the ambition of genius, reconcile the individuals more completely to his stations, and reduce the varieties of human character to such a state of inspired and monotonous tameness.⁶⁵

If the caste system described the essential social order what then was the knowledge system which maintained and reproduced that order? British, German and French scholars repeatedly asserted that, in opposition to the material, this worldly orientation of the European master race, the Indian civilisation was radically otherworldly or spiritual in its orientation. Therefore, the key to understanding India lay in its religion. And that religion was the religion of caste, which helped maintain the economic and political stratification. It would have to be the religion of the brahmins. It would be hinduism. By understanding Hinduism one could grasp the mind of the entire civilisation.⁶⁶

Let us return to the idea of the 'panopticon' and to another of its implications. The 'panopticon' also served as a laboratory where experiments could be carried out to test out methods for altering human behaviour. The European mind, looked upon India and other regions in "the rest of the world" as arenas for 'panoptical' experiments to test out the applicability of ideas which emanated from the dynamics of the metropolitan society. This penchant for experimentation was manifested in the debate between the Orientalists and

⁶⁴ Ronald Inden *Imagining India*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1990, 22.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 84-80.

Utilitarians each trying to implement its own utopia in India. The idea that the Indian civilisation was essentially religions was a position strongly argued by the Orientalists, that section of the European society - primarily the aristocracy which was disenchanted with the material world of Europe, and its industrialisation. It was a conservatism which wanted to demonstrate the way in which the state ought to function. It upheld the primacy of customs and traditions and sought legitimacy for the British rule in an Indian idiom. The idiom could be located in the texts of the tradition - the *Vedas*, the *Upanishads*. It justified British rule by a narrative of decline from a glorious past - a past where the coloniser and colonised met in an Aryan ancestry. The European had returned to redeem his fallen brethren. The narrative of the civilising mission became a narrative of redemption. The Utilitarians who at home were opposed to the Orientalists and the Romanticists, challenged the latter's views on India. The severest attack came from James Mill in *The History of British India* (1817). They upheld the supremacy of Utilitarian faith and gave a call for 'emancipation' of the colonies not in the idiom of native tradition but in the idiom of Utilitarian rationality. The objective was to emancipate India from its own culture - a culture that was described as chaotic, superstitious, custom ridden - as he wrote, 'Written laws were for the civilised nations' and customary law for 'brutes'.⁶⁷ Mill attacked hindu culture through an attack on the caste system as one which was unable to promote the principle of 'the greatest good of the greatest number'. India was described as site for 'oriental despotism'. This history became the hegemonic textbook for Indian history. It was used as textbook for the aspirant civil servants of the East India Company and Haileybury College,⁶⁸ thus deeply influencing the administrators of India in their attitudes towards those they governed. Mill's *History* also formed the hegemonic history for the textbooks which were written for the Indian students in the schools, colleges and universities set up by the British.

⁶⁷ Javed Majeed *Ungoverned Imaginings: James Mill's 'The History of British India' and Orientalism*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992, 147.

⁶⁸ K.N. Panikkar *Culture, Ideology, Hegemony: Intellectuals and Social Consciousness in Colonial India*, New Delhi, Tulika, 1998.

The objective of British written Indian history which was meant to be read by the Indians was to make the Indians and the Bengalis feel obliged to the British for ruling their country. It engaged in a comparison between the history of the coloniser and the history of the colonised. Even in cases where the texts were mediated by Orientalist admiration it was the 'native' who had to suffer ignominy.

The professed purpose of writing *The History of India as told by her own Historians* by Elliot and Dowson was to 'teach the bombastic *babus* of India the virtues of good government they were enjoying' under the British rule compared to the misery of their fate when the Muslims governed them.⁶⁹ Even histories where the Hindus were given a sympathetic picture, James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1829-32), were aimed at showing how the Rajputs had been continuously harassed by the Muslim rulers and that their independence was best ensured in the protecting arm of the British administration.⁷⁰

While constructing the Indian past the British historians chose from their sources those instances which satisfied their theoretical assumption. They focussed on political, dynastic history and did not talk of the broader social and economic dynamics of the Indian society. Even here their interest remained by and large confined to northern India. This focus then led to a periodisation of Indian history – a move pioneered by James Mill – into Hindu, Muslim and British (not Christian!) periods. Harbans Mukhiya and Romila Thapar have shown us how such periodisation was grossly erroneous even on the basis of history of India as the history of its ruling dynasties.⁷¹ While the India upto the 11th or 13th century A.D. was hardly Hindu - what about the many invasions, the Buddhist rulers, the many sects of 'Hinduism' - it would be incorrect to term the period from the 13th century to the coming of the British as the 'Muslim' period. The 'anti-Hindu' edicts of the

⁶⁹ Quoted in Harbans Mukhiya *Perspectives on Medieval India*, Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1993, 37.

⁷⁰ James Tod *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or, the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India*, Vol. 1, New Delhi, K.M.V. Publishers, 1971, xi.

⁷¹ See Romila Thapar, Harbans Mukhiya and Bipan Chandra *Communalism and the Writing of Indian History*, New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1999; Mukhiya op. cit., Thapar *Past and Prejudice*

contemporary muslim historians actually had for its target the hindu rajas and nobles whom the muslim nobility saw as rivals. To apply such terminology and interpretations to the entire hindu and muslim population may have been in the British interest but was an imaginative construction.

Born into state of political subordination, defeat and ignominy through a refutation of these demeaning narratives of the coloniser in schools and universities and various arena of 'contact' with the British, the English educated colonial intelligentsia sought to challenge these narratives as a strategy to challenge British dominance. These writers, which included the writers of historical fiction in 19th century Bengal, chose to shower adulations on the Orientalist historian who idealised a hindu past of ancient India. Some of these counter-narratives sought to challenge the notion that hindus were incapable of protecting their interests in the face of 'muslim' tyranny by searching and narrativising instances of 'hindu' valour and resistance against the 'muslims'. Other counter-narratives argued for a past where the hindu and muslim communities lived in amity but they did not challenge the idea of essential differences between the two communities. In doing so the Bengali historians and writers of the 19th century did not challenge the colonialist framework of history writing, they worked within its possibilities.

The Making of the *Bhadralok*

What was the milieu that informed the Bengali intelligentsia's response to the colonialist's history? We shall now take a brief look at a picture of Bengal under the British rule. What follows is by no means a comprehensive study of an extremely complex relationship between the colonial state and the colonised people. I have tried to highlight some of its salient features which are crucial for our study.

The first and in my view the most important feature of British rule, not only in Bengal, but throughout its extent, was the undeniable economic destruction, impoverishment and drainage of wealth which it caused.

Without going into a statistical study let us get some indication of the extent of the damage from certain illustrative facts. Dadabhai Naroji in his work *Poverty and UnBritish*

Rule in India used certain unconventional methods. He showed that the average expenditure of the British government on an Indian prisoner was almost double that of the average Indian's income. Even official estimates of famine deaths show an astronomical rise in the second half of the 19th century:

Years	Famine Deaths
1800-25	1,000,000
1825-50	400,000
1850-75	5,000,000
1875-1900	15,000,000

Table 1: Official estimates of Famine in Bengal in the 19th century.⁷²

Under an ambiguous head of 'services' the British government charged the Indian treasuries for the reception the Sultan of Turkey in London, and for the maintenance of the diplomatic and consular establishments of the United Kingdom in China and Persia.⁷³

In an attempt to institute an efficient and least hostile method of revenue collection the East India Company devised the Permanent Settlement in 1793. The important point to note about the Permanent Settlement is that although it made a tremendous impact on the agrarian scene, in no way did it radically alter the land relations in rural Bengal. In fact, the existing relations were strengthened and stabilised. It gave rise to a non-cultivating, absentee landlord class. This class – the *bhadralok* paid no attention to the improvement of the conditions of agriculture or the peasantry, resided in Calcutta and became the greatest beneficiaries of the newer opportunities brought about by Western-education.⁷⁴

That brings us to the issue of colonial education, a singularly important arena for 'contact' between the coloniser and the colonised the East India Company was disinterested to begin with about English education, moves were initiated mainly by the

⁷² Source R. P. Dutt *India To-day*, Calcutta, Manisha, 1992.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 114-15.

⁷⁴ Sumit Sarkar *Modern India: 1857-1947*, Madras, Macmillan, 1996, 32.

Christian missionaries, among them William Carey and David Hare. The involvement of the Company grew after the renewal of its Charter in 1813. A network of government monitored schools were set up to impart vernacular and English education. This either dismantled the existing indigenous schools or incorporated them into the administered system.⁷⁵ There were sporadic private efforts of the *bhadralok* but they were not as influential as the official system. The Hindu College (established in 1817) was the focal point of the education of Bengalis in the 19th century. It was set up through the efforts of the *bhadralok* to bolster the educational opportunities for their children.

But it was only small a section of the population which managed to benefit from Western education. In 1883-84 only nine per cent of all college students came from families with annual incomes of less than Rs. 200.⁷⁶ William Adams in his *Reports on Vernacular Education in Bengal* (1935-36) suggested that school fees, price of books and other costs prevented parents from sending their children to schools - he wrote, 'we expect the peasantry and shopkeepers of Bengal to make sacrifices for education which the same classes in England often refuse to make'.⁷⁷ Kazi Shahidullah and Poromesh Acharya has pointed out how the total dismantling of the indigenous education system led to education becoming an exclusively *bhadralok* affair. The *bhadralok* was the greatest beneficiary of the establishment of the Western education system.

The *bhadralok* was enamoured with Western education as it brought him the opportunity of an official job in the British government, and along with it a position of social respect. With their growing families an increasing section of the landed *bhadraloks* could no longer maintain their living standards solely on the rent received from land. They,

⁷⁵ See Poromesh Acharya 'Pedagogy and Social Learning: *Tol* and *Pathshala* in Bengal' *Studies in History*, 10 (2), 1994, 255-72; Kazi Shahidullah 'The Purpose of Government Policy on *Pathshala Gurumohashoys* in Nineteenth-century Bengal' in Nigel Crook ed. *The Transmission of Knowledge in South Asia: Essays on Education, Religion, History and Politics*, New Delhi, Oxford UP, 1996, 119-34.

⁷⁶ Sarkar op. cit., 66.

⁷⁷ William Adams *Adams' Report on Vernacular Education in Bengal and Behar*, Calcutta, Home Secretary Press, 1868, 21.

therefore, aspired to jobs in the service sector to supplement their incomes. But along with opportunities for jobs Western education also brought the danger of contamination of an alien religion. One of the primary reasons why the *bhadralok* took initiatives to establish their own schools and the Hindu College was to keep out this contamination. He sought to bring an arena hither to in the domain of the 'outside' into the domain of the 'inside'. Once set up the *bhadralok* was determined to keep all contaminants 'outside' its own the educational institutions. This exclusivist mindset is aptly illustrated in an editorial article published in the Bangla periodical *Sambad Prabhakar* on 21 December 1852 in reaction to the news of that Hindu College was about to open its doors to non-hindus:

When the respectable Hindus collected a grand amount of money and established the famous institution by the name of Hindu College, all Hindus believed that only Hindu students and none else will be admitted in it....

But if institutions like the Hindu College begin admitting students of all religions, and soon after missionaries are appointed as teachers, then it would be an ultimate situation, it would not be long before the *Bible* book is taught.⁷⁸

But despite its abhorrence the conservative sections of the *bhadralok* class could not prevent the Hindu college in particular and western education in general, from posing severe threat to their religious beliefs. Western education made the Indian student abhor his/her (more 'his' than 'her') religion as barbaric and superstitious. This and the activities of the Derozians and the Young Bengal were a cause for grave concern.⁷⁹

It was not only the poorer classes who were kept out of the benefits of Western education, the muslims of Bengal were also by and large deprived of it. The muslims matched up to their own proportion of the population only in the lower levels of education in the higher levels they lagged far behind.⁸⁰ As a community the muslims overwhelmingly

⁷⁸ Benoy Ghosh *Samayik Patre Banglar Samaj Chitra: 1840-1905* (Impressions of Bengali Society in Periodicals), Vol.1, Calcutta, Bengal Publishers, 1962, 335-36. (My translation)

⁷⁹ Manotosh Chakraborty *Hindu College O Unish Sataker Banglar Samaj* (Hindu College and 19th Century Bengali Society), Calcutta, Subarnarekha, 1997, 47.

⁸⁰ Rafiuddin Ahmed *The Bengal Muslims 1871-1906: A Quest for Identity*, New Delhi, Oxford UP, 1998.

comprised of the peasantry. The *bhadralok* was restricted mostly to three hindu upper castes - brahmins, baidyas and kayasthas – with 84.7 per cent of Hindu College students coming from these castes.⁸¹ But there is no reason to believe that the hindu *zamindar* treated his hindu tenants any better than the muslim *ryots*, or that the few muslim *zamindars* made any differentiation between the *Ryots* of the communities in his exploitative practices. Their predominantly rural character meant that the muslims were almost absent among the literate professions, other than their economic status the education of the muslims suffered for two reasons. First, segments of the muslims who were most important in the rural hierarchy - the priestly *mullabs* and the upper caste *ashraf* were willing to expose the muslim population only to religious 'Islamic' education. The British, who recognised these groups as denominational leaders sought to address the 'special needs' of the Bengali muslims in the few institutions set up for them.⁸² Second, some of the British administrators were consciously averse to encouraging Western education among the muslims, Lord Ellenborough wrote in 1843 - 'I cannot close my eyes to the belief that the race [the muslims] is fundamentally hostile to us and our true policy is to re-conciliate the hindus'. Such attitudes were hardened after the Mutiny of 1857 where the muslim participation was larger while the hindu *bhadralok* stayed away from it.⁸³ This lopsided composition of the 'literate' and the Western education in Bengal greatly influenced the *bhadralok's* cultural ideas and literary production.

Other than the classroom another route by which the Bengali *bhadralok* encountered the West was through the printed page. The second half of the 19th century saw an exponential growth of the print industry in Bengal. Centered around Calcutta the print industry became the largest indigenous enterprise. In 1859 Reverend James Long recorded that between 1834-59 more than 8,000,000 Bengali books been printed and sold,

⁸¹ Sarkar op. cit., 66.

⁸² Ahmed op. cit., 1-38.

⁸³ A.R. Desai *Social Background of Indian Nationalism*, Bombay, Popular Prakashan, , 1966.

with the period between 1854-59 itself accounting for an astounding 4,000,000 volumes.⁸⁴ This monumental output, however, got differentiated between the 'respectable' presses and the 'popular' presses of *Bat-tala*. Books published from the *Bat-tala* presses were printed on cheap quality paper and were despised by the Western educated *bhadralok*.⁸⁵ A comparative study of the two presses gives us a picture of the contrast in the tastes of the two classes of people of the 19th century. While the 'popular' press published more of mythologies, scriptures and moral tales the 'respectable' press produced more books of the rational disciplines of history, geography and an enormous number of European texts in Bangla translation. Thus, both in the classroom and in private reading the *bhadralok* encountered Europe mainly through books. Its informed his intellectual life.

	Number	Percent
Poetry	62	6.88
Poetry (religious)	12	1.33
Drama	112	12.43
Prose fiction	114	12.65
Social tracts	14	1.55
Other prose	53	5.88
Bramho tracts	51	5.66
Christian tracts	10	1.11
Scripture/ mythology	60	6.66
Law	72	7.99
Medical	22	2.44
Educational: School Book	67	7.44
Society/ Vernacular Lit. Dept.		
Vocabularies/ dictionaries	31	3.44
Grammar	28	3.11
Readers	105	11.65
Geography/ astronomy	27	3.00
History/ geography	42	4.66
Mathematics	19	2.11
TOTAL	901	

Table 2: Bengali Titles Available For Sale In 1865⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Tapati Roy 'Disciplining the Printed Text: Colonial and Nationalist Surveillance of Bengali Literature' in Partha Chatterjee ed. *Texts of Power: Emerging Disciplines in Colonial Bengal*, Calcutta, Samya, 1996, 30-62.

⁸⁵ Pannikar op. cit., 54-61.

⁸⁶ Source Tapati Roy op. cit., 48.

It is extremely attractive to place the attitudes and activities of the *bhadraloks* as a resultant of the socio-economic conditions they had to face. K.N. Pannikar warns us that to place the history of the times in an 'impact-response' framework would be too shallow. It undermines the unequal and unjust political relationship in which the coloniser and the colonised engaged. He asserts that the 'intellectual endeavour in the 19th century was an integral part of the struggle to grasp the reality of subjection.'⁸⁷ Response of the *bhadralok* was not monologic and it would be difficult to label it as 'liberal' or 'conservative' even for a single individual. Despite their class character the landlord-intelligentsia often spoke out for the betterment of their less privileged brethren and showed concerns for the questions affecting the common people. If Western education did not lead to progressive ideas it also did not automatically lead to conservative attitudes. Thinkers from Ram Mohan Roy to Romesh Chunder Dutt and even Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay passionately argued for salvaging the conditions of the Bengali peasant. Even thinkers like Radhakanta Deb, who were rooted in traditional knowledge and culture held advanced views on caste and female education.⁸⁸ R.C. Dutt pointed out the short comings of the British rule in his *The Peasantry of Bengal* (1874) but constantly reiterated his allegiance to the Crown. He described the British Empire as a "superb institution" and took care to say that his criticisms should be viewed as suggestions to strengthen and not weaken British rule, and that it was not his objective to subvert British rule in India.⁸⁹ In another frame of response Dinabandhu Mitra in his play *Neel-Darpan* (Mirror of Indigo-Plantations, 1860) made a scathing attack on the British merchants for their unprincipled trade practices and torture of the peasantry, but he places full faith in the British judges and in the Rule of Law. The play centres around the plight of a rich peasant family. Which suffers torture at the hands of the Indigo planters. Torap, a poor muslim peasant in a show of extreme loyalty jumps to the rescue of his master and is totally unconcerned that he lost his limbs in the process. The family is finally saved by the intervention of the Western educated son who returns from Calcutta and

⁸⁷ Ibid., 69.

⁸⁸ R.C. Dutt *Romesh Chunder Dutt*, New Delhi, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1968, 28.

⁸⁹ Dinabandhu Mitra *Neel-Darpan*, Asutosh Bhattacharya ed., Calcutta, Dey's Publishing, 1999.

takes matters to the court.⁹⁰ The play was extremely popular and received lauding from Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, and it had to be banned by the British. *Neel-Darpan* demonstrates the value the *bhadralok* placed in the British administrators and made a distinction between the 'good' Britishers and the 'bad' 'unBritish' Britishers.

The *bhadralok* – the colonial middle class – was, therefore, ambivalent in its attempts to come to terms with its position of subordination in one relation and dominance in another. It sought to eek out a better deal from the British by posing as the leader of the colonised people. Though it accepted the superiority of modern values it lacked the strength which would allow it to transform his society.⁹¹ He was thoroughly dependent on the British for his status and livelihood, yet constrained by the limitations which were placed on him. His education taught him liberal attitudes, he could not implement them in practice. The *bhadralok* was not yet able to work out an idiom which could really make it the leader of a "passive revolution". It was still in the process of working out his identity - differentiating between the 'self' and the many 'others'. His attitude of both loyalty and opposition towards the British the relationship between the Indian bourgeoisie and imperialism - a relationship of contradiction and compromise.

It was the *bhadralok* who pronounced the word 'nationalism'. It began with the organisation of *Jatiya Mela* (National Fair) on 12 April 1867, and carried on to National Paper, National *Poshak* (Clothes), National Circus and National Theatre. The *bhadralok* lent the ambivalence of his own 'self' to the nation he constructed and in turn to the literature he penned.

⁹⁰ Baidyanath Mukhopadhyay *Nabojagoron O Manobikatabader Bhumikaye Dinabandhur Natak* (Renaissance, Humanism and Dinabandhu's Plays), Calcutta, Barnali, 1976.

⁹¹ Priyaranjan Sen *Western Influence in Bengali Literature*, Calcutta, Academic Publishers, 1966. My Source is not too particular about the dates of publication of these works.

The *Bhadralok* Writes Back

If the educated Bengali learnt the importance of history in the classroom, he did so at home as well. European works of literature among other works, were read vociferously by Bengalis both in English and in Bangla. Shakespeare, Milton, Bunyon, Scott were familiar to the *bhadralok*. But his reading list also included some lesser known authors and works, like *Lalla Rookh* by Moore, G.M. Reynolds' *Mysteries of the Court of London* and Hobart Caunter's *The Romance of History: India*.⁹¹ In fact, most of these works did not bear much fidelity to the history taught in the classroom. Hobart Caunter's work for example clearly shows that Indian history merely served as an exotic background for a set of romantic tales - they often narrate events which were historically improbable. But as I have stated earlier whether the events of the story are 'found' by the historian or are 'invented' by the fiction writer both can reach similar interpretations. Hobart Caunter's generalisations in his Preface to *The Romance of History* bears a strong resemblance to the conclusions of Orientalist historians about India:

The present stories... develop the character of a distant people in a remote age, serve also to confirm many fine idioms of moral truth by exhibiting how, under the variations of clime and fluctuations of circumstance the great result of human actions is every where the same...

Their [mahomedan] princes were despots, their [hindus'] nobles warriors, their governments tyrannies, and their people slaves.⁹²

They are tales of an essentially noble race which has lost out in history - the nobility of the Indians characterised in the tales in no way challenge the argument which projects the British as the saviours of the Indians/hindus from tyranny and slavery.

In 1812 William Carey published a collection of Bangla tales called *Itihas-mala* (A Garland of History).⁹³ The title is suggestive of the fuzziness of the boundary between

⁹¹ Hobart Caunter *The Romance of History: India*, London, Frederick Warne and Co., n.d., v-vi.

⁹² Meenakshi Mukherjee op. cit., 42.

⁹³ Probadhchandra Sen *Banglar Itihas-Sadhana* (Study of the History of Bengal), Calcutta, Paschimanga Bangla Academy, 1997, 103-118.

history and fiction - they were at best stories set in the past, which stemmed from imagination and not any history book. It was this mode of the European works of historical fiction which were the most readily accepted by the *bhadralok* for writing his history - a history which is not supposed to be correct or objective, a history which precisely is a construction of the past, a history which is not aimed at 'knowing that' but in 'making sense'.

It is not that the Bengalis' writing of their own history was only a non-academic history. They made several attempts at writing their history text books for schools - Vidyasagar, Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, Romesh Chunder Dutt and others - but were thoroughly dissatisfied about the results of their work.⁹⁴ This dissatisfaction was perhaps captured best in Bankimchandra's lament that Bengalis don't have a history - 'Bengalis must have history, or else, they would never become human beings'.⁹⁵ What Bankim's assertion meant was not that the Bengalis were dying with curiosity about their past, or that there were no recorded events of their past. He meant that the existing history was not a history which 'empowered' the Bengalis, it wasn't a history which made them proud, it wasn't a history which gave them an 'identity', a 'self'. It was a history which the British used to stereotype the Bengali hindu *bhadralok*. They also used the derogatory reference *babu* as effeminate, one who shrinks from bodily exertion, and if his own history was not glorious, he could merge himself to others whose history had possibilities of glory. He looked for a general glory of his religion. He then turned to myths, epics and 'puranic' history. He also wrote histories of the kind followed by Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay in *Swapnalabdha Bharater Itihas* (A History of India Revealed in a Dream, 1876). Here he describes a contrafactual, a utopia – Maratha victory at the Third Battle of Panipat where the muslim commander promises not to attack India again.⁹⁶ But such events lacked historical plausibility, the *bhadralok* had to search for a probable, objective history. He, therefore, incorporated instances of glory from the past of to her hindu peoples into his own past. He found such instances in the history of the Rajputs and the Marathas fighting against the Mughals. The list of Bangla works which were based on James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*

⁹⁴ Quoted in Kaviraj op. cit., 124.

⁹⁵ Mrinalini Sinha *Colonial Masculinity*, Manchester and New York, Manchester UP, 1995.

⁹⁶ Chatterjee *The National and its Fragments*, 110-11.

and James Grant Duff's *History of the Mahrattas* is a long one. In order to use the collective 'we' in these stories, in order to pose the Rajputs and the Marathas as the 'natural' ancestors of the Bengalis, the essence of the Bengali 'self' underwent a mutation; it shed its linguistic differentiation and became a 'hindu self'. A 'hindu self' which valiantly fought against the 'foreigners' or the muslims and their religion. This evoking of the 'collective self' capable of protecting its own interests, and therefore entitled to better opportunities from the British government, was constructed by denigrating the muslims as tyrannical. This has been described variously as 'hindu revivalism' or 'vicarious' nationalism'.⁹⁷ It is my endeavour to study this which of these two descriptions is more appropriate.

⁹⁷ Anuradha Roy "'Foreign Tyrants or Foster Brothers" Muslims in the eyes of the Hindu Nationalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal' *The Calcutta Historical Journal*, 17(1), Jan-Jun 1995, 123-59.

CHAPTER 3

SHIVAJI IS 'OUR' HERO

ROMESH CHUNDER DUTT'S *MAHARASHTRA JIBAN PRABHAT*

To fill up the vacuum which existed in the available history of the Bengalis, one of the ports of glory to which the Bengali intellectual, newly educated in the European tradition, turned was the history of the seventeenth century Marathas, their spotlight being on the maverick hero, Shivaji. The hunt for glorious moments in the past was made imperative in the search of future glory, an exercise in the narrative negating of an inevitability of subjugation which Western imperialist histories had presented before their Indian subjects. The English and other Europeans posed themselves as deliverers of the Indians i.e. the hindus from the dark middle ages of Mughal or muslim misrule and tyranny. The hindus were vulnerable and needed a protector, an overseer and an administrator. The English were in some sense god send and their rule the destiny for India, the land of the 'hindoos'. This was, however, the colonisers' perspective. In order to challenge the civilisational inevitability of colonialism, which the European view scribed, the colonial historian had to erase the picture of the hindus, protectorless before the mohammedan conquerors. The search was, therefore, for the limited instances of chivalry, courage and resilience against the muslim warriors, in the available histories of India - which were, of course, written by the Europeans. James Grant Duff's *History of the*

Mahrattas formed the basic source for Romesh Chunder Dutt's *Mahrashtra Jiban Prabhat* (The Dawn of Maharashtra, 1878).¹

Mahrashtra Jiban Prabhat emerges into the Bengali literary scene a good 70 years after Mrityunjay Vidyalkar's *Rajabali* (1808), a period within which colonial education had taken root and began showing its effects in all spheres of the life of the colonial people who were in contact with the various arms of the colonial machinery. By this time the treatment of historical themes had shed its 'puranic' mould and entered a rational historiography. No longer was the change of dynasties and regimes an expression of divine will, instead in the eyes of the English-educated scholars the structures governing historical incidents underwent a transformation.² No longer did the writer assume the position of the an actionless subject narrating the events in the lives of kings and sultans; the writer now assumed the voice of the participant 'we'. It was our 'history' and the successes and defeats of the ruler or warrior were 'our' successes or defeats. Silently but surely, through these changes in perspective a new identity category was marking its space in the Indian psyche - the category of the 'nation' .

One of the many signs of an emerging nationhood is the unique criterion of the binding of a people to a territory. The very first sentence used by Romesh Chunder in *Mahrashtra Jiban Prabhat* bears this sign:

Towards the end of the twelfth century of the Christian era Mohammad Ghori conquered Arjabarta (p.151).

Thus, from the very beginning Romesh Chunder sets the tone in terms of a clash of civilisations. The very title of his novel also echoes the call of a millenarian movement - a struggle to end a 'dark night'. Before narrating the 'dawn' Romesh Chunder narrates the misery of the 'darkness'. He continues:

¹ Romesh Chunder Dutt *Mahrashtra Jiban Prabhat* in *Ramesh Rachnabali*, Calcutta, Sahitya Samsad, 1990, 151-249. All translations used are mine.

² Partha Chatterjee *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and postcolonial Histories*, Princeton, Princeton UP, 1993, 81.

For about three hundred years the emperors of Dilli did not attempt to grab the Deccan.

But relief from the raids of Dilli did not mean that the Hindu empire in the South was free from danger. The Hindus had given room to Muslim rule in the form of Daulatabad. At that time the national life of the Hindus were weak and declining, and the national life of the victorious Muslims strong and rising... (p.151).

There are several exercises in identity formation taking place here. Firstly, hindus and muslims, followers of two religions, are shown as two distinct communities, with rival ambitions and trajectories. The rise of the muslims rulers is linked in an inverse relation with the strength of the hindus. Secondly, what is being discussed here is a political history, but the two contenders of the political fortunes of the sub-continent are described as religious groups. At one level, there was a straight-forward hand-me-down categorisation of the sub-continent's past into hindu, muslim and British periods in the histories written by the colonisers. And thirdly, the use of the collective word 'jatiya' roped in all hindus and all muslims to the political destinies of the rulers who were then considered to be the representatives and leaders of these communities. Also, these destinies were viewed as concurrent with the destiny of the leader or ruler (and described variously in terms, such as charisma). A religion was portrayed as the mobilising factor for struggles of political fortune. And, as I have stated earlier, this binding inevitably meant that religious affiliation could no longer remain aloof from political happenings. The corollary of this formulation was that the political will to further the political interests of either community (hindu or muslim), therefore, becomes a measure of one's religiosity or religious devotion. Conversely, political misdeeds or actions of a ruler or ruling group were construed as a reflection of, or emanating from, the elemental nature of a religion. Politics, therefore, became a matter of faith. But, the entire exercise of writing a history is not a matter of describing the 'self' or what 'we' are. As already discussed, history writing by the colonial intellectuals was aimed at undoing the tale of the 'long dark night' which the coloniser told. Therefore, for the 'self' to be strong and capable of glory and self-reliance, it was required to compare, judge and distinguish it from its rivals. That is, the 'self' needed to be described in terms of what it is not and in opposition to the 'other'. If political glory is religious glory, political blemish is a religious blemish - 'our' god is better than 'their' god.

We must clear another point before we proceed any further. In the extract quoted above, to refer to the communities of hindus and muslims, Romesh Chunder uses the word 'jatiya'. Although, today, the first and most prominent meaning which the word 'jatiya' would invoke is 'national', 'jati', the noun of the adjective 'jatiya', can indicate different senses of communities. According to the *Samsad Bengali Dictionary* it means a group of similar things like *manabjati* (human race), *sarpajati* (snakes); classes of things like, *pusphajati* (a class of powers); religious, social and political groups; and caste divisions among hindus. If the connotations of the word 'jati' are so wide and varied even today, at the formative moment of national consciousness its ability to denote a nation would have been even more unsure. A concept which entered the Indian or Bengali psyche through the European coloniser, fails to receive an effortless translation into the language of the colonised. At one level, this ambiguity in Romesh Chunder is less than in Bankim. Bankim's usage of 'jati' encompasses all the sectors - caste, region, religion and nation.³ But in Romesh Chunder this usage has been narrowed down to 'Hindu jati' or between a religious community and the nation. Elsewhere, in his English writings Romesh Chunder has been less ambiguous, as in the *Economic History*, where he speaks of measures which 'weakens the Empire and impoverishes the nation'.⁴ It can be taken, therefore, that the religious grouping merged with the political in the form of the nation and there was a simultaneous existence of two nations, hindu and muslim, one legitimate and the other not. The very first sentence asserts that it was the muslims who attacked Arjabarta, the hindus were already there. The narrative of Romesh Chunder's novel is the narrative of an undoing of the past, a reassertion of the legitimate over the illegitimate.

We shall return later in the chapter to Romesh Chunder's handling of the religio-political divide. For now let us attempt an estimate of the generic divide between fiction and history in *Maharashtra Jiban Prabhat*. In the text, Romesh Chunder mentions four sources, the Mughal historian Khafi Khan, James Grant Duff, Rawlison and the seventeenth century French traveller Bernier (p.184). Of these he mentions that Khafi Khan's writings were hostile. At the time when Romesh Chunder wrote *Jiban Prabhat*

³ Sudipta Kaviraj *Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India*, New Delhi, Oxford UP, 1998, 113.

⁴ *Ibid.* 114.

Duff's *History of the Mahrattas* was the most authentic modern history on Shivaji. Romesh Chunder's tale, however, covers only a brief period of this voluminous history - from 1663, when Shivaji carried out a surprise attack on Saista Khans' camp, to 1667, shortly after Shivaji's return from Aurangzeb's court (Shivaji was born in 1630 and died in 1680). This is the period when Shivaji engaged his forces to make his presence felt by the Mughal empire. We can say that this was the period when the attention of the Mughal forces in the Deccan were focussed on neutralising Shivaji. Before this period, that is, from the securing of the Torna fort from Bijapur in 1646 till 1663, Shivaji was busy building up his independent strength conquering fortresses from Bijapur, and from Ahmadanagar which Bijapur had ceded to the Mughals. By the end of this period Shivaji's relationship with the Mughals had taken a decisive turn. Shivaji had established himself as a power centre. This was the time when he concentrated on consolidating his holdings by building more forts, enhancing the appropriation of agricultural surplus and the subjugation of other Maratha lords and bringing them under his overlordship. The choice of the beginning and ending points of the story was a narrative decision. A different choice might have altered the effect drastically. The object of Romesh Chunder to undo the legitimacy that the British historians sought by projecting themselves as the successors of the Mughals, necessitated that he showed Shivaji in strife against the Mughals. The story, therefore, ends where the scope of anti-Mughal events are reduced. However, despite having chosen to begin the story at a point when the Mughal commander Saista Khan was defeated by Shivaji, Romesh Chunder does not completely let go of Shivaji's activities against the Bijapur state. Before describing the crescendo of the lightning nocturnal operation on Saista Khan's estates the reader is provided with a quick flashback of the making of Shivaji. Interestingly, this is the only point of time when there is a clear narrative break between history and fiction, in fact Romesh Chunder himself makes the demarcation:

This is our first meeting with Shivaji; at this point we want to say a few things about his past. The reader well versed with history may skip the remaining part of this chapter if (s)he so desires (p.169).

As we can see, this is an instance of narratorial intrusion, where the narrator directly speaks to the reader, breaking away from an, otherwise, omnipresent narrative technique. There are a few other instances where Romesh Chunder resorts to such intrusions. Of these,

some may be termed minor intrusions, which were devised to effect a shift in the narrative space, a shift which does not follow the logical sequence so far in the narrative:

Chand Rao obtained a few days' leave and returned home. Reader come let us visit him in this rich estate (p.200).

Romesh Chunder needs to narrate this point of the story to be able to fill us in about Lakshmi, Raghunathji's sister and Chand Rao's wife, and more crucially about the enmity between the two men which is essential information for the progress of the narrative. There are also, what I would call major intrusions, those which describe a shift more substantial in the narrative elements such as characterisation:

Reader! The man who with extraordinary cunning, wiliness and martial strategy vanquished his brothers, imprisoned his father, and ascended the Mayur Singhashan [throne] at Dilli; who despite being the ruler of Arjabarta from Kashmir to Bengal, has resolved to conquer the Deccan and become the unrivalled emperor of entire India; who in a show of unparalleled cunning has imprisoned the brave and clever Shivaji, come let us enter the palace of that crooked and foresightless Aurangzeb and scrutinise his thoughts (p.223).

The purpose, therefore, is not merely to bridge a narrative shift but to focus the reader's attention on the 'thoughts' of Aurangzeb, as well as to influence the interpretation of the subsequent description of the 'thoughts' as proof of Aurangzeb's 'crooked and foresightless' character.

Not always is the history-fiction interface so clearly stated. Not on all occasions of such interface does one genre exist independent of the other in the text. That is, there are instances when history and fiction exist simultaneously. Counterfactuals are skillfully narrativised into gaps in the available history which have been created for that purpose. A favourite technique used by Walter Scott for such punching was to choose little known figures from history and build a story around them, a story which 'weaves in and out of the known track of historical events'.⁵ Romesh Chunder's technique is a modification of this. Though he selected Shivaji, an extremely prominent historical figure, as his central character, he introduced into the story a subplot about a young Rajput warrior Raghunathji,

⁵ Kaviraj, *op. cit.*, 133.

brave and chivalrous, who through his daring acts makes his way up Shivaji's ranks, is dismissed due to false charges of treachery pressed by Chand Rao, and ultimately recovers his dignity through further daring and loyalty. In this subplot Romesh Chunder also incorporated the Scottian romantic element through the relationship between Raghunathji and Sorojubala. There are several ends which Romesh Chunder sought to achieve through the subplot. In the Preface to his *Brief History of Ancient and Modern Bengal for the use of the schools* (1892), Romesh Chunder wrote:

An account of Kings and wars is useless and barren unless we also have an account of the people and their condition and their progress.⁶

This has been one of the themes in the practice of historical writing in the nineteenth century Bengal, the most quoted among them being Rabindranath Tagore, who in his essay 'Bharatbarser Itihas' [History of Bharatbarsa] described the imperial histories of India as narratives of a storm which overlook the life of the common people. In telling the story of Raghunathji, Romesh Chunder attempted a description of the valour, the commitment of a soldier in Shivaji's army, evidence that all under him and under his care were happy about and supportive of Shivaji's project of building an independent hindu Maratha nation-state. Thus, to an extent he tries to solidify, or give a total picture of the period. But, on the other hand, the opening of such a sector of factual sparseness, allows Romesh Chunder to interpret history to serve his own ends. In fact, the end of novels such as *Jiban Prabhat* is to 'falsify' history. By the deliberate use of counterfactual in nondocumented territory the fiction writer seeks to colour the meaning of the historical subject.⁷ Romesh Chunder's intention in the writing of history is manifest in another portion of his Preface to his *A Brief History*, where he addresses his reader thus:

For you a Hindu boy the history of Bengal should not commence with the conquest of that country by Bakhtiyer Khilji... I have considered it necessary to narrate these facts of the Hindu period in five chapters in order that some

⁶ Probodhchandra Sen *Banglar Itihas Sadhana* (Study of the History of Bengal), Calcutta, Paschimbanga Bangla Academy, 1997, 117 .

⁷ Kaviraj op. cit., 133 .

recollections of these facts may live in the minds of all educated Hindus long after they cease to be students.⁸

Although, imperial histories, and early colonial histories of the Marathas seldom delve into the subaltern, later research shows that most of Romesh Chunder's portrayal, and other such nationalist histories about Shivaji, spring from the imagination and not from evidence. The inclusion of the subplot also, allows the incorporation into a story about the glorious strife of the Marathas a glance of Rajput chivalry. As we can see, Romesh Chunder takes a great amount of pain to smoothen out the ruptures caused in his framework of hindu-muslim rift due to evidences of the presence of Rajput commanders in Aurangzeb's army - like Jaswant Singh and Jaisingh. The damage caused to Romesh Chunder's project by the unavoidable portrayal of a hindu versus hindu war, is sought to be undone by the description of a valiant Rajput migrant's single minded service to the cause of *dharma rashtra*.

The deviations from historical evidence in *Jiban Prabhat* can be broadly sorted into two types. The first includes those events which dealt with the political and military exploits of Shivaji. The second consists of the wider and deeper socio-cultural aspects of the period. In the first category the most glaring departure from historical fact is Shivaji's visit to Aurangzeb's court. Although, Romesh Chunder described Shivaji visiting Delhi, Aurangzeb's reception actually took place in Agra. Romesh Chunder's source Grant Duff too described Delhi as the venue of the visit. Aurangzeb shifted his capital from Delhi to Agra after his second coronation in June, 1759.⁹ We cannot, therefore, spot any design of Romesh Chunder in this choice of location. However, having accepted Delhi as the venue Romesh Chunder introduced his own counterfactual element in establishing an association between Shivaji and Prithviraj Chauhan, the last hindu ruler to have his capital in Delhi:

Raghunath Panth Nyayshastri, Shivaji's long time minister was following him at a distance.

⁸ Sen op. cit., 117.

⁹ R.C. Majumdar, H.C. Ray Chaudhuri and Kalikinkar Dutta *An Advanced History of India*, Madras, Macmillan, 1990, 484.

After a long while, Shivaji asked his minister Nyayshastri, did you ever come to Dilli before?

Nyayshastri - In my childhood I had seen Dilli.

Shibaji- Can you tell me what those sprawling wall like structures are? Why are you staring at them unmindfully?

Nyayshastri - Maharaj! We are looking at the wall of the fort of the last Hindu King of Dilli, Prithurai.

Shibaji was startled as he said - This is Prithurai's fort. This is where he had his capital! At this spot ruled the last Hindu King of Dilli? Nyayshastri that day is over like a dream! As a day gets over another begins, the dry leaves of winter give way to fresh leaves of spring. Will our days of glory never come again?

Nyayshastri - God's blessing can attain everything. May God bless us, that with your valour we may regain our lost glory (p.212).

This can be put as a case of 'interpretation within interpretation' - where Shivaji's motive to displace muslim rule and establish hindu independence is elucidated through his words - delineating Prithviraj as essentially a hindu king. A second mismatch between history and fiction is a case of deletion. In January, 1664, Shivaji carried out a sack of Surat the port city of North Konkan. Although this comes after the beginning point of Romesh Chunder's story - the attack on Saista Khan - and before the next important node (historically that is) - the coming of Jaisingh - there is no mention of this important episode. It gains its importance from the context of the novel and the correlation of the various forces in it. Surat which stood on the South bank of the Tapti, twelve miles from the sea, was the richest port on the west coast. It was controlled by the Mughals, the gateway to Arabia and the muslim holy places, and a centre of great interest for European trade. Shivaji gained great riches after the loot -estimated at above crore rupees. Also, the only force which put up some resistance to the onslaught were the Europeans.¹⁰ Did Romesh Chunder solve a danger of antagonising the English by 'forgetting' this incident?

Another point which is of interest to us, and had remained an obsession with nationalist historians is the incident of Shivaji's encounter with Afzul Khan, the commander of the Bijapur army. Both Grant Duff and Romesh Chunder (the latter

¹⁰ See Jadunath Sarkar *Shivaji and His Times*, Calcutta, S.C. Sarkar and Sons Ltd., 1948.

following his source) describe Shivaji as striking the first blow and killing Afzul Khan. In fact, Grant Duff comments upon it as an instance of murder of an invited guest. Romesh Chunder, however, does not add any authorial, moral comment to his narration. Later nationalist historians like Jadunath Sarkar have cited that it was Afzul Khan and not Shivaji who struck the first blow.¹¹ In another account of Shivaji in *Life of Shivaji Maharaj* by Nilkant S. Takakhav, the author states that one of the salient features of Sarkar's work is that it clears Shivaji from the charge of murdering Afzul Khan.¹² The question, here, as we shall see is not which account is true, but the purpose which served and the treatment it received. For Grant Duff a rogue Shivaji was convenient to establish a superior European ethic condemning the wickedness of premeditated political murders. For Romesh Chunder such condemnation was incompatible with his designs - hence, he maintains silence. More recently, historians have dissociated the exact order of events from any significance larger than immediate one. Stewart Gordon avoids describing the exact sequence of events in the text. He describes the entire encounter militarily - while Shivaji had every reason to be suspicious of Afzul Khan's intentions as the latter had at an earlier instance used such a meeting to imprison an opponent general, such a strategy on the part of Afzul Khan could have been forced upon him by the inability of his heavy cavalry to move among the mountains. However, on the part of Shivaji, the strategy of killing Afzul Khan while bold, also had an edge of desperation. Up to that point Shivaji knew that the Bijapur army was, in fact, putting down the rebellion and his army was incapable of meeting Afzul Khan in the field.¹³ As it stands both the commanders, Afzul Khan and Shivaji met each other in the tent with no more than one or two companions on both sides, and Shivaji and his party stood, victorious with the vanquished dead. Which, therefore, means that only the victorious side remained to tell the world who drew the first blood. Could any version of this story, but, be a 'version' or a 'story'?

These are the various deviations from historical evidence regarding the political and military exploits of Shivaji. Interesting though they may be by themselves, such deviations

¹¹ Ibid., 72.

¹² Nilkant S. Takakhav 'Preface' to *Life of Shivaji Maharaja*, Bombay, Manoranjan, 1921, x.

¹³ Stewart Gordon *The New Cambridge History of India: The Marathas 1600-1818*, New Delhi, Cambridge UP, 1993, 70.

were geared towards ensuring that the story line squarely fits the overall socio-cultural structure which Romesh Chunder's novel aimed to present. But apart from direct deviations Romesh Chunder also imaginatively fills in details of Shivaji and the values of his times in terms of caste, gender relations, Shivaji's revenue system, and religion. It is not that each of these are separable from the rest - the classification is a simplification for the purpose of study. We, however, need to note that other than his consciousness, Romesh Chunder's treatment of Shivaji's story is conditioned by his source - James Grant Duff's *The History of the Mahrattas*. Duff's book is replete with accounts of wars and battles, factions at court and concerned with who won and who lost - and pays little or no attention to the socio-economic aspects of the period. Therefore, the picture of the Maratha society and Shivaji's reign which we find in *Jiban Prabhat* is a product of Romesh Chunder's imaginative recreation of the social values of his own times.

At the very beginning let us take up the question of caste. The presence of the politics of caste is located in *Jiban Prabhat* but not in any form of visible discrimination or derogatory remarks with reference to individuals belonging to the lower castes. It is located in the nature of the values which are repeatedly asserted in the novel. The novel tells the story of military exploits, glorious strife and royalty. There is no character belonging to the lower castes. Caste identity is used as a tool of characterisation. Most often the introduction of a character is not complete without stating his/her caste (almost always 'his' as there are very few women characters in the novel), as in:

I have already mentioned, the priest is a high born Rajput Brahmin, and his name is Janardan Deb (p.161).

Time and again the virtues of a character is authenticated in terms of 'high birth' and caste identity, as when Shivaji addresses a Brahmin Peshwa:

Please give me your blessings that I may be victorious today, a Brahmin's blessings will surely be effective (p.175).

And again:

Shibaji had lost enthusiasm from the very beginning, and began repeatedly sending peace proposals to Jaisingh. But shrewd as he was, Jaisingh did not

believe all these proposals at the onset. Finally, Shibaji's trusted minister Raghunathji Panth Nyayshastri came as an emissary to Jaisingh, and made special efforts to convince the Raja, that Shibaji was not being clever with Jaisingh, he too is a Kshatriya, and knows how to respect Kshatriyas! Jaisingh believed in these words of a Brahmin who was learned in the scriptures (p.184).

Here we see how a reciprocal ethic is shown to exist between Jaisingh and Shivaji, two adversaries in the battlefield, due to caste camaraderie. Throughout the novel caste ties and loyalties are shown to be much stronger and firmer than political loyalties. Jaisingh reconsiders his original suspicions after he hears the same set of peace proposals from 'a Brahmin who was learned in the scriptures'. It is nowhere suggested that there were any differences between the proposals communicated through earlier emissaries and those sent through Raghunathji Panth. Raghunathji's 'caste qualifications', therefore, make him a credible possessor of truthfulness. It is noteworthy that there are several occasions in *Jiban Prabhat* when the caste of a character is shown to be readable from his physical features:

Silently, Raghunath moved out of sight with the speed of lightning, along with two hundred soldiers. Shibaji looked towards Tanaji and said, – 'This habildar is a Rajput, from his looks and behaviour it is evident that he belongs to a high ranking family (p.193).

It is not that the caste identity of a person cannot be judged from a person's appearance - in fact, some of the dominant markers of caste are physical markers. Also, castes being a system of stratification of power in a society, people of various caste would enjoy varying access to resources. These conditions have a direct bearing on an individual's physical attributes as well as social conditioning and behaviour. The point, however, is not to state the obvious. What we have in Romesh Chunder's treatment and indeed even in dominant form of present day usage, is an erasure of the link between appearance and in its place institution of a pseudo-linkage between appearance and innate qualities of the individual concerned. A particular caste identity is both the signifier and the signified of certain intrinsic qualities and vice-versa. The set of qualities linked with a particular caste identity is well defined and comes as a package. Therefore, the various components of Raghunathji habildar's 'looks' and 'behaviour' is proof incontrovertible of his being a Rajput belonging to a 'high ranking family'.

Another occasion where demarcation of caste boundaries is shown is in the unfolding of the relationship between habildar Raghunathji and Sorojubala, the daughter of the priest Janardan. In the fourth chapter of the story after the first meeting of the couple, Raghunath contemplates a possible future of togetherness. But suddenly a disturbing thought strikes him:

Raghunath! Will this beauty ever be yours? You are an ordinary habildar, and she the foster daughter of high born Janardan, fit to be bride to kings! Why are you causing pain to yourself in vain? Raghunath! Why thirst after this unquenchable fire?

But soon Raghunathji is emboldened by a hope of bridging the impossible:

God, pray to you, I will surely succeed! Fame, pride respect are humanly achievable, why should it not be so for me? Is my body weaker than others? Do my sinews lack strength? God, be my protector, I shall uphold my father's name in the battlefield, earn the respect due to a Rajput. Then? If I am successful, then Soraju! I shall no longer remain unworthy of you (p.158).

We must note carefully that at this stage in the relationship let alone the exchange of a single word, between the couple, there has not yet been any indication which would lead Raghunath to harbour any hopes of Sorojubala's interest in him. Yet our young man is not too deeply concerned about the wishes and inclinations of the lady he admires, but has already started working out caste equations vis-à-vis himself and the lady's foster father. The only hope he sees of being successful is to uphold his 'father's name'.

But by far the most striking sign of the value which is attached to caste hierarchies is the way a caste identity is shaped for the epicenter of the novel - Shivaji. In *Jiban Prabhat* Shivaji is described as a kshatriya and is shown to possess its concurrent characteristics. In his overt and covert negotiations with envoys and commanders of the enemy forces he invokes his kshatriyahood to convince them to side with him militarily. In the recounting of Shivaji's past Romesh Chunder traces his lineage:

It is popularly known that Jiji's [Shivaji's mother] father Jadab Rao belonged to the line of kings of old Deogarh. If this is true, then there can be no doubt that Shivaji descended from that old royal lineage (p.171).

There are two contradictions in this tracing of lineage. Firstly, the entire strength of Romesh Chunder's argument rests on a 'popularly known' piece of information which may or may not be true. Romesh Chunder's qualifier 'If this is true' reinforces the doubt about Shivaji's kshatriyahood. Secondly, the lineage which has been traced to prove Shivaji's royal ancestry is through his mother. This is totally contradictory to the overall patriarchal tone of Romesh Chunder's novel, and indeed socially caste lineages are traced along the male line and not the female line. However, *Jiban Prabhat* being a historical novel Romesh Chunder's treatment would have been justified had it been historically proved that Shivaji's claim to kshatriyahood had been socially accepted by his contemporaries. This is not the case. In fact, in the period of Shivaji's life with which we are concerned, the Maratha warrior did not claim to be a kshatriya - he did so only at the time of his coronation in 1674. The need for coronation was political one - a move to attain legitimacy and supremacy. Before we take a closer look at Shivaji's coronation let us take a look at Shivaji's family, the Bhonsles.

Shivaji's belonged to the Bhonsle clan of the Maratha caste. In the middle of the 16th century, Shivaji's ancestor Babaji Bhonsle survived on his cultivation and the collections he received as the headman of two villages of the Pune district which were then under Ahmadnagar. Babaji's son Maloji and Vitoji were the first to join military service as common soldiers or *bargirs* under Jadav Rao a noble of Ahmadnagar. Maloji's son Shahji, Shivaji's father, married Jija Bai. Shahji inherited his father's service, but went over to the Mughal service for a while (1630-32), and then entered the service of Bijapur. Shahji had deshmukh rights over the Puna jagir. In his absence it was Dadaji Kondev, Shivaji's guardian, who administered the jagir.¹⁴ It was from this jagir that Shivaji began his exploits and spread his influence. But, even after he became a force to reckon with militarily, Shivaji lacked the social sanction to be recognised as a ruler. He was unable to claim full loyalty and authority over those he ruled, or deal on equal terms with other rulers. His authority lacked a legal sanction. More over, the Maratha families who were once equal in status with the Bhonsles, were now jealous of Shivaji's success, and refused to adhere to his command.

¹⁴ Sarkar op. cit. 19-21.

Shivaji decided to solve all problems of authority by having himself crowned king.¹⁵ Shivaji did not belong to any line of kings.

The problem which Shivaji was now faced with was that in accordance with hindu scriptures only a kshatriya could be crowned a king. Such an attempt by a Bhonsle was looked upon by the brahmins and other twice-born castes as an upstart from the shudras trying to encroach upon kshatriya privileges - the Bhonsles weren't kshatriyas, they were tillers of the soil. The problem was solved by the fabrication of Shivaji's ancestry, a genealogy tracing for him Rajput origins from the Maharanas of Udaipur. His coronation ceremony was preceded by a set of purification ceremonies in which he paid penance for the sin of his ancestors and himself for non-observance of kshatriya rites for so long. It was only after he received the 'sacred thread' that the coronation began.¹⁶ It is, therefore, clear that neither was Shivaji's lineage through his mother's line acceptable in the society of his times, nor was he a kshatriya in the period in which the action of the novel takes place. It is an imaginative construction of Romesh Chunder and reflective of the values of the society to which he belonged.

Now, let us turn to Romesh Chunder's handling of the religio-political divide. We have already seen how a political conflict between two forces is given the shape of a concurrent conflict between two religious faiths. The tone set at the initial stages of the novel is maintained throughout. The nocturnal battle between Shivaji and Saista Khan's forces is described as 'Hindus and Muslims fought each other in the dark' (p.177). When Raghunath is suspected of helping Bijapur during the attack on the Rudramondal fort he is accused of having joined hands with the mussalmans (p.207). But, apart from this the most crucial statement which the novel makes is about the essential mission of Shivaji - the reader is never allowed to forget the Maratha warrior's central objective of establishing a hindu ruled kingdom in the south of India, by over throwing muslim dominance. In course of a conversation with Gopinath, a brahmin emissary of Bijapuri commander Abul Fazal [Afzul Khan], Shivaji lays down his programme:

¹⁵ Ibid., 201-02 and Gordon op. cit., 87.

¹⁶ Sarkar op. cit., 202-05 and Gordon op. cit., 87.

Whatever I have done, I have done for the Hindu jati and the Hindu faith. Goddess Bhabani herself has ordered me to protect Brahmins, prevent cow slaughter, punish those responsible for desecrating the sanctity of Hindu gods and holy shrines, and fight relentlessly against the enemies of our religion (p.173).

It is not that Shivaji's objective to establish Hindu rule was divinely ordained. Romesh Chunder shows how this resolve firms up in his mind in his childhood. His protector Dadaji Kondev (written as Kanaideb in the text) narrates stories of the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharat* to the child Shivaji which strengthened his faith in hinduism and inspires him to emulate the bravery of the mythical heroes and gave birth to hatred for the 'Mussalmans, the enemies of dharmas'. After Shivaji commenced his early exploits, Dadaji eggs him on from his death bed, "Son, fight for the independence of the country, protect the Brahmins, the cows and the peasants, punish those who have blemished the places of worship...." (p.171-72). Thus, the desire to fight for freedom from muslim rule is a part of growing up. It is important to note that this aspect of growing up is not unique to Shivaji, it is shown by Romesh Chunder to be a sentiment shared by people around him - a 'national' sentiment. This sentiment inspired eighteen year old Raghunath to join Shivaji's army (p.199). What's more it is a sentiment shared, secretly, by the hindu officers and commanders of the Mughal or Bijapuri forces - a dream of independence which has been lurking deep within, silenced by muslim might, is talked to and set free by Shivaji who is held up as the figure who embodies the desires of an emergent nation. The entire nation, all hindus, consolidate behind Shivaji, looking forward to their '*jiban prabhat*' or the 'dawn of a new life.'

The crucial question now is, was Romesh Chunder's portrayal of Shivaji as a crusader for the hindu faith supported by historical evidence? Let us examine the role Shivaji played in the political scene of the mid-17th century Indian subcontinent. As I have already discussed, history as a narrative form is open to interpretation and each historian puts together a narrative by a selection of historical facts to suggest an interpretation. In some cases, as with Romesh Chunder, facts are interspersed with counterfactuals. Thus, it cannot be said that Romesh Chunder's *Jiban Prabhat* is devoid of facts. It is an imaginative

recreation of a set of events which portray Shivaji as a crusader for the hindu faith, engaged in selfless strife against muslim tyranny.

When we are talking of a strife against the Mughals, we are talking of an empire which had been in existence with some stability for about a hundred and fifty years, facing a major military and political challenge. A state which had been resilient to external threats for a long time had built up a system of political and economic security, the weakening of which led to the possibilities of external invasion. The strength of the empire emanated from a centrally controlled military and revenue administration system where the *mansabdars* were in charge of both revenue collection and maintaining military contingents.¹⁷ Thus, a rebellion in one pocket of the empire could be dealt with effectively by mobilising the contingents of the adjoining areas.¹⁸ But the strength of the Mughal forces which lay in the speed and maneuverability of its cavalry and advanced artillery lost its effectiveness in the hills of Maratha operation. Shivaji's strategies were superior to the Mughals in these areas and made it difficult for the Mughals to subdue him.¹⁹

Shivaji began his career as the jagirdar of Poona under Bijapur. His territory was never a part of the Mughal empire, and therefore, the question of him liberating it from the Mughals does not arise. Till the early 17th century, the Mughal empire extended till Khandesh and Berar south of which were the muslim ruled kingdoms of Ahmadnagar, Bijapur, Golconda and Bidar. In expanding his base Shivaji did not fight only these muslim ruled kingdoms. In his early years, he fought rival Maratha families. Around 1647 he paid a visit to Sambhaji Mohit of the Mahal of Supe - his stepmother's brother, on the pretext of requesting for a 'post'. He imprisoned his uncle and annexed Supe.²⁰ In 1656 he conquered

¹⁷ Irfan Habib *The Agrarian System of Mughal India 1556-1707*, New Delhi, Oxford UP, 1999, 364.

¹⁸ M.N. Pearson 'Shivaji and the Decline of the Mughal Empire' *Journal of Asian Studies*, 35(2), Feb 1976, 227.

¹⁹ Gordon op. cit., 75.

²⁰ Ibid., 61.

Javli from the Maratha chief Chandra Rao More.²¹ Shivaji did not feel qualms about allying with the forces of Bijapur and Golconda - even against hindu powers like the Nayaks of the Karnatic.²² It is, therefore, wrong to claim the use of a religious force against muslim rule. Shivaji was a shrewd general and his moves were determined by political expediency.

At around the mid-17th century the Deccan kingdoms of Ahmednagar and Bijapur were experiencing internal problems which weakened them considerably. This was one reason why *jagirdars* like Shivaji found it easy to expand. This was also the time when the Mughals sought to expand. After the fall of Ahmadnagar in 1633 its spoils were shared by the Mughals, Shahji and the local governors. In this phase the boundaries of the Mughal Deccan were not clearly defined.²³ The centralised administration and revenue collecting system were not yet fully in place. As a result a uniform standard of cavalry contingents could not be attained in most parts. This lack of adequate forces meant that an erring *mansabdars* would not fear retribution. This led to an increased tendency among *mansabdars* not to pay revenue and, moreover, to extract excess revenue from the cultivators. In fact in the later part of the Mughal empire the repeated wars of succession led to a weakening of imperial control over the peripheries of the empire. Also, in such weakened state the only way of dealing with an external challenger was to crush him or to win his loyalty by incorporating him into the empire by making him a *mansabdar*.²⁴ But in cases¹ where the second method was used it only weakened the empire further as it provided a space for bargaining and undermined the position of the loyal *mansabdars*. In such circumstances the *mansabdars* resorted to overtaxation and oppression of the peasantry. This resulted in revolts in various areas which consolidated under regional forces like the Jats, the Satnamis, the Sikhs and the Marathas. However, the suggestion that the revolting peasantry collaborated with the Marathas under Shivaji leaves some questions unanswered. Shivaji was far from being a benevolent chief to whom the peasants could look for relief. The

²¹ Satish Chandra *Medieval India: From Sultanat to the Mughals: Part Two Mughal Empire 1526-1748*, New Delhi, Har Anand, 1999, 318.

²² Gordon op. cit., 81.

²³ Sarkar op. cit., 17.

²⁴ Pearson op. cit., 223-26.

terrain in which Shivaji operated was not conducive for extensive agriculture. The chief source of Shivaji's revenues, to fund his military expeditions, were plunders of neighbouring areas. The Maratha economy remained for a long time a 'marauder economy'. The principal method of extracting revenue was *chauth*- or one fourth of the total revenue. The areas adjacent to the region under his control were thus subjected to double taxation. Shivaji also imposed the *sardeshmukhi* - portion of revenue from the *deshmukhs* due to his claim to be the head of the *deshmukhs*. Shivaji's claim to *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi* gave him an excuse to invade any nearby region as these were rarely voluntarily paid.²⁵ In fact, Shivaji had formed a well defined plunder ethic for his army. The army functioned on the principle of 'No Plunder No Pay'.²⁶ Before going on plunder each soldier would be searched and at the end a complete record would be kept. The situation was so bad that according to an English report of 1675 "all people pray that the Moors may regain the country". Why then, would Shivaji be able to rally the peasantry if he was as oppressive as the Mughal mansabdars? It is here that his superior military might comes into play. Just at the time when it seemed that Aurangzeb could crush Shivaji, he got embroiled in the succession struggle. In the meanwhile Shivaji had strengthened his position. One of Aurangzeb's first acts after his victory over his brothers was to despatch Saista Khan, a high ranked commander against Shivaji in 1659. The humiliating defeat which Shivaji inflicted upon Saista Khan was a major affront to the Mughals. In January 1664, Shivaji dealt a second severe blow to the Mughal imperial resilience. He sacked Surat. In the 17th century Surat was by far the most important port of Mughal India. It was the port which was the entry and exit point of *hajj* pilgrims to Mecca, the sending and receiving point of gifts with other Islamic kingdoms around the Red Sea, as well as the trade which it supported. Shivaji returned with a loot of more-than-a-crore rupees and later demanded *chauth* from the town in return of a promise not to carry out a second plunder. But much more than the money the sack of Surat had a deeper political repercussion. Since the second battle of Panipat the Indian subcontinent had seen an invincible Mughal might. The biggest defence of the empire was to keep winning. The sack of Surat broke that spell. (Isn't it curious that Romesh Chunder has omitted this episode from his story?). This required Aurangzeb to take decisive action. It was responded to by the empire's move

²⁵ Gordon op. cit., 77.

²⁶ Habib op. cit., 403.

southward - a move which was 'not expansionist', but 'entirely defensive, a product of desperation, not of free Mughal choice'.²⁷

This time the Mughal forces were led by trusted noble Mirza Raja Jaisingh. Later Jaisingh was also made the Viceroy of the Deccan with full administrative authority. Jaisingh knew the danger of underestimating the Marathas, and so his first task was to isolate Shivaji by winning over the Sultan of Bijapur. As already discussed, other Maratha families who regarded Shivaji as an 'upstart' and were hostile to Shivaji also joined Jaisingh.²⁸ Having gained greater support Jaisingh laid siege on the Purandar fort in 1665. With no hope of relief Shivaji was forced to negotiate peace with the Mughals. According to the agreed terms out of the 35 forts held by Shivaji, 23 passed on to Mughal control. The loss of revenue which Shivaji incurred could be recovered by capturing Bijapuri territory in joint Mughal - Maratha efforts. Shivaji was excused from personal service and his son Shambhuji was made a mansabdar of rank of five thousand. With this strategy Jaisingh hoped to co-opt Shivaji against Bijapur. The entire plan rested on the success of the campaign against Bijapur. This remained illusory due to an alliance between Bijapur and Golconda. As a last resort Jaisingh persuaded Shivaji to visit Aurangzeb in Agra to facilitate a reconciliation between the two.²⁹ The events of this visit are well known and have been recounted in Romesh Chunder's story.³⁰ The visit was a turning point in Mughal-Maratha

²⁷ Pearson op. cit., 220-31.

²⁸ In the Maratha body politic there were no kingdoms separated by "boundaries" - but families with 'nested' rights - by shifting loyalties to another faction or polity the family shifted these rights. See Gordon op. cit., 35.

²⁹ Satish Chandra op. cit., 321-24.

³⁰ The widely accepted story of Shivaji feigning illness and distributing sweets is contradicted by Stewart Gordon due to lack of evidence in contemporary reports. Gordon put it down as a speculation, saying that it is more likely that Shivaji 'simply bribed the guards. See Gordon op. cit., 78.

In fact, Jaisingh's son Ramsingh was suspected by the emperor for having a hand in the escape of the royal prisoner. But, either way, the escape was a display of extreme wile and cunning and was a great affront to the emperor. Also see Jadunath Sarkar and Raghubir Singh *Rajasthani Records: Shivaji's Visit to Agra*, Calcutta, Indian History Congress, 1963.

relations. It proved that unlike Jaisingh, Aurangzeb attached little importance to Shivaji. This attitude, however, cannot be put down as arrogance on the part of Aurangzeb. He could not allow Shivaji greater freedom or status. His actions were conditioned by his nobility which consisted of top Rajputs and courtly Persians who did not entertain the idea of a 'low caste brigand' being raised above them. Also, Jahanara, Aurangzeb's favourite sister had a large share in the trade at Surat and nurtured a direct of grievance against Shivaji.³¹ Even officially Shivaji was abused as the "wild animal", the "mountain rat", the "knave" and the Marathas as "ashkiya" - "hard hearted" or "cruel" - and as "robbers".³² After this final breach with Shivaji the going got really tough for the Mughals in the south and the repercussions were felt across the empire. The Marathas went on to become the greatest single force responsible for the downfall of the Mughal empire.

To cut a long story short-the reason for Shivaji's success was a complex web of political, economic and military factors and not ideology. Shivaji wasn't able to unite all Marathas on the basis of religion, he never attempted to do so. The reason he could acquire the support of the peasantry in the areas he brought under his control was that he was able to out maneuver the control of his rivals. The argument that Shivaji envisaged himself as a crusader for a hindu kingdom is utterly false. As we have already seen, Shivaji allied with Muslim rulers from time to time even to attack hindu kingdoms. Shivaji's army had a large number of muslim recruits and commanders who reached high ranks. Court proceedings list names of muslim *quazis* or judges who were parts of the administration.³³ Much is made of Shivaji's assumption of the titles of *haindava-dharmodधारका* or "redeemer of the Hindu dharma" and *kshatriya-kulavatansa* or "the jewel of the Kshatriya clan". This by itself does not prove that Shivaji declared himself to be the champion of hindus. Protection of dharma was considered to be the usual task of a hindu king. Assuming these titles, therefore, was part of the coronation ceremony which itself was held due to reasons of political expediency. Another controversy surrounds the role of Ramdas as Shivaji's guru and whether he had entrusted Shivaji with the mission of redeeming hinduism. Historians

³¹ Pearson op. cit., 229.

³² Ibid., 232 and Habib op. cit., 404.

³³ Gordon op. cit., 66

have argued that the two met for the first time only in 1672.³⁴ Shivaji did what he did not for hinduism, but it is a fact that his exploits were largely responsible for the breakdown of the Mughal empire. Around the same period as Shivaji there were revolts in other parts of the empire which took the shape of millenarian religious movements, like the Sikh rebellion. There is a possibility that the attribute of one movement has been transferred to another. But as Stewart Gordon suggests the need to paint Shivaji as a redeemer of hinduism was specific to the needs of hindu revivalism of the late 19th century. This portrait grew in prominence in the 1930s and 40s when strained hindu-muslim relations renewed the focus on Shivaji and the Marathas.

Other than the liberal use of counterfactuals and really 'imaginative' facts to narrativise the tale of Shivaji's 'mission hindu state', Romesh Chunder also incorporates a code to provide coherence and an appearance of ideological consistency to the differentiation between hindus and muslims. The code is an answer to the crucial question - whom to fight and whom not to fight? At the beginning of the novel Shivaji sends Raghunath to Janardan, the priest to find out what goddess Bhabani has to say on the question. After the *puja* Janardan declares the divine commandment - 'victory in war against the *mlecchas*, defeat in war against co-religionists'. Shivaji's war strategies in the novel are shown to be directed by adherence to this Code. He asserts this Code to win over Jaswant Singh. He surrenders to Jaisingh's seige of Purandar not due to the latter's superior forces but in accordance with the Code. At the same time there is another rule in play; this concerns a much used tool in the confrontation between Shivaji and his opponents - the use of trickery. Trickery is perfectly legitimate if used against the muslims. Trickery is wrong if it is used against the hindus. Thus, Shivaji's night attack on Saista Khan's harem is a sign of valour. But the imprisonment of Shivaji by Aurangzeb is the worst cunning.

There exists, however, a single problem with the code - a faultline - which renders the entire scheme inconsistent. The problem arises due to the presence of Rajput commanders, especially Jaisingh, in the Mughal army, and Shivaji's surrender to the Mughals. It is an extremely painful exercise not only for Shivaji, but for Romesh Chunder as well. Chapter fourteen narrates the negotiation, or rather a conversation, between

³⁴ Ibid., 66 and Chandra op. cit., 326.

Jaisingh and Shivaji (p.184-88). Through this conversation Romesh Chunder tries to smoothen out the cracks which appear in his theory of a war for hindu freedom. Shivaji raises several questions. First, how come Jaisingh, a Rajput, is the commander of non-hindus? In his answer Jaisingh narrates how the Rajputs fought till the very end to retain their independence. But once they were defeated they became bound by word to defend the interests of the Mughals. Rajputs are not ones who go back on their word. Then, Shivaji puts a supplementary question, how come Jaswant Singh refused to fight against hindus? Jaisingh opines that Jaswant Singh's actions were not of true Rajput spirit. It would have been understandable if he had declared his enmity with the Mughals and joined hands with the Marathas in the fight for hindu freedom. To the question whether it is wrong to fight for the redemption of the hindu faith and to help hindu brethren in the task, Jaisingh answers that it is unshatriya like to be treacherous. Death in the battle field is a fortune for a shatriya. Would death in the battle help the cause for independence? To this Jaisingh replies that only adherence to truth can redeem hinduism, the blood of the brave will sprout the spirit of freedom. After this Jaisingh makes two important statements. First, he prophesies the doom of the Mughal empire and the re-emergence of hindu power which shall spread from Maharashtra to the entire 'bharatbarsa'. Second, he advises Shivaji not to teach his troops to loot and plunder and not to use cunning in warfare. The second is Romesh Chunder's attempt to redeem Shivaji in terms of an Anglo-Saxon ethic of gentlemanly warfare which his colonial education had taught him to value. Little did he know the importance of loot and plunder to the Maratha economy. Thus ends, Romesh Chunder's vision of a summit meeting of two greatest hindu politicians of their times. Though Shivaji the great hope of hindu reawakening surrenders to the muslims, it is asserted that ultimately the tables would turn. Romesh Chunder desperately tries to grapple with his scheme and historical evidence - a major give away - a faultline in the text.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to Romesh Chunder's treatment of gender in the novel. The point of our interest is the final chapter (p.246-49). Here for the first time after many years Raghunath meets his sister Lakshmi. But not for long. Lakshmi's husband Chand Rao is convicted for treachery (simultaneously absolving Raghunath from being suspected for the same crime) and is executed. Romesh Chunder focusses on Lakshmi -

'Who can describe the pain a Hindu woman feels at death of her Lord?. Lakshmi decides to commit *sati*. She reasons with her brother, 'For men there are many ways in which they can keep themselves occupied, many things to go after; but what is there for a woman? Today I have lost the centre of my existence..., please allow your Lakshmi to perform a woman's duties. Romesh Chunder celebrates in the final scene:

Gradually Lakshmi ascended the pyre, sat at the feet of her husband, lifted his feet with utmost respect on to her hands. She closed her eyes. It seemed that at that very instance Lakshmi's soul entered heaven.

The pyre was lit... the tongues of fire encircled Lakshmi's holy body, and soon gathering strength climbed above her head towards the night sky with tremendous sound. Not a limb of Lakshmi's moved, not a single hair wavered.

Could the text have been more regressive?

CHAPTER 4

DEFEATED, BUT NOT DISHONOURED

ROMESH CHUNDER DUTT'S *RAJPUT JIBAN SANDHA*

When Romesh Chunder Dutt took to writing his fourth and final historical novel in Bangla a year after *Maharashtra Jiban Prabhat* his search for instances of patriotism and resistance to 'foreign' dominance led him northwards towards Rajputana - the land of the Rajputs.¹ This time his source was James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan* (1829-32). Of the Rajput states covered in Tod's mammoth work over a fourth was devoted to the 'Annals of Mewar'. Tod's affection for Mewar was followed by Romesh Chunder and he chose to situate his story in the reign of Maharana Pratapsingh (1572-1597). The adversary from the Mughal side is Emperor Akbar. There are, however, two fundamental differences between the stories of *Jiban Prabhat* and *Rajput Jiban Sandha* (Dusk of the Rajputs, 1879). First, as is evident from the title, there is a diametric opposition between the moods in which Romesh Chunder has cast the two novels. While *Jiban Prabhat* capsulates hope and resurgence *Jiban Sandha* narrates a losing battle, a heroic strife against all adversity. The second distinction, however, is determined by Romesh Chunder's choice of material. While *Jiban Prabhat* celebrates a unity (no matter the historicity of such 'unity') of the anti-Mughal

¹ Rajasthan by no means is the sole abode of the Rajputs. Both in terms of percentage as well in absolute numbers several states outnumber Rajasthan in Rajput population even today. Yet in the popular conception Rajasthan continues to be identified with Rajputs and Rajput ethos. See Dereck O. Lodrick 'Rajasthan as a Region: Myth or Reality?' in the Karine Schomer. et al eds. *The Idea of Rajasthan: Exploration in Regional, Identity*, Vol.1, New Delhi, Manohar, 1994, 1-44.

forces, *Jiban Sandha* presents a disunited face. In fact, other than the battle of Haldighat the remaining instances of military prowess and gutsy sabre-rattling is found in conflicts caused by inter-Rajput rivalry. Also, in *Jiban Sandha* the counterfactual figure of bravery is the young Tejsingh who is involved in a traditional rivalry between the Rathore and Chandawat sub-clans. The primary object of interest is not the capture of territory or forts by the political overlord but the recovery of the Surjamahal fort from the clutches of the Chandawat chieftain Durjoysingh by Rathore Tejsingh. Unlike Raghunath, Tejsingh does not display total commitment towards the battle of Haldighat and other struggles between the forces of Mewar and the Mughals. In fact they are presented as a deterrent to his objective of recapturing the Surjamahal fort.

Other than the differences in the stories there is also an important distinction in the nature of source material and the relation between the source material and the novel. Tod's work is based entirely upon bardic and oral accounts of Rana Pratap's saga. Moreover, these bardic accounts are mostly those which emanate from Mewar, which were aimed at glorifying Mewar's stubborn resistance against the Mughals in contrast with the submission of other Rajput states. They especially claim a superior position for Mewar among the Rajput states in the phase following the Mughal decline. Later research has questioned the historicity of many of the episodes described in Tod's account. Also, it needs to be noted that since the publication of Tod's *Annals* it has been regarded as a primary source for Rajput history by the descendants of all Rajput states, notwithstanding the pervasive inaccuracies.² Dutt chooses to remain almost completely faithful to Tod's account as far as the figure of Rana Pratap is concerned but his story weighs heavily on counterfactual elements - the main interest being the strife between Tejsingh and Durjoysingh. It is important to stress here that Romesh Chunder cannot be held responsible for the historical inaccuracies as he had to accept Tod's account for want of better research. But for us it is necessary to study the extent of inaccuracies in these accounts, which have been mythified in later narratives even after further research has questioned their historicity. Figuring out the historicity question will enable us to demarcate precisely where history ends and where myth begins.

² Frances H. Taft 'Honour and Alliance: Reconsidering Mughal-Rajput Marriages' in Schomer op. cit., 233.

The story begins in 1576 at the time when Rana Pratap is organising his forces and those of his clansmen or *bhai'bant* to face the imminent attack by the Mughal forces led by Prince Salim and the Rajput commander Raja Manshingh. Rana Pratap works out a strategy such that the two armies meet at Haldighat, a mountain pass which is not conducive for the heavy artillery of the Mughals. The two armies engage in heavy combat, with the Rajput bravery taking on a vastly superior Mughal army. Pratap is surrounded by the enemy while attacking Salim. He is rescued and carried away to safety by his horse Chetak. Though defeated Pratap does not give up and despite fast depleting strength he receives steadfast assistance from the Bhils - a hill tribe of the Aravalis. In later years Pratap recaptures a considerable portion of his territory but complete victory eludes him. He and his family spend the entire time in utter misery in the caves of the Bhils constantly in danger of captivity. At a point of time in utter frustration with this kind of life he writes to Akbar seeking an end to the strife. But a timely intervention by Prithwiraj, a poet from Bikaner at Akbar's court, in the form of a poem lamenting the loss of the final hope of the Hindus, reinvigorates Pratap's resolve to take on the Mughals. The strife continues till Pratap's death.³ There is no confirmation of this letter. The novel ends with the final chapter narrating the events after the death of Rana Pratap when Pratap's son Rana Amarsingh submits to emperor Jahangir in 1613. The narration has a tone of lament:

³ Dutt's rendering of the poem in Bangla is almost an exact translation of Tod's account - "The hopes of the Hindu rest on the Hindu; yet the Rana forsakes them. But for Pertap, all would be placed on the same level by Akber; for our chiefs have lost their valour and our females their honour. Akber is the broker in the market of our race: all has he purchased but the son of Oodoh [Udaysingh]; he is beyond his price. What true Rajpoot would part with honour for nine days (*Noroza*); yet how many have bartered it away? Will Ceetore come to this market, when all have disposed of the chief article of the Khetri? Though Putto [Pratap] has squandered away wealth, yet his treasure has he preserved. Despair has driven many to this mart, to witness their dishonour: from such infamy the descendant of Hamir alone has been preserved. The world asks, whence the concealed aid of Pertap? None but the soul of manliness and his sword: with it, well has he maintained the Khetri's pride. This broker in the market of men will one day be overreached; he cannot live for ever: then will our race come to Pertap, for the seed of the Rajpoot to sow in our desolate lands. To him look for its preservation, that its party may again become resplendent." James Tod *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or, the Central and Western Rajpoot States of India*, Vol.1, New Delhi, K.M.V. Publishers, 1971, 273 (Henceforth *Annals*).

[Amarsingh] said - the son of Pratapsingh had given his word to his father that he would not reign under the suzerainty of the Mughals. I have not forgotten that promise. From today my son will be king. I am old and will proceed to exile.

That day Amarsingh forsook the capital Udaipur and started living in Nachauki. After this he lived for five more years, but never entered the capital again, nor did he take-up the royal sceptre.⁴

Romesh Chunder displays his adherence to the *Annals* by quoting a selection of four paragraphs from Tod's account of Rana Pratap in the notes to his final chapter. These selections are not descriptions of events but laudatory passages glorifying 'Pratap's heroism, fighting the Mughals against all odds despite the 'princes of Mewar, Amber, Bikaner and even Boondi... even his own brother Sagarji' allying with Akbar and upholding 'despotism'. Tod compares the Rana with the famous heroes of European history - 'Had Mewar possessed her Thucydides or her Xenophon, neither the wars of the Peloponnesus nor the retreat of the "Ten Thousand" would have yielded more diversified incidents for the historic muse, than the deeds of this brilliant reign amid the many vicissitudes of Mewar.... There is not a pass in the alpine Aravali that is not sanctified by some deed of Pertap, - some brilliant victory or oftener, more made glorious of defeat, Huldighat is the Thermopylae of Mewar; the field of Deweir her Marathon' (p.324-25n). The reason for quoting these passages is the resonance between Tod and Romesh Chunder's feelings about Rana Pratap as well as Mewar's tradition of non-submission to the Muslim rulers of Delhi and Agra. After having recounted the tales of repeated attacks by external forces on Mewar Tod celebrates the treaty of 1817 with the British which 'set them free'. This treaty 'placed the power of Britain in the East on an expurgable position, and rescued the Rajputs from a progressing destruction.... in a few weeks all Rajpootana was united to Britain by compacts of one uniform character; ensuring to them external protection with internal independence, as the price of acknowledged supremacy, and a portion of revenue

⁴ Romesh Chunder Dutt *Rajput Jiban Sandha* in Jogesh Chandra Bagal ed. *Ramesh Rachanabali*, Calcutta, Sahitya Samsad, 1990 250-336, 326. All translations of this text are mine.

to the protecting government'.⁵ Tod ends his account of Mewar with the hope that the years of oppression that have swept the land will be held in remembrance by the protecting power and that neither petulance nor indolence will lessen the benevolence which restored life to Mewar, or mar the picture of comparative happiness it created'.⁶ The independence of the Rajputs is best ensured, therefore, through their dependence on British 'protection'. He repeated this sentiment in his Dedication of the *Annals* to George IV:

The Rajpoot princes, happily rescued, by the triumph of the British arms, from the yoke of lawless oppression, are now the most remote tributaries to your Majesty's extensive, empire; and their admirer and annalist may, perhaps, be permitted to hope, that the signs of this ancient and interesting race for the restoration of their former independence, which would suit our wisest policy to grant, may be deemed not undeserving your Majesty's regard.⁷

In the days of Romesh Chunder, the English educated Indian intellectuals generally accepted loyalty to the crown. Romesh Chunder himself described the British empire to be a 'superb institution'. If Romesh Chunder did criticise various policies of the government and offered radical suggestions, he did so with a reformist agenda. He took care to mention that his object was not to subvert British rule in India.⁸ No doubt Romesh Chunder had a lot in common with Tod and included in his novel the account of Rana Pratap from the *Annals* almost entirely.

In one of the incidents for which Romesh Chunder follows Tod's narration almost verbatim, is a now famous exchange between Rana Pratap and Raja Mansingh. Though this exchange occurred in 1573, much before the battle of Haldighat, it is presented before the reader in a flashback where Mansingh narrates the incident to Prince Salim on the eve of the battle of Haldighat - 'I have told this to your father as well, I will tell you too about it, please listen' (p.268-69). The Raja was paying a visit to the Rana on his way back from

⁵ *Annals* i, 373-74.

⁶ *Annals* i, 400.

⁷ *Annals* i, xi.

⁸ R.C. Dutt *Romesh Chunder Dutt*, New Delhi, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1968, 28.

Sholapur in Gujarat.⁹ A feast was arranged in the honour of Mansingh on the banks of the Udaisagar lake but the Rana himself was absent. Instead his son Amarsingh played the host. On Mansingh's enquiry Amarsingh explained that his father was absent due to a headache. But Mansingh with all his worldly experience, did not fail to see the real reason for the Rana's absence. He insisted on Pratap's presence. At this Pratap sent a message that 'The Rana cannot share a meal with a Rajput who has given his daughter in marriage to a Turk; who shares his meals with Turks' (p.269). At such insult Mansingh departed leaving his meal unfinished with a promise to humble Pratap's pride. Romesh Chunder's account of the incident ends here. But Tod's account based on bardic narratives tells us that after Mansingh's departure the ground where the feast was spread was deemed impure, it was dug up and purified with the water of the Ganga; all witnesses of the incident bathed and changed their clothes to clear themselves of the impurity of Mansingh's presence.¹⁰ Romesh Chunder's leaving out this part of the story can be attributed to narrative need. If Mansingh is the narrator of the story he need not know what happened at the site of the feast after his departure. G.N. Sharma and Satish Chandra, however question the historicity of this account. According to them the importance of the incident lies only in the Rana Pratap's denial to attend Akbar's court in acknowledgement of the latter's sovereignty. He attributes the other details in bardic literature to the imagination of a later period.¹¹

The importance of this version of the meeting between the two Rajput Chiefs is not merely that it serves as a touchstone to test the historicity of Tod and Romesh

⁹ While Tod and Dutt present this incident as a courtesy visit later historians have pointed out that this visit was in accordance with the desires of Akbar. Akbar wanted to utilise Mansingh's traditionally cordial relations with the Sisodias (the ruling clan of Mewar to which Rana Pratap belonged) to try a hand at a diplomatic way to get the Rana to accept the Mughal emperor as the sovereign. For a discussion on this meeting see 'An anecdote relating to the supposed outbreak of open hostilities between Rana Pratap and Akbar' in G.N. Sharma *Rajasthan Studies*, Agra, Lakshmi Narain Agarwal, 1970, 63-67.

¹⁰ *Annals* i, 268-69. Tod calls it 'an anecdote illustrative of the settled repugance of this noble family [Mewar] to sully the purity of its blood.... its result had a material influence on its subsequent condition'.

Chunder's account. The fact that this account has grown to be of iconic importance each time the history of Rana Pratap is recounted is a pointer to its nodal importance in understanding the tensions and contradictions which underlay the Mughal-Rajput relations. The accusation which Rana Pratap makes against Mansingh is not a matter of bilateral importance. It is a question of honour – the Rajput honour. Rajput honour, as it is defined by the Mewar house had been violated by Mansingh and his household by the instance of the latter's sister being given in marriage to the Mughal emperor - a Turk. More precisely it was a violation of hindu honour to engage in matrimonial relations with a muslim - an act which had rendered Mansingh impure, unworthy of any civil relations, like the sharing of a meal. What goes unstated is the corollary that matrimonial relations between Rajput family and the Mughals implies the acceptance of Mughal suzerainty by the particular Rajput state. Abhorrence of such marriages on the part of the Mewar household is political in nature. The muslims, therefore, were the cause for conflict. The contradiction between the Rajputs and the Mughals is the primary contradiction. From the primary contradiction arose the secondary contradiction, that between those Rajput families who had submitted to the Mughals and the state of Mewar which continued to be defiant before repeated attempts by a powerful Mughal authority to crush its independence. In the event of other Rajput families defecting to the Mughal camp, Mewar and its leader continued to be the standard-bearer of ideal Rajput behaviour and racial purity. Here lies the faultline of the novel *Rajput Jiban Sandha*. The epicentre of the faultline is the same as that in *Jiban Prabhat* - the acceptance of Mughal overlordship by many Rajput households. Unlike in *Jiban Prabhat* where the Rajputs were only a third party, a hindu-muslim conflict led on either side by the Marathas and the Mughals, in *Jiban Sandha* they are the interested party. In *Jiban Prabhat* history allowed Romesh Chunder to avoid any instance of hindu-hindu conflict, in *Jiban Sandha* it becomes unavoidable - Raja Mansingh is the commander of the Mughal forces. A code similar to the one delivered by goddess Bhabani in *Jiban Prabhat* is delivered in *Jiban Sandha* as well. When Tejsingh visits the abode of Charanidebi at Nahara Mogro (Tiger Mount) to seek permission for an expedition to the capture Surjamahal fort from

¹¹ G.N. Sharma op. cit., 67; Satish Chandra *Medieval India: From Sultanat to the Mughals, Part Two, Mughal Empire (1526-1748)*, New Delhi, Har Anand, 1999, 119.

Durjoysingh, the priestess enforces the goddess' objection and delivers the code of conduct - 'It is not the tradition of Rajasthan to be engaged in domestic feud when an external threat is at the door' (p.277). Following this code Romesh Chunder declares:

There is no conflict like an inter-clan conflict. Because of inter-clan conflict Rajput chief Mansingh is a sworn enemy of Rajput chief Pratapsingh (p.267).

The Code which should govern the anti-muslim polity is breached by all but one Rajput family. But Romesh Chunder's novel presents an example of ideal Rajput behaviour. Although Rathore Tejsingh nurtures a grudge from his boyhood against Durjoysingh, the Chandawat chief, he suspends all hostilities against his adversary till the Mughals are warded off Mewar. Both the Rathores and the Chandawats belong to the Sisodia clan, the ruling clan of Mewar. The rivalry does not cease, only a superior rivalry takes precedence. It takes the shape of competitive valour between the two warriors. During the hostilities with the Mughals the royal family takes refuge in Surjamahal fort and as luck would have it Durjoysingh and Tejsingh get joint responsibility to defend it against the enemy.

Both Tejsingh and Durjoysingh were extraordinarily brave, but now each started displaying superior valour than the other. Wherever danger was most acute, wherever the enemy attacked in infinite numbers, both Tejsingh and Durjoysingh vied with each other to be the first to reach the spot, because Rathore was not inferior to Chandawat, and Chandawat was not inferior to Rathore.... Having decimated the enemy Chandawat and Rathore would enter the fort together, the tired Tejsingh and Durjoysingh would take position at the same place on the ramparts and satisfy their hunger and thirst with a little roti and unclean water. Then when the eastern sky reddened, the two arch enemies would sleep soundly like brothers.

Romesh Chunder locates no anomaly in the behaviour of the two Rajputs. He explains it as an application of the Rajput code of chivalry.

Durjoysingh allowed Tejsingh and his fellow Rathores to enter Surjamahal without any hesitation, for Tejsingh being a Rajput would not try to misuse the opportunity. Tejsingh started living with a handful of his forces among in the enemy camp, for Durjoysingh being a Rajput would never cause harm to Tejsingh during a battle with the external enemy (p.300-01).

Despite the brave resistance put up by the Rajputs, Surjamahal falls into enemy hands. Later when Akbar gets involved in suppressing rebellions in Bengal and Bihar the Mewar

forces capitalises on the opportunity to regain lost ground including Surjamahal. Here Romesh Chunder arranges the events such that chance has it that it is Tejsingh who is the first to enter the fort followed by the Chandawats. Tejsingh then apologises to Durjoysingh for having entered the fort without this permission and offeres to return the fort to his adversary. Durjoysingh refuses to accept it saying that he would not receive any 'charity'. At this point Tejsingh answers:

I have entered the fort during royal service. If I occupy the fort it will count as treachery. Rathore does not know treachery. The battle with the foreigners is not yet over. Till it ends, war between us is impossible. When the war with the foreigners cease, Rathore will not be late in returning to Surjamahal (p.311-12).¹²

Throughout the novel Romesh Chunder acquaints the reader with various aspects of the Rajput code of chivalry - they are loyal to the Rana, they are true to their word and they would rather face death than surrender to the infidels or the muslims. According to the code Tejsingh rescues Durjoysingh from the attack of a wild boar, but following the code he refuses to share food with Durjoysingh who has violated the code. Later when questioned by the priestess at Nahara Mogro Tejsingh explains that it was not unRajputlike of Durjoysingh to have captured Surjamahal from his (Tejsingh's) father Tilaksingh. But Durjoysingh 'does not know *rajdharm*, after the death of my father he snatched the fort from his widow. Even against my mother he had failed in direct combat and entered the fort like a thief' (p.274). According to Romesh Chunder's treatment, therefore, the primary goal of military expeditions is not material or political gains but a tussle over honour. The unprincipled enemy is motivated to humiliate the opponent the latter piously defends the chalice of his honour. In fact in the final combat between the two, where the Rathores regain control over Surjamahal, Durjoysingh is described as fighting like a *rakshas* (demon) and Tejsingh with the force of the gods. According to this code, even at the nadir of his reign Rana Pratap addresses his men:

¹² I can't help but drawing a comparison between Tejsingh's behaviour and the practice of fair play in a soccer match - when a player is down on the turf injured, the player from the opposition in possession of the ball shoots it out of the field to allow play to stop for treatment. Treatment over, the injured player's team returns the ball to its opponent to repay a good turn.

O brave men! Even with all the impiety around Pratapsingh will maintain Rajput piety. If there is no place for us in Mewar, we shall go to the desert, go to other lands, but I will not allow the Sisodia clan to be tarnished (p.310).

The struggle with the Mughals is, therefore, at an ideological plane. This ideological struggle grades the various actors in the novel. The Mughals are the enemies of the first order; Mansingh and his like who despite being Rajputs have submitted to the Mughals and established matrimonial relations with them, thus violating the ideal Code of Conduct, are enemies of the second order; Durjoesingh who has violated the code of chivalry is an enemy of the third order.

The ideological edge which Romesh Chunder presents is not between two political power centres - the Rajputs and the Mughals - but between two civilisations the hindus and the muslims. On the eve of the battle of Haldighat when a bard sings of Rana Sanga's exploits, he dwells on the possibility:

Would Arjabarta be once again united as it was under Prithwiraj? But alas! Storm clouds had been gathering to the west of *Bharatbarsa*. The intruder Babar and his Mughul army clouded *Bharatbarsa*... Will ever a Hindu king grace the throne of Prithwiraj? (p.263)

Once again, as in *Jiban Prabhat*, Romesh Chunder presents his narrative in the framework of a clash of civilisations. The hindus are the original inhabitants of Arjabarta - a land which by its very name is the homeland of and is reserved for the Arjas or the hindus. The muslims are the 'intruders' and have usurped the throne of the hindus. It is the desire of every hindu who is true to his religion to strive for the political independence of his faith from the clutches of the *mlechhas* or the infidels.¹³

In the novel the Mughals are addressed variously as *mlechha*, *jaban*, Turk and mussalmans - the terms being used interchangeably. The very first chapter identifies the Rajput states of Marwar, Amber, Bikaner and Bundi - all except Mewar - as having joined hands with the *mlechhas* but proclaim that 'the Rana will surely be victorious' (p.251). While

¹³ For a discussion of the political nature of Dutt's treatment of the hindu-muslim conflict see chapter two.

describing the battle of Haldighat Romesh Chunder presents it as a religious strife – ‘seeing Pratapsingh's extraordinary courage the hindus remembered Arjun, the Mussalmans for a moment readied to say their last prayers' (p.270). In the tremendous battle for the control of the Bhingarh fort the Rajput forces led by the young Chandansingh is described re-entering the fort after a phase of fighting - 'their eyes were red, their bodies covered with blood, it seemed from their looks as if having been defeated by some divine will in a battle with the *asuras* (devils) the *debatas* (gods) were returning slowly to their abode (p.303). In battle Romesh Chunder presents a contrast of numbers between the Rajput hindu army and the Mughal muslim army - the latter far outnumbered the former. But the Rajputs are brave. At Haldighat - 'Chauhan, Rathore, Jhala, Chandawat, Jagawat, warriors of all clans advance on the enemy with great fury.... But against the infinite numbers of Dilli what could this bravery achieve?' (p.269-70). Again at Bhingarh 'The Rajputs were extremely few in number but extraordinarily brave.... The Mughals have a bigger army, but would the Rajput surrender to the infidels' (p.303). In fact, this has been one of the historiographic strategies used by hindu communalist historians in writing the history of alien muslim dominance over the hindus - the hindus lost because of disunity. Individually Indian, (i.e. hindu) rulers were weak - collectively they would have been invincible. Harbans Mukhiya, however, contests this assumption and asserts that the Indian armies vastly outnumbered those of the Turks. The primary reason for their defeat was inferior military organisation and weaponry of the Indians.¹⁴ Romesh Chunder's attack on muslim civilisation also takes on the cultural front. He invites the reader:

Reader! On the eve of the battle come let us take a look at the Moghul camp.... Both Mansingh and Salim are still in the days of their youth, both are enthused by youthful interests. But Salim is the son of the emperor, therefore, enjoyed merry making and opulence. Never before had such an opulent ruler as him ascended the throne of Delhi.... Later this merrymaking grew to such proportions that Nurjahan started ruling the empire, and Emperor Jahangir spent his time with friends, nobles, women and wine. Mansingh was extraordinarily wise, extremely determined and efficient, and an excellent warrior. (p.267)

¹⁴ Harbans Mukhiya *Perspectives on Medieval India*, Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1993, 36 and 44n.

Salim, Jahangir in his youth, conforms to the picture of the 'Oriental despot' which Tod claimed had plagued the Rajputs. Even though Mansingh has allied with the muslim side, he is far superior in character - he is essentially a hindu but in the wrong position. By joining the muslims Mansingh has failed in his sacred duty of protecting hindu interests. The question is whose interest was Mansingh protecting and why? In fact why did all Rajput families forsake their religio-political duties by allying with the 'infidels' and establishing matrimonial relations with them? Was Mewar then the only true hindu kingdom of Rajasthan and Rana Pratap its last but brightest crusader?

To understand the dynamics underlying the apparent tales of chivalry and honour we need to assess the reasons which made Rajasthan an area of political importance for the Mughal empire. As a look at the map of Mughal India would clearly show, Rajasthan was a territory of both logistic and political importance. It lay in the route of communication between the fertile and productive Gangetic plains and the sea ports on the west - of the Indian subcontinent. Also, being adjacent to the vast central Indian state of Malwa, control of Rajasthan became the key to the control of Gujarat and other parts of peninsular India.¹⁵ Being situated right at the door of the Mughal capital Agra, instability in the region was always fraught with the danger of far reaching consequences. In fact, the triangle of Rajasthan, Malwa, and Delhi-Agra formed the locale for many a radical flux in political alliances. We would do well to remind ourselves that Babar was invited by Rana Pratap's grandfather Rana Sanga to invade Delhi and dislodge the Lodhis. Sanga's main aim was to destabilise the Lodhi rule and capitalise on it. But once Babar proved too strong Sanga changed plans and made efforts to gather a coalition - which included many Afghans - against Babar. Sanga was, of course, defeated by Babar at Khanwa in 1527.¹⁶ The uniqueness of the Rajputs from other states lay in their being a distinct cultural group with their own history, myths and customs but with a polity which saw a great degree of internal conflict and competition. In pre-modern Rajasthan the nature of the economy and administration gave rise to a society where power and authority were distributed among various individuals arranged in various rungs of the power strata. The loyalties of

¹⁵ Satish Chandra *Mughal Religious Policies, the Rajputs and the Deccan*, New Delhi, Vikas Publishing House, 1993, 2.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

individuals were channelised through numerous primary and secondary groups. These loyalties were subject to the influence of competing norms and constant inter-clan rivalry.¹⁷ On numerous occasions rival Rajput states supported an external power like the Khalji rulers of Malwa against another Rajput state. Clearly the Rajputs were greatly divided internally and rarely formed a united front against external forces.¹⁸

The rift among the Rajputs made it easier for Akbar to force them to submit but the relative ease with which most of the Rajput-Mughal alliances were reached is a pointer to their mutually beneficial character. Akbar tried to increase the stability and influence of the Mughal empire, which was then still in its formative stages by co-opting the local political elite into his nobility. In fact, the Rajputs proved to be the bravest and most loyal warriors of the Mughal empire and played an extremely important role in the expansion and consolidation of the empire. On the other hand, for the Rajput rajas the Mughal suzerainty was a source of stability in the local formations of status and hierarchy. Though they had to obey the *farmans* of the Mughal emperor the rajas continued to enjoy a great degree of autonomy and were able to use the sanction of the emperor to enforce their authority and command the allegiance of their subordinates. The Mughal paramountcy also meant that the Rajputs could not raid each other's territories or resort to war to settle disputes. Even questions of succession were arbitrated by the emperor. The ensuing stability enabled the Rajput rulers to serve the Mughal empire far from their homes and hold important administrative posts. The Mughals also awarded *jagirs* outside Rajasthan to those Rajputs who accepted their paramountcy, thus adding to the latter's source of revenue.¹⁹ Nowadays views of Rajput-Mughal relations much importance is paid to religious preferences of the Mughal ruler. Thus, the success of Akbar's Rajput policy is attributed to his religious liberalism. While Akbar's promotion of the equality of all religions was instrumental in creating an atmosphere of tolerance in his court, which

¹⁷ Norman P. Ziegler 'Some Notes on Rajput Loyalties During the Mughal Period' in Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subramaniam eds. *The Mughal State: 1526-1750*, Delhi, Oxford UP, 1995, 168-210, 169-72.

¹⁸ Satish Chandra op.cit., 3.

¹⁹ Satish Chandra *Medieval India* ii, 117-19.

witnessed a steady increase in the influence of the Rajputs at the cost of the Turanis, the lasting incentive for the Rajput chiefs to enter into the alliance in first place and its continuance was not the religious predilections of the emperor but political considerations.²⁰

Perhaps the most discussed aspect of Rajput-Mughal alliances is the role of marriage of Rajput princesses to the Mughal royalty - a point of interest in our study of *Jiban Sandha*. These were marriages not of two individuals, or even of two families but of two political heads. By giving a daughter in marriage to the Mughal emperor a Rajput chief would confirm his submission and strengthen the alliance. Such marriages were, however, nothing new for the Rajputs nor to the tradition of royal houses in the Indian sub-continent. Satish Chandra draws our attention to the Allahabad pillar inscription of Samudragupta (5th century A.D.) which clearly mentions that all subordinate rajas were required to send a daughter to the imperial household'. There are ample instances of marriages between hindu and muslim ruling houses much before the Mughals.²¹ Among the Rajput ruling families, too, marriages were modes of establishing an alliance. The Marwari term for both betrothal and alliance is *sagai*.²² In many occasions after the end of hostilities two Rajput families would confirm peace by a marriage. Also, marriage ties were used to access land belonging to another family.²³ In establishing matrimonial relations with the Rajputs, with aim to stabilising alliances, Akbar was only following a long observed norm. According to 17th century historian Fakhruddin Bhakkari, before his death Humayun had advised Akbar that 'this *qaum* (the Rajputs) should be reared up because they are not given to transgression and disobedience but only obedience and service'.²⁴

One of the prominent households that managed to resist Akbar's diplomacy, military expeditions and matrimonial alliances was Mewar. Two crucial reasons could be

²⁰ Satish Chandra *Mughal Religious Policies*, 1 and 6.

²¹ Satish Chandra *Medieval India* ii, 112-13.

²² Ziegler op. cit., 183.

²³ Ibid., 192.

²⁴ Quoted in Satish Chandra op. cit., 111.

cited for this. Firstly, Akbar insisted on personal submission and presence of the Rana at his court. In a truce mission by Rana Bhagwant Das, Rana Pratap put on a robe sent by Akbar and his son Amarsingh visited the Mughal court. But insistence on personal submission was not acceptable to the Rana. This had been the case with the rulers of Kashmir and Sindh as well.²⁵ It may be noted here that it was only when Emperor Jahangir dropped the insistence on personal attendance and service at the Mughal court that Rana Amarsingh finally submitted to the Mughals. The second reason for Mewar's long standing defense of its independence was its terrain. The heavily wooded Aravalis muted the strength of the Mughal army which lay in its heavy artillery power and cavalry. It prolonged the struggle for the submission of Mewar. Though Rana Pratap's pride has been cited as a reason for his refusal of personal submission, historians have argued that Akbar did not insist on establishing matrimonial relations with Mewar. Satish Chandra suggests that marriage alliances were not forced upon the Rajputs and if ever there was any force it was the force of circumstances - 'a realisation on the part of the rajas of the benefits these marriages might confer to them'. He quotes Abul Fazl saying that the rajas who entered into such alliances were considered to be more distinguished among the zamindars.²⁶ It was honour and not dishonour which induced the Rajputs to enter into marriage relations with the Mughals - at least as long as such alliances added to their authority. With the decline of the Mughal power and the disappearance of the overarching sanction conferred by such alliances there was a shift in view. There were two reactions - one which sought to explain the Rajput submission as an unavoidable necessity and another which looked upon it as degrading. It is of no surprise that the first view is expressed in the Jodhpur chronicles and the second in those of Mewar.²⁷ It was the bardic tales of Mewar which formed the source for Tod and in turn for Romesh Chunder.

Adherence to Tod also leads Romesh Chunder to frame his narrative in the paradigm of a civilisational conflict between the 'original inhabitant' hindus and 'intruder'

²⁵ Ibid., 120-22.

²⁶ Ibid., 114.

²⁷ Taft op. cit., 230.

muslims. But Rana Pratap's strife with the Mughals was hardly a hindu-muslim conflict. Not only was Raja Mansingh at the head of the Mughal or 'muslim' forces, even Rana Pratap was not alone. Though Pratap drew his contingents from his subordinates, a fact well acknowledged in *Jiban Sandha*, he was also helped in the battle of Haldighat by an Afghan contingent led by Hakim Sur. The point is not to charge Romesh Chunder with falsification of history, as his missing out on historical details is caused by inadequacy of available research. What I seek to assert is Romesh Chunder's exercise of an ideological choice to select the tale of Rana Pratap for his story and not any portion from the annals of Marwar or Bikaner or any of the other Rajput states included in Tod's *Annals*. In their campaigns for the Mughal empire the Rajputs who had cast their lot with the Mughals also fought bravely. But that bravery is not worth recounting as it was bravery on the wrong side of the civilisational divide. Bravery is, however, not the focus of attention - hindu assertion is.

Even though Romesh Chunder's tale does not mention the role of Hakim Sur in Rana Pratap's struggle, one contribution which he does mention is that of the Bhils. Following from the *Annals*, Romesh Chunder describes the Bhils as the original inhabitants of Rajasthan. They were displaced from the plains by the Rajputs and pushed into the interior mountains of the Aravali and Vindychal.²⁸ They continued to live by the proceeds of the raids on the settled population of the plains. The Mewar household managed to win over the Bhils and it was mandatory for a Bhil sardar to mark with his own blood the forehead of a Rajput chief during the latter's investiture ceremony. The Bhils turned out to be the most faithful warriors in the service of the Mewar house. In fact the Bhils provided shelter and protected the Rana and his family at times of great adversity during the Mughal attacks (p.278-80). The picture of the Bhils which Romesh Chunder presents is more or less in agreement with the accounts of the modern historians, although today we know more about the socio-economic arrangements which were instrumental to the stability of the Mewar-Bhil partnership. However, there is one detail in Romesh Chunder's picture which speaks about his imagination of what the Bhils are. He constantly refers to them as

²⁸ Isn't it curious that Dutt does not attribute any 'insider-outsider' framework to the displacement of the Bhils by the Rajputs?

an 'uncivilised' people. In chapter thirteen he describes a scene inside a cave dwelling of the Bhils where Tejsingh has taken shelter:

In the evening the Bhil women were busy with household chores. Their bodies are well built, naked or half-naked.... In each hut of the Bhil *pal* there burnt fires for cooking, around the fire in the open naked, barbaric Bhil children played. Far from the habitation of humans, deep inside the dense jungle of the mountain tops live these marauders! How unbelievable! Civilised people abhor them, civilised people have snatched their fertile lands, away from them the Bhils have had their revenge. Like ferocious birds time and again they have descended to the plains, the wealth looted from civilised people have fed Bhil children.... lit by the fire the crooked faces and limbs of the Bhils seem even more crooked. (p.281-82)

The dehumanization of the Bhils are an imaginative creation of a consciousness which looks upon the vast tribal populations of India as uncivilised and unworthy of human qualities. The so called civilised population snatched their land and forced them into tribal pockets, into an insulated existence. The attitude of the civilised population towards the tribals can be equated to that of the colonisers towards the colonised - a racial superiority. Romesh Chunder, educated under the British system, has taken to applying the same categories on the Bhils, in his novel.

Romesh Chunder's narrative shows ample evidence of choice making, whereby the novelist chooses to highlight certain elements in history, leave out some elements, introduce some elements as counterfactuals and provide his own interpretation to the events of the past. As I have argued earlier the consideration for all intellection is the present. There are two instances of direct rendering of history without any hint of the interference of fiction. The first of these tells the reader about Pratap's reconquest of a vast portion of Mewar from the Mughals. This account is clearly demarcated from the fictional part. It begins - 'The result of the battle of Deoweer is written in history' and ends 'it is not necessary to recount history here. We shall concern ourselves with the forts which are essential to the novel (p.311). The second direct account is the final chapter. It tells the reader about the events which followed the death of Rana Pratap till the surrender of Rana Amarsingh to the Mughal emperor Jahangir. The first sentence of the chapter is - 'Pratapsingh died in 1517 A.D' (p.324). It has a ring of finality to it, marking the end of

Romesh Chunder's tale which is constructed around the life of Rana Pratap, and marks the beginning of a factual account. There are several instances in the novel where no such demarcation exists. The glorious past of the Ranas of Mewar, their bravery and sacrifices in defense of Mewar's independence are recounted in the form of bardic songs. In a strange way these are instances of historical literature within historical literature. In the world of the novel they recount the past to the characters. The bards' songs have a direct bearing on the current situation in the novel. Before the battle of Haldighat a bard sings of Rana Sanga and his strife against the rulers of Delhi which had the promise of once again uniting the entire *Bharatbarsa* after Prithwiraj. That promise was cut short by the 'intruder' Babar. The bard inspires the Rajput warriors:

Brave men, grasp your swords with your able hands, raise the sharp spears above your heads, with a war cry rush to the battlefield, expel the wind blown, weak Turks far away, fill the city of Chittor with cries of victory. The memories of this old man is not a mere dream, the glorious days of Mewar will certainly return. One day, like Sangramsingh [Rana Sanga] Pratapsingh will quit the mountains and forests and ascend the throne, like Sangramsingh the name of Pratapsingh too will reverberate till the doors of Delhi, till the sea coast, till the highest snow capped peaks of the Himalayas. (p.262)

Remembering the past is motivated to future action, strategies and hope - if it happened in the past it can be repeated in the future, the 'long dark night' can be undone.

An alternative use of bardic recounting of history is seen when Tejsingh, in the guise of a bard, enters the court of Durjoysingh. There he sings ostensibly about Pratapsingh and the fort of Chittor. He asks the rhetorical question - 'Whose is the fort? – not his²⁹ who has stolen the fort from a boy by killing a woman. It is his who having been ousted from the fort now resides in the hills (p.285-86). Only Durjoysingh is able to realise the implications of the song. This song is a replication of Romesh Chunder's novel. Tejsingh is a creation of Romesh Chunder's imagination and in the subplot of the novel he is a shadow of Rana Pratap. Like Pratap he has been ousted from his rightful possession, is

²⁹ The Bangla word for 'their' and 'his' is the same - '*tabar*'. This allows a greater ambiguity in Tejsingh's tale. He can at once refer to the plural Mughal forces, as well as the singular Durjoysingh.

currently residing in the mountains, lurking for an opportunity to strike back. Like Pratap, he has extremely cordial relations with the Bhils. Like Pratap he refuses to share a meal with a Rajput (here Durjoysingh) who has breached the code of chivalry. Through the character of Tejsingh and the subplot Romesh Chunder gives himself the space to imaginatively recreate the life and times of Rana Pratap without actually taking too much freedom with available history. In fact in the sub plot he also adds a Scottian romantic element in the relationship between Tejsingh and the Rajput girl Pushpa.

If the bards' objective is to undo the 'dark' present and revive the 'glorious past', so is Romesh Chunder's. But while in *Jiban Prabhat* he had narrated the tale of a winning struggle, in *Jiban Sandha* it is the tale of a losing one - going down fighting till the last drop of blood; the eve of a miserable night of foreign dominance. In *Jiban Prabhat* his recounting of Shivaji's exploits was not furnished by the knowledge of the disenchantment of the rival Maratha clans. In *Jiban Sandha* the disunity among the Rajput clans and the fact that some of them were siding with the enemy is visible only too clearly. Romesh Chunder is, therefore, unable to fashion any grand national upsurge of the Rajputs against the Mughals, unlike Shivaji's dream of a great hindu kingdom to replace the tyrannical Muslim rule in *Jiban Prabhat*. What we have then, is not an assertion of Rajput national independence but only local independence of Mewar. Even that does not come across forcefully in the text. Only once through the words of Pratap's minister Bhamashah is there a sign of loyalty towards Mewar. Bhamashah hands over to Pratap his entire life's earnings to rescue the Mewar army from a financial crisis, describing his action as a service of a son of Mewar for the protection of the motherland (p.311). At all other times warriors both Bhils and Rajputs, declare their allegiance to the Rana and not to Mewar.

Before ending the chapter I would like to draw attention to two interesting points. The first is a prediction. In the caverns of the mountains, Rana Pratap's queen asks the priestess of Nahara Mogro, 'Shall we ever reconquer Dilli? What is there in the far future of Hindoostan? Victory to the Turks, or victory to the Sisodias?' The priestess answers:

Only darkness after darkness. The Rajputs battle with the Turks for many years; there after the Rajputs battle with the Hindus of the south; and then, what do I

see! White waves advance one after another from the deep seas and flood Bharatbarsa. The eyes of this old woman are weak! She can see no more. (p.300)

A tone of lament pervades. The sadness is intensified by the incidence of a hindu-hindu conflict. The Marathas, in whom Romesh Chunder reposed much faith in *Jiban Prabhat* - where Shivaji tries to draw the Rajputs into an alliance for a united front against the Muslims - are themselves the attackers of Rajput territory. What needs to be noted further is the civilisational focus in the prediction. It is the Rajputs versus the Turks, the hindus of the north versus the hindus of the south, and finally the advent of the Europeans.

Lastly, a word or two about the description of events at the imminent fall of the Bhingarh fort. Led by the teenager Chandansingh the handful of Rajput forces fight valiantly against the sea of Mughals. When all hope of defending the fort is lost Chandansingh and his warriors are concerned about the fate of their mothers and wives after their death - 'After that will our mothers, sisters and wives become concubines to the infidels! Will Rajput women be objects of entertainment in Dilli!' Suddenly one among them utters the magic code of Rajput honour - "Death in battle for men, funeral pyre for women!' But they hesitate to spell the plan to their women folk. At last Chandansingh presents the helpless situation before his mother - 'We are not afraid of battle. We are scared about the honour of Rajput women'. His problem is solved by his mother:

Son! Were you afraid to say this? If Rajput men are brave enough to die, don't Rajput women know how to die? Go! Prepare for the battle, we too are ready.

The passage that follows encapsulates Romesh Chunder's customary celebration of *sati*:

Chandan's mother addressed the other women of the fort - Today we shall be *satis*, be true companions to our husbands, is there a cause for greater happiness for Rajput women? Let the *mlechha* Turks see, Rajput men are brave, and Rajput women *satis*.

A thousand women took bath by the first light of the morning, offered prayers to the Gods, and attired in silk gathered at the royal entrance. Young, adult, old, women of all ages gathered, together they began taking God's name in joy. Then? Then, according to the age old ritual of the Rajputs a thousand women laden with jewellery climbed the pyre with jubilation. When defeat, dishonour, and threat to *dharm*a becomes inevitable, Rajput women protect their *satihood* in this manner. (p.304)

CHAPTER 5

FROM GENTLE FOE TO PERNICIOUS FOREIGNER A STUDY OF SHORTER LITERATURE

As I have argued earlier, an interest in history, or in the past, does not imply a penchant for historicity. For the readership which was hungry for the past, history was not required to be the main ingredient of the dish - a flavoring and a garnishing with history would do. Needless to say this was the way the writers perceived their task as well, with history forming the canvas the author could have the freedom to choose the colours of his brush strokes. The lasting criterion being that the picture should be conducive to the present realities, the author could choose his/her degree of adherence to the truth - which of course, was limited by the available research. It was, therefore, not obligatory for the author to consult works of history or works which make "truth claims". The author unlike a historian, need not 'find' his/her story, (s)he has the freedom to 'invent' them. In the previous two chapters we had devoted our attention to works of literature where the source books were works of history - James Grant Duff's *History of the Mahrattas* and James Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*. Romesh Chunder Dutt also took care to remain within the constraints of his source texts and create fissures, gaps, within its factual elements to introduce counterfactual elements. Romesh Chunder's imagination, therefore, restricted itself within the realm of the possible. In this chapter, however, we shall take a look at historical literature for which the source text need not have been a work of history - the literary work could have been a re-rendering of an already existing work of fiction. Also

in these cases the literary artist was not constrained by the given elements of the source texts and could twist, add and subtract them in a way that suited his/her imagination. A consciousness or a sense of history was only taking shape in our period of interest - and this consciousness was at a different level for different sections of the readership and different age groups. A plot line could deviate at will from 'truth', as long it maintained a sense of the past.

The very first story I would draw attention to is a tale about Rana Sangramsingh or Rana Sanga who ruled the Rajput state of Mewar from 1509 to 1527, a period of intense political tussle which saw the foundation of the Mughal empire under Babar. It was published in the year 1848(?) in a collection of stories - *The Times of Yore* - by Shoshee Chunder Dutt,¹ written in the English language. Although the sources for the various stories are different for 'Sanga, King of Mewar' Shoshee Chunder principally follows the account given in Tod's *Annals*. Although Tod gives us a very detailed account of the struggle of succession between Sanga and his brothers, following which he had to live a life of exile till he ascended the throne of Mewar,² this is not confirmed by later historians. The only conclusion that has been reached is that Sanga's ascension was not easy.³ Tod follows bardic tales which refer to a royal feud between the three sons of Rana Raemul - Sanga, Prithi Raj, and Jeimal - over who would succeed their father to the throne. At last they took the matter to the oracle of Nahara Mogro. Once it is predicted that Sanga was designated as the next Rana of Mewar his brothers attack him and in the process blind him. Sanga flees and lives a long while in exile first as a shepherd and later with a band of dacoits under Rao Kurimchand. There Sanga's royal identity is revealed to Kurimchand by an

¹ Shoshee Chunder Dutt 'Sanga, King of Mewar' in *The Times of Yore or, Tales from Indian History, from the Invasion of Alexander the Great to the Battle of Panipat*, London, Lovell Reeve, 1885, 166-176. All translations used are mine.

² James Tod *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan or, The Central and Western Rajpoot States of India*, Vol.1, New Delhi, K.M.N. Publishers, 1971, 235-37. (Henceforth *Annals*)

³ See Mohammad Habib and Khaliq Ahmad Nizami *A Comprehensive History of India* Vol. 5, 'The Delhi Sultanat (A.D. 1206-1526)', New Delhi, People's Publishing House, 1982, 798; Satish Chandra *Mughal Religious Policies, the Rajputs and the Deccan* New Delhi,

omen and the latter gives his daughter in marriage to Sanga. When the condition becomes favourable Sanga returns to take up the reins of the kingdom. Shoshee Chunder picks up his tale at the point of the omen. Sanga's identity is not revealed to the reader and he is identified as Abho - though his true identity is made very apparent from the title of the story. Kurrumchand, however, gauges from Abho's appearances - 'His form was well-knit and exhibited great muscular strength, and on his countenance... [were] the traits of a mastermind' - that he was 'born to be king' and treats him with 'peculiar deference' (p.167). Unlike in Tod, agency to Sanga's marriage is not attributed only to Kurrumchand (as it is spelt in the story). Shoshee Chunder adds a romantic element by telling us that Sanga, alias Abho, had solicited the hand of Kurrumchand's daughter Meera in marriage, 'but Kurrum, in spite of all his pre-possessions for the unknown warrior, had hitherto discountenanced his suit. The tables were now turned' (p.168). Meera and Abho are married.

It is at this point that Shoshee Chunder's imagination takes over the narrative. Abho and Kurrumchand are led by chance to an old man who 'could see into the future with a clear sight and reveal secrets which were withheld from other mortals'. In an aside with Abho the old man reminds him of the event of Nahara Mogro. When Abho expresses his despair of it being a case of 'vain prophecy' the old man asks him to 'despair not' and 'drew out from the folds of his garment a small velvet bag, which with a little coloured tape he hung round the young soldier's neck' - a charm which will make Abho 'invincible in arms' (p.168-69).

After this 'time passed on' before Shoshee Chunder introduces the next counterfactual - an encounter between Abho and the Rajput dacoits laden with booty and a 'body of Moguls, equal to them in number'. In order to prevent a destructive combat Abho proposes 'a decision by single combat'. At this the challenge is accepted by 'a strong, fierce-looking Mogul'. After great struggle Abho defeats his adversary but due to 'the nobleness of his nature' stops short of killing the 'Moslem'. At this the vanquished identifies himself

as 'Baber' and accepts defeat and asks Sanga to take up arms again. Abho then reveals his true identity, 'I am Sanga, prince of Mewar'. At this:

The soldeirs on both sides heard with surprise the important disclosure, nor was Baber any longer anxious to settle scores with his adversary on the spot. He held out his hand with frankness to the heathen prince, who pressed it with equal ardour, and at that spot was the ex-chief of Ferghana promised the support of Mewar against the emperor of Delhi. (p.170-71)

The second counterfactual is an imaginative reworking of the prelude to Babar's attack on Ibrahim Lodhi in 1526. Before Babar's entry a conflict was in progress between Rana Sanga and Ibrahim Lodhi over the control of Malwa. When Babar appeared on the scene in 1518-19 there were negotiations and some understanding is said to have been reached between Sanga and Babar. What the exact nature of the agreement was is not known. It is generally believed that Sanga had invited Babar to attack Ibrahim Lodhi at Delhi, while Sanga promised to open a second front in an attack on Agra. Possibly Sanga had expected Babar to be happy with the Lodhi's treasures and leave for central Asia like his ancestor Timur and then Sanga could move in to capture the areas he coveted from much weakened Lodhi empire. Also, it is speculated that in return for his support Babar had pledged to divide Ibrahim Lodhi's territory and hand over all areas west of Agra to Sanga. Tod, however, is silent on any pact. The contemporary source which mentions a military alliance is *Babar Nama*. Sanga did not move to Agra nor did Babar part with any of his conquered territory. All equations changed when Sanga realised that contrary to his expectations Babar, who came to India having been displaced from his ancestral kingdom, intended to stay.⁴ Sanga had ascended the throne of Mewar in 1509 much before Babar's advent to the north-Indian plains in a march from Kabul to Punjab in 1525. Therefore, a pact of the nature Shoshee Chunder has narrated is impossible. Even Tod's account maintains the correct chronology of the events. But such portrayal of the pact serves an important narrative purpose. Although history has it that Sanga's forces were defeated by Babar in the battle of Khanwa on 16th March, 1527, Shoshee Chunder places Sanga on a higher moral ground. In 'Sanga, King of Mewar' the first clash between the Rajputs and Mughals is clash of equals.

⁴ Satish Chandra *Mughal Religious Policies*, 7-8.

The balance is broken only by Sanga's victory over Babar in an one to one combat.⁵ But Sanga's victory is not his own victory, it is victory by the virtue of the old man's charm. In fact, in the story, Sanga loses the charm before his defeat at Khanwa.

Shoshee Chunder's version of Babar's promise is also different - here Babar's was supposed to pay tribute to Sanga. But as in history no side honoured the commitments. According to Shoshee Chunder the mutual failure to honour commitments squares out each other - 'The promises and engagements on both sides were therefore null and void, and, both parties being equally brave and ambitious, waited for some pretext to go to war' (p.172). It is not to redress a breach of promise but anxiousness to 'pull down this aspiring infidel' which motivates Sanga to challenge Babar. Historians have suggested that Babar's occupation of Delhi was proving to be a graver danger to Mewar than the earlier Lodhi empire. Rana Sanga made efforts to gather together a coalition to force Babar to leave India, it was a coalition which no previous Rajput ruler had enjoyed. Other than many Rajput rulers many Afghans including Mahmud Lodhi, the younger son of Sikandar Lodhi and Hasan Khan Mewat joined Sanga's forces - a fact recorded by Tod as well. Shoshee Chunder, however, makes no mention of any coalition. Like the duel, the battle too is a one to one conflict - a clash of personalities. In fact from this point onwards other than the fact of the defeat of the Rajput forces under Sanga there is not much resemblance between history and Shoshee Chunder's story. What is remarkable in his treatment is that he refrains

⁵ It is very interesting how Shoshee Chunder makes subtle changes to Tod's account and rearranges ideas to give shape to his narration of the hand to hand combat between Rana Sanga and Babar. Tod writes: "The Rajpoot prince had a worthy antagonist in the king of Ferghana. Like Sanga, he was trained in the school of adversity, and like him, though his acts of personal heroism were even romantic, he tempered it with that discretion which looks to its results. In A.D. 1494, at the tender age of twelve, he succeeded to a kingdom; ere he was sixteen he defeated several confederacies and conquered Samarcand, and in two short years again lost and regained it. His life was a tissue of successes and reverses; at one moment hailed the lord of the chief kingdoms of Transoxiana; and at another flying, unattended, or putting all to hazard in desperate single combats, in one of which he slew five champions of his enemies." - *Annals*, 242.

In 'Sanga, King of Mewar' it is Rana Sanga who challenges Babar to duel, and the swashbuckling element is incorporated.

from presenting the story clearly in the frame of a civilisational conflict. In fact, he leaves out certain elements from Tod's account, which are recounted by other historians as well, which would have perfectly suited the civilisational framework. According to the *Babar Nama* Babar's forces were growing weary of the alien climate of 'Hindustan' and pleading with him to return to Kabul. This aversion to war strengthened after Sanga defeated a detachment of Babar's forces at Bayana in the run up to Khanwa. In order to infuse a new spirit into his soldiers, Babar declared the war against Sanga to be a *jihad* and all those Afghans who joined the Rajputs to be *kafirs* and *mulhids*. He also made his men swear by the *Quran* not to desert the battle and renounced wine by destroying flasks of Ghazi wine thus proving himself to be a good muslim.⁶ On the other hand Shoshee Chunder 'invents' his own events. Babar's defeat at Bayana was not in a full fledged battle but another hand to hand combat in which a 'strong sabre-stroke brought Babar to the ground'. He also gives an ingenious reason for Sanga's defeat at Khanwa. One day, before the battle, while the Rana takes his bath in a river he had leaves the magic charm on the bank. When he returns he find it missing, taken away not by any human being but by a pigeon. When the Rana attempts to shoot the pigeon with an arrow a voice from the clouds says - "O, king! thy hour is gone". Sanga's fall, as his rise, is divinely ordained. Historians, however, give a more mundane explanation - Babar adopted a far superior strategy in the battle by the use of a chain of carts as a barrier from behind which his troops could shoot at the Rajput front and using flank squadrons to attack the enemy from the sides and the rear. This coupled with superior artillery, wellbred horses and an organised command system formed a winning formula.⁷

After the battle Shoshee Chunder focusses on Babar's attitude to his vanquished rival. He refuses to put Sanga to death - 'Babar respected and dreaded his foe' (p.176). Babar is gracious in victory. 'Sanga, King of Mewar' is a tale not about a civilisational

⁶ Annals, 243-44; Satish Chandra *Mughal Religious Policies*, 8-9; Satish Chandra *Medieval India: From Sultanat to the Mughals, Part Two*, New Delhi, Har Anand, 1997, 34; John Briggs *History of the Rise of the Mahomedan Power in India till the year A.D. 1612* translated from Mahomed Kasim Ferishta, Vol.1, Calcutta, Editions Indian, 1966, 55.

⁷ Satish Chandra *Medieval India* ii, 35.

conflict but a tale of heroism. Babar too is heroic even though he is a 'Moslem' or an 'infidel' - terms which occur only once each in the story. Sanga or the Rajputs are not for once identified as hindus. The divine will, works as much for Sanga in the magic charm being awarded to him, as it does for Babar in it being taken away from Sanga.

Finally, Shoshee Chunder ends his story with an explanation for Sanga's death. It is believed by historians that Sanga was poisoned by some of his own subordinates who considered his plans to renew attacks on Babar to be suicidal,⁸ though there is no confirmation of the cause of his death. Shoshee Chunder's story attributes the act of poisoning to a traitor Sillaidi whose possible grudge against Sanga could have been a disappointed love for Meera Bae' - Sanga's queen (p.177). Earlier it was Sillaidi who was sent by Sanga as an emissary to Babar's court - but did not return till the day of the final battle. However, Shoshee Chunder's tale does draw any connection between Sillaidi's betrayal and Sanga's defeat. A failed romance is the cause for royal murder. While in 'Sanga, King of Mewar' romance remains in the fringes in another tale in the collection - 'The Beauty of Kanouj' - it forms the mainstay.⁹ This is a story set in the 1018 A.D. during Mahmood of Ghazni's siege on the city of Kanouj. Though, Mahmood is remembered in Indian popular imagination as the first muslim to invade India, notorious for his sack of the temple of Somnath, Shoshee Chunder's Mahmood is the picture of a gentle man - 'He was as polite as brave' (p.62).

The possible source for this story is the *History of the Rise of the Mohomedan Power in India till the year A.D. 1612* by John Briggs, which is a translation from the Persian original of the 17th century historian Mahomed Kasim Ferishta. This is how Ferishta recounts the episode:

Mahmood, with an army consisting of 100,000 chosen horse, and 20,000 foot raised in the countries of Toorkistan, Mawur-ool-Nehr, Khorassan, and the adjacent provinces, undertook an expedition against Kunouj

⁸ Satish Chandra, op. cit., 36.

⁹ *Times of Yore*, 57-64. All translations are mine.

He there saw a city which raised its head to the skies, and which in strength and beauty might boast of being unrivalled. The Indian prince of this rich city was Koowur-Ray. He affected great state and splendour, but being thus unexpectedly invaded, had no time to put himself in a posture of defence, or to collect his troops. Terrified by the great force, and the formidable appearance of the invaders, he resolved to sue for peace, and accordingly going out, with his family, to the camp, he submitted himself to Sooltan Mahmood. The author of the *Habeeboos Seer* relates that he even embraced the Mahomedan faith. The King of Ghizny remained in Kunouj only three days, and then marched towards Meerut...¹⁰

With this much information Shoshee Chunder transforms the tale into a romance. On the night before the submission Mahmood, in disguise tours the streets of Kanouj when he hears a woman shrieking for help. When Mahmood arrives at the scene he finds a young lady being abducted by three men, one of whom is later identified as Yasovi the prince of Kanouj. Mahmood immediately comes to the rescue of the young lady Parvati and conducts her to her house in safety. The next day the king of Kanouj, whom Shoshee Chunder calls Korra, submits to Mahmood. Shoshee Chunder, however, does not mention anything about Korra's conversion to the Mahomedan faith. Instead Mahmood of the story responds in a totally contrary manner - 'Mahmood received them with great generosity, and even refused to accept Korra's submission, treating him more as a brother than as an enemy' (p.62). In this assembly the previous night's incidents are brought before Korra who then entreats to Mahmood for a redressal of Yasovi's misdemeanor. Mahmood declared that Yasovi should marry Parvati. When Parvati is brought before the assembly she 'looked afflicted'. Observing this the Sultan asks her whether there is 'some other youth' whom she desires.

But the maiden said nothing in reply. She only raised her eyes and fixed them on him [Mahmood], with a look so fond and suppliant that Mahmood started and felt confused, as the conviction rushed on his mind that he was the party beloved. The maiden seemed to read his thoughts, and, when he averted his face, she hung her head and burst into tears. (p.64)

Mahmood is described as struggling hard to control his feelings. When he proceeds to bless the bride his voice is 'almost choked by his feelings'. Later 'Mahmood called upon all

¹⁰ Briggs op. cit., 33.

the force of religion to forget the lovely heathen, whose image for a long time after disturbed his calmer reflections'. What we witness here is the creation of a possibility of subversion and an immediate negation of it. In 'The Beauty of Kanouj' Sultan Mahmood is presented in the most agreeable terms. He protects a woman from dishonour, Shoshee Chunder discards the element of the Kanouj royalty's conversion to Islam. Mahmood refuses to accept submission and instead treats Korra as his brother, and he makes an honourable settlement by proposing a royal marriage for Parvati. All these virtues are in keeping with the definition of one of 'us' - of Shoshee Chunder's and his reader's party. These are characteristics which grant to Mahmood the status of the hero in 'The Beauty of Kanouj'. Yet Mahmood is not quite one of 'us'. He is an outsider. He is granted the privilege of presiding over the judgement as well as the marriage ceremony. But he is also an outsider - an alien. There is no pejorative mention of his alienness. But when Mahmood offers to 'dissolve the match' if Parvati comes up with the name of another youth who 'reigns' her heart, it is met with silence from Parvati. Even Mahmood's voice chokes when he offers blessings to Parvati during the wedding. Only, the silence is eloquent. The silence points out to a possible situation for sexual transgression. Having conquered Kanouj, Mahmood is handed over the rule of the city of Korra - "our laws have henceforth no force in Kanouj, for the law of Mahmood has from this day become the law of Korra" (p.63). But this does not imply a change in the hegemonic order which is upheld in the world of the story. In fact, Mahmood's judgement is most acceptable to all parties present, thus, signifying conformation to established norms. The narrative, then, comes perilously close to miscegenation and averts it - the silence is a sign of the phobia generated.

The expression of desire in the eyes of Parvati and the deep sigh represents a sympathetic association between femininity and transgressive behaviour. But Parvati's desire exists alongside a simultaneous knowledge of her womanhood and dependence on men for social acceptability and survival. Her desire meets its punitive end in her hanging her head and bursting into tears, as it threatens the male hegemony in which women cannot be desiring subjects. This male hegemony is a hindu male hegemony exercising itself against alien transgression. The contest between the insider and outsider - hindu and muslim - is decided over the field of female desires. The silence of Mahmood and Parvati

spells out this conflict rather eloquently in a story where, otherwise, muslims are given a humane treatment.

Having seen the anxiety over a possible relationship between a muslim man and a hindu woman, let us now take a look at situation which presents a relationship between a muslim woman and a hindu man. Written a decade after 'The Beauty of Kanouj', Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay's 'Anguriya Binimoy' ('Exchange of Rings', 1957) is a story in which an incipient relationship is established between the Maratha chief Shivaji and Aurangzeb's daughter Roshinara.¹¹ This seemingly improbable theme is not Bhudeb's invention but is borrowed from Hobart Caunter's story 'The Mahratta Chief' in *The Romance of History: India* (1836).¹² In Caunter, however, the love between the hero and heroine is not incipient but leads to marriage and a child - Shambaji, Shivaji's heir. The story begins with Shivaji's men abducting a Mughal cavalcade and kidnapping Princess Roshinara in order to force Aurangzeb to an alliance. Shivaji's masculinity, hospitality and chivalry leads Roshinara to fall in love with her captor. Aurangzeb's forces rescue Roshinara and she is found to be pregnant. She is kept under watch in the palace and the boy born to her is taken away. Meanwhile Shivaji visits Aurangzeb at Delhi, where he is imprisoned.¹³ Shivaji and Roshinara escape secretly. Shivaji recaptures his territory. Many years later Aurangzeb sends Roshinara's long lost boy, now a youth whose identity is a mystery to all, in an expedition against Shivaji. Roshinara identifies her son - names him Sambajee. Sambajee crosses over to his father's side and ascends the throne after Shivaji's death. What Caunter proposed, Bhudeb disposed. In Bhudeb's story there is love but no marriage in the real

¹¹ Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay 'Anguriya Binimoy' ('Exchange of Rings') in Kanchan Basu ed. *Dushprapya Sahitya* (Rare Literature), Vol.2, Calcutta, Reflect Publication, 1992, 436-85 (All translations used are mine). The story was originally published in *Aitihāsik Upānyas* (The Historical Novel). The other story in the volume was 'Saphal Swapna', based on Hobart Caunter's story 'The Traveler's Dream' in *The Romance of History* (see footnote 13). The book *Aitihāsik Upānyas* was, however, not a 'novel' but simply two stories - 'the term *upānyas* had not yet, at that time, acquired its present-day meaning of a real novel' - see Dusan Zbavitel *Bengali Literature* in Jan Gonda ed. *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. 9 Wiesbaden, Otto Harrassowitz, 1976, 239.

¹² Hobart Caunter 'The Mahratta Chief' in *The Romance of History: India*, London, Fredrick Wame, n.d., 474-514.

¹³ Both Caunter and Bhudeb make the same mistake as Romesh Chunder who was guided about the site of Shivaji's visit by James Grant Duff's *The History of Mahrattas*.

sense and certainly no child. Writing in remote England, for an English audience, Caunter was blissfully unaware of the picture of miscegenation his imagination conjured. In fact, Caunter's objective of writing an Oriental romance leads him to be frivolous with chronology and history in 'The Mahratta Chief'. After Roshinara is rescued by Aurangzeb's forces Shivaji murders a Mughal general in a manner which replicates Duff's version of the encounter between Shivaji and the Bijapuri commander Afzal Khan.¹⁴ Bhudev sets correct both history (the murder of the Mughal general is deleted in his story) as well as sexual politics. In 'Exchange of Rings' Bhudev adds his own imagination in the form of a counterfactual, whereby, Roshinara is kept in the same prison as Shahjahan. Shivaji sends a ring and messages to Roshinara through a vendor, asking her to flee with him. But Roshinara after much hesitation decides against it - 'If father had voluntarily given me in marriage to him [Shivaji], then he would have been the greatest support for his son-in-law' (p.487). Instead she writes a letter to Shivaji, through the vendor, and sends her ring in exchange of the ring which Shivaji had sent to her. In the letter Roshinara writes:

What can I say? - you are my Lord [husband], as a sign of that I hereby exchange my ring with yours - therefore, today we are married. But if I become your companion in reality, it would be a hurdle to the realisation of your goals. With this consideration I deprive you of the pleasures of marital life. If you say that my presence would not have prevented you from becoming a king - I would believe you - but think again, just being king is not what you desire. Therefore, just as I sacrifice my marital fortunes for the realisation of my Lord's goals, you too have sacrificed your wife for your countrymen. I am not able to write any more - yours always, Roshinara (p.485).

The Christian ritual may be a romantic symbol for Bhudev's Bengali audience, but it is not wedded love which is socially acceptable. In Roshinara's letter marriage vows are fused with the affirmation of separation. Unlike instances of relationships between a hindu woman and muslim man - as in 'the Beauty of Kanouj', or *Rajput Jiban Sandha* and *Padmini Upakhyan* - where the dominant response is either silence or violent anxiety, the Roshinara-Shivaji relationship exists in the realm of the possible. There is no confirmation of the marriage from Shivaji, his participation in the exchange of rings does imply his partaking its ritual significance. A muslim woman remains a desirable partner but not a real companion.

¹⁴ James Grant Duff *The History of the Mahrattas*, Vol.1, Delhi, Low Price Publications, 1990.

Her presence is a hurdle to the inner goals of the hindu man. He reads Roshinara's letter in the presence of his guru, Guru Ramdas.¹⁵ Earlier Ramdas accuses him of being inattentive towards the cause of independence of his country (p.484). Roshinara too cites this as the reason for not coming to live with Shivaji. Even against Shivaji's desire he cannot marry her as his first devotion is to the independence of his country - '*Swadesh*'. Independence from whom? From the tyranny of the muslims led by Aurangzeb. In one of the many instances of muslim tyranny in the story, Bhudeb describes the inhuman treatment meted out by the Mughals to a Maratha soldier - an incident which is not based on Caunter's story. The Maratha soldier had committed treachery by leading the Mughal into the fort where Shivaji held Roshinara. Later the Mughals tried to force him to become a muslim. He refuses to do so and hurls abuses at Islam. The Mughals in response beat him unconscious and throw him into a dungeon. In his hallucinations the soldier asks for water:

I saw Goddess Bhabani come along with a few demons. She said to me, "Here you are wretched creature! You have harmed my son Shivaji - you have been traitor to your motherland¹⁶ as well, and have handed her over to the infidel enemies. Don't you know, the mother of the womb, the milking cow, and the all-giving motherland - all three are the same. One who can harm the motherland can also kill a cow or one's own mother. So, for you all the country's water has turned into cow-blood and all eatables into cow flesh. Here eat.

The Mughals threw raw beef and cow-blood into the dungeon. When Shivaji sees this he reacts - 'Alas! How much longer will *Bharatboomi* tolerate these sinners?' (p.454)¹⁷ It is to the

¹⁵ Guru Ramdas is often tipped to be Shivaji's inspirer in the quest for a hindu rashtra. But the two met only in 1672 much after Shivaji's visit to Agra. See Stewart Gordon *The New Cambridge History of India: The Marathas 1600-1818*, New Delhi, Cambridge UP, 1993, 66.

¹⁶ The word used in Bangla is *janmabhoomi*, literally 'land of birth'. But the sense conveyed here is that of 'motherland'.

¹⁷ In survey of Bhudeb's works Tapan Raychoudhuri says, 'He was probably the first Bengali Hindu writer to state unequivocally that he considered the reigns of the Muslim dynasties superior to British rule. He shared with several of his well-known contemporaries the belief that as a religion Islam was superior to Christianity He believed that God had sent the Muslims, the most egalitarian of all peoples, to teach Hindus the lesson of equality between man and man.' While I do not contest Tapan Raychoudhuri's conclusions with respect to the entire body of Bhudeb's works,

sacred task of relieving the motherland of the sinful muslims that Shivaji has devoted his life.¹⁸ Roshinara is a distraction and so must be left behind.

In 1958, a year after 'Anguriya Binimoy', Rangalal Bandopadhyay's *Padmini Upakhyān* was published – a long poem which is held as a pioneering effort in modern Bangla poetry.¹⁹ As the title suggests the poem is based on the well-known Padmini-Alauddin legend. In the introduction Rangalal states that he had selected this story from Tod's *Annals and Antiquities of Rajasthan*. Although there is a lot of debate over the historicity of the Padmini legend most of these debates are concerned about *Padmavat* a Hindi epic (in Persian script) written by Malik Mohammad of Jais in 1540 A.D.²⁰ Tod's account differs from *Padmavat* with respect to the identity of the king. While in *Padmavat* Padmini is the wife of Ratan Sen, in Tod she is married, to Bheemsi (or Bheemsingh) the uncle and protector of Rana Lakumsi (Lakkhansingh). In Tod and Rangalal, therefore, Padmini is not the queen of Chittor. The case for the Padmini episode being true is really weak, and so is the capture of Padmini as the primary motive for Alauddin's siege of Chittor. The attack on Chittor was part of Alauddin's series of campaigns to bring the regions of Rajasthan, Malwa and Gujarat under the control of the Sultanat. After six month siege Rana Ratansingh surrendered. Though in other instances such surrender was preceded by *jauhar*, no contemporary source mentions *jauhar* in the case of Alauddin's

'Anguriya Binimoy' certainly does not fit the bill. See Tapan Raychoudhuri *Europe Reconsidered: Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal*, New Delhi, Oxford UP, 1988.

¹⁸ I have discussed the issue of Shivaji's dream of an independent hindu state in chapter two.

¹⁹ Rangalal Bandopadhyay *Padmini Upakhyān* in Santi Kumar Dasgupta and Haribandhu Mukhti eds. *Rangalal Rachanabali*, Calcutta, Duttachaudhuri and Sons, 1975, 135-72. All translations are mine.

²⁰ For arguments in favour of the Padmini episode being historical see A.B.L. Awasthi 'Padmini-Episode, re-examined', Calcutta, Indian History Congress, 1963, 149-51; Sudhish Dhar Diwedi op. cit., 75-78; and for those claiming it to be a figment of literary imagination see Kalika Ranjan Qanungo 'A Critical Analysis of the Padmini Legend' in *Studies in Rajput History*, New Delhi, S. Chand, 1971, 1-20; Gaurishankar Ojha *Rajputane ka Itihās* (History of Rajputana), Vol.2, Allahabad, n.p., 1926, 486-95.

capture of Chittor.²¹ However, the rejection of the Padmini legend by modern historians has come much after Rangalal wrote *Padmini Upakhyān*. Our interest lies in Rangalal's handling of Tod's account. It may be interesting to note that Shoshee Chunder's version of the legend ends with Bheemsi's flight from captivity. It does not mention the *jauhar* episode at all.²² For Rangalal, however, the *jauhar* or the sati incident is crucial. Before entering the flames Padmini speaks to the other women of the Chittor fort:

For whom shall we keep our lives?
Specially in the reign of infidels,
No one is spared. (p.167)

Jauhar is shown to be a way to protect the honour of Rajput women from muslim lust. By protecting her honour, Padmini protects Rajput culture from being tarnished.

Rajputs belong to Bhanu's [Sun] line
The infidels are out to blacken their name. (p.146)

The fight over Padmini - that being the sole motive of Alauddin in invading Chittor (p.144) - is a fight between two cultures and two civilisations. It is, in fact, a clash between the followers of two religions - one true and one false. Rangalal is merciless on Islam and its followers. In the poem he refers to Alauddin and his soldiers by the pejorative terms - *jabans* or *mlechhas*. Only once does he use the term - mussalman. He calls Alauddin by his name only twice - at all other times referring to him as *jabanraja* or 'king of infidels'. Alauddin swears by the *Quran*:

Here, I swear by the Quran,
I shall demolish the Chittor citadel.
Hindu gods, goddesses and Hindu women,
My anger and wrath shall make impure. (p.153)

As usual the Khalji-muslim army is infinite - 'as boundless as the sea' (p.163). Rangalal focuses on the ferocity of its war cry 'Allah-o-Akbar' in a footnote - 'According to Lord Byron, when the Muslims utter this war cry they pronounce the 'ho' sound in a manner which creates a feeling of utter dread' (p.146n). Rangalal tops his anti-muslim tirades by denying muslims any humanity:

²¹ Satish Chandra *Medieval India*, 89-90.

²² 'Padmani, The Fair One of Cheetore' *Times of Yore*, 111-18.

Corrupt, tyrannical, malicious, demons,
Is it strange that Hindus don't regard the infidels as human.

He presents a contrast between two communities: while the Muslims and their king are "Treacherous, mean, characterless, sinful, / Devoid of any sense of good and evil", the Hindu king is "The peace loving, pious, Hindu king / For the sake of amity showed his woman". (p.151) If Alauddin's attack on Chittor is perceived as a religious war, the Rajput retaliation is also presented as a 'Hindu' response. Even in captivity Bheemsingh curses Alauddin:

What! A dog aspires to taste the sacred ghee?
Born among the *asuras*, you thirst after the divine honey? (p.152)

The Muslims are placed in the lowest rung of the three-tier mytho-religious order whereby the heavens are the abode of the *debatas* or the lesser gods, the earth inhabited by the *manushyas* or mortals and the *asuras* or demons condemned to the *patal* or the underground.²³ The *asuras* are engaged in a perpetual contest to wrest control of the world from the *debatas*. Such attempts are illegitimate as the *asuras* are against the rule of *dharma* or true religion. For Ranganatha, the Muslims are the *asuras*, a threat to *dharma*. It is the task of the Rajputs as defenders of *dharma* to wage incessant war against Alauddin and his army.

While Rajput men defend religion by the use of arms in battle, Rajput women must do so by protecting their bodies and preventing miscegenation. When Padmini hears Alauddin's endeavour for the first time, she takes all blame on herself:

It is for me, that this battle rages
The country faces dark days.
I am the cause of misfortune...
Curse this life, curse this youth
Curse beauty and fairness. (p.148)

²³ The classification of *swarga* (heaven), *marta* (earth), *patal* (underground) is a classification of the human world. The paradisaical space was separate as was hell or *narak*. Thus, *debatas*, *manushyas* and *asuras* were a classification of the social order expressed in religious terms.

The woman is an object of desire - the blame for man's lustful behaviour is placed on her. It is her duty to protect her body from illegitimate male desire.²⁴ There is, however, a legitimate male desire - that of the husband - and this must be protected. The husband has uncontested and undivided right over his wife. Any violation of this monopoly is interpreted as a slur to the wife's *satihood*. By protecting her *satihood* the woman protects the honour of her husband, his family and *dharma*. This right of the husband over his wife's *satihood* has the sanction of religion:

Husband is dearer than the heart.
It is for him that a woman has life and youth....
Satihood is the core of *dharma*,
There is nothing beyond,
This has been the Kshatriya tradition in every age. (p.167)

The ideal, most pious and honourable women, who are loyal to their husbands do not hesitate to make the ultimate sacrifice to defend their *satihood*. After Gora's (Padmini's brother) death his wife does not wish to delay being with her husband and is extremely eager to enter her husband's funeral pyre (p.161). To prevent their *satihood* being tarnished by infidels Padmini leads all the women of Chittor fort to the pyre. Padmini promises fame and worship by posterity:

All will be tested,
The best will be announced,
People will praise the one who is most loyal to her husband.

Other than the promise of being worshipped there is also the fortune of an assured place in paradise:

Come we will enter *Amarabati* today.
O what a happy day it is.... (p.167)

²⁴ This idea has attained the status of commonsense. Every year there are reports of right wing activists attacking women for 'provocative' clothing. Even a premier university like JNU has not been outside the purview of the 'culture police'. According Anuradha Nagraj's report 'RSS lines up schoolgirls at JNU campus *shakha* in *Indian Express*(NewDelhi), 12 Aug 1998, 1 and 4, 'Sunil Mohanty the man incharge of running the four *shakhas* on the JNU campus, says," After students join JNU, they tend to get cut off from the Indian tradition. Drinking and smoking becomes a habit. The aim of the *shakha* is to retrieve interest in things that matter.... Girls on campus wear what they want to, do what they want to and there are no rules they follow. There is a complete lack of discipline.'"

Thus, Rajput and hindu honour is protected but Chittor falls to the muslims. With certain defeat and death facing them the Rajputs fight valiantly in the battle. The poem describes it as a battle for independence. The day of Chittor's fall is described as the last day of independent *Bharatbarsa* (p.169). He laments the rise of muslim power in India and the fall of hindu rule:

In unity the hindu rajas
Were in peace always. Had they remained that way could from across the
Sindhu
The infidels have come? (p.159)

The dominant reading of *Padmini Upakhayan* is that of a patriotic poem. It provides a militant code for patriots:

Only his life is worth,
Who gives his life for the country. (p.165)

Rangalal is remembered by the following lines:

Who wishes to live a life without freedom?
Who would wear the chains of slavery?
Luxury without freedom is equal to hell,
A day's freedom is paradisaal....(p.167)²⁵

The story of Padmini's sacrifice in the pyre is, therefore, a celebration of a fight for freedom and independence - independence from foreign clutches of a false religion. Written in 1858, around the First War of Independence or the Indian Mutiny, this poem is often portrayed as the first literary sign of a patriotic fervor and the nationalist consciousness. But this is how Rangalal's poem concludes:

Bharat is fortunate, the sad night is nearing dawn
Will we still be sleeping?
The English are kind, to awaken our minds

²⁵ Rangalal was a great admirer and follower of English poets and these lines bear a close resemblance to Moore's *Irish Melodies*:

From life without freedom
Oh! Who would not fly....

These lines went on to become one of the most quoted emblems of the militant nationalist movement in Bengal.

To the brightness of knowledge...
O God! Let not the poison of revolt
Flow again.

Who's *Bharat*? Who's freedom? Freedom from whom?

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The centre of the *bhadralok's* world was the city – the city of Calcutta. Running through the heart of the city, almost dividing it into two was the Circular Road (it has been renamed after Independence). In the early days of the East India Company, around the mid-18th Century, the Circular Road was a moat around the Fort William. It was called the Maratha Ditch.¹ It was meant to protect the British possessions from the raids of the Maratha forces. Though the British township was secure, larger parts of Bengal and its peasantry were not. Even today one comes across Bangla folk songs which reflect the horror which once reverberated in the villages of Bengal due to the Maratha *baryirs*. This knowledge unambiguously points out the 'forgetful' character of the *bhadralok* over the exploits of the Marathas.

While claiming the Marathas to be the 'natural ancestors' of 'modern Bengali' the writers of historical fiction of the 19th century 'forgot' the devastation of the previous century. It is important to note that while expressing pride in Maratha victories and bravery the only figure who is highlighted is Shivaji. Somehow the link between Shivaji and the later Marathas disappears. In *Rajput Jiban Sandha* Ramesh Chunder Dutt touches upon this link slightly. The priestess of Nahara Mogro looks into the future and foresees attacks by

¹ Purnendu Patri *Ki Kore Kolkata Holo* (The Making of Kolkata), Calcutta, Ananda Publishers, 1986, 40-41.

the hindus of South against the Rajputs. Dutt does not elaborate on it. While Shivaji is 'remembered' as his battle was against 'foreigners', the later Marathas are 'forgotten' when they fought against 'fellow countrymen'. This faultline between memory and 'amnesia' is never resolved in the texts that have been discussed in the previous chapters. In each text it has presented itself in varied forms. In *Jiban Prabhat* it is the tension revealed in the conversation between Jaisingh and Shivaji. It is a scenario where a hindu Rajput general leads a muslim Mughal army against hindu Shivaji. In *Jiban Sandha* the faultline shows up through the relations between Rana Pratap and Rana Mansingh. In 'Sanga, King of Mewar' it is the discrepancy between Sanga's victories over Babar in one to one combats and the narrative fact that these victories are powered by a lucky charm. Sanga is not so strong physically after all. The silence shared by Mahmood and Parvati is accompanied by the silence of the narrator in 'The Beauty of Kanauj'. In each of the cases the narratorial voice tries to smoothen out these faultlines, impart coherence to the narrative. In 'The Beauty of Kanauj' Mahmood's weaning away from Parvati is explained within the larger logic of Mahmood's magnanimity – once the betrothed the bride cannot be given to another man. Roshinara's letter in 'Anguriya Binimoy' cites the primacy of Shivaji's duties towards his countrymen as the reason for avoiding conjugation. No answers are offered to the question – if the muslim princess can be desirable, why can't she be marriageable?² By far the most elaborate attempt to explain the faultline is found in Romesh Chunder's use of the Code – it is wrong to fight against co-religionists when the infidels are attacking; Goddess Bhabani's edict is – victory in war against infidels, defeat in war against co-religionists. Each explanation seeks to present things as 'natural', 'this-is-the-way-things-are', or as 'common sense'.

The 'common sense', however, is not a uniform one among all the texts that have been discussed. In Romesh Chunder, Rangalal and Bhudeb the distinction between religions – hindu and muslim – is also a political one. Religion affects and determines the legitimacy of the political head. The proper meeting place for the hindus and the muslims

² In today's popular cultural productions, most notably in the Hindi films a hindu man sharing a relationship with a muslim woman is acceptable and seen as secular – as in *Bombay*, *Shaheed-e-Mohabbat* and *Gadar*. However, one does not come across many instances of a muslim man sharing a relationship with a hindu woman!!

is the battle field; hindus are never supposed to face each other in the battle field. Valour is glorious only when it is directed against the 'outsider', the 'foreigner', the 'intruder'. Though the battles described are fought politically – with armies, through attacking or defending forts, devising military strategies - the fight is over abstract objects like 'honour' or 'promises'. They are attempts to 'regain' the 'glory' of the hindu religion or protect its 'honour'. Shoshee Chunder's treatment is markedly different. The conflict between Sanga and Babar is precisely a political one, but it is determined by supernatural intervention. The charm is taken away from Sanga when his time as king is ordained to be over. Such a treatment is a remnant of Mrityunjay Vidyalkar's *Rajabali* (1808) which merges mythical, 'puranic' past and historical past. It is a tale of kings beginning from King Yudhisthira of the *Mahabharat* and continuing upto the year 1726. The change over from the hindu rulers to the 'yavana' rulers is explained thus: "when Sekandar Shan [Alexander] had become emperor in the land of the Yavanas, he had once come to Hindustan, but seeing the religiosity and learning of the Brahmans, he had declared that a land whose kings had such advisers could never be conquered by others. Saying this he returned to his country and never came back to Hindustan. Now there were no more such Brahmans and bereft of their advice this country lost divine grace and were all defeated by Yavanas". Mrityunjay sees divine will in the *yavana* take over by a 'fact' about Somnath which will never again be mentioned by Bengali writers: "There was a very large sacred idol called Somnath which was once in Mecca. Four thousand years after the time when the Yavanas say the human race was born, this idol was brought by a king of Hindustan from Mecca to its present place".³ Shoshee Chunder's scheme is similar but modified – although the divine will decides the fates of both Sanga and Babar it can operate only upon Sanga. This distinction between hindus and muslims is amplified in the sexual politics of 'The Beauty of Kanouj'. But here religion does not hierarchise political forces into a superior/inferior, legitimate/illegitimate, insider/outsider relationship, nor do deities issue edicts to carry out crusades against and refrain from supporting a non-hindu political force as we find in *Jiban Prabhat*, *Jiban Sandha* and 'Anguriya Binimoy'. Shoshee Chunder's *The Times of Yore* is a book of tales of kings of queens, foregrounded in the canvas of history. It is not a history of 'us' but of 'them'.

³ Partha Chatterjee *The Nation and its Fragments : Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton UP, 1993, 77-84.

The awareness of the distinction between history and literature is most acute in Romesh Chunder Dutt – a reason why I chose to work on two of his novels. In these novels he narrates extensive passages of factual history and demarcates them from his fiction. He works his counterfactuals into the plausibility of the available history most scrupulously. All the other texts discussed also rely on the field of plausibility created by available histories but do not display an awareness of the distinction between history and fiction, a difference between 'finding' and 'inventing' stories.

What ever be the level of distinction between history and fiction all the texts discussed make a distinction between hindus and muslims. It is a civilisational difference. The muslims were always people who have come from outside – foreigners. The source of their alienness is their religion. The perception of danger to the indigenous religion varies. In Shoshee Chunder the muslims are fit for social interaction, they can be virtuous, but marital relations are avoided. In Rangalal they are pernicious, malevolent forces, desperate to contaminate hindu honour and hindu women. The higher the threat perception the stronger is the need for a crusade to rid the motherland of the 'foreigners'. The 'outsider' is to be kept out of two boundaries. One, is the boundary of culture and religion – an arena where the 'self' is still sovereign. The programme here is one of defence. Two, is the boundary of the motherland – a territorial definition. In this case the 'self' has to be militarised, prepared for a final assault on the 'foreigner'. All other disputes and identities lose their relevance before the hindu selfhood. The divisions in the 'self' are explained as disunity or as distractions from the supreme objective – salvation of the pristine religion and the sacred motherland. All members of the community must constantly renew their identity through allegiance to the cause. They must rally behind the one leader – like Shivaji or Rana Pratap – and show unflinching commitment to the cause of the motherland.

The story of the chosen leaders is the *bhadralok's* story. By his claim to 'know' a past, which bears the possibilities of future glory, the *bhadralok* also claims to be the rightful heir to the legacy of Shivaji, Rana Pratap or Ratan Singh. He seeks allegiance and trust from his countrymen in the same manner as Raghunath or Tejsingh display their allegiance to their overlords in the pages of historical fiction. Such a call for allegiance is replete with

problems about the *bhadralok's* claim to leadership. For instance, the culture of the leaders of the community is elitist – Shivaji and the Rajputs are kshatriyas and are advised by brahmins. But I would like to draw attention to two specific problems which arise from such questions of allegiance.

Firstly, in almost all the stories I have dealt with the woman becomes the arena for defining culture. In Romesh Chunder and Rangalal defense of religious values takes the form of celebration of *sati*. In his treatment of the woman and the glorification of *sati* the *bhadralok* responded to the debates which were extremely relevant in his own time. The abolition of *sati* and related legislations occupied a large portion of the battle between the colonial state, the colonised elite in 19th century Bengal. Lata Mani has argued how *sati* became the mode through which colonial power was both enforced and contested.⁴ To both the colonial government and the proponents of the anti-*sati* laws the authority to seek was tradition as inscribed in sacred texts. The opponents of such legislations also cited scriptures to their cause. Needless to say all participants of the debate were male – women's voices were not articulated. For the opponents of *sati* it was a question of the 'inner' domain which is outside the purview of colonial intervention.

The colonial state accepted the argument of tradition and its inability to prevent the hindus from practising their religion even if it were 'barbaric'. The legislations, therefore, stressed that to be legal *sati* had to be a voluntary act. In all the incidents of *sati* in the texts we have discussed we find that *sati* is a voluntary act. It is the men who are hesitant or try to prevent women who are extremely eager to perform *sati*. Of course, it is a sign of their piety and honour and they are to be revered. If Rajput men can show their patriotism by giving up their lives in war in the defense of religion, their women are willing to burn themselves alive to save their bodies from contamination by 'foreigners'. In this manner

⁴ Lata Mani 'Contentious Traditions: The Debate on *Sati* in Colonial India' in Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid eds. *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, New Delhi, Kali for Women, 1989, 88-126; also see Radhika Singha 'The privilege of taking life: Some "anomalies" in the law of homicide in the Bengal presidency' *The Indian Economic and Social History Review*, 30(2), 1993, 181-214.

women are incorporated into the 'self', they can contribute to nation-building, they give consent to the leadership of the *bhadralok*.

Secondly, the *bhadralok's* leadership is articulated in these texts to be of the same order as that of Shivaji or Rana Pratap's leadership in the fight against the muslims. But the articulation does not complete itself as examples which must be emulated in a fight against the British. Instead the cultural and religious difference between the hindus and the muslims is vividly and vigorously sketched, muslims are described as malevolent forces who are out to tarnish hindu honour. If the hindus have lost their independence they have lost it to the muslims who occupied their land of birth - *Bharatbarsa* or *Aryabarta*. In fact, Rangalal makes it clear that the British rule is a positive development and calls for no more revolts – an obvious reference to the Revolt of 1857. Such articulation has been explained in two ways. First, as a 'vicarious nationalism' where, in an obvious situation of colonial control the *bhadralok* is unable to direct patriotic feelings against the British and, therefore, targets the neighbouring muslim. Second, it has been explained as a 'hindu nationalism' and 'revivalism'. I subscribe to the second view. Having said so I would like to make some clarifications and qualifications. The *bhadralok's* targeting of the muslims is not merely a case of pragmatism but must be understood in relation to very obvious cases of inequality of opportunity between the two communities in the colonial situation. In his classroom and his workplace the *bhadralok* hardly interacted with muslims thus, allowing for a deepening of the stereotypes he came across the in colonial texts. The history he wrote cannot be explained away as imaginative recreation of the history of India as written by British Orientalist historians. Not only did the *bhadralok* add his own counterfactuals, we also need to question the very reason why this history appealed to him. In a situation where opportunities were limited under colonial rule the *bhadralok* sought to retain his relative advantage over other groups even as he sought greater opportunities. He legitimised his claims by claiming to negate the coloniser's narratives of a long, dark night, in the process constructing the muslims as the foreigner. I think 'sectarian nationalism' is a methodological question. It is definitely an attempt to direct discontent towards a wrong, hapless enemy. But that does not leave the targeted enemy untouched. It gives rise to a majoritarianism that adversely affects the relationship between the two communities. With

a stress on separate recognition of political denominations along religious lines the colonial state forces both communities to look for their essences and seek origins thus accentuating the differences. The colonial state is thus, not challenged. Revivalist nationalism constructs a past to co-opt the masses for the protection of the *bhadralok's* interests. At the same time we must heed K.N. Pannikar's caution that such exclusivist conception of nationalism needs to be recognised as an attempt by the *bhadralok* or the bilingual elite to come to terms with the colonial situation, which placed him in a relation of subordination with respect to the coloniser and a relation of domination with respect to the rest of the people. He lacked the necessary strength to be able to fight the coloniser without endangering his own position. With increased strength, in later stages of the British rule, anti-colonial programmes were articulated in an inclusive nationalism which tried to forge hindu-muslim unity by adopting the strategy of the "passive revolution". But even such nationalism maintained the essential differences between the two communities while calling for 'peaceful co-existence'. It called for a 'joint movement' for political liberation and not a unity of the people in fight for substantive rights for social and economic equality. In fact, the national bourgeoisie forever continued to adopt its strategy of contradiction and compromise in the face of imperialism.

Thus even after half a century of political independence the class character of the Indian ruling classes and its relations with imperialism have not been radically altered. And with it the historical narratives which are in currency today bear a resemblance to those produced by the *bhadralok*. Those narratives have today acquired the status of myths and are part of popular consumption, especially in children's literature. It has become almost impossible for a layman to differentiate between what is 'fact and what is 'fiction'. In fact, fiction has become more powerful than fact. Narrated and renarrated through popular stories, comic strips, television serials and other mass media, with suitable alterations and additions in each occasion, many of the stories we have discussed in this work have entered into the public memory. Academic refutations of these histories have been prolific. But they have mostly remained restricted to snug seminar rooms, scholarly libraries or in research volumes such as the present one. Myths have persisted. Faced with disillusionment of tremendous social inequity these myths have served as an attractive

source of strength for the masses. Anant Pai, editor of the immensely popular comic series *Amar Chitra Katha* said in an interview: "It is not what has happened that is necessarily true; but its interpretation that helps in confidence building. If someone calls you an ass I can't prevent that man from calling you names; but I can change your interpretation of what an ass is."⁵ The point is that the interpretation here, is not foregrounded on facts. It exists independent of facts. In fact, it seeks to recreate facts – falsify history. What is of grave danger is that this programme is now seeking legitimacy from the field which posed the severest challenge before it. Academics is being brought to the service of legitimising myth; archeology is being used to 'prove' the trueness of the story.

If the myth-making began in the moment of colonial subjugation, it continues in a phase of increasing imperialist globalisation. The Indian bourgeoisie having refrained from the task of radical agrarian transformation lacks mass support at home. Constrained by the limited possibilities of economic advancement it, therefore, is unable to challenge imperialism. Imperialism on the other hand, with mobile capital chasing favourable labour regimes, wants in the less developed world, nation states which are weak in relation to capital but strong in relation to labour. In its search for such imperialised zones it is willing to grant certain concessions to nation-states which accept its grip. The imperialised national bourgeoisie, unable to oppose its anti-colonial nationalism now returns to the form of nationalism which we have studied in this work – 'revivalist nationalism'/ 'communal nationalism'. The difference being this time it is in control of state power. Its narratives are not counter-hegemonic narratives but hegemonic narratives. It tries to render coherence to the contradictions arising out of imperialist domination, look for 'outsiders', target 'foreigners'. Its narratives are all pervading, difficult to challenge from within an unequal power relationship. We need to study these narratives. We need to pry open its faultlines. And we need to devise strategies through which the challenge is not restricted to a privileged few. We have to search for contestatory voices in the narratives of the people.

⁵ Nandini Chandra *Constructing a 'National Popular': The Hindu India in 'Amar Chitra Katha' (1970-1991)*, M.Phil. dissertation, New Delhi, Centre for Linguistics and English, Jawaharlal Nehru University, 1996, 152.

To move from a exclusivist, reactionary nationalism to a liberating, anti-imperialist nationalism the existing narratives of the nation have to be challenged. The challenge has to be made the right of the people. When the hegemonic power tries to hide its demonic face in the guise of culture and tradition, by aestheticising politics, its contest must vigorously politicise culture.

It is in this light that this dissertation seeks to engage with the uses of history in the past. By its very nature an M.Phil. dissertation is limited and much remained undone in this enterprise. But I must also state that my research has been extremely beneficial for me as it made me critically question my assumptions and in some cases radically alter them. One such realisation is regarding the nature of colonialism and the way in which it has refined our lives. I began with a notion of implantation the metropolis and institutions from the metropolis to the colony. But this proved inadequate, as it could not explain the ways in which the colonial elite challenged the colonisers. Ultimately I adopted a 'contact' perspective which views the coloniser-colonised relationship as dialectical, each constantly refiguring the other.

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